An Appreciative Inquiry Study of Successful Navajo High School Students on the Navajo Nation

Dissertation

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate School of The Ohio State University

By

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Graduate Program in Education: Policy and Leadership

The Ohio State University

2014

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Abstract

The purpose of my study was to identify and describe the positive core related to learning that exists within TCHS and Navajo adolescents’ vision for future academic achievement. A qualitative case study design was used to facilitate the participation of academically successful Navajo adolescents of a public high school on the Navajo Nation in the first two stages of the AI 4-D Cycle: Discovery and Dream. The participants of my study were purposively selected to be grade and gender balanced. Eight students, a male and female from grade nine through twelve, participated in the AI process. Research methods involved in gathering data during AI protocols included: Semi-structured paired interviews, whole group discussions, participant generated documents, direct observation, and participant observation (Cooperrider, 2000; Somekh & Lewin, 2005). Data were analyzed using a combination of several techniques that included: content analysis, thematic coding, axial coding, open coding, and pattern matching (Weber, 1990; Yin, 2009).

The quality of the research I conducted reflected the attention I gave to ensuring its credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Two salient findings emerged from the analyzed data: (1) The participants identified and described a positive core within TCHS, and (2) The participants co-constructed a compelling vision for the future academic achievement for students at TCHS.
The findings of this study suggest that TCHS’s positive core is grounded in a sense of community the participants felt. They described the capacity of relationships to develop within TCHS and shared an appreciation for TCHS activities that integrated the reservation community. Participants’ co-constructed vision for future academic achievement included a positive image of the future of TCHS as a school where students are leading the nation in college admittance. This provided the context where participants envisioned student engagement supporting academic achievement.

This study may have important implications for Indian education by providing a unique perspective by focusing on the strengths of the system instead of its deficits. My study will help readers understand how the Discovery and Dream stages of the AI 4-D Cycle can empower students with a voice towards reframing how Indian education is viewed, providing a model for empowering American Indian/Alaska Native students to enhance pedagogical practices. As Indian education continues to fall under scrutiny, now under the auspices of NCLB, I believe it is time to use the power of AI to build high achieving, healthy schools serving American Indian/Alaska Native students. I believe AI can continue to empower students with a voice in their school’s educational change efforts and that of Indian education.
Dedication

This work is dedicated to the love of my life, my beautiful wife, Stephanie. I simply can’t state how influential you are, this would not be possible without your continued love and support; my son, Elijah David, for showing unconditional love, no matter how many times I stayed behind to work while you went to the park to play, and for inspiring me to give you an example of tenacity, perseverance, and hard work; my mother, Yael Cohen, for defining these characteristics for me my entire life, you never let me give up and continually pushed me to stay the course; and to the Navajo, I learned what it means to live a life of balance, generosity, and resiliency from the many years I spent living and learning with you.

In loving memory of David Del Monaco, you will always be my friend and my brother; and Rose Mike, I know you are running in Heaven.
Acknowledgments

I would not be the man I am today, without the mentorship of Dr. Ray Calabrese, my doctoral chair, my role model, and my mentor. My life changed the moment I met you. Your support, guidance, advice, and optimism taught me the meaning of mental toughness and love. You believed in me, even when I didn’t believe in myself, and never accepted anything less than my best. You know the potential of the human spirit and see the good in everything. You embody the spirit of appreciative inquiry; every student, parent, or teacher I work with for the duration of my career will feel the benefit of your influence on me as an educational leader and person. I am a difference maker because of you.

I would also like to thank Dr. Scott Sweetland and Dr. Christine Ballengee-Morris for serving on my dissertation committee.

I have rarely encountered a teacher who is as authentic and caring as Dr. Sweetland. I still remember sitting in the computer lab in the basement of Ramseyer Hall learning how to create formulas in Excel. To me, this moment exemplified your commitment to your students’ learning. You taught me more than economics, finance, and management, you taught me the holding power of concepts when communicated with humor, wit, and personality.
Dr. Ballengee-Morris, you have been an inspiration to me from the moment we met. Our conversations remain some of the highpoint learning experiences of my graduate studies at The Ohio State University, whether in your office or at your home. Those conversations helped shape this dissertation into a work that does justice to the strength of indigenous people. I look forward to opportunities where we can continue to work together.

I also want to thank the professors of the Educational Administration program that had an important role in my development as an educational leader. Dr. Ann Allen, for being an advocate of the democratic ideal. The work we did together taught me the discipline I needed to get through this journey. Dr. T.K. Daniel, for teaching me the power and importance of justice and equity. Your confidence in me inspired me to start this program. I want to thank Dr. Helen Marks for pushing my thinking concerning topics of innovation in education. I also want to thank Dr. Sebnem Cilesiz, whose insight contributed to a well-thought qualitative study.

I want to show my love and appreciation for my Navajo family: Paula Mike, Wynter “BB” Dan, Maxine Lane, Ada Lane, Tyler Lane, Lyle Lane, Lucy Dan, A.C. Dan, Roberta Lane, Tina Mike, and Rose Mike, may you rest in peace. You are the reason why I will always return to the reservation and why it is home.

I wish to thank the administration, faculty, teachers, students, and parents on the Navajo Nation for giving me the most influential experience by accepting into your community and treating me like family. I want to thank Karin Jones for serving as my field observer and for her commitment to education on the Rez. I want to thank Mr. Adelbert Goldtooth for giving a young man his chance to teach, you opened my world
and gave my life a purpose with your decision; and, to the participants of my study, for allowing your story to be told.

I want to thank my friends, whose companionship will always guide me through any difficult journey: My brother Oren, John, Dan, Marlon, “Chico,” Dave, rest in peace; and, a special thank you to Dusty Miller, who was always there to talk me down from the “dissertation ledge.”

I conclude by thanking my family: Stephanie, Eli, Mom, Aba, Oren, Rachel, Avi, Greg Hagan, Judy Hagan, and David Hagan for all of your love and support.
Vita

June 1998 ..............................................Conejo Valley High School

2003 ..............................................B.A. English, Indiana University

2011 ..............................................M.A., Educational Administration, The Ohio State University

2004-2008 ........................................Language arts teacher, Tuba City High School

2008-2009 ........................................Graduate Teaching Associate, Center for the Study and Teaching of Writing, The Ohio State University

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2012-2013 ........................................Academic Coach, Tuba City Junior High School

2013-present ......................................Principal Resident, Denver Public Schools
Publications


Fields of Study

Major Field: Education: Policy and Leadership

Minor Field: Educational Administration
# Table of Contents

Abstract ........................................................................................................................................... ii
Dedication ........................................................................................................................................ iv
Acknowledgments .......................................................................................................................... v
Vita ..................................................................................................................................................... viii
Publications ..................................................................................................................................... ix
Fields of Study ............................................................................................................................... ix
List of Tables .................................................................................................................................. xiv
List of Figures ................................................................................................................................... xv

Chapter 1 .......................................................................................................................................... 1
Introduction ......................................................................................................................................... 1
Background to the Study .................................................................................................................... 4
  Demographic profile ....................................................................................................................... 4
  Organizational structure of schooling on the reservation ................................................................. 5
  High-poverty schools in the Navajo Nation ...................................................................................... 6
  The Navajo Nation and NCLB ......................................................................................................... 7
  Student achievement data .............................................................................................................. 9
  Educational experiences ................................................................................................................ 13
  Supporting the educational experience ......................................................................................... 14
    Navajo adolescents in Tuba City, Arizona .................................................................................... 15
Problem Statement ......................................................................................................................... 18
Purpose of the Study ....................................................................................................................... 21
Overview of the Methodology ......................................................................................................... 22
Unit of Analysis ............................................................................................................................... 25
Research Questions ........................................................................................................................ 26
Objectives ......................................................................................................................................... 26
Assumptions ..................................................................................................................................... 26
Limitations ......................................................................................................................................... 27
Delimitations ..................................................................................................................................... 27
Definition of Key Terms ................................................................................................................... 28
  Adolescent ..................................................................................................................................... 28
  American Indian/Alaska Native ....................................................................................................... 28
  Appreciative Inquiry ....................................................................................................................... 28
  Glass Ceiling ................................................................................................................................. 29
  Indian education ............................................................................................................................ 29
  Positive Core ............................................................................................................................... 29

x
Chapter 2 .................................................................................................................. 35

Literature Review ........................................................................................................ 35
  Conceptual Framework ............................................................................................... 35
  Epistemology ................................................................................................................ 36
  Professional Education Experiences ........................................................................... 37
  Theoretical Perspectives  ............................................................................................. 39
    Appreciative inquiry ................................................................................................. 39
    Resilience theory ....................................................................................................... 44
    Linking AI and resilience theory .............................................................................. 49
  Competing Theory ....................................................................................................... 50
  Search Criteria ............................................................................................................. 51
  Synthesis of the Empirical Research ......................................................................... 54
    Influences of personal resilience and school success ............................................. 54
    Figure 2.2. Enculturation, personal resilience, and high school achievement .......... 61
    Enculturation influences personal resilience and school success ........................... 61
    Personal resilience and school success of Navajo adolescents ................................. 63
    The generative nature of AI in schools ..................................................................... 66
  Summary ....................................................................................................................... 69

Chapter 3 ...................................................................................................................... 70

Methodology and Research Design .............................................................................. 70
  Purpose of the Study ..................................................................................................... 70
  Research Questions .................................................................................................... 71
  Context of the Study ................................................................................................... 71
  Approval for the Study ................................................................................................ 72
  Unit of Analysis .......................................................................................................... 72

I chose this criterion for selecting participants because students who can meet the above criterion have demonstrated the capacity for school success and manifest the positive characteristics of personal resilience. The participants selected to participate in my study engaged in all AI protocols over the two-day period. One participant, however, had to leave early prior to presenting her individual metaphor early in the Dream stage. .................. 73

Role of Researcher ....................................................................................................... 73

Methods ......................................................................................................................... 76

Data Analysis ................................................................................................................ 78
  Voyent ......................................................................................................................... 79
  Tapor ............................................................................................................................ 79

Research Quality .......................................................................................................... 80
  Trustworthiness ......................................................................................................... 80
  Audit Trail .................................................................................................................... 82
  Bias ............................................................................................................................... 83
  Summary ....................................................................................................................... 84

Chapter 4 ....................................................................................................................... 85
Findings

Purpose of the Study ........................................................................................................... 85
Theoretical Perspectives ....................................................................................................... 85
Methodology and Research Design ...................................................................................... 88
Research Questions ............................................................................................................. 89
Data Analysis ....................................................................................................................... 89
Report of Findings ............................................................................................................... 96

Description of Day 1 and 2 ................................................................................................. 97
Day one: Discovery ............................................................................................................... 97
Precursor to the AI discovery stage process ................................................................. 102
Introduction to the AI discovery stage process ........................................................... 104
The first series of Discovery protocols ............................................................................. 106
The second series of Discovery protocols ......................................................................... 113
The third series of Discovery protocols ........................................................................... 118
Summary of day one: Discovery ....................................................................................... 125
Day two: Dream .................................................................................................................. 125
The first series of Dream protocols .................................................................................. 129
The second series of Dream protocols ............................................................................. 146
The third series of Dream protocols ................................................................................. 151
Culminating Protocol: Collective Metaphor ................................................................. 154
Closing AI activity ............................................................................................................. 156
Summary of day two: Dream ............................................................................................ 159

Two Salient Findings .......................................................................................................... 160
Finding 1: The participants identified and described a positive core within TCHS .......... 160
  Sense of community in homecoming activities ............................................................. 161
  Sense of community in school-related clubs ............................................................... 166
  Sense of community in relationships among students and with teachers ................ 169
  Student-teacher relationships ....................................................................................... 172
  A sense of community in sports .................................................................................. 176
  Summary of finding one ............................................................................................... 179
Finding 2: The participants co-constructed a compelling vision for the future academic
  achievement for students at TCHS ............................................................................... 180
  Positive image of the future ......................................................................................... 181
  Vision for future learning experiences ....................................................................... 183
  Off-reservation learning experiences ......................................................................... 189
  Summary of finding two .............................................................................................. 192

Chapter Summary ............................................................................................................ 192

Chapter 5 .......................................................................................................................... 194
Purpose of the Study ........................................................................................................ 194
Summary of the Literature Review .................................................................................. 194
Methodology and Research Design ............................................................................... 198
Research Questions .......................................................................................................... 199
Summary of Findings ....................................................................................................... 200
Discussion of Findings ...................................................................................................... 200
  Finding 1: The participants identified and described a positive core within TCHS .... 200
  Finding 2: The participants co-constructed a compelling vision for the future academic
    achievement for students at TCHS ........................................................................... 204
Implications for Future Research ..................................................................................... 208
Limitations ................................................................................................................................. 210
Relationship of Findings to Relevant Theory ........................................................................ 211
Recommendations for Praxis for School Administrators ......................................................... 213
  Recommendation 1 .................................................................................................................. 214
  Recommendation 2 .................................................................................................................. 214
  Recommendation 3 .................................................................................................................. 215
Significance of the Study ......................................................................................................... 215
Summary and Conclusions ....................................................................................................... 217

List of References .................................................................................................................... 219

Appendices ................................................................................................................................ 248
  Appendix A: Study Approval by Superintendent ................................................................. 249
  Appendix B: IRB Consent Approval Letter ............................................................................ 251
  Appendix C: IRB Continuing Review Approval Letter ......................................................... 253
  Appendix D: Parental Permission Form ............................................................................... 255
  Appendix E: Student Assent Form ......................................................................................... 261
  Appendix F: Consent Form ...................................................................................................... 265
  Appendix G: Day One – Discovery Stage Powerpoint .......................................................... 271
  Appendix H: Day Two – Dream Stage Powerpoint ............................................................... 286
List of Tables

Table 1.1. American Indian Population.............................................................5
Table 1.2. 2001 Accountability results for the six Navajo high schools in Arizona.........9
Table 4.1. Data analysis process.................................................................90
Table 4.2. Frequencies of key terms identified by Voyer’s textual analysis tool..........91
Table 4.3. TCHS participant information......................................................96
Table 4.4. Ice-breaker activity.................................................................103
Table 4.5. What students would like to see happening....................................111
Table 4.6. What students value about themselves and what others value in them......118
Table 4.7. Secret ingredients.................................................................123
Table 4.8. Student characteristics............................................................130
Table 4.9. Students’ greatest dreams..........................................................135
Table 4.10. Student descriptions of metaphors..............................................139
Table 4.11. Students’ ideal learning setting..................................................150
Table 4.12. TCHS in the future.................................................................153
Table 4.13. Personal commitments............................................................158
List of Figures

Figure 1.1. Mathematics proficiency of Navajo 10th graders compared to Arizona’s average…………………………………………………………………………………………11
Figure 1.2. Reading proficiency of Navajo 10th graders compared to Arizona’s average.12
Figure 1.3. Writing proficiency of Navajo 10th graders compared to Arizona’s average..13
Figure 1.4. Dropout rates for TCHS, American Indian, and State trends………………..17
Figure 1.5 Description of the appreciative inquiry 4-D Cycle…………………………...23
Figure 2.1. The influences and positive effects of family, community, and school………56
Figure 2.2. Enculturation, personal resilience, and high school achievement…………….61
Figure 3.1. The first two stages of the AI 4-D Cycle – Discovery and Dream………………75
Figure 4.1. Visualization from Tapor showing key terms and their links…………………..93
Figure 4.2. The correlation between teachers and students in Voyent…………………….94
Figure 4.3. The correlation between school and spirit in Voyent………………………..95
Figure 4.4. Affirmative challenge……………………………………………………………..113
Figure 4.5. Multiple images……………………………………………………………………141
Figure 4.6. Aspirations…………………………………………………………………………142
Figure 4.7. Resilience……………………………………………………………………………144
Figure 4.8. Group metaphor……………………………………………………………………156
Chapter 1

Introduction

Navajo adolescents living on the Navajo Nation endure adverse conditions. The Navajo Nation is the term applied by the Navajo to refer to the land they exercise sovereignty over (Bailey & Bailey, 1999). They face economic and social conditions that place a glass ceiling on their aspirations (Lee, 2002). Poverty, high unemployment, and poor quality of health are symptomatic of the status and condition of life experienced on the Navajo Nation. I witnessed these conditions first hand. I spent four years as a high school teacher on the Western Navajo Nation in, Arizona. In addition to my teaching experience, I volunteered as a soccer coach, and sponsored many school events including dances, parades, and graduation. I became involved in many of the cultural aspects important in the Navajo community. I embraced my participation in the Navajo culture. I attended numerous Navajo and Hopi ceremonies; I was married in a traditional Navajo ceremony. I returned to the reservation to work for another year as an administrator at the junior high school and to conduct my study. I continued to learn more about the Navajo culture, as I took my son to herd sheep, haul wood, and enjoy the beauty of Navajoland.

My experience on the Navajo Nation was a turning point for me. I recognized a glass ceiling experienced by Navajo adolescents as an illusion. The glass ceiling consisted of invisible barriers to success. These artificial barriers had the potential to inhibit Navajo adolescents’ success. Such barriers were embedded in a false belief system
that Navajo adolescents established from their environment. The glass ceiling created a belief among Navajo adolescents that life was limited to dropping out of school, poor health, substance abuse, and poverty. This view of life created a sense of hopelessness among Navajo adolescents. I disagree with their belief. I discovered evidence of the innate capacity of Navajo adolescents to break a learned belief system that incapacitated them.

I witnessed many examples of Navajo adolescents’ innate capacity to take control of their lives, take pride in their culture, and contribute to society. These examples are educationally, culturally, and civically related. Educationally, I witnessed students who rode the bus for two hours each way after a 10 hour school day, and maintained a 99% attendance rate for our school (Arizona Department of Education, 2011b). Culturally, students proudly wore traditional clothing such as rug dresses and wore their hair in traditional buns during school-sponsored events. Civically, the school in which I worked was nationally recognized for its Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) program, which encouraged many Navajo graduates to enter the military. They followed in the tradition of the Navajo Code Talkers (Kawano, 1990), famous for their exploits during the Pacific campaign of World War II.

My educational, cultural, and civic experiences with Navajo adolescent students informed my belief in their capacity to be successful. This caused me to look for many opportunities to facilitate their success. In many instances, I used current events relevant to them, such as the opening of the National Museum of the American Indian.

On the day the National Museum of the American Indian opened, I asked my Navajo students if a Navajo Renaissance was possible. My students and I referred to a
Navajo Renaissance as the collective renewal and reconstruction of the Navajo community by community members through the building or rebuilding of institutions, culture, history, and traditions (Nagel, 1995). The collective dream of a Navajo Renaissance created by my students was different from the present reality described by federal datasets and other recorded data on the status and condition of life experienced by Navajo adolescents on the Navajo Nation. This data does not capture the innate capacity I believe exists among Navajo adolescents related to their potential to succeed.

My experience as an educator in the Navajo community gave me an opportunity to work with Navajo adolescents as an advocate for them to achieve their potential. I discovered that affirming my students’ strengths and celebrating their successes helped to create a belief system that they were capable of breaking through the glass ceiling. I believe a positive focus of inquiry towards affirming the strengths and successes among Navajo adolescents is more productive than concentrating on the deficits that contribute to a negative impression of American Indian students related to learning (Tippeconic, 1991).

My positive nature led me to question the benefits of a tendency to focus on the pathologies related to learning of American Indian students, including the Navajo (Lomawaima, 2000). Consequently, I embraced the theory of appreciative inquiry (AI) as an alternative to the problem-solving theories that focus on the deficits of organizations and people. AI’s core mission is to search for the best in people, their organizations, and the world around them (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005). A primary assumption in AI is that something works (Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987). The collaborative discovery of what works produces the positive core. The positive core consists of the wisdom, stories,
achievements, strengths, high point experiences and unexplored capabilities that exemplify the resilience inherent in Navajo adolescents’ potential to succeed (Cooperrider, Whitney, & Stavros, 2008).

**Background to the Study**

In this section, I describe Navajo adolescents’ experiences related to learning and the legislative regulations that shape their learning experience on the Navajo Nation. Authority over Navajo education is given to the States of Arizona, New Mexico, and Utah as the educational provider. Because of this, Navajo adolescents’ experiences exist within a system of accountability for providing a high-quality, healthy, and uplifting education for Navajos (McCarty, 2008).

**Demographic profile.**

The Navajo are part of a larger, diverse American Indian/Alaska Native population composed of 562 distinct federally recognized tribes, 619 reservations, and 175 Native languages (DeVoe & Darling-Churchill, 2008; McCarty, 2002). Among this population, the Navajo represent the second largest tribe in terms of enrollment, but are the largest population of full-blooded American Indians (see Table 1.1). Table 1 presents Population data of the 5 largest American Indian tribes (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012). The Navajo occupy the largest reservation, the Navajo Nation (27,000 square miles). The Navajo Nation spans portions of northern Arizona, southern Utah, and eastern New Mexico (Choudhary, 2000; U.S. Census Bureau, 2012). Because of the vastness of the Navajo Nation, communities on the reservation where schools are located become educational centers, serving students from surrounding communities who travel great distances to get to school.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tribe</th>
<th>Total Population</th>
<th>Full-blood population</th>
<th>Percent full-blood</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Navajo</td>
<td>332,129</td>
<td>286,731</td>
<td>86%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cherokee</td>
<td>819,105</td>
<td>284,247</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Choctaw</td>
<td>195,764</td>
<td>103,910</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chippewa</td>
<td>170,742</td>
<td>112,757</td>
<td>66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sioux</td>
<td>170,110</td>
<td>112,176</td>
<td>66%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1.1. American Indian population

To centralize the education of Navajo students across the States of Arizona, New Mexico, and Utah, the Navajo Sovereignty in Education Act of 2005 allowed for the creation of the Navajo Nation Department of Diné Education (DODE) to implement and enforce the educational laws of the Navajo Nation. There is no uniform educational oversight, however, that is conducted by the DODE for its schools at this time.

Organizational structure of schooling on the reservation.

With no centralized oversight by the DODE, local Indian school boards govern schools on the Navajo Nation. Navajo students attend five categories of schools both on and off the reservation: (1) public; (2) Bureau of Indian Education (BIE); (3) private; (4) grant; and (5) parochial. For the purposes of my study, I refer to reservation or Navajo high schools within the public school system in Arizona, and use data obtained from the six public school district high schools on the Navajo Nation in Arizona; all of which are reported as high-poverty schools.
**High-poverty schools in the Navajo Nation**

A high-poverty school is a K-12 public school where 75% or more of enrolled students are eligible for free and reduced-priced lunch (FRPL), a federal poverty indicator (Aud et al., 2011; Kim & Sunderman, 2005). Though social influences of a student are critically influential to student performance (Krasner & Pierre-Louis, 2009), economic status alone determines qualification for FRPL based on average poverty levels; the poverty level for a family of four, for example, is at an annual income of $23,050 (DeNavas-Walt, Proctor, & Smith, 2010). Using a family of four as a reference, children from such families with incomes at or below 130% of the poverty level, or $29,965, are eligible for free meals and those from families with incomes that are between 131% and 185% of the poverty level, or $30,195.50 – $42,642.50, are eligible for reduced-price meals (Ralston, Newman, Clauson, Guthrie, & Buzby, 2008). I use the term high-poverty school to represent high schools, the people within them, and the stakeholders they serve. High-poverty schools can be found in urban, suburban, rural, and town settings and are attended by approximately 11.8 million students from all racial/ethnic subgroups (Harris, 2006).

The high-poverty status of all schools on the Navajo Nation reflects the economic conditions experienced on the reservation. These economic conditions are characterized by the levels of poverty the Navajo Nation experiences. The Navajo Nation experiences poverty levels three times the average poverty rate in the United States of 14% (U.S. Department of Commerce, 2010). The percentage of Navajos on the Navajo Nation living in poverty is: (a) 42.9% for individuals; (b) 40.1% for families; and (c) 53.1% for families with a female head of household (Choudhary, 2006). Such poverty levels present
a perennial issue for the Navajo on the Navajo Nation. Poverty levels are closely tied to unemployment rates, or people who are eligible for work, but do not have a job (Bane & Ellwood, 1983). The Navajo living on or around the Navajo Nation have experienced an average level of unemployment at 47% between 1982 and 2005, with 19.8% of those employed still living in poverty (U.S. Department of the Interior, 2005) The symptoms of such economic conditions manifest for Navajo adolescents in substance and alcohol abuse (Kunitz, 2006; Kunitz & Levy, 2000), poor quality of health (Cunningham-Sabo et al., 2008; Willeto, 2007), and teenage pregnancy (Dalla & Gamble, 2000a; Dalla, Jacobs-Hagen, Jareske, & Sukup, 2009; Deyhle & Margonis, 1995; Hossain & Anziano, 2008). Navajo high schools often have to mitigate these symptoms of poverty while remaining focused on facilitating student academic success under the overarching policy of No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) (Willeto, 2007).

**The Navajo Nation and NCLB.**

Each public school on the Navajo Nation operates under the regulations of the State Educational Agency (SEA), including Arizona. Arizona is required to legislate a plan to implement the overarching policy of NCLB (Sunderman, 2001). NCLB regulations require greater exposure to rigorous content taught by highly qualified teachers, demand strict rules for reporting scores by subgroups, focus on schools’ staffing of highly qualified teachers, and increase federal spending as an incentive for increased or improved student performance (Cookson, 2007; Fuller, Wright, Gesicki, & Kang, 2007; Fusarelli, 2004).

No Child Left Behind applies to the Navajo via Title VII, which supports the efforts of local educational agencies (LEA) on the Navajo Nation so that Navajo
adolescents can meet the same challenging state academic achievement standards as all others are expected to meet, closing the achievement gap. LEAs and schools are held accountable for accomplishing this goal.

Beginning in 2010, Arizona began using A-F School Accountability Letter Grades as a focal point to improve student academic performance (Arizona Department of Education, 2011a). Under the A-F accountability system, evaluations are conducted based on academic outcomes and academic growth. Academic outcomes refer to how many students are passing Arizona’s standardized test, Arizona’s Instrument to Measure Standards (AIMS). Other factors, such as dropout rate, graduation rate, and English language learner reclassification rate are taken into consideration to determine academic outcomes. Academic growth is determined by comparing the change in AIMS test scores from one year to the next year for similarly achieving students across the state. Academic growth evaluates how well a school is growing its students, academically, on an annual basis. Up to 100 points is awarded for each factor. The sum of points a school earns determines what grade that school receives. Among the six major public high schools on the Navajo Nation, using Arizona’s accountability framework, all six demonstrated a below average level of performance and received a D grade in 2011 (see Table 1.2).

An integral component to Arizona’s accountability framework is the adoption of the goal of 100% proficiency in tested areas by 2014. In Arizona, proficiency is defined as meeting or exceeding a standard and is measured using AIMS. Accountability for demonstrating 100% proficiency by 2014 is defined within the context of NCLB as Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) (Harris & Herrington, 2006). AYP is determined by a school’s testing goals, including its progress toward reaching the 100% proficiency goal.
in math and reading and graduation and attendance goals by 2014 within a specific framework established by individual states (Balfanz, Legters, West, & Weber, 2007; Byrd-Blake et al., 2010; Choi, Seltzer, Herman, & Yamashiro, 2007). AYP status follows a dichotomous model (Met or Not Met), while measuring academic outcomes and academic growth over time.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>AYP Determination</th>
<th>Met Attendance Rate</th>
<th>Met Graduation Rate</th>
<th>Accountability Grade</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CHS</td>
<td>Not Met</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GHS</td>
<td>Not Met</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MVHS</td>
<td>Not Met</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>D</td>
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<td>PHS</td>
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<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TCHS</td>
<td>Not Met</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WRHS</td>
<td>Not Met</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: Key factors that, when combined with student achievement, provide Arizona’s framework to determine school accountability of the six Navajo high schools.*

Table 1.2 2011 Accountability results for the six Navajo high schools in Arizona

**Student achievement data.**

The focus on student achievement is a primary concern for public schools under accountability guidelines, specifically for determining the AYP component of NCLB. Student achievement is publicly reported and provides a measure of a school’s AYP. Navajo student achievement can be determined based on the percentage of Navajo adolescents demonstrating proficiency in the tested areas applicable to AYP: mathematics, reading, and writing. Since 2003, though achievement of Navajo
adolescents has fluctuated, the rise and fall in measured proficiency of mathematics, reading, and writing standards mirrored a similar trend to State averages (see Figures 1.1, 1.2, & 1.3).

Beginning in 2003, achievement in all three tested areas saw significant gains since NCLB. The achievement gap between Navajo adolescents and the average proficiency demonstrated by all students in Arizona, however, persists. The achievement of Navajo adolescents across the six public schools in mathematics saw the most gains in the years immediately following the implementation of NCLB (see Figure 1.1). The number of Navajo adolescents demonstrating proficiency in mathematics increased from 11.2% to 44% in the first six years. The higher mathematics achievement demonstrated by Navajo adolescents on the Navajo Nation paralleled the overall gains in mathematics achievement demonstrated by American Indian/Alaska Native students. This gain was attributed to classroom activities characterized by the standards-based instruction received in classrooms (Akiba, Ya-Fang, Yue-Lin, & Mueller, 2008).
Figure 1.1. Achievement of Navajo adolescents, represented by the average percent of Navajo adolescents in the six Navajo high schools who have demonstrated proficiency in mathematics according to AIMS compared to Arizona averages between 2003 and 2011.

Figure 1.1. Mathematics proficiency of Navajo 10th graders compared to Arizona’s average
Figure 1.2. Achievement of Navajo adolescents, represented by the average percent of Navajo adolescents in the six Navajo high schools who have demonstrated proficiency in reading according to AIMS compared to Arizona averages between 2003 and 2011.

Figure 1.2. Reading proficiency of Navajo 10th graders compared to Arizona’s average
Figure 1.3. Achievement of Navajo adolescents, represented by the average percent of Navajo adolescents in the six Navajo high schools who have demonstrated proficiency in writing according to AIMS compared to Arizona averages between 2003 and 2011.

Figure 1.3. Writing proficiency of Navajo 10th graders compared to Arizona’s average

**Educational experiences.**

The National Indian Education Study (NIES) identified characteristics that shape the educational experience of American Indian/Alaska Native students. These characteristics include their exposure to standards-based instruction and assessments, as well as their exposure to their Native language and culture in the classroom (Mead, Grigg, Moran, & Kuang, 2010). To a large extent, Navajo adolescents’ educational experiences in the classroom are shaped by a standards-based curriculum (McCarty, 2008). Within this curriculum, Navajo adolescents on the Navajo Nation have the option
to take advanced placement (AP)/honors classes, career technical education classes, college prep classes, and Navajo studies and language classes.

The standards-based curriculum Navajo adolescents experience at school serves as a catalyst towards their increased academic achievement. A reliance on standards, however, was found to negatively affect community relations (Patrick, 2008), inhibit the use of authentic assessments in the classroom (McCarty, 2009), and limit the use of the Navajo language in school (Lee, 2007; McCarty, Romero, & Zepeda, 2006). Patrick’s (2008) study, however, found that there was hope and optimism on the Navajo Nation that student achievement could continue to rise against the backdrop of a standards-based curriculum.

**Supporting the educational experience.**

In support of their education, Navajo adolescents who live on the reservation are more likely to experience many protective benefits through their community, culture, and traditions (Galliher, Jones, & Dahl, 2010; Lee, 2007). Researchers identified these protective benefits manifesting in strong family and social networks. Factors associated with academic success among Navajo adolescents include the adoption of social goals in school (Dole & Csordas, 2003; Hinkley, McInerney, & Marsh, 2001) and the encouragement to finish school received by family members, notably through matrilineal family networks (Deyhle & Margonis, 1995; Willeto, 1999). Family encouragement is associated with predictions of Navajo adolescent’s academic success (Deyhle & Margonis, 1995; Galliher, et al., 2010; Kunitz, 2006) and influences their college aspirations (Willeto, 1999).
Navajo adolescents in Tuba City, Arizona.

The Navajo Nation is broken down into 11 Chapters, serving as local governmental entities, including Tuba City, which is located in the Western portion of the Navajo Nation in northern Arizona. Although the geographical area of Tuba City is limited to an area served by an existing municipal infrastructure, the town serves as the educational center for a wider area encompassing approximately 4,400 square miles of Coconino and Navajo Counties. The transportation policy for Tuba City Unified School District (TCUSD) extends the service area to a 55-mile radius surrounding Tuba City. The service area of Tuba City includes the Chapters of Coalmine mesa, Cameron, Bodaway/Gap, Coppermine, LeChee, Kaibeto, and Red Lake. For the purposes of my study, I narrow my focus to Tuba City High School (TCHS) and Navajo adolescents attending TCHS.

During the 2009-2010 school year, TCHS experienced an average daily enrollment of 879 students. Approximately 99% of its students are American Indian/Alaska Native, including Navajo, Apache, Paiute, or Hopi from Tuba City and the surrounding communities. The student body is diverse in their tribal affiliation.

For the purposes of my study, I use the term Navajo adolescents as representative of the student population of TCHS. TCHS is on the Navajo Indian Reservation, where Navajo tribal affiliation represents the majority of students’ tribal affiliation. TCHS did not make AYP for the 2010-2011 school year and received a D based on Arizona’s accountability framework. The graduation rate for TCHS was 62.1% (four-year) and 71% (five-year), with an attendance rate of 99%. The dropout rate experienced at TCHS is below the State of Arizona’s average for American Indian students, yet remained above
the average for all students (see Figure 1.4). Students attending TCHS experience a standards-based curriculum with AP/honors classes, technology based education, Navajo language courses, career technical education, and technology-based education. Extracurricular activities include diverse clubs, National Honors Society, marksmanship, JROTC, and a variety of sports.
Figure 1.4. Average dropout rates experienced by TCHS compared to state averages for American Indian students and all students respectively between 2005 and 2010. Dropout rate is defined as the percent of students who are enrolled in school at any time during the school year, but are not enrolled at the end of the school year and did not transfer, graduate, or die. Data retrieved from: http://www.azed.gov/research-evaluation/dropout-rate-study-report/.

Figure 1.4. Dropout rates for TCHS, American Indian, and State trends

The conditions for Navajo adolescents appear bleak when the sole source of information comes from achievement data. I agree with the veracity of data, yet, my experience working with Navajo adolescents on the Navajo Nation teaches me something quite different. My experience teaches me that Navajo adolescents have an innate capacity to be successful. This innate capacity manifests itself in undocumented and unreported highpoint experiences and aspirations that describe a picture of high potential,
indicating Navajo adolescents’ ability to be successful in a highly complex global context. I now present my problem statement, where I describe the successful experiences related to learning that exist within Navajo high schools. I narrow my focus to TCHS to identify and describe their documented successes. I will also provide a description of AI, the theoretical research perspective and methodology that facilitated the discovery of the positive core that exists within TCHS and its vision for future academic achievement.

**Problem Statement**

There is evidence of successful experiences related to learning that exists within high schools on the Navajo Nation. I present evidence of successful experiences related to learning that is: (a) found in related research on Navajo education; (b) demonstrated through the achievement of Navajo adolescents; and (c) embedded in school-based data reported to the Arizona Department of Education by TCHS.

Empirical research with Navajo high schools found specific characteristics that contribute to the successes they experience. Navajo schools: (a) provide examples of successful collaboration among students (Jackson & Smith, 2001); (b) are sites of social cohesion among students (Hinkley, et al., 2001; McInerney, Roche, McInerney, & Marsh, 1997; McInerney & Swisher, 1995); (c) provide an example of tribal resonance (Willeto, 1999, 2007); and (d) are driving forces of self-determination (Manuelito, 2006). These characteristics help shape a successful high school learning experience for Navajo adolescents on the reservation.

A successful learning experience for Navajo adolescents in high school is exemplified by the increase in scholarship recipients among graduating seniors. The Office of Navajo Nation Scholarship Assistance (ONNSA) reported awarding 5,963
scholarships to Navajo adolescents in 2010 while experiencing a record number of applicants (11,208). ONNSA awards scholarships to qualifying Navajo adolescents to achieve their educational aspirations after high school. Among the scholarships Navajo adolescents are eligible to receive is the Chief Manuelito Scholarship. The Chief Manuelito Scholarship provides financial assistance to high achieving Navajo students who meet rigorous testing, GPA, and course of study requirements. Navajo high schools, with an increasing number of recognized programs related to Career Technical Education (CTE), Navajo culture and language, advanced placement (AP) and honors classes, and athletics provide a platform for Navajo adolescents to achieve academically and construct future aspirations related to learning. Local newspapers, such as the Navajo-Hopi Observer and the Navajo Times often include articles of former graduates of high schools on the Navajo Nation achieving their aspirations and pursuing successful careers such as doctors, lawyers, military officers, and veterinarians.

In my study, I narrowed my focus of successful experiences occurring in high schools in the Navajo Nation to TCHS. TCHS is a high poverty school with a population eligible for FRPL reported at 99%. TCHS has the lowest dropout rate among the public high schools on the Navajo Nation in Arizona, the fewest number of on-campus incidents requiring law enforcement intervention, and the highest attendance rate. TCHS is the only Navajo high school to have met both the attendance and graduation rate in AYP determinations, and has the highest student achievement as measured by the percent of 10th graders demonstrating proficiency in mathematics, reading, and writing. TCHS, however, is not considered high performing; yet, within this school, I believe exists a personal, cultural, and organizational history of success referred to as the positive core.
The positive core of an organization includes the wisdom, knowledge, positive attitude, stories, achievements, strengths, highpoint experiences, capabilities, and innovations of an organization and the people within it. It identifies the sources of health, vitality, and excellence that give life to an organization when it is most alive, effective, and constructively capable in economic, ecological, and human terms (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2003). The positive core is discovered through a process of inquiry that strengthens an organization’s capacity to apprehend, anticipate, and heighten its positive potential (Whitney & Schau, 1998; Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2003).

Discovering the positive core is at the heart of the AI process (Cooperrider, et al., 2008). AI is the collaborative search for the best in people, their organizations, and the relevant world around them that is termed the positive core (Whitney, 2010). AI assumes that every organization has a positive core and makes the deliberate choice to study the best of an organization, which is its positive core (Cooperrider, Sorensen Jr., Whitney, & Yaeger, 2000).

As the first step in the AI process, discovering the positive core has a significant affect on an organization’s ability to collectively generate a vision of a sustainable future and enhance an organization’s capacity for positive change. A positive vision that people invest with shared meaning can bridge the relationship between people’s behavior and their actions toward achieving a desired future (Watkins & Mohr, 2001). A vision of the future fosters an authentic commitment from individuals that guide present and future actions (Senge, 1990). The process of discovering the positive core through the AI process has shown success when applied to high school settings.

Researchers facilitating change in the high school setting reported significant
success when examining schools through an AI theoretical research perspective and research methodology. Discovering the positive core in schools resulted in improving the learning environment for students with disabilities (Calabrese, et al, 2008), reinvigorating a struggling rural school district (Calabrese, Hester, Friesen, & Burkhalter, 2010), and raising student achievement in non-AYP schools (Calabrese, Hummel, & San Martin, 2007). Examining schools through the use of an AI theoretical research perspective and research methodology provided opportunities for stakeholders to collaboratively discover new possibilities not previously imagined.

Because of AI’s potential to create an optimistic vision for the future, its use within a Navajo educational setting is an important line of inquiry not previously explored that complemented existing lines of inquiry.

Although the data presented in the background to this study present a bleak aspect of a larger picture, I intend to describe another, brighter aspect that exists within TCHS. I applied an AI theoretical research perspective and research methodology that identified and described the positive core related to learning that exists within TCHS and Navajo adolescents’ vision for future academic achievement.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of my study was to identify and describe the positive core related to learning that exists within TCHS and Navajo adolescents’ vision for future academic achievement.
Overview of the Methodology

My study used a qualitative case study design to identify and describe Navajo adolescents’ discovery of the positive core within TCHS and Navajo adolescents’ vision for future academic achievement through their involvement in the AI process.

I used an AI theoretical research perspective and methodology to guide my study. AI was used because of its affirmative approach and capacity to facilitate interaction and collaboration with others (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2003). An AI methodology typically involves a 4-D Cycle: Discovery, Dream, Design, and Destiny (see Figure 1.5). For the purposes of my study, participants were engaged in the first two stages of the 4-D Cycle: Discovery and Dream.
The appreciative inquiry 4-D cycle consists of four stages: Discovery, Dream, Design, and Destiny. The Discovery stage, the first stage of the cycle, asks participants “What gives life” to their organization. The Dream stage, the second stage of the cycle, asks participants “What might be” of their organization. The Design stage, the third stage, asks participants to question, “How can it be” for their organization. The Destiny stage is the fourth stage of the cycle and culminates the process with a plan to sustain “What might be”. All four stages makeup the AI 4-D Cycle (Whitney & Cooperrider, 1998).

Figure 1.5 Description of the appreciative inquiry 4-D Cycle
The Discovery stage is the first stage of the 4-D Cycle in which participants inquire into what gives life to their organization. They begin to discover their positive core by appreciating the best of “What is?” in their organization (Cooperrider, et al., 2008). The Dream Stage is the second stage of the 4-D Cycle in which participants imagine their ideal future of the organization. The Dream stage uses the data generated in the Discovery Stage to facilitate participants’ collective vision. The collective vision becomes the “What might be?” of their future academic achievement (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005). The Design Stage is the third stage of the 4-D Cycle where participants take the best of what is and use that discovery to design a model of “What will be.” The fourth stage, the Destiny Stage, is where a plan is created and commitments are made to allow the shared vision to become a reality for the organization (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2000). As a whole, all four stages comprise the AI 4-D Cycle.

My research used the first two stages of the 4-D Cycle: Discovery and Dream. The first two stages of the AI 4-D Cycle guided Navajo adolescents in the discovery of the positive core related to learning that exists within TCHS and to construct their vision for future academic achievement.

I chose to use only the Discovery and Dream stages for the following reasons: (a) the time constraints placed on taking students out of academic classes to participate in my study; (b) participants were engaged in describing positive core experiences related to learning; (c) participants’ discoveries of their highpoint learning experiences elicited key themes that underlie the positive image of a desired future; and (d) participants envisioned a future of academic achievement (Cooperrider, et al., 2008).
Unit of Analysis

The unit of analysis of my study was a group of purposively selected academically successful Navajo adolescent students of TCHS who participated in the first two stages of the AI 4-D Cycle: Discovery and Dream.

I worked with TCHS guidance counselors and administrators, who provided input toward the selection of student participants. Participants were chosen according to specific criterion that provided a representative sample of academically successful TCHS students. The selection criterion was presented to two guidance counselors and the building principal, who identified students meeting the criteria based on their knowledge of the student body. The criterion listed below for selecting student participants brought an experienced and initial perspective of the experience of academically successful students at TCHS. Additionally, student participants were actively engaged in one or more school-based extracurricular activity for more than one year if applicable. Extracurricular activity participation refers to school-based activities engaged in by adolescents that are organized and supported by schools, primarily occur on school grounds, and offer a challenging setting outside of academics (Feldman & Matjasko, 2005). Extracurricular activity participation lent a perspective of the experience at TCHS outside of the academic classroom. Participants were selected based on the following criteria:

a. gender balance
b. grade balance
c. enrolled in a course of study (honors class, AP class, Navajo language class) to make them eligible to receive the Chief Manuelito Scholarship
d. involved in one or more extracurricular activity

e. passed the State graduation test when applicable

I chose this criterion for selecting participants because students who can meet the above criterion have demonstrated the capacity for school success; therefore, manifest the resiliency among Navajo adolescents.

**Research Questions**

My study was driven by an overarching question and guided by two specific research questions. The overarching question that framed my study was: How do Navajo adolescent students of a non-AYP, high-poverty public high school on the Navajo Nation identify and describe the positive core related to learning that exists with their school and create a vision for future academic achievement? The following research questions guided my study:

1. How do Navajo adolescent students at TCHS describe the positive core that exists within TCHS?

2. How do Navajo adolescent students at TCHS describe their vision for future academic achievement?

**Objectives**

The objectives of my study were as follows:

1. To describe the positive core related to learning that exists within TCHS.

2. To describe the conditions necessary for Navajo adolescent students at TCHS to achieve their vision for future academic achievement at TCHS.

**Assumptions**

My study was based on the following assumptions:
1. Tuba City High School has a positive core related to learning.
2. Navajo adolescent students at TCHS can describe the positive core related to learning within TCHS.
3. Tuba City High School has an undiscovered positive core and the potential to be high performing.
4. Navajo adolescent students at TCHS want to aspire to high academic achievement.
5. Navajo adolescent students at TCHS can create a vision for future high academic achievement.

Limitations

My study had the following limitations:

1. My study was limited by the use of only the first two stages of the 4-D Cycle: Discovery and Dream.
2. My study was limited by time constraints to enable the participation of Navajo adolescent students at TCHS in the first two stages of the AI 4-D Cycle: Discovery and Dream.
3. My study was limited by specifically focusing on the positive core within TCHS and the collection of positive data through qualitative methods.

Delimitations

My study had the following delimitations:

1. My study was delimited to TCHS, a non-AYP, high-poverty public high school on the Navajo Nation in Arizona.
2. My study was delimited to purposively selected participants: Navajo adolescent students at TCHS.

**Definition of Key Terms**

**Adolescent.**

Rather than conceptualize adolescent as a liminal stage, generally placed between the ages 9 to 15 years old, in which identity solidifies, I define adolescent within the Navajo understanding of adolescence as the beginning of a journey in which youth acquire the tools to be active cultural agents within the social environments they participate (Deyhle & LeCompte, 1994; Dole & Csordas, 2003). For the purposes of my study, I refer to adolescents to be within the age range of a high school student (14 to 18 years old).

**American Indian/Alaska Native.**

I use the terms *American Indian/Alaska Native* to refer to people indigenous to what is now the United States (Lomawaima & McCarty, 2006). I use the above term to encompass the shared American Indian identity of people indigenous to the United States (Pewewardy, 2002). Given the cultural, linguistic, political and social diversity present among the 566 federally recognized tribes, the term is used as a broad reference when discussing issues that affect the population as a whole (Lomawaima, 2000; McCarty, 2009; Ogunwole, 2006; Tippeconic, 1991). I use only the term American Indian when referencing indigenous peoples in the lower 48 states.

**Appreciative Inquiry.**

Appreciative inquiry is a theoretical research perspective and methodology that searches for the best in people, their organizations, and the world around them. AI is a
collaborative process of discovering what gives life to an organization when it is most effective and capable in economic, ecological, and human terms (Cooperrider, et al., 2008).

**Glass Ceiling.**

The glass ceiling is a descriptive term for the presence of artificial barriers to achievement (Lee, 2002). The metaphor was originally applied in economics to explain the unseen, yet unbreachable barrier that inhibits upward mobility, regardless of qualifications or achievements (Federal Glass Ceiling Commission, 1995). For the purposes of my study, I use the term glass ceiling to describe the invisible barriers through which Navajo adolescents view success.

**Indian education.**

*Indian education* refers to education that takes place in schools -- institutions independent from Indigenous culture (Tippeconic, 1991). An additional meaning of *Indian education* includes the culturally based education of Indigenous youth from parents, relatives and communities, independent of institutions that operate under the discretion of federal and/or state mandates (Lomawaima & McCarty, 2006). Institutions of *Indian education* evolved from on and off reservation mission and federal schools to include state public schools in present discussions (Lomawaima & McCarty, 2006). I use the term strictly to refer to the institutional education of American Indians that occurs outside of Indian culture, thus is subject to federal and state policy.

**Positive Core.**

The Positive core is the sum of the best of an organization and its people, including the greatest achievements and innovations that an organization and its people
experience. The positive core is the wisdom, knowledge, positive attitude, stories, achievements, strengths, highpoint experiences, capabilities, and innovations of an organization and its people. Discovering the positive core is a process of inquiry in which an organization enhances its collective wisdom, builds energy and resiliency to change, and extends its capacity to achieve extraordinary results (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005).

Reservation.

I use the term reservation and Indian country to refer to lands designated as federal territory, governed by tribal governments and federal Indian policy, where Indian country is used to include all Indian lands. Though reservations are parcels of land reserved from original lands inhabited by an indigenous tribe, not all reservations (for example, the Cherokee reservation) are part of the original land holdings from first contact with Europeans (Bailey & Bailey, 1999). Moreover, not all Indian tribes have reservations, nor do all American Indian/Alaska Natives live on reservations. I use the specific name of a reservation (e.g. Navajo Nation) when appropriate.

Self-determination.

Manuelito (2006) conceptualizes self-determination from an Indigenous perspective. An Indigenous interpretation of self-determination parallels the values held by many Indigenous tribes, including the Navajo, to encompass unity, harmony, and cohesiveness (Manuelito, 2006; McInerney, et al., 1997; Newman, 2005; Pewewardy, 2002). Therefore, I conceptualize self-determination from the Navajo to be neither individualistic nor based on competition, but as a communal goal of thinking, planning and doing for ones’ tribe (Manuelito, 2006).
**School success.**

I refer to school success as encompassing the positive educational experiences of American Indian/Alaska Native students at school (Willeto, 1999). For the purposes of my study, school success includes domains of positive school functioning defined in the research, comprised of: Persistence in school (Hare & Pidgeon, 2011), participation in extracurricular activities such as sports and clubs (Whitbeck, Hoyt, Stubben, & LaFromboise, 2001), an increased sense of belonging and school membership (Jones & Galliher, 2007), and high school graduation (Sakiestewa, 2000).

**Significance of the Study**

My study has the potential to be important toward informing the pedagogical practices of teachers of Navajo adolescents, to the education profession, Indian education, federal policymakers, educational researchers, and toward the advancement of using AI in educational environments.

My study has the potential to be important to educators of Navajo adolescents. My study provided a model for empowering Navajo adolescents to enhance pedagogical practices from the personal perspective of the student. Accordingly, student perspectives can inform and influence teachers’ pedagogical practices.

My study has the potential to be important to the education profession because it extended an AI theoretical research perspective and research methodology to stakeholders of a non-AYP, high-poverty public high school in the Navajo Nation. The replicable methodology can be applied to suburban and urban schools toward the discovery of the positive core. Moreover, the use of AI as a theoretical research perspective provides a contrasting perspective of education by viewing low performing
schools as a source of strength waiting to be discovered instead of viewing them as problems to be solved (Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987).

Historically, a deficit-based perspective has been applied to Indian education (Meriam et al., 1928; U.S. Department of Education, 1991; U.S. Senate, 1969). My study focused on the positive core that promotes the success of Navajo adolescents using an AI theoretical and research perspective. AI provides a competing perspective to Indian education’s reputation as a tragedy (Tippeconic, 1991). My study can inform tribal policymakers who are required to implement the mandates of NCLB. The use of AI has the potential to promote the discovery of personal, cultural, and organizational strengths that lead to a positive impact on realizing and sustaining higher academic achievement under NCLB.

My study has the potential to be important to federal educational policymakers because of its potential to strengthen a high poverty school’s capacity to improve student achievement. High-poverty schools accounted for approximately 17% of the nation’s K-12 public schools in 2008 (Aud et al., 2010). Among the initiatives of NCLB is to improve the academic achievement in the Nation’s highest poverty schools (Cookson, 2007; Gerstl-Pepin, 2006). Through an AI research methodology, my study identified and describe how the discovery of a high poverty school’s positive core can impact the organization’s capacity to meet the initiatives set forth in NCLB by improving academic achievement.

My study has the potential to be important to educational researchers because of its ability to open new lines of inquiry. Specifically, it has the potential to be important to researchers of Indian education. My study advanced the theoretical understandings of
successful Navajo adolescents as representative of the American Indian/Alaska Native population (Demmert, McCardle, & Mele-McCarthy, 2006; Sakiestewa, 2000; Whitbeck, et al., 2001; Willeto, 1999; Zyromski, Bryant Jr., Deese, & Gerler Jr., 2008). Finally, my study has the potential to discover the positive core related to learning of Navajo adolescents and how this discovery can create a vision of future academic achievement to reveal the personal, cultural, and organizational strengths of a Navajo high school.

My study extended the use of AI to a Navajo high school and compliment AI work already done in both public and private educational settings (Calabrese, 2006; Ryan, Soven, Smither, Sullivan, & VanBuskirk, 1999). My study advanced the use of AI in school settings to promote cultural change conducive to envisioning, realizing, and sustaining higher academic achievement in a non-AYP, high-poverty public high school on the Navajo Nation.

**Summary**

My dissertation consists of five chapters. Chapter 1 provided the background of the study, problem statement, purpose of the study, overview of the methodology, unit of analysis, research questions, objectives, assumptions, limitations, delimitations, definition of key terms, and the significance of the study. Chapter 2 presents a competing perspective, an explanation of conceptual and theoretical frameworks, and a review and synthesis of related empirical research. Chapter 3 provides a description of the context of the study, research design, the specific methods to be used to collect data, and the data analysis procedure. Chapter 4 presents a detailed narrative of the salient findings based on participants’ involvement in the first two stages of the AI 4-D Cycle: Discovery and Dream. Chapter 5 provides a discussion of the findings, implications for future research,
and a conclusion to the study.
Chapter 2

Literature Review

The following chapter presents a review of the literature germane to my study. The literature review includes: (a) my conceptual framework comprised of my epistemology, professional education experience, and theoretical perspectives; (b) a presentation and discussion of a competing theory; (c) a discussion of my rationale and search methodology for empirical research relevant to my study; (d) a presentation of the relevant research; and (e) a summary of the chapter.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for my study is comprised of my epistemology, professional education experience, and the theoretical research perspectives of appreciative inquiry (AI) and resilience theory. This section provides the basis of my view and approach of my study of a Navajo high school. My epistemology and professional education experience informed my belief that a positive core related to learning exists within a non-AYP, high-poverty high school on the Navajo Nation; and Navajo adolescents have a vision for future academic achievement. My belief that a high level of academic achievement can be realized in a high-poverty school is supported by research (Bell, 2001; Blank, 2011; Carter, 2000; Cooper, Ponder, Merritt, & Matthews, 2005; Harris, 2007; Izumi, 2002; Johnson & Asera, 1999; McGee, 2004; Ragland,
Clubine, Constable, & Smith, 2002; Reeves, 2003, 2007). The purpose of my study was to identify and describe the positive core related to learning that exists within TCHS and Navajo adolescent’s vision for future academic achievement.

**Epistemology**

My study was grounded in a social constructionist epistemology. Social constructionism maintains that the source and maintenance of all knowledge is generated from social interaction. Social constructionism refers to the construction of meaning by people’s interactions as they negotiate the world around them (Berger & Luckman, 1966). A social constructionist epistemology views reality as consisting of: (a) multiple viewpoints where none are superior to the other; (b) language as deriving its meaning through relationships within cultural and historical settings; (c) relationships as being formed with others and in a constant state of change that creates a continuous state of meaning making; and (d) human interactions as creating the potential to recognize the past, take the good, and construct a better future (Gergen, 1999) The beliefs of social constructionism serve as the epistemological basis of AI.

A social constructionist epistemology forms the foundation for AI. Social constructionism’s foundation states that people co-construct their reality through their interactions with each other as they understand the context where they live and work (Crotty, 1998). A social constructionist epistemology aligns with the premise of AI to bring people together to collectively construct a better future (Cooperrider, Barrett, & Srivastva, 1995). I describe how a social constructionist epistemology integrates with my professional educational experiences in the next section.
Professional Education Experiences

My professional education experiences are grounded in a social constructionist epistemology and influence the AI theoretical research perspective and AI research methodology I used for my study. My professional career began as a high school language arts teacher at a high-poverty school on the Navajo Nation in Tuba City, Arizona. In my four years as an educator on the Navajo Nation, I also taught writing courses at the tribal college, Diné College, to adult learners. My role as an educator evolved towards a leadership capacity, where I spent one year as principal of a high-poverty, urban middle school in the Midwest. I moved back to continue working on the reservation. I spent another year as the academic coach of a junior high school on the Navajo nation, where I conducted my study. I left the reservation at the beginning of the 2013-2014 school year to continue my leadership development with a large urban school district in the West.

In my role as an educator, I want to give my passion a purpose; I look for opportunities to make a difference. My passion is to empower youth from disadvantaged backgrounds to take control of their lives and recognize their innate ability to achieve at high levels and contribute to society. I seek to empower youth with the skills and belief that they can learn and succeed in reaching a high level of academic achievement. In doing so, my role as an educator allows me to build positive and constructive relationships with youth, including my Navajo adolescent students. I work from the premise that the language people use to understand their world is the through such relational processes as collaboration, communication, and negotiation (Gergen, 1985).
When that language is positive and hopeful, it serves as a catalyst for fashioning new possibilities inherent in relationships (Ludema, 2000).

A deeper understanding of social constructionism informed me that students have the capacity to create a new reality of their choosing, potentially breaking through the glass ceiling, and creating a new belief system where academic achievement can emerge from an economically disadvantaged context. I believe that Navajo adolescents can create and sustain this future of hope and possibility.

My epistemology and professional education experiences led me to form core beliefs as an educator about Navajo adolescents: (a) they have a capacity to be successful; (b) they desire to be successful; and (c) a history of their success is discoverable. My core belief is also that a Navajo high school has a discoverable history of facilitating the success of Navajo adolescents. I believe that by affirming and validating the positive core related to learning that exists within TCHS, the learning environment of Navajo adolescents can give way to a high level of academic achievement.

The academic achievements of Navajo adolescents against the backdrop of myriad risks present on the Navajo Nation increase emphasis on their capacity to overcome adversity. For the purposes of my study, risk refers to the elevated probability or threat of a negative occurrence (Doll & Lyon, 1998). Navajo adolescents who achieve academically despite the risks present on the Navajo Nation underscores their resilience. A theory of resilience posits that healthy or positive development can occur despite adversity and risk (Fergus & Zimmerman, 2005). Resilience theory is associated with a shift from deficit-based thinking towards an increased emphasis on strengths (Rak & Patterson, 1996). The strengths-based focus of resilience aligns well with AI. Together,
AI and resilience theory comprised the theoretical research perspectives I applied to my study.

**Theoretical Perspectives**

**Appreciative inquiry.**

Appreciative inquiry is the theoretical research perspective that I used in my study of TCHS. In AI, there are five underlying principles: (a) the constructionist principle – organizational realities depend on communal ways of knowing; (b) the principal of simultaneity – inquiry and change are not separate moments; (c) the poetic principle – an organization’s narrative is constantly being co-authored by its members from endless possibilities; (d) the anticipatory principle – an organization’s future is guided by current linguistic practices and subsequent images; and (e) the positive principle – positive questions initiate lasting change (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2000).

Applying an AI theoretical research perspective to my study allowed me to describe how focusing on the positive core related to learning that exists within TCHS served as a catalyst for Navajo adolescents to create a vision for future academic achievement.

I used AI as the theoretical research perspective for the following reasons: (a) it is generative in nature; (b) it has the capacity for individual growth and organizational transformation (Bushe, 2007); (c) it employs a narrative-based methodology (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2003); and (d) it contrasts with traditional problem solving methods as one that is appreciative and affirming (Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987). AI is a theoretical research perspective and research methodology used to initiate organizational change through a positive inquiry approach. AI balances a problem-based focus by facilitating
the discovery of what is good about people, their work, and the context that enables them to thrive (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005). Through discovery, AI takes the best from the past and present to provide the basis for constructing a future of what could be. This narrative becomes the collectively co-constructed design to sustain the organization’s destiny (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2003).

**Origins of appreciative inquiry.**

Appreciative inquiry originated as a research methodology in the 1980s by David Cooperrider as part of his doctoral dissertation while a doctoral student at Case Western Reserve University. Cooperrider was working with a private, non-profit medical practice, the Cleveland Clinic Foundation (CCF), in Cleveland, Ohio. The CCF had been plagued by conflicts in leadership and decision-making between professional responsibilities and administrative affairs. Concerns within the CCF led to a partnership between Case Western Reserve University and the Organizational Behavior Department’s doctoral program under the direction of Dr. Suresh Srivastva. As the chair of Cooperrider’s doctoral dissertation committee, Srivastva mentored Cooperrider as he experimented with alternative processes that deviated from traditional organizational development. Cooperrider’s non-traditional processes revealed that AI articulated the collective wisdom found within any organization and the importance of life-giving forces of any organization. The outcome of this experience led to the creation of the AI research methodology (Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987).

Appreciative inquiry’s line of inquiry follows research related to humanistic psychology (Maslow, 1943, 1954, 1962, 1965), positive psychology (Seligman &
Csikszentmihalyi, 2000), and learned optimism (Seligman, 1990, 2006). The line of inquiry that focused on what made people healthy and their lives worthwhile has its genesis in the work of William James (1890), who posited that human behavior and human nature is inherently optimistic.

Cooperrider was influenced by work focused on empowering people. He believed in the latent potential of people to transform their organizations. This led to energizing organizations through the cooperative and collaborative discovery of what is good about people, their organizations, and the context that enables them to thrive. The AI research methodology takes the best from the past and present to create the future. AI generates hope and possibility in the life of the organization as the people within the organization learn to value, trust, and appreciate each other (Ludema, Wilmot, & Srivastva, 1997). Through the AI method, the energies of people within the organization are directed toward discovering their positive core.

The positive core discovered through the AI research methodology reflects the greatest achievements or experiences than an organization or person experiences. The positive core is that which gives meaning to an organization and is expressed in a variety of ways, including the wisdom, knowledge, positive attitude, stories, achievements, strengths, highpoint experiences, capabilities, and innovations of an organization and the people within it (Cooperrider, et al., 2008). AI posits that every organization and human being has a discoverable positive core with the capacity for moments of inspiration, opportunity, and images of the future (Fitzgerald, Murrel, & Miller, 2003). The positive core is discovered through a process of inquiry that strengthens an organization’s capacity to apprehend, anticipate, and heighten its positive potential (Whitney & Schau,

Appreciative inquiry is a form of action research (Dick, 2004). Action research follows a cyclical pattern of steps following the identification of the objective: planning, executing and fact-finding (Lewin, 1946). Traditionally, the objective of an action research process centers on addressing a problem within a specific setting (Glesne, 2006; Merriam, 2009). With traditional modes of action research, researchers focus on problem solving models that identify problems, brainstorm solutions, analyze data, and provide solutions (Glesne, 2006). This traditional approach leaves organizations confronting the same problems because the original focus was on symptoms not causes (Senge, 1990). The problem-solving approach has a tendency to create feelings of alienation, skepticism, and fear among participants (Boyd & Bright, 2007). AI balances the dominant application of a problem-based focus by facilitating the cooperative and collaborative discovery of what is good about people, their work, and the context in which they thrive (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005).

Appreciative inquiry extends traditional action research by using the positive core within an organization as the impetus toward facilitating whole system change as a change methodology, with success documented in an array of settings. AI differs from the traditional problem solving models by encouraging participants to reflect on and share personal past and present experiences within the organization. Through the engagement of storytelling, participants co-construct their organization’s narrative and create a guiding image of the future. An image can be defined as a phrase, metaphor, or story with a shared meaning (Bushe, 1998).
Applying the concept of imagery to organizational development posits that an image of the future guides and determines present and future action (Cooperrider, 2000). The fate of an organization can be determined by its future image, understanding that a positive image inspires the actions necessary to realize that vision. A collective positive image with a shared meaning can bridge the relationship between people’s behavior and their actions toward a desired future (Watkins & Mohr, 2001). AI focuses on the sharing of the best from the past and present with the goal of seeking a collective desired future for the organization.

Appreciative inquiry has multiple applications as a change methodology. AI’s initial applications were in the private business sector where it was employed as a change and strategic planning process. In this manner, it has been used by various corporations such as GTE and British Airways (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005; Whitney, Cooperrider, Garrison, & Moore, 1999). Following the success of AI within the corporate setting, the U.S. Navy, BBC, and the country of Nepal applied AI to foster large-scale collaborative action (Cooperrider, et al., 2008). The large-scale involvement that came from working with big corporations and countries carried over to AI’s application in the public sector. The Imagine Chicago project, for example, demonstrated how AI engaged Chicago neighborhoods to become more vibrant (Browne, 2004). In addition to the large-scale action AI facilitates, it has also shown success when applied to small group, or team settings (Bushe, 1998; Bushe & Coetzer, 1995). In this capacity, AI has found success as a theoretical research perspective and research methodology in K-12 and higher education settings (Calabrese, 2006; Calabrese, Goodvin, & Niles, 2005; Calabrese, Hester, Friesen, & Buckhalter, 2010; Calabrese, Hummel, & San Martin, 2007;
Appreciative inquiry as a theoretical research perspective seeks to understand what people value about themselves and their organization. As a research methodology, AI provides the structure for initiating whole organizational systemic changes by emphasizing the generation of ideas and the construction of meaning with others within the organization. In the following section, I describe the complementary theoretical perspective of resilience theory as an additional lens to view my study.

**Resilience theory.**

In addition to AI, I considered a number of additional theoretical perspectives that align well with an AI theoretical research perspective and research methodology. Among the many theoretical perspectives that focus on the ecology of human potential and emphasize human thriving, I considered applying self-determination theory as a theory of motivation and resilience theory. Self-determination theory is intended to describe the causes, processes, and outcomes of human thriving (Vansteenkiste & Sheldon, 2006). Self-determination theory specifies the conditions that support an optimal motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2009). While self-determination theory as a theory of motivation is a viable lens to help conceptualize the success of Navajo adolescents, it does not take into account the independent variables presented by contemporary and historical data on Navajo adolescents that influence academic achievement, including high dropout rates (Brandt, 1992), teenage pregnancy (Dalla & Gamble, 2000a; Deyhle & Margonis, 1995), alcoholism (Kunitz, 2006; Kunitz & Levy, 2000), and other social and cultural challenges.
The status and condition of life experienced by Navajo adolescents describe an environment not conducive to school success. As such, a learned helplessness exists among Navajo adolescents, manifested through a belief system that places a glass ceiling on success (Chafouleas, 2004; Seligman, 1990, 2006). The myriad difficulties experienced on the reservation frame the resilience of Navajo adolescents who achieve academically. As a result, I chose resilience theory as the paralleling theoretical perspective I applied to my study.

Resilience theory has been applied to various fields of science to describe the persistence of natural and human systems in the face of potentially debilitating changes (Antonovsky, 1979; Holling, 1973). In social science research, the construct of resilience has been derived from the field of developmental studies on the risk of children in disadvantaged or dangerous circumstances who achieve positive developmental outcomes despite their elevated risk of later developing a problem (Garmezy, 1974). Resilience research has examined and described multiple tracks to resiliency: cultural, family, and personal resilience (Benard, 2004).

Resilience theory emerged as a lens to understand the capacity of people to achieve positive outcomes at the personal level. Since its initial application, resilience has been applied to explain the persistence of collective human systems in the face of difficulty through the development of cultural and family resilience frameworks. Cultural and family resilience are applied to describe the strengths inherent in resilient collective human systems. Cultural resilience is defined as the capacity of a cultural system to absorb disturbances and initiate adaptive changes through protective factors at the
cultural level-spirituality, family, and language (Ambler et al., 2003; HeavyRunner & Marshall, 2003). Embedded at the cultural level, resilience has been applied to examine the persistence of cultural artifacts such as language in American Indian/Alaska Native communities (Aguilera & LeCompte, 2007; Hinton, 2003; Hornberger, 1998, 2009; Hornberger & King, 1996; Suina, 2004; White, 2006). Family resilience refers to the family processes in surmounting crisis or prolonged hardship (Walsh, 1996). Personal resilience is the capacity of an individual to positively adapt to difficulty (Garmezy & Masten, 1986).

Cultural, family, and personal resilience are not completely distinct; there is an interrelationship among them. Whether applied at the cultural, family, or personal level, the seminal works on resilience define the construct by its dominant perspectives. The dominant perspectives prevalent in resilience research include understanding resilience as: (a) continuous and dynamic (Garmezy, 1974; Rutter, 2012); (b) something that can be strengthened through a process of positive adaptation (Werner & Smith, 1982); (c) requiring successful negotiation of various risk and protective factors (Garmezy, Masten, & Tellegen, 1984); and (d) a construct with a relational basis (Saltzman et al., 2011; Werner, 1993). It is within this understanding of resilience, one that parallels the American Psychological Association’s definition of resilience as a process of adapting well in the face of risk, that I apply personal resilience theory as a complementary theoretical perspective to AI in my study with Navajo adolescents (Southwick & Charney, 2012).

To identify and describe the individual capacity of Navajo adolescents of TCHS to be successful, I chose to identify and describe Navajo adolescents of TCHS through
the lens of personal resilience. I define resilience, as the capacity of people to positively adapt to difficulty towards overcoming adversity; ultimately becoming successful in their lives through perseverance and affectional support through strong relational ties, despite exposure to high risk, or the elevated probability of an undesirable outcome (Greene, Galambos, & Lee, 2004; Masten, Cutuli, Herbers, & Reed, 2002).

While resilience theory is concerned with risk, it is also focuses on the strengths of people and the power of human interaction. Resilience theory is part of a shift in thinking from deficits towards human potential and the strengths embedded in human beings who demonstrate personal resilience despite risk (Rak & Patterson, 1996).

Resilience can be fostered or promoted by an individuals’ ability to strengthen one or more of the following traits: (a) social competence; (b) problem-solving ability; (c) autonomy; and (d) sense of purpose (Benard, 2004). In order to exhibit high levels of resiliency, an individual does not have to exemplify all of these traits. The process of strengthening one or more of these traits over time leads to increased levels of resiliency (Wang & Reynolds, 1995).

Resiliency is a process-oriented construct that emanates from peoples’ positive adaptation to difficulty, ultimately giving way to success (Egeland, Carlson, & Sroufe, 1993). This process centers on peoples’ use of internal adaptive mechanisms (psychological well-being or competence) and external adaptive mechanisms (relationships or institutional support), and how these mechanisms help people negotiate various risk factors and protective factors to overcome adversity (Doll & Lyon, 1998).

A number of risk factors and protective factors can influence a person’s ability to overcome adversity. Adversity refers to negative experiences that have the potential to
disrupt adaptation by virtue of risk factors such as: exposure to domestic or neighborhood violence, psychopathology, poverty, homelessness, and community level traumas of war and natural disasters (Masten, et al., 2002). Protective factors are identified as assets, and can moderate the effect of adversity and influence resilience.

Protective factors are identified across the literature as a dominant perspective associated with resilience. Early resilience research closely defined resilience with concepts of competence (Garmezy, 1974) and a sense of coherence, or an individual’s ability to make sense of the world (Antonovsky, 1987). As resilience research evolved, it was understood that these concepts were protective factors, or assets that people can draw upon to influence levels of resilience. Competence and a sense of coherence were individual protective factors that influenced individual resilience. Additionally, protective factors associated with the family, community, and culture are found to be of equal importance in the process of strengthening resilience (Fergus & Zimmerman, 2005). In this context, assets include resources embedded within people or resources that stem from relationships with other people or organizations (Yates & Masten, 2004).

Within a relational context, assets embedded in human relationships have been found to be integral toward the development of resilience. Researchers have affirmed that caring relationships (Ainsworth, 1989) and strong support networks were important assets that strengthened levels of resilience (Steele & Steele, 1994). When applied to education, resilience research has focused on the power of positive relationships to influence resiliency among students who face adversity (Crosnoe, Erickson, & Dornbusch, 2002; Johnson, 2008).
Resilience research has been applied to educational settings to understand how children exposed to risk, such as poverty, achieve success (Garmezy, 1991a). In the context of education, resilience research posits that the assets contributory to success in school are located in at least one of three places: the child, the family, or the school (Masten, Best, & Garmezy, 1990). These assets manifest as individual competence (Garmezy, 1991b), cultural and familial support (LaFromboise, Hoyt, Oliver, & Whitbeck, 2006; Strand & Peacock, 2002), and supportive teachers (Bernard, 1993). The relationships that emerge from the use of these assets contribute to a child’s ability to adapt to adversity, develop a strong level of resilience, and succeed in school (Pianta & Walsh, 1998).

**Linking AI and resilience theory.**

Appreciative inquiry and resilience theory are parallel schools of thought that emerged in their respective fields in response to the dominant application of deficit models of focus (O'Leary & Ickovics, 1995; Watkins & Cooperrider, 2000). The emerging positive line of inquiry reframed how researchers viewed people and marked a shift away from examining people as deficit-based. Researchers asked what made people psychologically healthy and what conditions created their ability to thrive (Carr, 2007). AI and resilience theory both emphasize the power of relationships and human interaction to create a better future. My study filtered AI through the notion of resilience to identify and describe the positive core related to learning that exists within TCHS and Navajo adolescents’ vision for future academic achievement. In the following section, I briefly describe a competing theoretical perspective as a way of viewing my study.
Competing Theory

Critical theory, as a competing theory, can be applied to my study. Critical theory has been derived from philosophers like Kant, Hegel, and Marx, and examines oppression experienced in society, particularly by minority populations (Habermas, 1973). Many critical theorists focus on the oppressive aspects of society (Crotty, 1998). Critical theory is grounded in a belief that people should be freed from the circumstances that enslave them (Freire, 1972). The focus on empowering people towards understanding that a better life can be provided allowed critical theory to serve as a tool for educational reform (Lather, 1986). The concentration on how to provide a better future for education connects critical theory and AI.

Critical theory and AI are both grounded in a social constructionist epistemology, through the belief that people, through their interactions, create a better future (Gergen, 2008). Critical theory and AI differ, however, on their view of human interaction. Traditionally, critical theory focuses on power relationships and how that power is abused, creating an unjust society (Crotty, 1998). Isolating where injustices exist serves as the impetus for correcting the problem (Freire, 1972). AI is a different line of inquiry in terms of its focus. AI does not focus on the perceived problems in society; AI looks toward affirming the power of human interactions to create a better future (Cooperrider, et al., 1995). Consequently, I chose AI because of its empowering methodology that seeks to involve people in a transformative process for creating a better future. In the next section, I present my rationale and search methodology for empirical research relevant to my study.
Search Criteria

The purpose of my literature review was to identify empirical research associated with my study. The empirical research I used to anchor my study met the following criteria: (a) empirical research with a well-defined qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods methodology from 1995 to present; (b) empirical research published in peer-reviewed journals; (c) empirical research available in full text from online databases or available through a loan service through the university library; and (d) empirical research that has its primary focus on American Indian/Alaska Native adolescents.

I delimited my search of the empirical research using the following online databases: Education Full Text; Education Research Complete; Electronic Journal Center (Ohio Link); ERIC; Psychology and Behavioral Sciences Collection; PsychInfo; SocIndex with Full Text; and AnthroSource. Education Full Text, Education Research Complete, and ERIC were all used due to their focus on empirical research related to education. PsychInfo and Psychology and Behavioral Sciences Collection were used to gain access to empirical research done in the areas of positive psychology, learned optimism, and positive research done in the area of psychopathology. SocIndex and AnthroSource were used to gain access to empirical research with done in the areas of sociology and cultural anthropology.

The overarching question that guided my search of empirical research related to my study asked: How are AI and resilience theory used to understand and describe American Indian education? Within this overarching question, the following specific search questions guided my search strategy:

1. What empirical research describes the school success of American Indian/Alaska Native adolescents?
Native students?

2. What empirical research describes the use of appreciative inquiry or other positive lines of inquiry with American Indian/Alaska Native adolescents?

3. What is the empirical evidence supporting the relationship between appreciative inquiry and resilience?

4. What empirical evidence describes the personal resilience of American Indian/Alaska Native adolescents?

I used the following keywords and keyword combinations from the databases to conduct my search:

1. Appreciative inquiry
2. Positive psychology
3. Resilience
4. American Indian/Alaska Native adolescents
5. American Indian education
6. Navajo adolescents
7. Indian reservation
8. High school
9. High-poverty
10. Positive core
11. Academic achievement
12. Education

The following keyword combinations were used to refine and narrow my search:

1. Appreciative inquiry + high school + Indian reservation
2. Resilience + high school + Indian reservation
3. Positive psychology + high school + Indian reservation
4. Appreciative inquiry + American Indian + education
5. Resilience + American Indian + education
6. Positive psychology + American Indian + education
7. Resilience + American Indian adolescents + academic achievement
8. Appreciative inquiry + American Indian adolescents + academic achievement
9. Positive psychology + American Indian/Alaska Native adolescents + academic achievement
10. Appreciative inquiry + Navajo adolescents + academic achievement
11. Resilience + Navajo adolescents + academic achievement
12. Positive psychology + Navajo adolescents + academic achievement
13. Appreciative inquiry + education OR school

My detailed search yielded a paucity of empirical research examining the academic achievement of American Indian/Alaska Native adolescents. Little empirical research exists applying a positive line of inquiry to describe the personal resilience of American Indian/Alaska Native adolescents, with no documented evidence of the use of an appreciative inquiry theoretical research perspective or research methodology. A series of database searches were also conducted for empirical research applying a positive form of inquiry to specifically describe the academic achievement of Navajo adolescents. This search yielded few results. To place my study within the landscape of emerging AI empirical research in education and towards the expansion of American Indian educational research, I conducted an additional search for empirical research using the
keywords: Appreciative inquiry and education or school. I found the following themes throughout my detailed searches of empirical research:

1. Family, community, and school influences on the development of personal resilience among American Indian adolescents that leads to school success.
2. Enculturation influences the personal resilience of American Indian adolescents and school success.
3. Enculturation and social relationships were predictors of personal resilience and school success among Navajo adolescents.
4. AI facilitates the discovery of a school’s potential for school success by validating its positive core.

The presentation of the search results is reflected in a synthesis of the empirical research.

**Synthesis of the Empirical Research**

I organized my discussion of the empirical research relevant to my study around four central themes: (a) Influences of personal resilience and school success; (b) enculturation influences resilience and school success; (c) enculturation and relationships are predictors of Navajo school success and positive functioning; and (d) the generative nature of AI improves the daily life of schools and students.

**Influences of personal resilience and school success.**

The personal resilience and school success of American Indian/Alaska Native adolescents are positively related to family, community, and school influences. Personal resilience can be identified by the positive characteristics of American Indian/Alaska Native students who overcome adversity to achieve academically: (a) good self-concept;
(b) a strong sense of direction; and (c) tenacity (Bergstrom, Cleary, & Peacock, 2003). I refer to school success as encompassing the positive educational experiences of American Indian/Alaska Native students at school (Willeto, 1999). For the purposes of my study, school success includes domains of positive school functioning defined in the research, comprised of: Persistence in school (Hare & Pidgeon, 2011), participation in extracurricular activities such as sports and clubs (Whitbeck, et al., 2001), an increased sense of belonging and school membership (Jones & Galliher, 2007), and high school graduation (Sakiestewa, 2000). The development of these characteristics and school success are related to family, school, and community influences (see Figure 2.1).
Figure 2.1 A visual synthesis of the research related to the various manifestations of family, community, and school-related influences toward the development of personal resilience and school success of American Indian/Alaska Native adolescents

Figure 2.1. The influences and positive effects of family, community, and school
I developed Figure 2.1 based on the findings and sources I discovered in my review of the research. In the following sections, I present my synthesis of the research related to the relationship between family, school, and community influences and the personal resilience and school success of American Indian/Alaska Native adolescents.

*Family-related influences.*

Support, guidance, and validation characterize the family influences American Indian/Alaska Native adolescents receive from the immediate and extended family. Family influences, often defined as strengths, were found to positively influence the development of personal resilience and positive school functioning of American Indian/Alaska Native adolescents (Stiffman et al., 2007; Thornton, Collins, & Daugherty, 2006).

Resilience research with American Indian/Alaska Native adolescents identified the family as a protective factor toward the development of personal resilience. Native adolescent students from across the United States and Canada identified connections to parents as a major contributor to their resilience. Native adolescent students appreciated the influences of elders, grandparents and parents; resilient adolescents knew that they could rely on family to help them overcome adversity and build resilience (Bergstrom, et al., 2003).

Positive connections within the family are associated with the increased likelihood of resilience among American Indian/Alaska Native adolescents. The likelihood of resilience was found to increase with higher levels of maternal warmth (LaFromboise, et al., 2006). Family influences are integral in guarding against potential
risk factors as well. Family attention, parental expectations, and caring exhibited by the family serve as protective factors against adverse health associated with sexual abuse in reservation-based American Indian adolescents; this included guarding American Indian adolescents against feelings of hopelessness (Pharris, Resnick, & Blum, 1997). In addition to aiding in the development of personal resilience and the positive psychosocial development associated with resiliency, the protective factors associated with positive family influences are also correlated to positive school success.

Family influences positively affect school success. Family influences, for example, were found to contribute towards positive school functioning of American Indian/Alaska Native adolescents (Thornton, et al., 2006). The family was also plays an important role in youths’ education and cultural identity (Hare & Pidgeon, 2011). In addition to the positive influence of family, American Indian/Alaska Native adolescents developed personal resilience and experienced success in school through positive community influences.

**Community-related influences.**

Influences at the community level are contributory to the development of personal resilience and school success in American Indian/Alaska Native adolescents. The level of community support was significantly associated with the increased probability of resilient adaptation among American Indian/Alaska Native adolescents. The safety within the community, for example, served as a protective factor against negative outcomes, such as school failure, substance/alcohol abuse, depression, suicide, and feelings of hopelessness (Nalls, Mullis, & Mullis, 2009). Moreover, the extent to which American Indian
adolescents have strong positive feelings of belonging to a Native community were attributed to the development of personal resilience (Bergstrom, et al., 2003).

Community influences extended beyond the development of personal resilience and positively affected school success. Community support was found to encourage persistence in school (Hare & Pidgeon, 2011). Influences within the school environment were positively associated with positive school success and the development of personal resilience.

**School-related influences.**

School-related influences positively contributed to the development of personal resilience and school success among American Indian/Alaska Native adolescents. School influences manifest in the research as the capacity of the school to provide caring, supportive adults to form relationships with adolescents, and the school’s capacity to validate American Indian/Alaska Native adolescents’ indigenous culture (LaFromboise, et al., 2006; Laquer, 1998; Powers, Potthoff, & Bearinger, 2003).

Laquer (1998) examined the capacity of a school to form relationships with students through a program designed to build resiliency in at-risk American Indian children through bonding with supportive adults at school. The support of school personnel was effective in guarding against risk factors detrimental to building resilience in adolescents. Powers, Potthoff, and Bearinger (2003) identified the strongest predictor of school success to be the extent to which schools provide supportive personnel and safe and drug-free educational environments. A specific focus of examining the influence of cultural programming on school outcomes by Powers, Potthoff, and Bearinger (2003) has
been noted by researchers of American Indian/Alaska Native education as a positive influence on school success.

The concept of culturally responsive schooling (CRS) (Ladson-Billings, 1995a, 1995b) is considered an effective pedagogical practice when working with American Indian students (Mohatt, Trimble, & Dickson, 2006; Robinson-Zanarty et al., 2011). In an American Indian educational context, CRS refers to pedagogy within a firm grounding in the heritage language and culture indigenous to a particular tribe (Brayboy & Castagno, 2009). Included in CRS is the notion that best practices to foster academic achievement of American Indian adolescents differ from those typically used in schools off the reservation (Ingalls, Hammond, & Dupoux, 2006). Schools located on reservations provide culturally specific educational opportunities to American Indian adolescents that elude them within public high schools off the reservation. Adolescents reported that cultural identities were fostered, their lived realities recognized through culturally relevant curriculum and flexible programs that accommodate their needs (Hare & Pidgeon, 2011).

Proponents of CRS posit that the community-based and culture-based education best meets the needs of Native adolescents, and is a prerequisite for the development of culturally healthy students and communities associated with that place (Bergstrom & Peacock, 2005; Bowman, 2004; Brayboy & Castagno, 2009). A growing body of research is identifying the positive relationship between the enculturation, or experiencing one’s native culture as a protective factor (LaFrombroise, et al., 2006), embedded in CRS and the development of personal resilience and school success (see Figure 2.2).
Figure 2.2 Factors that positively influence the development of personal resilience have concurrent affects on the school success, and enculturation of American Indian/Alaska Native adolescents, and vice versa. The reciprocal nature of this relationship increases opportunities for experiencing all three positive adaptive mechanisms (LaFromboise, et al., 2006; Whitbeck, et al., 2001).

Enculturation influences personal resilience and school success.

Enculturation includes three important dimensions: (a) involvement in traditional activities - knowledge of the culture and participation in it; (b) cultural identity-the degree to which a person’s self-concept incorporates the culture; and (c) traditional spirituality-knowledge and practice of spiritual ways and values (Whitbeck, et al., 2001). At least one dimension of enculturation is present in empirical evidence supporting its positive influence on developing American Indian/Alaska Native personal resilience and promoting school success, with reciprocating affects.

The strongest predictor of higher levels of resiliency among American Indian adolescents living on reservations characterized by high levels of unemployment and

61
poverty was enculturation. For each increment of enculturation tested, adolescents were 1.8 times more likely to be resilient (Thrane, Whitbeck, Hoyt, & Shelley, 2004). Enculturation reduced the likelihood of adolescents engaging in risk factors such as alcohol and drug use and early sexuality (Thrane, et al., 2004). Moreover, engagement in risk factors such as alcohol and substance abuse and early sexuality was predicted by poor academic achievement (Mitchell, Rumbaugh Whitesell, Spicer, Beals, & Kaufman, 2007). Enculturation positively affected the school success of American Indian/Alaska Native adolescents by virtue of its protective mechanisms.

Enculturation is a significant predictor of school success, having a positive effect on the school performance of American Indian/Alaska Native adolescents (Whitbeck, et al., 2001). Enculturation was positively related to sports participation and clubs, as well as increased sense of belonging in school. In addition to enculturation, Whitbeck, et al. (2001) found that participation in extracurricular activities was positively associated with the high school achievement of American Indian/Alaska Native adolescents.

Enculturation is a concept most likely to be experienced by adolescents living on reservations (Demmert, Grissmer, & Towner, 2006). Stiffman et al (2007) investigated the relationship of personal, familial, and environmental strengths to the outcomes of urban and reservation American Indian youths from a series of interviews with American Indian adolescents. Adolescents on the reservation gave more responses for positive tribal strengths than urban American Indian adolescents as contributory to school success (Stiffman, et al., 2007). The concept of enculturation and its individual dimensions positively influence the personal resilience of American Indian/Alaska Native adolescents from myriad tribes and locales across the United States and Canada as
described in empirical research. This theme parallels findings consistent with research with Navajo adolescents (Deyhle, 1995; Dole & Csordas, 2003; Willeto, 1999). In the following section, I present my synthesis of empirical research applying a positive line of inquiry toward examining the personal resilience and school success of Navajo adolescents on the Navajo Nation.

**Personal resilience and school success of Navajo adolescents.**

In my search for empirical research applying a positive line of inquiry with Navajo adolescents I identified two important traits that influenced the development of personal resilience and school success among Navajo adolescents: Enculturation and relationships. In the following sections, I describe how Navajo enculturation is defined among the research. I then present a synthesis of my finding and conclude by discussing the role of relationships on the personal resilience and school success for Navajo adolescents.

**Navajo enculturation in the research.**

The concept of enculturation was defined in a number of ways in empirical research with Navajo adolescents, while maintaining similar concepts to the dimensions identified by Whitbeck, et al. (2001). Navajo enculturation was referred to as Navajo ethnic identity (Jones & Galliher, 2007), Navajo cultural identity (Rieckmann, Wadsworth, & Deyhle, 2004), Navajo cultural ties (Deyhle, 1995), and tradition (Dole & Csordas, 2003). The concept of tradition has been applied in research with Navajo adolescents to refer a closer connection to various domains of Navajo culture (Dole & Csordas, 2003; Galliher, et al., 2010; Hinkley, et al., 2001; McInerney, et al., 1997;
Willeto, 1999). Traditionalism was used to define enculturation as a multi-dimensional construct.

Three domains of Navajo traditionalism resulting from two separate factor analyses on information pertaining to Navajo life included: (a) ritual behavior referring to Navajo curative ceremonies; (b) cultural conventions entailing recognized Navajo activities, however, not specifically reflective of spiritual beliefs related to Navajo ways; and (c) language use and how well it is spoken and understood by Navajo adolescents (Willeto, 1999). This model presents a rich description of Navajo enculturation using various domains of traditional Navajo culture.

In the following sections, I describe the cultural and relational influences toward the development of personal resilience and school success among Navajo adolescents.

**Influences of personal resilience.**

Similar to findings from empirical research with adolescents of other American Indian/Alaska Native tribes, the development of personal resilience in Navajo adolescents is positively related to enculturation. An association between positive psychosocial development and ethnic identity commitment and belonging exists to promote personal resilience among Navajo adolescents (Jones & Galliher, 2007). Jones and Galliher (2007) identified ethnic identity, as a measure of enculturation, to be a predictor of positive psychosocial functioning; Navajo adolescents reporting high levels of ethnic identity have the most positive functioning, and higher levels of self-esteem. Navajo cultural identity has also been linked to positive psychosocial development (Galliher, et al.,
2010), reduced depression among Navajo adolescents (Rieckmann, et al., 2004) and increased success among their own society and in the Anglo world (Deyhle, 1995). Moreover, Navajo enculturation acted as a protective factor against behaviors symptomatic of the prevalence of risk factors on the reservation (Mitchell, et al., 2007; Nalls, et al., 2009). In addition to enculturation, influential relationships had positive affects on the personal resilience of Navajo adolescents on the Navajo Nation (Dole & Csordas, 2003).

The presence of positive relationships provided Navajo adolescents with a positive influence towards the development of personal resilience. Dole & Csordas (2003) identified enculturation as a means to draw Navajo adolescents together and connect them with their families. Familial relationships have also been found to be strong predictors of coping and responding to stress (Wadsworth, Rieckmann, Benson, & Compas, 2004) and towards Navajo adolescents’ school success (Willeto, 1999). The school success of Navajo adolescents was associated with similar cultural and relational influences as well.

*Influences of school success.*

School success was found to positively correlate with Navajo enculturation and the presence of positive relationships. Research with Navajo adolescents that explored the resilience associated with balancing the role of being a teenage mother and a high school student identified familial support and encouragement to influence positive school functioning in the face of the adversity of being a teenage mother (Dalla & Gamble, 1997, 2000b; Deyhle & Margonis, 1995).
Some researchers believe there is a positive association between Navajo enculturation and the school success of Navajo adolescents (Jones & Galliher, 2007; Willeto, 1999). When examining both positive and negative effects of traditionalism on educational outcomes, no negative results, such as school failure, were associated with Navajo enculturation in all domains tested (Willeto, 1999). Navajo enculturation was distinguished as a predictor of positive social functioning, school belonging, and school membership; enculturation served to not only encourage school success, but to also deter Navajo adolescents from engaging in behaviors that act as risk factors against academic achievement (Jones & Galliher, 2007).

In searching empirical research articles applying a positive line of inquiry with Navajo adolescents, I identified that the development of personal resilience and positive school success was influenced by two important traits: Navajo enculturation and relationships. In the following section, I present the final finding of my literature search through a synthesis of AI research in educational settings.

**The generative nature of AI in schools.**

I was unable to discover evidence of empirical research applying an AI theoretical perspective or AI research methodology with American Indian/Alaska Native adolescents. Implicit among the literature synthesized is the positive core of reservation American Indian Alaska Native adolescents and the schools they attend. To place my study within the landscape of emerging AI empirical research in education and American Indian/Alaska Native educational research, I will present a synthesis of my search for empirical research applying an AI theoretical research perspective and research methodology in an educational context.
Appreciative inquiry can facilitate the discovery of the positive core within a school and validate the potential for improvement. Referencing empirical work applying AI, the findings highlight the generative nature of AI positively influencing schools. AI was applied in higher education to improve the experience of students (Calabrese, Roberts, et al., 2008). AI has also aimed to strengthen the school experience of doctoral students of educational administration (Calabrese, et al., 2007) and to create a supportive learning environment in the preparation of school administrators (Calabrese, 2012). AI has also been applied both as a theoretical research perspective and research methodology to K-12 educational settings.

Appreciative inquiry has been applied to K-12 educational settings as a research methodology to facilitate positive change. As an action research methodology, AI uses methods commonly associated with qualitative research such as focus groups, semi-structured interviews, and online surveys. These methods have been applied to identify a positive core of teacher and administrator experiences related to at-risk students (Calabrese, et al., 2005), to strengthen social capital between university and school partnerships (Calabrese, 2006), to improve working relationships between teachers and school psychologists (Keenaghan, 2010), to improve the social environment for students with disabilities (Calabrese, Patterson, et al., 2008; Doveston & Keenaghan, 2006), and give new life to a struggling rural school district (Calabrese, et al., 2010). AI influenced the development of questions to elicit positive experiences of school leaders in their leadership development, with affirmation manifesting as a key form of support (Boerema, 2011). On a larger scale, AI facilitated the positive transformation of school districts and large-scale educational initiatives internationally by (a) constructing narratives of peace
in Northern Ireland (Smith & Neill, 2005), (b) identifying the positive qualities of effective professional development programs in South Africa (Steyn, 2012), and (c) using the AI 4-D Cycle to facilitate the school improvement efforts of a large school district in England (Willoughby & Tosey, 2007a).

The use of the AI 4-D Cycle has been applied as a research methodology toward strengthening the academic achievement in non-AYP schools (Calabrese, Hummel, et al., 2007) and empowering at-risk students to create enjoyable and respectful learning environments (San Martin & Calabrese, 2011).

Appreciative inquiry can facilitate the discovery of sources for academic achievement by validating the positive core within a school. Although AI has had an impact on education, to date, AI has not been applied toward examining American Indian education; there are no studies focusing on the positive core within reservation schools. The application of AI to focus on the positive core of schools on Indian reservations is missing from the research literature. The intent of my study was to address this gap in empirical research by using the first two stages of the AI 4-D Cycle (Discovery and Dream) to identify and describe the positive core related to learning that exists within a high-poverty, non-AYP school on the Navajo Nation and describe Navajo adolescents’ vision for future academic achievement. The generative nature of AI has the potential to begin a shift in thinking about Indian education from its pathologies towards its potential, creating a more optimistic outlook for the education of American Indian/Alaska Native adolescents.
Summary

Chapter 2 provided information describing the conceptual framework of my study, including my professional education experiences and beliefs. Also included in the chapter was the epistemology of social constructionism from which my professional education experiences and beliefs are derived. AI and resilience theory was described as the theoretical research perspective; my study filtered AI through the lens of resilience theory. I described critical theory as a competing theory. I also discussed the rationale and search methodology for empirical research relevant to my study, including the search criteria and guiding questions. I then presented a synthesis of the related empirical literature. I will discuss the research design and methodology that I used for the purposes of my AI study in Chapter 3.
Chapter 3

Methodology and Research Design

A qualitative case study research design was used to facilitate Navajo adolescents through the first two stages of the AI 4-D Cycle – Discovery and Dream. My research used the first two stages of the AI 4-D Cycle to identify and describe participants’ involvement in the AI process towards discovery of the positive core related to learning that exists within TCHS and their vision for future academic achievement.

In the following paragraphs, I describe the research design and methodology I used for my study. I address the purpose of the study and its guiding research questions. I then describe the context of the study. I address the unit of analysis, including the process for jurying those who participated. I provide an explanation of my role as a participant-observer and explain data collection methods and data analysis I employed in my study. I provide an overview of how I planned to ensure research quality. I conclude Chapter 3 with a summary of the chapter.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of my study was to identify and describe the positive core related to learning that exists within TCHS and Navajo adolescent’s vision for future academic achievement.
Research Questions

My study was driven by an overarching question and guided by two specific research questions. The overarching question that framed my study was: How can Navajo adolescent students of a non-AYP, high-poverty public high school on the Navajo Nation discover and apply the positive core related to learning and create a vision of future academic achievement? The following research questions guided my study:

1. How do Navajo adolescent students at TCHS describe the positive core that exists within TCHS?
2. How do Navajo adolescent students at TCHS describe their vision for future academic achievement?

Context of the Study

The research site for my study was conducted at TCHS of Tuba City Unified School District #15 (TCUSD), located in the western Navajo Nation. TCHS is the comprehensive high school of TCUSD. TCHS received a D grade by the Arizona Department of Education (ADE) the last two years since the inception of the A-F School Accountability Letter Grade System in 2010. During the 2011-2012 academic year, TCHS reported an average daily student enrollment of 699 students. Of these students, 99% are reported to ADE as American Indian/Alaska Native, with an equal number of students eligible for FRPL; thus, qualifying TCHS as a high-poverty school. For the 2011-2012 academic year, TCHS reports an attendance rate at 92.7%; a promotion rate at 57%, and a four-year graduation rate at 62.1%. TCHS is currently in school warning, year 1 as it struggles to meet Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) (Arizona Department of Education, 2012).
Tuba City High School has struggled to meet AYP and reach an accountability grade above a D since the implementation of the grading system. Due to this history of TCHS, I believe this site has an undiscovered positive core related to learning that can be used to generate a vision of future academic achievement.

Approval for the Study

I contacted the Superintendent of TCUSD, Dr. Harold Begay, for permission for Navajo adolescent students of TCHS to participate in my study. Then I contacted the principal of TCHS for permission to conduct my study. My study has been approved by the superintendent and TCHS appropriate personnel [See Appendix A].

Unit of Analysis

The unit of analysis of my study was a group of purposively selected academically successful Navajo adolescent students of TCHS to participate in the first two stages of the AI 4-D Cycle: Discovery and Dream. I worked with TCHS guidance counselors and administrators, who provided input toward the selection of student participants. Participants were chosen according to specific criterion that provided a representative sample of successful TCHS students. The selection criterion was presented to two guidance counselors and the building principal, who identified students who met the criteria based on their knowledge of the student body. The criterion listed below for selecting student participants brought an experienced and initial perspective of the experience of academically successful students at TCHS. Additionally, student participants must be actively engaged in one or more school-based extracurricular activity for more than one year if applicable. Extracurricular activity participation refers to school-based activities engaged in by adolescents that are organized and supported by
schools, primarily occur on school grounds, and offer a challenging setting outside of academics (Feldman & Matjasko, 2005). Extracurricular activity participation lent a perspective of the experience at TCHS outside of the academic classroom. Participants were selected based on the following criteria:

f. Gender balance

g. Grade balance

h. Enrolled in a course of study (honors class, AP class, Navajo language class) to make them eligible to receive the Chief Manuelito Scholarship

i. Involved in one or more extracurricular activity

j. Passed the State graduation test when applicable

I chose this criterion for selecting participants because students who can meet the above criterion have demonstrated the capacity for school success and manifest the positive characteristics of personal resilience. The participants selected to participate in my study engaged in all AI protocols over the two-day period. One participant, however, had to leave early prior to presenting her individual metaphor early in the Dream stage.

**Role of Researcher**

My role as a researcher conducting action research is that of participant-observer. As a participant, I was actively engaged in the research, not merely a detached observer. The role of a participant-observer is twofold: engaging in activities and observing (Spradley, 1980; Yin, 2009). As a participant-observer, I facilitated whole group discussions, focus groups, and semi-structured paired interviews throughout all AI protocols of the Discovery and Dream stages. The participant-observer develops an understanding of the social surroundings, while becoming a part of the community in
which they are present (Glesne, 2006).

The participant-observer role afforded me the opportunity to work towards establishing rapport, building trust, listening, and communicating with participants. This opportunity created a research environment where their stories were validated and their engagement allowed them to share and interact with one another (Merriam, 2009). As participant-observer I facilitated the discovery of the positive core related to learning that exists within TCHS and Navajo adolescents’ vision for future academic achievement. Through the crafting of AI questions and protocols, I facilitated AI protocols throughout the first two stages of the AI 4-D Cycle—Discovery and Dream to describe their ideal learning environment within the school, e.g., how they best learn, relationships that empower them for success, and school sponsored activities that promote achievement at TCHS (see Figure 3.1).
Figure 3.1 Participants imagine “what could be” by taking the positive core identified in the Discovery Stage and then collectively envisioning an ideal future in the Dream Stage of the AI 4-D Cycle (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2003).

Figure 3.1. The first two stages of the AI 4-D Cycle – Discovery and Dream

As a participant-observer, former teacher of TCHS, and administrator in the district, through careful reflection and analysis, I needed to be cognizant of how my role, beliefs, and emotions might have affected this study. I consciously balanced my level of engagement through listening and inquiry in an effort to remain neutral and minimize preconceived notions that could possibly result in skewing the data. In my role as participant-observer, careful attention was made to minimize bringing biases to my study (Yin, 2009).
Participants’ privacy was protected and confidentiality of information guaranteed. All protocols, including the process of identifying participants were reported to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of The Ohio State University. The data I collected during the course of my study was only available to the principal investigator and me. Participants or their parent(s)/guardian(s) were given the opportunity to refuse participation in the study; participation in the study is strictly voluntary explaining that any student may withdraw for any reason from my study without fear of recrimination. I met with all student participants and their parent(s)/guardian(s) to explain the study, answer any questions. I collected parent permission, consent, and assent forms from students and parents prior to the study that can be found in the appendices.

**Methods**

A group of purposively selected Navajo adolescent students of TCHS participated in the first two stages of the AI 4-D Cycle: Discovery and Dream. AI methods mirror those commonly associated with qualitative research. Research methods involved in gathering data through the AI 4-D Cycle include semi-structured, paired interviews, focus groups, identification of participant generated documents, artifacts, direct observation, and participant observation (Cooperrider, 2000; Somekh & Lewin, 2005; Yin, 2009). Qualitative research methods are supported by researchers of American Indian/Alaska Native peoples and organizations as a mode of inquiry responsive to indigenous self-determination (Lomawaima & McCarty, 2002; Smith, 1999; Tsey et al., 2007; Wilson, 2008).

For my qualitative case study, data collection coincided with the first two stages of the AI 4-D Cycle – Discovery and Dream, and include data gathered from semi-
structured paired interviews, focus groups, field notes resulting from direct observations, my role as participant-observer, and participant created documents. I initially began with semi-structured paired interviews. I then made the decision to use focus groups when participants responded more openly and deeply and added richer data. I followed the same protocols in facilitating the focus groups that would have been used in the semi-structured paired interviews. I recorded all sessions for transcription and kept detailed field notes throughout the Discovery and Dream stages of the AI 4-D Cycle. I also collected digital data. The participants’ stories and all other data collected in the Discovery Stage were used to map the second stage of the AI 4-D Cycle: Dream. I used a field observer to take descriptive field notes of the AI process while I facilitated the Discovery and Dream Stages.

The field observer’s formal education includes a master’s degree in educational administration (Northern Arizona University, Flagstaff, Arizona). The field observer has experience in the research field as an Undergraduate Research Associate for a Robinson professor of history (George Mason University, Fairfax, Virginia). The field observer’s experience working with American Indian students on both the Navajo and Hopi reservations brought a unique understanding of American Indian student behaviors, spending the last 21 years living on the Navajo Nation and working as a librarian and teacher in a public school district on the Navajo Nation and as an administrator at a BIE school in a nearby Hopi village. The field observer served as a detached observer and noted participant behavior in addition to recording rich descriptions of the responses.

I took the field observer through a brief training in taking descriptive field notes for AI research. I described the structure used for taking field notes: Separating the notes
into two columns. The right column is for recording descriptive data, and can include behaviors observed, direct quotes, or body language. The left column records the observer’s thoughts and reflections on the data, including questions the data conjures. Prior to conducting my study, the field observer and I observed a math class at TCHS and independently took field notes from our observation. After the notes were taken on the right column, I instructed the field observer to think about the data collected before filling in the left column. The following day, we reviewed the field notes, including the data collected in the right column and the reflections in the left column.

**Data Analysis**

Data collection was conducted over a two-day period, encompassing the first two stages of the AI 4-D Cycle: Discovery and Dream. During this time, all AI protocols of this study were recorded and transcribed verbatim. The process for analyzing the data began with me becoming familiar with the data. I reflected on how the information as a whole related to the research questions before beginning the data analysis process. Data were analyzed using a combination of several techniques that included: content analysis, thematic coding, axial coding, open coding, and pattern matching (Weber, 1990; Yin, 2009). I coded data through an open coding process by reading the data line by line, grouping the data into several categories I identified (Somekh & Lewin, 2005). I used axial coding to note the frequency each code, keeping a detailed log. I noted the links between categories and relationships that existed.

I used qualitative software programs to facilitate the identification of themes. The text analysis programs of Voyeur measured term frequencies and included visualizations of relationships between terms and correlates of frequently occurring terms. Tapor and
Voyent were the Voyeur tools I used to facilitate the interpretation of the textual data. Qualitative analysis programs provided a level of data analysis that facilitated open and axial coding and added to the validity of the findings that came from the coding aspect.

**Voyent.**

The text analysis program Voyent was used to perform a lexical analysis of my data. I studied the frequency, distribution, and correlates related to the data. Through a number of tools, including world cloud visualizations, contextual summaries, word trend charts, and grids, I identified frequent terms, their correlates, and the context in which they occurred. Voyent provided a visualization of the text by presenting keywords drawn from the text that are visually differentiated based on their frequency. The word cloud visualization accompanied frequency tables and graphs to chart distributions and correlates; thus, quantifying the data as an additional resource towards analyzing the text. I triangulated the data from Voyent with Tapor, in order to confirm the frequency, distribution, and correlations related to the data.

**Tapor.**

Tapor is a textual analysis program that presents a visual analysis through a web of terms. Tapor uses links to find collocates for terms and displays links between them using a force directed graph. It shows term frequencies in proximity to key terms. I identified relationships or links between terms. Once terms are identified as linking, I was able to triangulate the collocates identified in Tapor with correlations identified in Voyent, which included the context in which links are present. Based on the frequency of certain terms presented through Voyent and Tapor, recurring themes were identified that facilitated the open and axial coding process.
Research Quality

The quality of the research I conducted reflected the attention I gave to ensuring its credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

Trustworthiness.

The researcher is responsible for ensuring that the research is valid; thus, establishing trustworthiness (Glesne, 2006). For the purposes of my study, trustworthiness can be determined within social science research by the following terms: credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability, and maintaining an audit trail (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Credibility, or internal validity, refers to establishing that the research findings match the reality constructed by the participants. Member checking is common among qualitative researchers as a strategy that allows participants to validate emerging findings and ensure the data collected are credible according to them (Merriam, 2009). Credibility was also ensured through triangulation of data. Triangulation of data compares and cross-checks findings against multiple sources of data. The data in my study were collected through semi-structured paired interviews, participant group discussions, participant created documents, and direct observation employed through the first two stages of the AI 4-D Cycle: Discovery and Dream. The data were triangulated from these data sources to determine the credibility of the collection methods (Cooperrider, et al., 2008).

Transferability refers to whether the findings of a research study can be transferred to other contexts (Somekh & Lewin, 2005). My goal of this qualitative research was to make sure that data were accurately reported and that my interpretation of the information gathered in my study accurately reflected the reality described by the
participants (Merriam, 2009). The reader can then decide whether the findings are transferable to other contexts or areas of study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Dependability refers to the responsibility of the researcher to account for potential changes in the context of the study and to acknowledge these changes by maintaining consistency between findings and data collected. My study was based on the dependability of protocols regarding data collection procedures throughout the first two stages of the AI 4-D Cycle: Discovery and Dream (Cooperrider, et al., 2008).

Confirmability of the data refers to the process of reviewing and confirming all data collected upon completion of the study (Somekh & Lewin, 2005). I member checked with participants on all data collected during and after each AI protocol throughout the study for accuracy of data. Accuracy was also confirmed during the triangulation of data from the semi structured participant paired interviews, whole group discussions, and the participant created documents.

I also presented the salient findings of my study to my field observer as an additional method to ensure confirmability. I presented the salient findings of my study, along with the data analysis process. The field observer confirmed the accuracy of the findings. Following this confirmation, I presented the findings to the participants of my study.

I presented the salient findings to participants for accuracy as well as to identify how they resonated with the participants. In presenting the findings, I explained the process I employed to identify the salient findings and included a PowerPoint presentation with images collected from the data analysis software programs of Voyent.
and Tapor. Students confirmed the findings for accuracy and described how the findings resonated with them.

**Audit Trail.**

An audit trail presents an account of how a qualitative researcher arrived at the findings (Merriam, 2009). Following its audit trail can authenticate the findings of my study. I present an audit trail of my research to describe the research steps I have taken from the start of my research to the report of my findings. This was done so that the reader will have a clear understanding of my research path.

At the start of the project, I formulated an overarching question that sought to identify and describe Navajo adolescents’ positive core. From the overarching question, I developed a problem statement exploring the benefits of applying a form of inquiry to discover the positive core of a Navajo high school from the perspective of successful Navajo adolescents.

I then identified the unit of analysis of the study. I developed research questions informed by the application of an AI theoretical research perspective and research methodology. I developed a research design, a qualitative case study that was informed by AI theoretical research perspective and methodology and resilience theory. I presented an executive summary of my proposed research to the Tuba City Board of Education and received approval of the study from the school board and superintendent. I received IRB approval from The Ohio State University before I began my research study.

I worked with two guidance counselors and the school principal to facilitate the purposive selection of participants. They had knowledge of the student body, to identify potential participants who met my criterion. Potential participants and their parents were
invited to an informational meeting, where I received parent permission and participant assent. The AI research process took two days, where I collected data with the assistance of a field observer who took descriptive field notes. Data were analyzed using Voyent and Tapor and other qualitative data analysis techniques. The data included participant created documents, field observer field notes, and digitally transcribed audio filed data collected from AI activities. The data analysis process revealed two salient findings. I presented the findings, along with the data analysis process, to the participants and field observer to confirm their accuracy.

**Bias.**

Avoiding the potential of bias coming into my study remained a focus throughout the design and implementation of the research. Although I was an employee of TCUSD at the time I conducted my study, employed at the junior high school. The junior high school is a separate building from the high school, where I conducted my study. Additionally, I did not know the students who participated in my study. Though there are tacit issues of power due to my employment with TCUSD, my role as a participant-observer allowed me to develop a collegial relationship with my participants. I depended on my ability to form collegial relationships with the participants so they would feel comfortable and share in a genuine manner (Glesne, 2006; Somekh & Lewin, 2005). As an additional measure to avoid potential bias, I trained a field observer to take descriptive field notes throughout the study. The field observer noted participant behavior and recorded rich descriptions of their responses.
Data were collected throughout the first two stages of the AI 4-D Cycle: Discovery and Dream. Careful attention was taken to safeguard the quality of the research and address trustworthiness and bias.

Summary

Chapter 3 described the research design and methodology I used for my study. It then described the purpose of the study, research questions, context of the study, and the unit analysis, including the jury process of participants. It then described the role of the researcher as a participant-observer, data collection methods, and the processes employed to analyze the data. Chapter 3 concluded by describing how the quality of my research addressed trustworthiness and bias.
Chapter 4

Findings

I divide Chapter 4 into two sections. Section one begins with a restatement of the purpose of my study and the theoretical research perspectives used to guide my study. I then describe the research design, including the methodology and research questions. I conclude this section with a presentation of the data analysis procedures and a statement of the two salient findings of my study.

Section two of Chapter 4 presents the report of the findings in two sections. The first section presents the narrative of students’ participation in the Discovery and Dream stages of the AI 4-D Cycle. The second section presents a detailed summary of the two salient findings that emerged from the data analysis. I conclude this section with a summary of Chapter 4.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of my study was to identify and describe the positive core related to learning that exists within TCHS and Navajo adolescents’ vision for future academic achievement.

Theoretical Perspectives

Appreciative inquiry is the theoretical research perspective that I used in my study of TCHS. In AI, there are five underlying principles: (a) the constructionist principle –
organizational realities depend on communal ways of knowing; (b) the principal of simultaneity – inquiry and change are not separate moments; (c) the poetic principle – an organization’s narrative is constantly being co-authored by its members from endless possibilities; (d) the anticipatory principle – an organization’s future is guided by the current linguistic practices and subsequent images; and (e) the positive principle – positive questions initiate lasting change (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2000).

Applying an AI theoretical research perspective to my study allowed me to describe how focusing on the positive core related to learning that exists within TCHS serves as a catalyst for Navajo adolescents to create a vision for future academic achievement.

I used AI as the theoretical research perspective for the following reasons: (a) it is generative in nature; (b) it has the capacity for individual growth and organizational transformation (Bushe, 2007); (c) it employs a narrative-based methodology (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2003); and (d) it contrasts with traditional problem solving methods as one that is appreciative and affirming (Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987). AI is a theoretical research perspective and research methodology used to initiate organizational change through a positive inquiry approach. AI balances a problem-based focus by facilitating the discovery of what is good about people, their work, and the context that enables them to thrive (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005). Through discovery, AI takes the best from the past and present to provide the basis for constructing a future of what could be. This narrative becomes the collectively co-constructed design to sustain the organization’s destiny (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2003).
In addition to AI, I considered a number of additional theoretical perspectives that align well with an AI theoretical research perspective and research methodology. Among the many theoretical perspectives that focus on the ecology of human potential and emphasize human thriving, is resilience theory. Resilience theory was a viable lens to help conceptualize the success of Navajo adolescents, while taking into account the independent variables presented by contemporary and historical data on Navajo adolescents that influence academic achievement, including high dropout rates (Brandt, 1992), teenage pregnancy (Dalla & Gamble, 2000a; Deyhle & Margonis, 1995), alcoholism (Kunitz, 2006; Kunitz & Levy, 2000), and other social and cultural challenges (Choudhary, 2000; Deyhle & LeCompte, 1994; Dole & Csordas, 2003; Schwarz, 2001). The myriad difficulties experienced on the reservation frame the resilience of Navajo adolescents who achieve academically. As a result, I chose resilience theory as the paralleling theoretical perspective I applied to my study.

The seminal works on resilience define the construct by its dominant perspectives. The dominant perspectives prevalent in resilience research include understanding resilience as: (a) continuous and dynamic (Garmezy, 1974; Rutter, 2012); (b) something that can be strengthened through a process of positive adaptation (Werner & Smith, 1982); (c) requiring successful negotiation of various risk and protective factors (Garmezy, et al., 1984); and (d) a construct with a relational basis (Saltzman, et al., 2011; Werner, 1993). It is within this understanding of resilience, one that parallels the American Psychological Association’s definition of resilience as a process of adapting well in the face of risk, that I applied personal resilience theory as a complimentary
theoretical perspective to AI in my study with Navajo adolescents (Southwick & Charney, 2012).

**Methodology and Research Design**

My study used a qualitative case study design to identify and describe Navajo adolescents’ discovery of the positive core related to learning that exists within TCHS and Navajo adolescents’ vision for future academic achievement through their involvement in the AI process.

I used an AI theoretical research perspective and methodology to guide my study. AI was used because of its affirmative approach and capacity to facilitate interaction and collaboration with others (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2003). An AI methodology typically involves a 4-D Cycle: Discovery, Dream, Design, and Destiny. For the purposes of my study, participants were engaged in the first two stages of the 4-D Cycle: Discovery and Dream.

The Discovery stage is the first stage of the 4-D Cycle in which participants inquired into what gave life to their school and identified what influence their academic success. They begin to discover their positive core related to learning by appreciating the best of “What is?” in their organization (Cooperrider, et al., 2008).

The Dream Stage is the second stage of the 4-D Cycle in which participants imagined their ideal future of academic achievement. The Dream stage uses the data generated in the Discovery Stage and participants collectively envisioned a future of academic achievement for Navajo adolescents into the future. The collective vision became the “What might be?” of their future academic achievement (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005).
My research used the first two stages of the AI 4-D Cycle (Discovery and Dream) to facilitate the discovery of the positive core related to learning that exists with TCHS and Navajo adolescents’ vision for future academic achievement. Data were collected during the two days of the Discovery and Dream stages primarily through focus groups, and included semi-structured paired interviews, field notes, participant created documents, and my role as participant-observer.

**Research Questions**

My study was driven by an overarching question and guided by two specific research questions. The overarching question that framed my study was: How can Navajo adolescent students of a non-AYP, high-poverty public high school on the Navajo Nation discover and apply the positive core related to learning and create a vision of future academic achievement? The following research questions guided my study:

1. How do Navajo adolescent students at TCHS describe the positive core that exists within TCHS?

2. How do Navajo adolescent students at TCHS describe their vision for future academic achievement?

**Data Analysis**

Data collection was conducted over a two-day period, encompassing the first two stages of the AI 4-D Cycle: Discovery and Dream. Data were collected during the two days of the Discovery and Dream stages through semi-structured paired interviews, field notes, participant created documents, and my role as participant-observer. Data collected during the course of the Discovery and Dream stages were analyzed through a rigorous process (See Table 4.1). All AI activities of my study were recorded and transcribed.
verbatim. Data were analyzed using a combination of several techniques, including: content analysis, thematic coding, axial coding, open coding, and pattern matching (Weber, 1990; Yin, 2009). I used qualitative software programs through Voyer to facilitate the data analysis as an integral part of the data analysis process.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step</th>
<th>Procedure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1    | Converted all data to a text document (audio files, filed notes (RH), and participant created documents were all converted to text)  
Including for analysis only the right hand column, the direct observations. |
| 2    | Cleaned the data.  
Eliminated any words or questions from the participant observer;  
Removed any identification characteristics linked to participants;  
Ran data through Voyent for visualization of word frequency;  
Read it line by line and excluded words extraneous to data analysis;  
Kept previous file with excluded words to provide sense and context. |
| 3    | Used Voyer’s textual software (Voyant and Tapor ) to identify words that are prominent in the data, including their links to other words/concepts.  
Ran Data through Voyent to identify frequent terms, distributions, and correlations;  
Ran Data though Tapor to identify prominent words and their links;  
Re-ran data through Voyent to confirm relationships in Tapor;  
Located patterns in the data consistent between the two software analysis programs and identified codes. |

Table 4.1. Data analysis process
Table 4.1 Continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th><strong>Open and Axial Coding Process.</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Went line by line through the raw data to identify codes and combinations of codes, keeping an ongoing log;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Noted the line number(s) where code appears;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Noted the frequency a code appears;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kept a tally of how frequent a code appears.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td><strong>Re-Ran data through Tapor and Voyent to re-confirm relationships between codes.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td><strong>Identified salient findings based on the data.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td><strong>Confirmed salient findings with participants and field observer.</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note:* Step 3 was repeated a number of times to confirm whether the codes were recurring; therefore, used in the coding process.

Voyent and Tapor both identified frequent terms and their respective links, relationships, and correlates. Voyent placed the connections in context in the data. Both programs presented quantitative data, which served as an additional resource in support of the findings (see Table 4.2).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Links</th>
<th>Hits</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>268</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>145</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>143</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>134</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.2. Frequencies of key terms identified by Voyent’s textual analysis tool
In Table 4.2, hits refer to the number of times that the program identified the word in the data. Links refer to how many connections to other frequent terms exist. The term people was the only term not interconnected and served as an outlier. The charts, graphs, and word clouds provided visualizations of the quantitative data generated by the programs.

Based on the frequency of certain terms presented through Voyent and Tapor, recurring themes were identified that facilitated the open and axial coding process. Once relationships were identified in the coding process, Voyent and Tapor were used to view the relationship between the key terms in Table 4.2. The visual links presented in Tapor provided one level of analysis that identified the relationship between key terms and their links (See Figure 4.1).
Figure 4.1: The key terms are indicated with a larger font. Their links are identified, including how the key terms are related.

Figure 4.1. Visualization from Tapor showing key terms and their links

The links between key terms in Tapor were confirmed through Voyent. Voyent placed the links in context with the entire data set, which allowed for identification of
where terms were highly correlated and what context the correlations existed (See Figure 4.2 and 4.3). Figure 4.2 shows the correlation between “teachers” and “students.” Figure 4.3 shows the correlation between “school” and “spirit.” The points where the trends paralleled with the highest frequency served as the basis for determining in what context the trend existed. Together, the data analysis process yielded two salient findings of my study.

*Figure 4.2:* The trend between students and teachers is strong. Segments 12, 14, and 21 indicated the strongest correlation.

Figure 4.2. The correlation between teachers and students in Voyent
Figure 4.3: One of the highest frequencies in which the term school is used correlates with spirit, unity, and pride in segments 11-15.

The data analysis from my study revealed two salient findings. The two findings are reported separately with rich, descriptive quotes from participants that exemplify the finding.

Finding 1: The participants identified and described a positive core within TCHS.

Finding 2: The participants co-constructed a compelling vision for the future academic achievement for students at TCHS.
**Report of Findings**

I divide the report of findings into two sections. In the first section, I describe the first two stages of the AI 4-D Cycle: Discovery and Dream. In the second section, I present the two salient findings that emerged from the two days of my study. I include participant created documents and quotations from the participants to strengthen and provide support for these findings throughout the section in tabular and narrative form.

Participants who comprised the unit of analysis of my study were a group of purposively selected academically successful Navajo adolescent students of TCHS to participate in the first two stages of the AI 4-D Cycle: Discovery and Dream (See Table 4.3). Participants were grade and gender balanced. The descriptive data I present to illustrate the findings and construct their narrative of participation were collected by direct observation or were shared freely by participants through their involvement in the AI process. I used pseudonyms to protect the identity of the participants. For the purposes of readability, I use the term students instead of participants throughout this section.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant Pseudonym</th>
<th>Grade Level</th>
<th>Gender</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tali</td>
<td>9th</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skye</td>
<td>9th</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ashley</td>
<td>10th</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malcolm</td>
<td>10th</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.3. TCHS Participant information
Table 4.3 Continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pattie</td>
<td>11th</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>11th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nicholas</td>
<td>11th</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>11th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cindy</td>
<td>12th</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>12th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dylan</td>
<td>12th</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>12th</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: Tali left the study in the second day for personal reasons, just prior to presenting her personal metaphor.*

Description of Day 1 and 2

**Day one: Discovery.**

I drove the short distance from the town’s supermarket, where I bought two-dozen fresh donuts, water, and soda for the students, to the high school on a Thursday morning. I drove past an assortment of trailers, wooden sweat lodges, heaps of junk cars, and traditional *hogans*. It was a cold and clear morning; the stove providing warmth inside the *hogan* produced thick smoke as it came out of the chimney in the center of the roof. I turned left at the post office and drove by a government tract housing neighborhood, with a pack of stray dogs commanding drivers to yield on the narrow, pothole-ridden streets. When I arrived at the high school across the street from this neighborhood, I unloaded all of my materials: computer, markers, and pens in a backpack, easel, three 12-packs of soda, two boxes of donuts, grocery bags of napkins and plates, and a case of 24 water bottles.

The new school building grew out of the desert, which was painted bright pink by the sunrise, like an anomaly in the old reservation town. It was one of the newer buildings
in town, and one of the tallest (the juvenile detention center was newly built and bigger, but had not officially opened yet). The entrance faced westward, with a metal, Native inspired sculpture over the entrance. Many students were outside; their every breath visible in the crisp, cold air. A female student saw the amount of things I needed to carry and helped me carry my supplies into the building. I went to see the receptionist, with whom I reserved the room for the two days, and she led me to the classroom adjacent to the library. The student followed us to the room and dropped my supplies off by the door. I didn’t ask her name, but thanked her, gave her a donut and a bottle of water; she smiled and walked off.

The classroom was not currently being used by a teacher or a class. It had no posters, decorations, student work, or the things that showed it was “lived in.” It lacked the color, brightness, and life of an active classroom. All of the walls were an off-white color, with clean dry-erase whiteboards on the north and south side of the room, and a new interactive whiteboard fixed over another dry erase board on the east wall. Along the west wall was a full-length shelf that stood waist high, with blank bulletin boards above it and a teacher’s desk in the northwest corner of the room. The desks were in neatly arranged rows facing the interactive whiteboard. I immediately rearranged the desks so that there was a semi-circle with eight desks for the students, one for me, and one to set my computer on. I pushed all other desks against the walls, and set up four pairs of desks facing each other for the students to use during their paired interviews. We met from 8:30 a.m. until 3:30 p.m. in this classroom.

I set up the donuts, water, and soda with the paper plates and napkins by the door on other desks I put next to each other to form a table. I set up the easel with newsprint.
By 7:45 a.m., I waited for the students to arrive. I turned on my computer, brought up the power-point presentation of protocols that would guide students through the AI process, with guiding questions, motivational videos, and relevant photos. I displayed the title slide, indicating our purpose of the day, on the board with one word on it: Discovery.

Eight students, four male and four female began to arrive. Cindy was the first. She walked in looking at her phone. Cindy had long brown hair that fell down to her waist. She curled her hair before coming to school because she was going to have her picture taken that day; it was make-up picture day for school pictures. She wore a faux leather jacket, light pink blouse, and tapered jeans. She sat down at a desk and I asked her how she was and what she was looking at. She was immersed in her Twitter feed.

Dylan followed soon after. Dylan wore thick-framed glasses, a t-shirt that read “teen spirit,” and jeans. He sat next to Cindy and they began talking. Malcolm walked in next. He carried a gym bag, as basketball playoffs were getting started. He set his bags down and immediately asked if the donuts were for them. I said, “yes,” and encouraged them to help themselves. He went straight for the food and began eating.

Ashley arrived as Malcolm was eating his second donut. She had her hair parted to the side and pulled in a ponytail. She wore glasses and had braces. She wore an oversized fleece jacket and blue shirt that read “twilight” on it. I greeted her and asked her to make herself comfortable. Nicholas and Pattie walked in together. Pattie had a wide smile making her eyes squint to the point where I wondered if she could see. She had long hair that was curled that day as well. A white scarf hung loosely around her neck, loose enough to see a turquoise necklace.
Nicholas, who stood over six feet tall, brought his gym bag as well, indicating he was also an athlete. He looked as if he just had a haircut; it was buzzed short with clean, straight edges. He wore a purple polo shirt over a black long-sleeved moisture wicking athletic shirt. He looked at Malcolm hovering around the donuts and went to speak with him and eat donuts as well. Pattie sat down next to Ashley and made small talk.

Skye arrived and sat at one of the desks by the back wall. He took out a math book and began doing math homework. Skye wore dark colored jeans, shoes, shirt, and hooded sweatshirt that seemed to blend into one dark-colored uniform of adolescence. I announced that the donuts and drinks were for them and encouraged the group to eat because we had a lot to do and will be going “full speed.” Everyone got up and began eating with purpose; Malcolm may have been on his fourth donut by this time.

After all participants finished eating, they sat at a desk they chose in the semi-circle. I was already seated in my desk when the field observer arrived with a large legal pad of yellow paper. She walked in and immediately began looking through her pockets for a pen. I had a box of pens as part of the supplies I brought, and handed her one. I wondered if Tali would make it, the time was approaching 8:30 a.m. Then she arrived. Tali was a small girl, maybe 5 feet tall. The oversized light blue, crew neck sweatshirt gave the impression that she was smaller than she actually was. She took the only seat left, the desk next to Skye. I asked her if she wanted a donut and she declined, but took a bottle of water, of which I retrieved for her.

All students were seated and I was seated facing them. Tali was seated to my right, Nicholas to my left. Between Tali and Nicholas from left to right were Pattie, Ashley, Malcolm, Cindy, Dylan, and Skye in that order. I described AI and explained this
was the approach they would be using to discover the best in them, TCHS, and the world around them. I also explained that everything we talk about in this room remained in the room. I told them I would protect their confidentiality. I emphasized that everything we discussed in this classroom will not be shared with anyone outside of my advisor and myself, that I will use pseudonyms when I report my findings and in any publications that may result from my study. Moreover, I reviewed ground rules to encourage participation, respect contributions, and create an environment of comfortable sharing. I introduced the field observer to the students and explained that was going to help me capture all the information necessary to tell their story. She was going to record their behaviors, body language, and what they say. I reminded them that we would be using a digital voice recorder to capture their stories, which I placed on the desk I was using. I wanted them to feel comfortable and share freely and honestly throughout the process. Students did not know each other. Nicholas and Malcolm knew each other because they were both co-captains on the basketball team; Cindy and Dylan knew each other from similar classes. Over donuts and discussion, everyone else met each other for the first time. I didn’t know anything about the students, only that they met the criteria for participation. I wanted to learn about them from their stories.

As a participant observer, I was engaged in the AI activities and shared in students’ stories, asking questions and validating their responses, ensuring the data I was collecting was accurate. I took notes on the newsprint that stood on the metallic easel next to the board displaying the power point slides. The easel was situated so that everyone could see it. During the discussions, the field observer took notes on students’ descriptions, noting their behavior, body language, etc. in a seat towards the back of the
classroom.

**Precursor to the AI discovery stage process.**

As a precursor to the AI Discovery stage process, I sought to shape the research environment where my research was taking place. I wanted to make the process immediately relevant to the students. As a way to focus the direction of inquiry and have the students get to know each other, I presented the first AI activity. Students were asked to think of their favorite movie and describe what it was about the movie and its characters that made it important to them. The purpose of this AI activity was to assist students in focusing on the values and stories embedded in the movies. With this focus in mind, we began our first group discussion. When students began sharing, I stood up at the easel to write down key terms, themes, and memorable quotes from their stories on the newsprint. I explained that I intended to document what they were communicating by member checking for accuracy and reviewing the newsprint following the activity to ensure that nothing was left out. I followed this process for each activity in the two AI stages, producing a detailed account of students’ stories, as their narratives were unfolding.

Students’ talked about movies of various genres and time periods, from movies filmed before they were born to movies presently in theaters. In each case, they described stories that resonated with them. Some students knew immediately what movie they were going to share, other students, like Pattie, Tali, and Skye passed when I first asked them to share; they indicated they were still thinking of what movie and its characters were important.
I wrote the titles of the movies on the newsprint next to the respective student’s names. When students revealed the title, I asked them what the movie was about and probed deeper regarding the importance of the characters and the connections students made with them. Students described qualities, situations, or experiences of the characters they identified with when I asked what about the movie and its characters made it important (see table 4.4). Table 4.4 displays the movie students shared and the comments they used to describe its personal importance. I created Table 4.4 from the newsprint generated from the discussion. I used a favorite movie and its characters as the first activity to make the process immediately relevant and to learn something about the students. In AI research, change begins the moment the first question is asked; the first question positioned the focus of the research on something positive and with meaning to students.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Pseudonym</th>
<th>Movie</th>
<th>Descriptive comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tali</td>
<td>Up</td>
<td>Resolute, determined, loving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skye</td>
<td>Premium Rush</td>
<td>Simple, determined, plan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ashley</td>
<td>Flight</td>
<td>Personal conflict, honest, relates to step-father (alcoholism)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.4. Ice-breaker activity
Table 4.4 Continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Characteristic(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Malcolm</td>
<td>Rocky IV, Not the most talented, hard work, underdog</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pattie</td>
<td>ATL, Talented, from broken home but still made it, pursue his dream and talent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nicholas</td>
<td>John Carter, Dares to try, risk, planner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cindy</td>
<td>Clueless, Fabulous, dramatic, determined, funny</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dylan</td>
<td>Lincoln, Intuitive, determined, creative</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The first activity of the day shaped the research environment by allowing students to get to know each other, including each other’s values and experiences. In sharing their stories, students began to appreciate characteristics they value and described situations in which they can relate. Following the initial focal inquiry activity, students engaged in protocols associated with the Discovery stage of the AI 4-D Cycle.

**Introduction to the AI discovery stage process.**

Students participated in the Discovery stage of the AI 4-D Cycle to discover and appreciate their positive core related to learning. The positive core is the sum of the best of an organization and its people, including the greatest achievements and innovations that an organization and its people experience. The positive core is comprised of the values, strengths, positive attitude, stories, achievements, highpoint experiences, and
capabilities of an organization and its people. I facilitated the students’ identification of their positive core through AI protocols associated with the Discovery stage.

I divided the protocols of day one into three series of protocols with common goals. The first series included protocols that served as opening questions to set the tone and energy of day one. During the first series of protocols, students shared their experience at TCHS and what, if present, would create the ideal school and promote a positive experience for students. The first series of protocols culminated in the creation of the students’ affirmative challenge.

The second series of protocols engaged students in discovering the best within themselves, and included protocols where student described: (a) their highpoint personal experiences; (b) a time when they dared to try something new; (c) what makes them good students and leaders of TCHS; and (d) what others value in them as good students and friends.

The third series of protocols was comprised of protocols where students identified the best within TCHS. These protocols included students describing: (a) TCHS at its best; (b) what is happening now that students do not want to lose; (c) what is not quite great, but has the potential to be great; and (d) the “secret ingredients” or special factors that make TCHS great when it is at its best.

These AI protocols associated with the discovery stage provided the framework for students towards constructing the narrative of TCHS’s life giving story (Cooperrider, et al., 2008). Each protocol blends into succeeding protocols, forming the Gestalt of the Discovery stage. In the following sections, I present a narrative of students’ involvement
in the Discovery stage, including how the research unfolded and how students were engaged from my perspective as a participant observer.

The first series of Discovery protocols.

The first series of protocols associated with the Discovery stage set the tone, energy, and direction of day one, leading to the creation of the affirmative challenge (Cooperrider, et al., 2008). The first protocol engaged students in describing their experiences as academically successful Navajo high school students of TCHS. The protocol engaged students in semi-structured paired interviews to describe their experiences at TCHS. Their descriptions included experiences with their peers, their teachers, and how other students in other classes might describe their respective experiences. The second protocol encouraged students to identify what, if present, would create the ideal school and shape positive experiences for students.

The values generated by students led to the creation of the affirmative challenge. The affirmative challenge is the guiding statement that identifies what students want to see grow and flourish in TCHS. It captures TCHS’s ideal effectiveness, written in the present tense. The affirmative challenge orients the focus of the research and its protocols towards the collective discovery of their positive core related to learning (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2003). The affirmative challenge was the culminating protocol of the first series of protocols associated with the Discovery stage.

Students engaged in a semi-structured paired interview for the first protocol. In a semi-structured paired interview, two students interview each other using guiding questions that provide a focus for the interview. While the guiding questions provide a focus for the interview, it is an open framework that allows the conversation to grow as
people connect, share their stories, and delve into their aspirations (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2003). To generate an informative and inspiring discussion, students exchanged stories following the guiding questions: *What is it like coming to school each day: (a) with your peers; (b) with your teachers; and (c) how would other students in other classes describe their experience?* These guiding questions for conducting the interview were projected on the board. I explained that asking additional questions in an interview, such as my probing into what made students’ movie selections and its characters important in the initial AI focal activity, allowed the story to have depth and its significance fully understood. I explained that stories gain depth when rich details about the people or the emotions associated with the story are shared. I encouraged students to ask the *who, what, when, where, and why* questions. I then divided the students into pairs for them to participate in the semi-structured paired interview.

The rationale I used to pair students was with the intention of giving them a chance to form a relationship with someone they wouldn’t otherwise know, pairing demographically opposite students (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2003). I paired Tali, a ninth grade female with Dylan, a twelfth grade male. In turn, Cindy was paired with Skye. Nicholas, a junior was paired with Ashley, a sophomore. In turn, Malcolm was paired with Pattie.

Students readily moved to previously arranged pairs of desks. They reflected on the guiding questions, moving through each question individually, but sustaining the interview until all parts of the question were answered before changing roles. Students immediately engaged with each other to hear their partner’s story. I put up the two newsprints created from the initial AI focal activity on the southern whiteboard. I walked
around the room to hear the conversations and note student behaviors and interaction. Conversation and laughter filled the room; there was a constant buzz from the students. To hear the conversation from a specific pair of students, I had to be close enough where their voices dominated the collective conversation. To hear specific conversations, I pulled up a desk along side a pair of students and listened to their stories. I allotted fifteen minutes for the paired interview. Everyone, however, wanted more time to talk after my first attempt to reconvene into a whole group discussion where students would share their experience in the paired interview. I waited a few more minutes until I started to hear a lull in the conversations, and the group was ready to sit back in the semi-circle and share their stories. Following the interview, I facilitated a whole group discussion, similar to a focus group, for students to share their experience.

In the discussion, students shared their experience at TCHS, adding richer descriptions to their stories when I asked clarifying or probing questions. This was evident when Ashley shared her experience at TCHS. Ashley comes from a rural, outlying community approximately 40 miles from the school. She described her perception of TCHS from the perspective of an “outsider.” She shared that her first impression was negative; yet, she described that her attitude changed and she grew to love the school and town. I asked, for example, what caused her attitude to change to solicit a richer description to her story. As each student shared, I asked those additional questions to elicit richer details and descriptions. The student whose story was being shared by his/her partner would interject and respond to my clarifying question, adding a backstory to give her/his current experience a context.
As students shared their personal narratives, they described their relationships with peers and interactions with their teachers. Students shared what connects them with their peers and how their teachers engage them in their learning. Students also shared their feelings about what they perceive the experience of other students in other classes to be at TCHS. The values generated from this protocol, including what made their experience positive, was applied to the following protocol and their affirmative challenge.

**Affirmative challenge choice.**

The affirmative challenge is the guiding statement that identifies what students want to see grow and flourish in TCHS, capturing TCHS’s ideal effectiveness. The affirmative challenge is written in the present tense and provides a focus for the protocols that follow the AI process (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2003). As an AI researcher, I was cognizant of the importance of shaping the affirmative challenge as something provocative, motivational, and awe inspiring. The challenge used the values generated in the previous protocol, and relied on the students’ ability to describe the ideal effectiveness of TCHS in the next protocol. I presented the next protocol as a challenge to students to look beyond the deficits of TCHS they shared when describing other students’ experiences at TCHS.

Negative data arose when students shared how they perceive other students would describe their experience at TCHS. Negative data, however, represent the absence of something people care about (Cooperrider, et al., 2008). In AI, negative data can be used affirmatively by reframing it as a focus of positive inquiry. I constructed a question that
reframed the negative data. I asked students to not focus on the absence of something, but to focus on what they care about that could be included in TCHS to create the ideal school and support a positive experience.

In the next protocol, students described what, if present, would create the ideal school. I displayed a single guiding question on the board: *What would you like to see happening here at TCHS?* I presented this activity and encouraged students to see beyond deficits and to reframe what they described as absent to what they would like to see happening. I also encouraged students to ask probing questions in their interviews, and they broke into pairs to conduct their interviews.

I walked around the room and listened as students described their values and aspirations for TCHS while their partner generated a list of values and aspirations on an index card. I shadowed groups during the interview process, pulled up a desk beside a pair of students and listened to the interview process. I listened as students asked probing questions about each other’s experience.

When the interviews concluded, the students participated in a whole group discussion to debrief on what they would like to see happening at TCHS. I facilitated student identification of what students would like to see happening at TCHS that would create the ideal school and support a positive experience for students. I listened to their stories, identified common themes, and member checked throughout the discussion for accuracy, and collectively generated a list on newsprint (see Table 4.5).
Table 4.5. What students would like to see happening

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>People</th>
<th>Academics</th>
<th>School Culture</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teachers that connect with students (9)</td>
<td>School to promote/sponsor academic programs for post-secondary engagement (6)</td>
<td>Updated technology (7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Involved teachers (8)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Academic focus (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excited (driven) teachers (5)</td>
<td>Clubs (academic or extracurricular) (6)</td>
<td>Updated library (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supportive teachers (4)</td>
<td>Challenging (3)</td>
<td>School spirit/pride (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counselor involvement (3)</td>
<td>AP/Honors classes (3)</td>
<td>Trusting school (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Involved students (2)</td>
<td>Music classes (1)</td>
<td>Eco-friendly school (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer mentoring/counseling (1)</td>
<td>Variety of classes (1)</td>
<td>Student-involved decisions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fair Teachers (1)</td>
<td></td>
<td>More funding for sports (1)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.5 presents what students’ aspirations related to the people (e.g., peers, teachers, administrators) within TCHS, academics, and school culture. Students described what they envision taking place at TCHS that would create the absolute best school and give students a great experience. Their responses were grouped according to unifying themes. The number in parenthesis indicates the frequency in which the response emerged in the discussion. In students’ narratives, they described academic opportunities, new technology, and the involvement of teachers in shaping a great learning experience at TCHS. I facilitated students in grouping their stories under a unifying title. I placed check marks next to items that were similar in meaning, revealing items that were discussed more frequently.
The next step in this series was a whole group discussion of the topics, themes, and values students identified that would generate the affirmative challenge. I explained that the challenge captures the values listed on the newsprint that students want to discover and learn more about. Students reviewed the newsprint and agreed that all values on the newsprint that received multiple check marks should be included in their challenge.

The values described from the previous protocols stimulated conversations among the students. Students moved away from identifying problems and began describing their ideal school. I waited for consensus among the students before integrating words or phrases into the challenge, including specific values. After consensus, I typed their challenge directly into the PowerPoint slide providing students with a visual aid to guide their work.

I read the challenge five times out loud to the students. Following each reading, students recommended minor changes. The term “technologically integrated,” for example, replaced “21st Century” at the behest of a student. They worked as a group to complete their affirmative challenge. When finished, students described TCHS as their ideal school (See Figure 4.4).
Tuba City High School is a technologically integrated, academically focused school that promotes and sponsors an individualized and equal learning experience, preparing students for successful post-secondary engagement and providing students extracurricular opportunities through exposure to involved, engaged, and supportive teachers, counselors, and administrators in a trusting and vibrant learning environment, challenging students to go above and beyond their expectations.

Figure 4.4. Affirmative Challenge

After everyone agreed on the challenge, applause erupted in the room following a sixth and final reading. With the enthusiasm students demonstrated, we transitioned to the second series of protocols associated with the Discovery stage.

**The second series of Discovery protocols.**

The second series of protocols included students: (a) identifying and sharing highpoint personal experiences; (b) sharing a time when they dared to try something new; (c) discovering personal strengths and values that make them good students and leaders at TCHS; and (d) adding stories describing what others, including their family, friends, and teachers value about them as students and friends. In the following sections, I share the narrative of the students’ continued participation in day one as they moved through the second series of protocols associated with the Discovery stage.

**Highpoint personal experience.**

The first protocol of the series engaged students in identifying and sharing a highpoint personal experience. To introduce students to the concept of a personal
highpoint experience, I described it as a moment when they felt most alive, most engaged, and most effective. The protocol began with an inspirational story that resonated with the students. I shared the story of Billy Mills, an American Indian from the reservation who accomplished the unthinkable. Leading up the video, I described Billy Mills’ history: From the Pine Ridge Reservation, to boarding school student, to college athlete, to military veteran, and ultimately, to Gold medalist. Students knew of Billy Mills and some had met him when he visited a nearby school on the Navajo Nation. As the first American, let alone, American Indian to take gold in the 10,000 meter race, I showed participants a brief video of Billy Mills taking the Gold medal in the 1964 Olympics. Though students were familiar with the man and the story, they had not seen the grainy footage that captured the moment when Billy Mills headed down the stretch of the final lap to claim the Gold medal. We discussed how Billy Mills must have felt that moment, and how he might continue to draw strength and hope from that highpoint personal experience almost 50 years later.

I showed students pictures of other moments that captured people’s highpoint personal experiences, carefully showing pictures that might resonate with students on the reservation: Making the game winning shot in basketball, falling in love, watching the sunset, caring for a horse, and riding a bull. I explained that this time does not have to be related to school or even involve learning; it had to be a time when it “felt good to be you.” The guiding questions asked students to share the details about this moment, including: (a) where it took place; (b) what was happening; and (c) to describe the feelings and emotions they felt. The goal of this protocol was to identify and share an example of a highpoint personal experience.
This protocol engaged students in their third semi-structured paired interview to share their stories. Students followed the guiding questions displayed on the board and asked additional probing questions to give their partner an opportunity to delve into the emotions and people involved with the experience.

After twenty minutes of sharing, I facilitated a whole group discussion where students shared their stories. Dylan began sharing his story with the audio recorder in his hand. When a student was sharing a story, s/he wanted to hold the recorder, which was on my desk in previous protocols, requiring students to speak loud enough to project their voices so their stories were captured. When students wanted to share, they passed the recorder to those students. The audio recorder became known, as Nicholas jokingly called it, “the spirit stick.” I appreciated that their stories were being recorded; I did not have to worry about the soft voices of Tali and Skye being missed. As a participant-observer, I felt students wanted to make sure their stories were captured and were creating their norms for how the process was going.

Out of this protocol, students shared their highpoint personal experiences. In sharing their narratives, students described moments when they felt stress free, exhilarated, and a sense of accomplishment. As a participant observer, I sensed that students have multiple obligations and responsibilities. I wanted to provide a context for their experiences. I asked students to describe some of the responsibilities they have in and out of school. There was a collective sigh among some of the students as they thought of their many responsibilities.

Pattie described a home life where she acts as the primary caregiver, caring for her younger sisters, her horses, and other livestock. Malcolm took us late into the night,
after cross-country, basketball, or baseball practice (depending on the season), and after helping his younger brother with his homework, he finished his homework. Cindy took the group through the many extracurricular activities she participates in, from cross-country to student council to drama club. She described the eighty-mile drive (one way) she took after school to a small city off the reservation for ballet class once a week, and on longer trips out of state to compete. Students shared their highpoint personal experiences and reflected on what made that experience significant. I listened and identified key themes and concepts that emerged from the whole group discussion on newsprint, member checking for accuracy. Students reviewed the newsprint before moving on to the next protocol.

Students continued sharing their narrative of experiences in the next protocol. The guiding questions for this protocol asked students to: Think of a time when they dared to try something new; And to describe something they did in which they dreamt about doing that they never did before. Students described the situation, what they did, and how it made them feel. This protocol engaged students in a whole group discussion. Students reflected on the guiding questions while I put up the newsprint from the previous protocol next to the others. The newsprints visually presented students’ narrative as it was being constructed in chronological order along the blank whiteboards.

The students described being in the ocean, flying on an airplane, and depending on someone. Students shared how they felt taking a risk and the accompanying emotions associated with taking the risk. They described fear and anxiety ultimately giving way to exhilaration. The goal of this activity was to have students discover moments when they took a chance and made the most out of an opportunity.
Personal strengths and values.

For the third protocol of the series, I facilitated student identification of their personal strengths and values through a whole group discussion where students shared their responses to the following guiding questions: What makes you good students? And, what makes you leaders of TCHS?

Students reflected on the questions and used index cards to write down details for reference in the whole group discussion. During the ensuing discussion, students identified personal strengths and values. They generated a list of strengths and values they believed made them good students and leaders at TCHS. The students described their academic and family responsibilities that manifest their values. They knew what they valued; yet, they were hesitant to talk about themselves.

Students were looking down at the desk tops, some were picking nervously at their fingernails, and they spoke softly when they shared what they perceive their personal strengths and values to be in the group discussion. They gradually became comfortable talking about themselves as similar strengths, values, anxieties, and experiences were shared within the group. As the discussion continued, students felt at ease and contributed to the running list being compiled on the newsprint (see Table 4.6). Table 4.6 lists the personal strengths and values that I captured on newsprint. The personal strengths and values the students generated were added to those generated in next protocol, describing a comprehensive picture of what makes them good students, leaders, and friends.
Students transitioned to the protocol where they described their personal strengths and values from the perspective of their teachers, family, and friends. I displayed the guiding questions on the board: *What do other people value about you and who you are as a friend and as a student? Your teachers? Your friends? Your family?* I continued to facilitate student identification of their values in a whole group discussion, also reflected in Table 4.6. Students described what they feel others value in them as a friend and student. I listed personal strengths and values on the same newsprint, member checking throughout for accuracy. Students reviewed the newsprint for accuracy before transitioning to the third series of protocols.

**Table 4.6. What students value about themselves and what others value in them**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Pseudonym</th>
<th>Personal strengths and values</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tali</td>
<td>Responsible, Determined, Resolute, Listen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skye</td>
<td>Perseverance, Determined, Listen, Engaged</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ashley</td>
<td>Character, Competitive, Different, Honest, Disciplined</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malcolm</td>
<td>Responsible, Passionate, Underdog, Determined</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pattie</td>
<td>Driven, Talented, Supportive, Dependable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nicholas</td>
<td>Consistency, Humble, Versatile, Determined, Driven, Helpful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cindy</td>
<td>Determination, Pride, Encouraging, Driven</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dylan</td>
<td>Resilient, Humble, Reliable, Trusting, Respectful, Determined, Independent</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The third series of Discovery protocols.

The third series of protocols associated with the Discovery stage included protocols to focus student discovery of the positive core within TCHS. During the first protocol, the students described TCHS when it is, or was, at its best in creating an
environment where people want to come and be part of this experience. The second protocol asked students to share what is currently happening at TCHS that they do not want to lose. The next protocol delved deeper into discovering TCHS’s positive core by identifying things that are not quite great, but have the potential to be great. In the final protocol, students shared what they feel are the “secret ingredients,” or key things that are special factors that make TCHS great. In the following sections, I present how students constructed TCHS’s life-giving narrative according to the protocols.

**TCHS at its best.**

In the first protocol of the series, students described TCHS at its best. I showed students a picture of “CSI: Miami” detectives as the visual transition and introduced this protocol to students as detective work; students had to delve through their experiences, as well as the stories they were told about TCHS, to describe TCHS at its best. The guiding questions for this activity were: *What history that you know about, or experience you have had, describes TCHS at its best? When do you experience TCHS as a place where you want to come every single day for athletics, academics, or extracurricular activities?*

Students were asked to describe TCHS when it is at its best in creating an environment where people want to come and be a part of this experience.

Students engaged in a semi-structured paired interview to share their stories. I noticed that students were validating each other’s stories as they were engaged in their interview. I heard students respond to each other’s stories, saying, “I know” and “me too!” There was excitement in the room. The students were engaged in their interviews for forty minutes; the longest time of the day in which students needed to share their
stories. As students concluded the interview process, they took their seats in the semi-circle to participate in a whole group discussion. Once all students were seated for the whole group discussion, students shared their stories of TCHS at its best.

I facilitated the students’ description of TCHS as a place people want to come to and be part of the experience. In sharing their stories, students drew from experience and what family members shared with them about TCHS’s history. Students described their interaction with their peers, school sponsored events and the spirit and unification associated with them, and past years of successful athletic teams.

When a student had a story to share, the “spirit stick” was quickly relayed to that student, then s/he added to the discussion. I sensed that students readily shared their stories, offering a backstory and providing rich descriptions of the people that were involved. I captured their stories on newsprint, including notable quotes from students, key terms, and themes. The newsprint filled up quickly; this whole group discussion produced four sheets of newsprint.

Students transitioned to the next protocol where they described what is happening right now at TCHS that they do not want to lose. I displayed a picture of a moving van and talked about how moving requires you to decide what is important enough to take, while inevitably leaving some things behind. I explained that TCHS was moving into the future and it was time to identify what it is important. I explained that you take the things that are important to you, things that you do not want to lose. The goal of this protocol was to describe what is currently happening at TCHS that are so good that students want to take into the future so other students can enjoy them.
The guiding question for this protocol was: *What is happening right now at TCHS that you do not want to lose?* Students were to engage in a semi-structured paired interview for this protocol. Students, however, asked if we could forgo the paired interview for a whole group discussion instead. As a participant observer, I wanted students to feel empowered in the process. I saw their stories become rich and descriptive when they had the opportunity to share their story. I followed the same process for ensuring confirmability for the whole group discussion, taking notes on the newsprint, member checking for accuracy, and reviewing the newsprint to ensure the stories were accurately captured. For the remainder of day one, students engaged in whole group discussions.

With the guiding questions displayed on the board, students reflected on what is currently happening at TCHS that are so important to them, they want to take into the future so other students can enjoy them. I passed out index cards and encouraged students to write down at least four to five aspects of TCHS that are important to them to start the discussion while I put up the four newsprints from the previous discussion. Once the discussion commenced, I facilitated student identification of what is currently happening at TCHS that students do not want to lose. Out of this protocol, students generated a list of what is currently happening at TCHS that is important to them. In sharing their stories, students described the academics at TCHS and school sponsored events that generate a collective spirit among the students and staff. Students shared the importance of homecoming and “hoopcoming;” specifically, in their capacity to promote school spirit, perpetuate traditions, and celebrate achievements and successes. Student driven organizations such as student council were described as something important to students.
as well with the potential to initiate a collective aspiration. Students shared the new tradition of an off-campus prom that was led by the student council the previous year to exemplify the result of students coming together to achieve something. In sharing their stories, students described their positive memories, and expressed a desire that other students can have them as well.

The next protocol in the series probed deeper into what is important to students that is currently occurring at TCHS. The guiding prompt for this protocol asked students to: *Describe the things that are not quite great, but have the potential to be great.* Students reflected on the question and used the same index card from the previous protocol to list what they think could develop into something great. I facilitated the collective identification of aspects of TCHS that have the potential to be great in a whole group discussion.

In sharing their stories, students described their classes, their teachers, and extracurricular programs that have the potential to be great. I recorded the key themes on newsprint, member checking throughout the discussion for accuracy. The newsprint was reviewed following the protocol as an additional measure of accuracy. I put up the newsprint beside the one from the previous protocol and transitioned to the next protocol.

The next protocol continued to facilitate student identification of the best within TCHS. This protocol presented to students that to create a great school, one has a recipe. This protocol informed students that there are things that make the school successful when it is at its best. The guiding question asked students to describe the “secret ingredients.” I encouraged students to come up with at least four to five key aspects of TCHS that are special factors that make this school great. Students used index cards to
record their ideas for the discussion. I facilitated student identification of what students felt are the “secret ingredients” of the recipe for a successful TCHS in a whole group discussion. In sharing their ideas, students described the academics (classes and learning experiences), the opportunities to display school spirit, their teachers, and the involvement of the community. I captured their ideas on newsprint as the discussion progressed (See Table 4.7). In what was uncharacteristic of students during discussions, students began calling out what they felt were the “secret ingredients.” I refer to “secret ingredients” as the influential factors students feel are contributory to TCHS’s success.

Table 4.7 lists the factors students described that make the school successful when it is at its best. Students described aspects related to academics and organizational factors as the factors contributory to the success of TCHS. The factors that emerged in the whole group discussion were listed on newsprint. I member checked with students throughout the discussion for accuracy and students reviewed the newsprint at the conclusion of the protocol.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Academic</th>
<th>Organizational</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Advanced Placement/Honors Program (3)</td>
<td>School spirit/pride/unity (6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individualized learning programs (3)</td>
<td>Collective determination to get better as a school (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Different teaching/learning experiences (1)</td>
<td>Communication (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Core academics (1)</td>
<td>Community/stakeholder involvement (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum (1)</td>
<td>Students (1)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.7. Secret ingredients
Table 4.7 Continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Diversity of classes (1)</th>
<th>Structure (1)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Friendly/safe learning environment (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Trust (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Enthusiasm (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Encouragement (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Events/activities to promote spirit (1)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note:* Students responses were grouped according to unifying themes. The number in parenthesis indicates the frequency in which the response emerged in the discussion.

To provide closure for day one, I asked students to take a moment and walk around the room to review the newsprints displayed throughout the room. Students went around the room looking over the newsprints. After a few minutes, students returned to their seats and began describing what they feel they learned or discovered today.

In a whole group discussion related to their stories, students reflected on the day’s protocols, including what they discovered, what affect the AI process had on them, and how the day resonated with them. In sharing their stories, students discovered that they learned about other people’s perspectives and aspirations, about TCHS’s history of success and potential to revive that history, and about what is good about themselves and their school. Students discovered that they are not alone as academically successful students at TCHS as they described how the Discovery stage brought them together and created a common ground from which to build upon.
Summary of day one: Discovery.

Day one involved the students in the discovery stage of the AI 4-D Cycle to identify and describe the positive core related to learning that exists within TCHS. Students used ground rules to create and maintain a research environment conducive to honest and open sharing. I divided the protocols of day one into three series with common goals. The first series included three protocols that served as opening questions to set the tone and energy of day. During the first series of protocols, students shared their experience at TCHS and what, if present, could create the ideal school and promote a positive experience for students. The first series of protocols culminated in the creation of the students’ affirmative challenge. The second series of protocols engaged students in discovering the best within themselves, and included four protocols where students described: (a) their highpoint personal experience; (b) a time when they dared to try something new; (c) what makes them good students and leaders at TCHS; and (d) what others value in them as good students and friends. The third series of protocols included four protocols where students identified the best within TCHS by describing: (a) TCHS at its best, its past and present successes; (b) what is happening now that students do not want to lose; (c) what is not quite great, but has the potential to be great; and (d) the “secret ingredients” or special factors that make TCHS great when it is at its best. The data collected from discovery was used to map the second stage of the AI 4-D Cycle: Dream.

Day two: Dream.

In the Dream stage, students imagine “what might be” of TCHS. The Dream stage protocols facilitate students’ construction of a positive image of the future grounded in
the outcomes of the Discovery stage. Students entered the room with familiarity on day two, the Dream stage, going to the same desks they used during the Discovery stage. Students set their things down, got up to get some donuts, and grab a water bottle without hesitation or needing to be encouraged. I asked students to peruse the newsprint displayed on the whiteboards from Discovery stage and confirm what was said. Students agreed with everything listed on the newsprint and were eager to begin the day.

After students perused the newsprint and confirmed what was said in the Discovery stage, they took their seats in the semi-circle. To provide inspiration and motivation as day two commenced, I described the life of Rohan Murphy as a student and an athlete. I then showed the Nike commercial of Rohan Murphy working out, demonstrating his commitment, showing his audience the work he does without legs. Nicholas had seen the video before, but that did not diminish his admiration of Rohan Murphy’s accomplishment. The goal was to inform students of the inspiration provided by the actions of others and create a research environment where students felt energized and inspired to collaboratively imagine the possibilities for themselves and TCHS during the Dream stage.

The Dream stage involves collaboratively imagining, as a strategic activity, that leads to high levels of creativity, commitment, and enthusiasm for the organization and its future (Cooperrider, et al., 2008). The Dream stage tells the story of students collaboratively imagining a future of academic achievement for students of TCHS. I explained to students that their work during the Dream stage would result in their vision for future academic achievement for succeeding generations of students of TCHS.
The purpose of the Dream stage is to envision the future of an organization (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2003). A dream is an AI term for creating a vision for an organization by constructing a positive image of the future, typically through visual metaphors and imagery. In AI, a positive image of the future acts as a motivating factor toward influencing individual and organizational behaviors (Cooperrider, 2000). The fourth principle of AI, the anticipatory principle, states that organizations grow in the direction of their positive images of the future (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2003). The protocols associated with the Dream stage provided a framework for centering discussion on developing, sharing, imagining, and defining students’ vision (dream) for future academic achievement for students of TCHS (Cooperrider, et al., 2008).

I divided the protocols associated with Dream stage into three series of protocols with similar goals, with each protocol sequencing to the next. The final protocol served as the culminating AI activity. To re-establish the relationships among the students from the Discovery stage, I began the day using the semi-structured paired interview model because of its relationship building capacity before switching to the whole group discussion model (Whitney & Cooperrider, 1998).

The first series of protocols consisted of an AI focal activity and two protocols that served as a precursor to the Dream stage. The first series of protocols bridged the values and accomplishments of the Discovery stage to the possibilities inherent a collective vision of their ideal future. Through a PowerPoint presentation, students reviewed the values and accomplishments from the Discovery stage. The slides were designed for each student with his/her picture, values, and/or notable quotes recorded in the Discovery stage. Students confirmed the values and accomplishments of the
Discovery stage through the process of member checking throughout the presentation. Students then engaged in an initial AI focal activity to describe a positive experience they had between the Discovery and Dream stages. The first protocol engaged students in describing what their greatest dream would be for themselves, their friends, their teachers, and their school. In the second protocol, the students visualized, through the creation of a personal metaphor, to describe and share their core characteristics, strengths, or words that describe them at their best through the creation of a personal metaphor.

The second series of protocols included three protocols that shaped the students’ vision for future academic achievement for students of TCHS, where students described: (a) the dream they have for future students of TCHS; (b) how they best learned through sharing a highpoint learning experience; and (c) their ideal learning setting.

The third series of protocols included two protocols that engaged students in collectively imagining their ideal future, including their individual achievements and those of TCHS. The first protocol allowed students to view their capacity to achieve success by imagining their accomplishments in their ideal future. The second protocol engaged students in a creative dialogue of TCHS’s accomplishments in ten years.

The culminating protocol associated with the Dream stage engaged students to collectively produce a metaphor for TCHS, illustrating TCHS’s life giving narrative. Students took the best of the past and present and using it as a springboard to the future, capturing TCHS’s journey toward achieving greatness.

Following all protocols associated with the Dream stage, I asked students what they discovered during the AI process, including both Discovery and Dream stages. Students described the impact the process had on reshaping their perception of TCHS on
its positive core and positive potential. In sharing their experience with the AI process, students described a desire to make a positive difference in TCHS and carry the two days forward. The Dream stage concluded with students describing how they would commit to making their vision for future academic achievement happen. Students then shared their personal dedication to TCHS’s success.

**The first series of Dream protocols.**

The first series of protocols served as a precursor to the Dream stage. Students discussed what was shared in discovery through a PowerPoint presentation that included the values and accomplishments they described in the Discovery stage. Students then engaged in an initial AI focal activity to describe something good that happened to them in the three days since the Discovery Stage. The first protocol of the Dream stage gave students an opportunity to imagine if they had the powers of a superhero, what their dreams would be for their teachers, friends, and school. The second protocol engaged students in illustrating the core characteristics that describe them at their best through their construction of a personal metaphor. By constructing a positive image of themselves, students were introduced the concept of a positive image.

I created and shared a PowerPoint presentation that reviewed the work students accomplished in the Discovery stage. This presentation listed the students’ values and accomplishments recorded during the Discovery stage. Students reviewed each slide and had the opportunity to add to the slide if they felt anything was missing. During the presentation, students were reminded that they are difference makers. Difference makers can see what works and are committed to being a force toward positive change. To support this point, individual slides were included in the PowerPoint entitled “TCHS
“Difference Maker” with each student’s picture, and a brief list of what they valued about themselves taken from the Discovery stage and notable quotations (See Table 4.8).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Pseudonym</th>
<th>Values and Notable Quotes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tali</td>
<td>Resolute</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Loving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Always there for friends and family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Likes the unexpected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“I get things done”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“There’s things we can change”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skye</td>
<td>Determined</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Helpful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Will get into the ocean at night</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“There’s a lot for I am going to do for my future then I thought I’d have to do”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ashley</td>
<td>Honest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Students should see the full picture of what they can accomplish”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Character: It’s what you do when no one’s looking”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Different</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malcolm</td>
<td>Hard worker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Underdog</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Who knows what could happen and how far we could go”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“I want to try and bring that back, I’m still a sophomore, I got two more years”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dependable</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.8. Student Characteristics
Table 4.8 Continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Talented</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Caregiver</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Overcoming the odds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Good listener</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Competitive: Driven to be better</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Role-model</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pattie</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nicholas</th>
<th>Driven</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Helpful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Athletic</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>“You only live once”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reliable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Funny</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cindy</th>
<th>Fabulous</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>Determined</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“I have a lot of positive memories here, I hope others have them”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Supportive</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dylan</th>
<th>Resilient</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Engaged</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Making the most out of what life gives you”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Carpe Diem”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“We have been that school that others looked up to so we can be again”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Students received applause from the other students when their respective slides were shown. All students exhibited a bashful smile when their slide was projected. During the slide show, student confirmed the information to ensure accuracy. The presentation continued by reviewing the work students accomplished in the Discovery
stage by displaying the affirmative challenge. Students reflected on their affirmative challenge and considered if there is anything they wanted to add to the challenge before moving forward with the next protocol. The students described their commitment to the challenge as it was created during the Discovery stage. The next protocol served as an AI focal activity to begin day two focused on positive experiences.

Students participated in an initial AI focal activity where they described something good that happened to them during the three days since day one, the Discovery stage. I shared something good that happened to me to begin the discussion, emphasizing that it does not have to be a grand event; it could be any positive experience. I facilitated a whole group discussion for students to share their stories. Students shared stories of, going out of town, watching a movie, baking cookies, going to a birthday party, hanging out around the house, and playing video games. The anchoring concept that symbolized what the students described as a “good” experience was engaging in their respective activity with family or friends. The goal of the AI focal activity was to frame the students’ conversation and ensuing discussions, on positive experiences. By recalling and sharing their positive experiences, students recognized the positive interactions they experience in their lives.

An integral part of AI is bringing forth the best from the past to the present and using it to build momentum towards the future. The preceding activities in which students engaged in the Dream stage sought to create a research environment conducive to imagining an ideal future for TCHS. Students identified the best of the past and present shared in the Discovery stage to use as a springboard to the future as identified in the Dream stage. The generative nature of focusing on positive interactions and experiences
allowed students to see themselves as difference makers with the potential to make a meaningful difference in the lives of people around them and to catalyze positive change for TCHS. The next protocol empowered students with the opportunity to describe the greatest dreams they have for TCHS and the people in their lives.

Students engaged in a semi-structured paired interview to describe what their greatest dream would be for themselves, their friends, their teachers, and TCHS if they had the powers of a superhero. Literature pertaining to appropriate qualitative research methods with adolescents posits that relating an interview question to a familiar context increases adolescents’ rapport and confidence in their ability to answer the question (Deatrick & Faux, 1991; Holmbeck & Shapera, 1999). I framed the guiding questions of this protocol by carefully selecting the analogy of a superhero to provide relevance; thereby, gaining access to students’ worlds (Kirk, 2007).

I asked students to imagine if everything we discussed in the Discovery stage came together, how would they describe their dream? The guiding questions asked students: What if you had the powers of a superhero; What would be the dreams you would have as a person, for your friends, for your teachers, and for your school? The goal of this protocol was for students to describe their greatest dreams, and provide them with a platform to dream without restrictions. Similar to the concept of “idealized design,” this protocol engaged students in creating a vision that represents the best ideal-seeking system they can currently conceive (Ackoff, 1993). Students engaged in a semi-structured paired interview to describe what they want for themselves, their friends, their teachers, and TCHS.
Students moved into the prearranged pairs of desks to engage in their interviews. They divided into pairs, interviewing the same partner as they did in the Discovery stage. I circulated the room observing behaviors and encouraging students to ask probing questions. I also shadowed groups by pulling up a desk and listening to their interviews. There was excitement in the room during the interview process as students’ creativity became evident in sharing their stories. Students enthusiastically described the superpower they would wish for themselves and how that superpower could help realize the dreams they constructed. When the conversations started to calm, we convened as a whole group for students to share their stories.

I stood by the easel in the front of the room to record what their dreams would be if they had the powers of a superhero in a whole group discussion. Students described the greatest dream they have for themselves, their friends, their teachers, and TCHS. Students also included the “superpower” they creatively conceived that would help realize their dreams (See Table 4.9). Table 4.9 captures the dreams students described and in this protocol. In sharing their stories, students described using their “superpower” to help their dreams be realized. Students described teachers receiving help and resources to teach effectively, and students getting the support they need to understand and achieve. I member checked throughout for accuracy and reviewed each newsprint at the conclusion of the activity.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student pseudonym</th>
<th>Superpower</th>
<th>Dream for themselves</th>
<th>Dream for their friends</th>
<th>Dream for their teachers</th>
<th>Dream for TCHS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tali</td>
<td>Teleportation and time travel</td>
<td>Be happy</td>
<td>More choices in their lives</td>
<td>Vacation; a break</td>
<td>A school where students have a variety of choices, variety of classes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sky</td>
<td>Telekenisis Mind Reading</td>
<td>To have the ability (physical or mental) to do whatever he wants</td>
<td>To have someone supportive in their lives</td>
<td>To be able to communicate with students; to always be able to help students</td>
<td>To be a school where teachers and students have input</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ashley</td>
<td>Telekenisis</td>
<td>Go to different countries; Experience how life is; and not stick around on the reservation</td>
<td>To be successful and finish college; Leave the reservation</td>
<td>To have students who understand; Would use superpower to help in class, tutor and mentor students</td>
<td>“Top Notch” school; more programs; and to open doors for other students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malcolm</td>
<td>Fly, time travel</td>
<td>Living by a river to flyfish and hunt; connected with nature; and $100 million</td>
<td>To be able to have fun</td>
<td>Teachers would know how to motivate students and help them understand</td>
<td>New technology; Aesthetically beautiful; New athletic facilities</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.9. Students’ greatest dreams
The protocol enabled students to view themselves as difference makers, with abilities to make meaningful differences in the lives of those around them. Students shared their desire to initiate positive change in the protocol. In the next protocol, students shared their strengths and values in the generation of a metaphor.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 4.9 Continued</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pattie</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nicholas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cindy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dylan</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Personal metaphor.**

Metaphors are generated in the Dream stage as an agent for initiating positive change. The essential principles of metaphors in AI research are to: (a) cultivate new perceptions; (b) facilitate the learning of new knowledge; (c) create scenarios to guide future actions; and (d) invite experimentation (Barrett & Cooperrider, 2001). Two dominant forms of metaphors that manifest in epistemology are verbal and visual metaphors (Feinstein, 1982). Visual metaphors are a way of processing information and communicating people’s experiences with rich and vivid detail (Langer, 1957). In my research, I used visual metaphors for students to share their personal strengths and values as a method of data collection aligned to the epistemological nature of many indigenous groups (Smith, 1999; Smith, 2009; Wilson, 2008; Smith, 2009; Wilson, 2008).

The oral culture of American Indians incorporates the use of visual metaphors to process and share knowledge and information (St. Clair, 2000). Among the Navajo, metaphors provide a framework for understanding their experiences and interactions (Schwarz, 1998). Moreover, research with the Navajo views art as a form of communication with special meaning (Hatcher, 1976). An AI protocol facilitated the generation of a visual metaphor as a method of sharing the personal strengths and values that were described in the Discovery stage.

Students were presented the concept of a metaphor as a creative way to visualize what people value about themselves, their strengths, personal experiences, beliefs, and cherished traditions. I used a personal metaphor as an example of how I visualize my values, accomplishments and how strength can be drawn from it. In a PowerPoint, students were shown images of an F-16 fighter jet, a grizzly bear standing on its hind
legs, and a black rose. Students then discussed the possible strengths and values could be communicated by the images. The guiding prompt for this protocol was projected on the board: *Choose a personal metaphor that captures the core characteristics, factors, or words that describe you at your best. Why does your metaphor create strength for you?*

Students received a sheet of newsprint and an assortment of colored markers and reflected on the prompt, often looking at the newsprints that were displayed around the room from the Discovery stage. The goal of this protocol was to build off the outcomes of the Discovery stage where students could illustrate the personal strengths and values discussed in the Discovery stage. To determine an appropriate metaphor, students reflected on the personal stories of their highpoint personal experiences and values shared throughout the Discovery stage.

Students worked independently on their personal metaphor. When they were finished creating their metaphors, they presented their metaphor to the whole group, explaining its symbols and describing its meaning. Students’ metaphors captured their current values and aspirations. They shared the images that illustrated their strengths or described them at their best, shared their adversity, and captured their aspirations.

This section includes examples of students’ metaphors that illustrate their strengths or describe them at their best, share their adversity, and capture their aspirations. In describing their metaphors, students shared their narrative by describing the strengths they value in themselves, how they describe personal adversity, and aspirations (See Table 4.10). Table 4.10 displays how students described their strengths, aspirations, and adversity through the presentation of their metaphors.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strengths</th>
<th>Adversity</th>
<th>Aspirations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Perseverance</td>
<td>Broken family</td>
<td>Attend College</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protectiveness</td>
<td>Chaos</td>
<td>Find peace and safety</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td>Death</td>
<td>To be resilient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loving</td>
<td>Sickness</td>
<td>To reach goals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stubborn</td>
<td>Sadness</td>
<td>To be a role model</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persistent</td>
<td></td>
<td>Gain confidence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Determination</td>
<td></td>
<td>To be regal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive nature</td>
<td></td>
<td>To have self-Esteem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reliable</td>
<td></td>
<td>Remain adaptable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Warm</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultured</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With potential</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patient</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fortitude</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Optimistic</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.10. Student descriptions of metaphors

Students used multiple images to visualize their strengths, creating many metaphors to symbolize the characteristics they value in themselves and to describe...
themselves at their best (See Figure 4.5). Figure 4.5 presents one student’s metaphor, which communicated myriad strengths and values through multiple images. The dominant mode of communicating strengths and values among the students was through animals. Students described their protective nature through the image of a bear; whereas, the lion represented leadership, a hawk symbolizes perseverance, a horse illustrated stubbornness, a cat symbolized the resilience to “always land on its feet,” and a bull represented confidence.
The aspirations of the students were also depicted in their visual metaphors (See Figure 4.6). The metaphor presented in Figure 4.6 illustrates a student’s aspiration to be confident and regal, like the queen illustrated in the metaphor. In addition to this metaphor, students described their aspiration to go to college by illustrating the part of
the country they want to go to college in or drawing the logo of the college of their choice. Students described their aspiration to be a leader and to find balance in their lives. Students described the aspiration to accept that challenges will exist in their lives, but deferred to their strengths and accomplishments as a testament to not be defined by their adversity.

Figure 4.6. Aspirations
Students shared the challenges they must overcome to achieve their aspirations when presenting their metaphors, describing their resilience to overcome adversity. Students described how adversity manifests in their lives, reflected in table 4.10. In explaining their metaphors, students shared their resilience to continue and their ability to find hope somewhere (See Figure 4.7). Though students described their adversity when sharing their metaphors, their sources of strength and aspirations towards overcoming adversity remained the focus of the discussion. The metaphor presented in figure 4.7, for example, illustrates the adversity a student perceives, represented by the dark forest and storm clouds. The student described being the small green plant, resilient toward maintaining a ray of sunshine amidst the chaos the dark forest and storm clouds create. The student also described aspirations related to college and maintaining balance, or *Ke'ē*, a Navajo term for emotional well-being (Schwarz, 1998).
Figure 4.7. Resilience
Through cultural participation, such as dancing in pow-wows and believing in the Navajo saying, “walk in beauty,” students used their metaphors to describe the Navajo culture as a source of strength. A student drew a spiraled circle and described how this symbol is reminiscent of a traditional Navajo story about “The Man in the Maze.” Students shared the story of a man who endures struggles inside a maze, but emerges gifted with knowledge and rejuvenation. Students described their Navajo culture, through the stories shared by grandparents and a belief advocated by the father, helping maintain progress towards reaching their aspirations.

The personal metaphor protocol allowed students to visualize and describe their strengths, aspirations, and the adversity they face in their experience as successful Navajo high school students on the reservation. The personal metaphor protocol offered students a creative process to share their positive core described in the Discovery stage.

The first series of protocols associated with the Dream stage built off the values and accomplishments of the Discovery stage. Students reviewed what was said in the Discovery stage through a PowerPoint presentation that reviewed individual and collective values and accomplishments. Through an initial AI focal activity, students described something good that happened to them in the time between meetings. Students then described their greatest dream and imagined what superpower they would use to realize that dream. To conclude the first series of protocols associated with the Dream stage, students generated personal visual metaphors that captured the core characteristics that illustrated them at their best.
The second series of Dream protocols.

The second series of protocols associated with the Dream stage included three protocols where students visualized what might be of TCHS’s ideal future, including their dreams for future students of TCHS and the learning experience TCHS provides. In the first protocol, students described their greatest dream for future students of TCHS. The next pair of protocols overlapped. Students described how they best learn in the second protocol. The values generated from this protocol were applied to the third protocol. The third protocol allowed students to connect how they best learn to describe their ideal learning setting.

An AI dream is to construct a meaningful visualization of a positive vision of the future. The dream is an AI term for visualizing a desired future. The Dream stage is a time for people to describe their wishes and dreams for their work, their working relationships, and their organization (Whitney, 1998). The concept of a dream was introduced by describing its ability to shape people’s beliefs and actions. An example of an athlete visualizing the ideal performance and the subsequent actions was used to explain the power of visualizing. I described how a basketball player can see the ball going in the hoop in the player’s mind’s eye before his/her actual performance. The mental connection between the image of making the basket, and it actually happening, described the relationship between a positive image and positive action. During the discussion, one student, was “shooting a free throw” in his seat. To reinforce the connection between a positive image and a positive action, I explained how a profound image of the future inspires present and future behaviors and actions draws the future into the present (Cooperrider, 2000). Through the AI process, students focus on appreciating
positive experiences and interactions. During the Dream stage, the students focused on their ability to imagine the possibilities of having more positive experiences and interactions by dreaming for the future.

The first protocol of the second series engaged students in a whole group discussion to describe their dream for future students of TCHS. I projected the following guiding prompt on the board for students to reflect on before they shared their story in a whole group discussion: *Describe the greatest dream you have for future generations of Warriors.* I passed out index cards for students to use to write ideas to share in the discussion. The goal of this activity was to get the students thinking about possibilities without any constraints.

In a whole group discussion, students shared their dream for future students of TCHS to attend a school that prepares them for college through rigorous academics and opportunities to be involved through extracurricular programs. Students also described the opportunities that can be afforded to future generations of students of TCHS from experiences away from the reservation.

Students shared that they hope future generations can have experiences off the reservation, including participating in summer academic programs, going to college, and merely experiencing the realities of life off the reservation. Students described the transformative potential of off reservation experiences: How these experiences can create hope that the status and quality of life on the reservation can improve. Moreover, students shared that off reservation experiences can empower people with the ability to initiate positive change. I captured their dreams on newsprint, member checking for accuracy.
Students reviewed the newsprint for accuracy and if they wanted to include anything before moving on to the next pair of protocols.

The next pair of protocols led to the construction of a dream for TCHS and its learning setting. The first protocol guided students to share how they best learn. The values generated from this protocol served as the basis for constructing their vision of what might be of the learning setting at TCHS. I introduced the pair of protocols by explaining that dreams for the future are partly inspired by a previous positive experience. Students described how they best learned and used the values from this protocol to describe their ideal learning setting.

Students engaged in a semi-structured paired interview to share how they best learn by describing a highpoint learning experience. The guiding questions for this activity were projected on the board: *Describe how you best learn by providing an example of that experience. Who was there? What was happening? What did you learn? What made this a magic learning experience for you?* Students reflected on the questions and engaged in their interviews. I put the newsprint from the previous activity up on the wall; the whiteboards were completely covered with the newsprints from the Discovery stage and Dream stage protocols.

When students reconvened in a whole group discussion, they shared their learning experiences, emphasizing how they were learning and what made it memorable. Students described how they were engaged in what they were learning, described times when they were utilizing visual, interactive, auditory, and hands-on approaches to learning. Students also described learning experiences where they collaborated with their peers. Common themes were identified in their stories to categorize their experiences. I recorded key
themes that emerged from their discussion on newsprint, member checking as the newsprint was being created, and common themes were identified. Students recognized the common themes and understood how their experiences were categorized and what made some experiences similar. The values generated from this protocol were applied towards describing the ideal learning setting students envision for TCHS. Students reviewed the newsprint for accuracy before transitioning to the next protocol.

The next protocol engaged students in a whole group discussion about their vision for creating the ideal learning setting at TCHS. Whole group discussion remained the data collection method for the remainder of protocols associated with the Dream stage. I followed a strict set of protocols to ensure confirmability during the discussion. I listened to their stories, wrote emerging details on newsprint, facilitated the identification of themes, member checking for accuracy, and reviewed the newsprint at the conclusion of the whole group discussion.

Students were asked to describe their ideal learning setting. This protocol was presented to students as an opportunity to see their “Dreams in Action.” The guiding questions for this activity were: Based upon how you best learn, how would you describe an ideal learning setting for students at TCHS? What would be happening? How would you be engaged? What would your teachers be doing? The goal of this protocol was for students to describe what it would look like if the experiences they shared were part of the everyday learning experience at TCHS.

In a whole group discussion, students described their ideal learning setting. Students’ stories were captured on newsprint during the discussion (See Table 4.11). I converted the original newsprint generated from the students’ stories into table format to
increase readability. In sharing their stories, students described how they would be engaged in learning in their ideal setting and what the role of the teacher would be in this setting. Students described being engaged visually, interactively, and through haptic modalities. Students shared their ideas of an ideal learning setting where collaborative and participatory models of learning are supported, where the learning setting is student-centered. In this setting, the teacher facilitates the learning and introduces visualizations and technology. Students further described how they imagine the role of the teacher to be, emphasizing the relationships that can be formed between the student and the teacher.

Students’ stories were captured on newsprint. The information was confirmed by member checking with students during the whole group discussion.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role of the Teacher</th>
<th>Student Engagement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Facilitating learning (student driven)</td>
<td>All students involved</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building comfortable/professional relationships with students</td>
<td>Collaborative learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interacting with students</td>
<td>Visualization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connecting with students on a personal level</td>
<td>Hands-on projects/ learning by doing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Create an open welcoming classroom</td>
<td>Class discussions/debates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introducing technology</td>
<td>Smaller class sizes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduce visualizations</td>
<td>Field trips</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Students helping each other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Experiences outside of school</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.11. Students’ ideal learning setting
The second series of protocols included the students’ narrative of their vision for future academic achievement for TCHS. The protocols included three protocols that engaged students in describing their vision for the future of TCHS. Students described their dreams for future generations of students of TCHS, described how they currently best learned, and then shared their idea of the ideal learning setting at TCHS.

**The third series of Dream protocols.**

The third series of protocols engaged students in creative dreaming of an ideal future, including individual achievements and those of TCHS. Creative dreaming allowed the students to think differently for what was possible; to realize the only limitations were ones they placed on themselves or TCHS.

The first protocol in the series engaged students in creating a vision for their ideal future. I introduced this protocol to students by giving them a context to share their story. I asked students to imagine they are at a family reunion and family members were asking them what they achieved and how they achieved it. Students were originally going to describe their achievements 10 years into the future. At the suggestion of the underclassman, however, the context from which their stories will emerge changed to imagine they are thirty years old, 12-15 years in the future. To reinforce the relationship between a positive image and positive action, the guiding prompts for this protocol were twofold: *Describe what you achieved and how you achieved it.*

In a whole group discussion, students shared stories of their accomplishments at thirty years old. In sharing their stories, students described: (a) the academic success they will experience; (b) their professional accomplishments; and (c) how they will make their reservation community a better place. All students described obtaining graduate degrees
in a variety of fields, including master’s degrees and Ph.D.’s. Students described how their educational achievements related to their professional goals. Students described being acclaimed scientists, doctors, video game developers, politicians, and actors. Students described establishing scholarships for students of TCHS, building a community center, starting a non-profit organization to encourage the arts, and moving back to the reservation to work. In sharing their accomplishments at thirty years old, students articulated the educational and professional dreams they have for themselves and a desire to make a positive difference in their community.

The second guiding question of the protocol asked students to describe how they achieved their dream. I asked students how they accomplished all they described. From this question, students described the values that will promote the actions to realize their dream. Students shared their determination, perseverance, risk taking, hard work, humbleness, strategy, scholarships, and hope. This protocol allowed students to articulate a dream for themselves and to envision the actions that will ultimately manifest their ideal future.

Students were given another context in the second protocol to share their vision for TCHS, and describe its ideal future. I transitioned to this protocol by encouraging students to “keep looking forward,” maintaining a vision for the future inspired by the following context:

The New York Times heard about a high achieving high school on the Navajo Nation that is surpassing all other schools in the country; a reporter is flying in to share TCHS’s story with the rest of the nation in a special feature on the front page of the Sunday Edition of The New York Times.
Students worked in groups to design the front page and share TCHS’s story. Each group was given a sheet of newsprint and colored markers to design the front page.

When the pages were complete, each group presented their story, with each person presenting a portion. The students shared their story of a school successful in its innovation, academics, scholarship, and athletics (See Table 4.12). Table 4.12 synthesizes students’ documents, identifying how each group described TCHS’s success 10 years in the future.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Paired Groups</strong></th>
<th><strong>Accomplishments of TCHS in 10 years</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Group 1</strong></td>
<td>TCHS: An Oasis of Triumph</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academics</td>
<td>100% College Acceptance Rate; 28 Average ACT Score; Outstanding IB and AP Programs; 100% Graduation Rate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Athletics</td>
<td>Back-To-Back State Champions, Basketball and Cross-Country Tuba City High School Wins Third Baseball State Championship in a Row</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scholarship</td>
<td>TCHS Named Naval Honor School for Excellence in ROTC Program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Dylan Foundation Awards $10 Million to 100 Graduating Seniors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Innovation</td>
<td>Tuba City High School Student Science Project Leads to Innovations in Near-waterless Agriculture and Renewable Energy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.12. TCHS in the future
Table 4.12 Continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group 2</th>
<th>TCHS Rises Above the Odds</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Academics</td>
<td>Ranks number 7 in the country, and 85% of students have pursued college into an Ivy League school. 15 % attend local community or technical schools/colleges</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Athletics</td>
<td>State Champions in Cross-Country, Volleyball and Basketball. Drill Team Best in the Nation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scholarship</td>
<td>30 Gates and Williams Scholars; 80 Chief Manuelito Scholars</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Innovation</td>
<td>Creates a car that operates off water</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The third series of protocols associated with the Dream stage facilitated students in describing their ideal future, including their individual achievements and those of TCHS. The protocols in this series gave students a context from which they described their ideal future. In doing so, students shared the dreams they have for themselves and articulated the behaviors and actions that can realize their dream. The second protocol gave students a creative platform to envision the ideal future for TCHS. In constructing their vision for TCHS, students described the school’s achievements in terms of academic, athletics, scholarship, and innovation. Following this series of protocols, the students engaged in the culminating protocol of the Dream stage where they created a collective metaphor, a positive image of TCHS.

**Culminating Protocol: Collective Metaphor.**

The creation of a collective metaphor allows an organization’s story to unfold and gives people within the organization an ability to decide the organization’s direction.
toward it’s imagined future (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2003). Students were shown images synonymous with change: a bridge and a caterpillar. I explained that a bridge can connect the past to the future and a caterpillar undergoes a metamorphosis, emerging as a beautiful butterfly. Both images showed the students examples of positive transformation. The guiding prompt for this protocol was: Using the entire whiteboard each person will contribute to a group metaphor that captures the characteristics of TCHS that you described today (including the people, the experiences, and the potential). Each student contributed to the metaphor. In the presentation of the metaphor, each student described his/her contribution following the guiding questions: How do your values fit in? What element did you contribute to the metaphor? Describe what strengths your metaphor captures. How can you draw strength from your metaphor? I removed some sheets of newsprints that were displayed from previous protocols from the north facing whiteboard, and taped five sheets of clean newsprint to form a canvas approximately eight feet long. All the markers were laid out and students began contributing to the metaphor.

Students spread out, spanning the entire canvas. As each student contributed individual parts, they were creating a cohesive image of TCHS that shared the life-giving narrative students identified and discovered during the first two stages of the AI 4-D Cycle: Discovery and Dream. Many metaphors that emanate from indigenous cultures communicate a narrative or tell a story (Donaldson, 2002; King, 1987; St. Clair, 2000). St. Clair (2000) posits that there are two dominant metaphors among most indigenous groups in the Americas: The journey and the Quaternity (the four directions of the earth). The journey metaphor manifested in the description of the group metaphor by students.
In sharing their metaphor, students described the narrative of TCHS’s journey toward academic achievement; the students entitled their metaphor “Warrior Odyssey.” Students described the positive core of TCHS with the potential to carry TCHS forward, allowing it to emerge as a high achieving school (See Figure 4.8). Students shared in the vision they collectively imagined for TCHS through the crafting and acceptance of its positive image. The students’ metaphor enabled them to embrace the power of the future in hopes of academic achievement for TCHS. Their stories reflected a belief that TCHS held the capacity for an even brighter future that can sustain success for its students.

![Figure 4.8. Group metaphor](image)

**Closing AI activity.**

The closing AI activity asked students to reflect on their participation in the first two stages of the AI 4-D Cycle: Discovery and Dream. Students shared what they
discovered in a whole group discussion. Their stories and reflections were captured on newsprint. Students described the common goals they share for the future, including their individual aspirations and their vision for future academic achievement for students of TCHS. Students described the impact the AI process had on reshaping their perception of TCHS on its positive core, and applying this positive core toward creating a compelling vision for the future. In sharing their experience with the AI process, students described a desire to make a positive difference in TCHS. I wanted the students to take ownership over initiating positive change within TCHS. I asked if they would make one personal commitment toward creating their shared vision and move TCHS closer to achieving greatness.

The personal commitment is not a protocol traditionally part of the Dream stage; it is common in the Destiny stage of the AI 4-D Cycle. AI researchers applying an AI research methodology in schools noted that a challenge for AI is capitalizing on the energy and momentum generated among participants to sustain implementation (Calabrese, et al., 2010). The personal commitment was included, therefore, for the AI process to have a lasting impact on the students. Students excitedly shared what they learned through their participation in the Discovery and Dream stages of the AI 4-D Cycle: Students: (a) discovered the positive core related to learning that exists within TCHS; (b) learned to value, affirm, validate each other; and (c) described a compelling vision for future academic achievement for students of TCHS.

The closing AI activity, particularly the personal commitment, reinforced the relationship between positive image and positive action. The guiding question for this protocol asked students: *What is one thing you are going to commit to doing when I leave*
The personal commitment gave students ownership over making something positive happen in the school, something that begins the odyssey, moving TCHS closer to its ideal future. Students were given time to reflect on the question and define their personal commitments.

In a whole group discussion, students shared their personal commitments as I captured their commitments on the last sheet of newsprint. The dedication of the students to initiate the positive action was evident (See Table 4.13).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Pseudonym</th>
<th>Personal Commitment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Skye</td>
<td>I’m going try to help my peers do the best they can to graduate and what they can do to be successful in school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malcolm</td>
<td>I’m going to win a state title for them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ashley</td>
<td>Since I’m the sophomore president, I’m going try to keep that tradition with the prom and also with homecoming.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nicholas</td>
<td>Something I’m going do after this program would have to be to start an Aces Program club for the school, for kids that enjoy Science and Engineering. I would also like to create more extracurricular activities that are run by students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pattie</td>
<td>I will work on some of the things that we discussed, and think of new ways to make the school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dylan</td>
<td>I would try and start a few more clubs and get a lot of people involved in those clubs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cindy</td>
<td>I just want to relay the message to my peers that it’s not over high school, there’s more to life than the reservation.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.13. Personal commitments
Summary of day two: Dream.

Appreciative inquiry enables participants to create a shared vision for the future grounded in examples from the organization’s past (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005). The Dream stage provided students with the opportunity to reflect on their dreams and a platform to collectively construct a dream for future academic achievement for students of TCHS. The protocols associated with the Dream stage of the AI 4-D Cycle bridged the values and accomplishments of discovery to possibilities of an ideal future described in Dream. Through three series of protocols, students collectively dreamed for the future academic achievement for TCHS.

The first series of protocols served as a precursor to the Dream stage and included protocols to review what was said in the Discovery stage, illustrate the values described in the Discovery stage, and introduce the power of visualization on creating an ideal future. The second series of protocols associated with the Dream stage included three protocols where students visualized what might be of TCHS’s ideal future, including their dreams for future students of TCHS and the learning experience TCHS provides. The third series of protocols engaged students in creative dreaming of the achievements they envision for themselves and TCHS. The culminating protocol associated with the dream stage facilitated students in illustrating TCHS’s life-giving narrative and journey towards a future of academic achievement.

To conclude the Dream stage, the students shared the positive experience of participating in the first two stages of the AI 4-D Cycle. In sharing their experiences with the AI process, students described their desire to make positive differences in TCHS and give the AI process a lasting effect. The Dream stage concluded with students describing
how they would commit to realize their vision for future academic achievement. Students then shared their personal dedication to beginning TCHS’s journey towards achieving greatness.

**Two Salient Findings**

I organize this section by presenting a detailed description of the salient findings of my study. I begin by restating each finding. I then provide a detailed narrative with descriptive quotations from the participants in tabular and narrative form to support each finding. For readability, I refer to the students who participated in the study as participants, while referring to students of TCHS as students. I conclude my presentation of each finding with a brief summary. The two salient findings of my study are:

1: The participants identified and described a positive core within TCHS.
2: The participants co-constructed a compelling vision for the future academic achievement for students at TCHS.

**Finding 1: The participants identified and described a positive core within TCHS.**

The following sections present a narrative of the participants’ description of the positive core within TCHS. They discovered the positive core within TCHS through their combined stories of: (1) school-related highpoint experiences, (2) the unexplored strengths of TCHS, (3) the relational strengths among students and with teachers, and (4) the greatest achievements in extra-curricular programs experienced by the people within TCHS. The positive core is exhibited in a sense of community embedded in school spirit, school-based clubs, relationships, and the contexts through which people are brought together at TCHS. A community is created based on the shared values and shared goals of a group (Bellah, 1995; Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, & Tipton, 1985). A sense of
community refers to the feeling of belonging created among people, that people matter to one another and are committed to each other (McMillan & Chavis, 1986). The participants’ words and experiences were consistent with Bellah’s definition of community, and grounded their feeling of belonging within TCHS. In the following sections, I share their narrative of this sense of community.

**Sense of community in homecoming activities.**

With as many as one hundred miles separating where TCHS students live, the school acts as a place of social cohesion. School-related activities provide a platform for students to come together, creating a sense of community at TCHS. School-based activities associated with homecoming provided students this opportunity; here they displayed pride in their school culture and Navajo heritage. Participants’ highpoint experiences occurred during these activities when they felt a high level of school spirit. School spirit is a measure of a sense of community and pride in the school students feel; often elicited through participation in extra-curricular or school-based activities (Coker & Border, 2001; Libbey, 2004). The indicators of school spirit were evidenced in stories related to: (1) the pride demonstrated as TCHS Navajo students; and (2) the sense of community felt at TCHS.

Aspects of the Navajo heritage celebrated during school homecoming activities included running, a respect for elders, and traditional Navajo dress. Running is an important part of Navajo heritage. Adolescent girls sprint towards the sunrise during their *kinaalda*, or puberty ceremony. Navajos run east to greet the gods of their myths and legends every morning, exhibiting pride and cultural identity (Brooke, 1998). Cindy shared how running affects her life, “Whenever I need to get away, I run. I run in the
morning to let the holy people know I’m asking for them to answer my prayers.”

Malcolm followed, “Running gives me balance in my life. Being out there in nature puts things into perspective. There is harmony, there is ke’e, my well-being when I am running.” Ashley affirmed her commitment to running, “I stayed committed to running even after my kinaalda. I feel connected to my [Navajo heritage] when I run.” This aspect of Navajo heritage was combined with school activities during homecoming.

The homecoming activity to embody running is the run up [the town’s hill] to whitewash large rocks and arrange them in the logo of the school. The “Run” combines the tradition of running as students run to the highest point of the town known as “The Hill.” The Hill’s significance was explained by Cindy, “That’s where people go to run, walk, hike, watch the sunset. It is the premier destination in town.” The TC logo created by the students during their homecoming run can be seen for miles to the south, east, and west. Ashley noted her appreciation for this event:

As a Navajo cross-country runner, I love running with the students. Even the junior high students join us up to the top of the hill. We see everybody out watching us. People stand on the steps of the housing complexes; we can see the students on the bleachers at the high school.

Running provided a connection to the Navajo heritage. Another connection also existed in a respect for elders.

Pattie described a respect for her elders as an aspect of Navajo heritage with which she connects. Pattie spoke of this respect:

The Navajo way is to show respect to our elders. We learn from their experiences. Their experiences teach us a lot. We don’t ask them a lot of questions, but when
they speak, we listen. That is how I always show respect. I am grateful to have my grandparents around because I can learn from them.”

Tali appreciated what she learns from her elders; specifically, her grandmother. She lives with her grandmother because her mother is not present and her father travels off the reservation for work, often gone for weeks at a time. While the language and educational gap prevented her grandmother from helping her with homework, she felt fortunate to have her grandmother around. She said:

I know she can’t help me with homework, but I learn about my history, my parents, and my culture [from her]. She speaks very little English, so I am able to speak Navajo with her. I feel fortunate to have that opportunity. I show my respect by listening to her, there are lessons in her stories and I can learn from her experiences. It helps me feel grounded and connected to my culture.

Malcolm conveyed a similar connection to his Navajo heritage when he helps his grandparents. He spoke of his respect:

I show my respect by helping my grandparents. They can’t do all the things at the ranch they used to do. It is my responsibility to help; it keeps me grounded in a deeper understanding of my Navajo culture. I don’t ever want to forget where I came from.

Respect of the elders in the Navajo community is shown through traditional Navajo dress. The elders often only wear the traditional dress of the Navajo. It is the elders who wear the velvet dresses, squash blossom pendants, and hair buns. Cindy equated dressing traditionally as a symbol of respect for her elders and Navajo heritage. She said, “Dressing traditional shows our elders we respect them and what they did
before us. It shows that we are proud to be Navajo.” Dylan provided a similar explanation, saying, “Wearing traditional clothing is a visible display of pride in our Navajo [heritage].” Homecoming activities offered a cultural overlap, providing a context to demonstrate pride as a TCHS Navajo student.

The students and staff celebrate homecoming week by wearing their conch belts, arrow guards, rug dresses, and turquoise and silver jewelry. Pattie said, “I love getting to wear my rug dress on Native American Dress Day. I don’t always get to wear it.” Ashley participated in this activity as well. She said, “I also put on my dress and my grandmother’s jewelry. It’s cool to be traditional that day.” Traditional clothing is usually reserved for graduations or ceremonies, not for regular school days. Malcolm was poignant about the lack of opportunities to celebrate their Navajo heritage as a regular occurrence. He said, “In elementary school, we dressed up all the time and had little pow-pows, and our parents came. We don’t really have that in high school.” He continued to say that the Navajo tradition is celebrated in the highly rural areas. He said, “Usually, if you’re traditional, you live out [in the middle of nowhere] and herd sheep, you’re considered [by non-rural students] to be Johnny.” A “Johnny,” is a stereotype of a Navajo who lives a more traditional lifestyle. During homecoming, however, the city kids and rural kids set aside stereotypes and wear traditional Navajo dress.

The term “traditional” carries a unique meaning among the Navajo. Traditional people have been identified as those who speak Navajo and live in rural areas (Hinkley, et al., 2001). According to Dylan, “Traditional means a celebration of the old.” To Cindy, traditional meant something more. She said, “What we consider traditional or old is really a symbol of our strength and [relevance today].” The strength of the Navajo heritage
endured what Cindy considered “the struggle and survival [of the Navajo way of life].”

Maintaining traditions was a focus of homecoming. Pattie said, “Everything we do that week makes me feel like we are continuing a tradition.”

The tradition of respecting the elders in the community is upheld during the Thursday night bonfire. Nicholas explained the activity:

The bonfire begins with each class going out to haul wood on Monday, trying to collect the most wood during the week. Most of the wood goes to the elderly to heat their homes for the winter, not just to burn in the bonfire. This activity is not about the fire or which class collects the most wood, it’s that we are giving back to those who laid the foundation for us.

Tali became emotional as Nicholas told his story. She explained the reason for her tears. In her words:

I remember almost every year my grandmother would get wood from TCHS [collected during homecoming] to heat our trailer. I didn’t understand what it meant back then to get wood from students, I thought we were just getting wood. My grandmother would say a prayer before lighting the fire and tell me that this act is [significant]. When I was finally able to participate this year, I made sure I went out to get a lot of wood.”

These school-based activities built a sense of community by providing a connection to Navajo heritage and school spirit at TCHS.

Dylan described the sense of community he feels when school activities invoke school spirit. He said, “There’s a lot of spirit during homecoming. It’s when we are at our best. We come together for the sporting event and pep assemblies.” Nicholas agreed,
“During homecoming, more than any other time, people really come together.”

Togetherness represented one of the unexplored strengths of TCHS. Cindy said, “When we come together during homecoming, students show their pride, participate, and really care about the school. It brings out the best in our school.” As a freshman who experienced his first homecoming, Skye said, “I knew right away it was not a regular week. [People really come together] for the activities.” The unity created, as Dylan commented, “A positive aura [sense of community] around the school.” Tali agreed, “The pep assembly, the bonfire, the parade, the game, and the dance all create a positive energy in the school, people seem less glum.”

**Sense of community in school-related clubs.**

Dylan defined the purpose of school-related clubs to “Get people involved around a collective interest in something; even something as simple as a math club for students interested in math.” The sense of community around school-based clubs was affirmed by Tali when she said, “I would totally join a math club. I would probably get to spend time with new people. Some of the best experiences I’ve had are when I am involved with other students [in clubs] I might not normally see.” Nicholas acknowledged, “Clubs allow everyone the chance [to be involved], not just us jocks.” School-based clubs occurred during the regular school day, allowing for all students to participate, while sports programs hold practices after school until six in the evening. Pattie, who lives in the interior of the reservation, cannot participate in sports because of the responsibilities she has at home, and the two-hour bus ride it takes for her to get home. She said:

If I played volleyball, which I’d love to do, I wouldn’t get home until eight at night. My circumstances don’t give me that flexibility. After school, before I start

166
my homework, I have to corral the sheep, feed the horses, and help my little sisters with their homework. I also have to prepare dinner. I hardly have time to think about volleyball.

Clubs gave Pattie the opportunity to participate with other students who share her interests. She continued, “If it wasn’t for clubs, I would be missing out on feeling part of something I don’t get to do on the Rez. Even just coming together with other students makes a difference in my life.”

Skye spoke of the difference students can make in the school when opportunities exist for them to be involved in a group activity/event. Skye, who participates in the environmental club, was proud of the change his club was responsible for initiating. He stated:

Our club started a recycling program here at TCHS. People on the Rez don’t normally recycle, they burn their trash. But at school, students are using the recycling bins. One person volunteers to take the bins to [the town off the reservation] on the weekends too. It’s a step in the right direction and something I think speaks to the potential of the student body.

Dylan recalled a story that also spoke to the potential of the student body when they are involved. He said:

When I was a junior, Student Council petitioned to have the first prom in TCHS’s history to be held off campus, rather than in the gym where it has been held since the school opened. We ignited a spark of student activism; the off-campus prom is a great example of what we can do when we come together. Students got petitions signed, presented at the school-board meeting and got the superintendent to listen
to us. I feel proud that we broke the ice for it to happen again. Students were able to unify for that cause.

Ashley, a member of Student Council (STUCO) during this time, followed:

As the sophomore class president, I have the [capacity to advocate] for more student-driven changes in the school. STUCO is working to get students involved. We are committed to encouraging more clubs because I know we can make a difference.

Cindy affirmed Ashley’s commitment and spoke of students’ continued influence in the school:

I won’t be here next year, but I know underclassman like Ashley and Skye are committed to finding ways to improve the school, like Skye’s recycling program and Ashley’s commitment to Navajo culture. They don’t have to be life-changing things, just changes that continue to [embody] the spirit of the students.

Tali spoke of her commitment and said, “I want to keep the new tradition with the prom going.” Malcolm summed up the potential of the collective student body, “There’s power in numbers. Who knows how far we could go.” Inspired by these stories, Skye said, “I’ve learned that there’s so much more I can do than I originally thought…[I’m] just getting started.”

As an unexplored strength within TCHS, the sense of community was experienced through homecoming activities and school-based clubs. Clubs provided students the opportunity to pursue personal interests that may otherwise not be supported on the reservation, while coming together with other students. The friendships among
students, and the relationships between students and teachers, also created a strong community within TCHS.

**Sense of community in relationships among students and with teachers.**

In the following sections I present the sense of community found in relationships among students and with teachers. As an unexplored strength at TCHS, a sense of community manifested among students as: (1) mutually supportive peer friendships and (2) a tolerance of diversity their friendships embody. A sense of community extended to include the relationships students form with their teachers. With a range of contexts where relationships are fostered, there were opportunities to support in their learning and toward reaching their goals.

**Mutually supportive peer friendships.**

The distances that separate students on the reservation often keep them from seeing each other outside of school. TCHS becomes a center for students to meet, where they form mutually supportive friendships with each other. These friendships embody the diversity present among the student body and are indicative of the sense of community at TCHS.

Tuba City High School serves a hub for students to meet and build friendships. Ashley, who lives 40 miles northeast of TCHS, said, “Unless there is a school function, I hardly ever see my friends on the weekends.” Pattie, who lives 60 miles from Ashley, agreed. She said, “I only see my friends at school.” When students come together at TCHS, the friendships formed among them are an important part of their school experience. Nicholas’s friendships motivate him to go to school. He said, “One of the
main reasons I come to school is for my friends. They help me with my problems. I view my friends as family.” Tali offered a similar view, saying, “I’m the only child at home, so my friends are like family to me.” Cindy, whose sisters are older and out of the house, provided a similar analogy, comparing the connection she has with her friends with family. She said, “I feel like an only child with my sisters gone, but my friends are like my family, we are connected like sisters.” These strong connections provided a source of mutual support.

The mutual support had a positive impact on Ashley. She talked about how her friendships supported her transition to TCHS. She said:

At first, I was scared to come to TCHS after going to smaller schools deeper on the reservation, so I didn’t know anybody on my first day [at TCHS]. Then I met Jocelyn and I started noticing that other students are successful here. Jocelyn and I rely on each other. We have similar goals, so we support each other in reaching them.

Pattie received support from her friends that strengthened her self-confidence. She spoke of these friendships, “I’m always there for my friends and they are there for me.” When recalling a time her friends showed their support, Pattie remarked:

No one in my family has ever gone to college. Sometimes, I don’t feel like a student because of the [responsibilities] I have at home caring for my sisters. My mom is not there, when she is, she’s not emotionally stable enough to be a mother. I never thought I would be able to go to college, but my friends always told me different. My friends help me believe I can go to college, even though I sometimes think I’m just a Rez girl.
Support involved a sense of reciprocity. Receiving support was important, as was offering support was important.

Malcolm valued his reliability, believing his friends can count on him for support. He said, “I consider myself reliable. I think my friends would say I am always there to support them.” Similarly, Cindy sees herself as a good friend because of the support she gives to her friends. She shared a story embodying this quality:

My best friend is an only child and pregnant so I am there for her. Her family didn’t take [her pregnancy] too well. So I know she needs my support; she can count on me. [My friend and I] took different paths in high school. I took advanced classes and focused on academics; now, I’ll go to college next year, and she won’t, but we’re friends, and I’ll always be there for her. Our differences don’t matter.

Skye complemented Cindy’s story when he spoke about the differences between himself and his friends. He said, “I have different friends, not just people like me. I like video games and science, but that doesn’t mean all my friends are like that.” Malcolm and Dylan both considered themselves “different” from their friends. Malcolm said, “I’m different, I have goals past graduating high school. But that doesn’t mean I only have friends who share that with me.” Dylan described his experience as a gay student, “I know I’m different than some kids, but I never felt that way [at TCHS], I’ve never felt discriminated against.” Dylan’s experience influenced his aspiration to advocate for the rights of gay adolescents. He said:

I know bullying is a problem in this country, especially with regard to gay students. I guess I feel lucky to not have experienced that. I’d like to give others
the same experience. It says a lot about our school, the students that go here, and the relationships we have with each other.

In addition, the relationships embedded in TCHS’s sense of community included student-teacher relationships.

**Student-teacher relationships.**

The capacity for relationships to develop between students and teachers was an unexplored strength identified within TCHS. The positive student-relationships at TCHS were first reported by Tali. When describing her relationships, she spoke of the connection she feels with her teachers. She commented:

I have good relationships with my teachers. I love my English class and career exploration class. The teachers in those classes really encourage students to see what life can be like beyond the reservation. I feel like all I know is the reservation. They take the time to know my situation and what I may be experiencing. They get involved, so I feel a connection with them.

Dylan’s view of his relationship with teachers focused on mutual respect:

I connect with the teachers I have a relationship with. We have this mutual respect for each other. They know my circumstances aren’t the best; that I am just trying to make the most out of what life gave me. They see that I’m successful despite the fact that I grew up without my parents, and I think I earn their respect.

These connections were common experience among participants. Pattie spoke of her positive relationships with teachers as connections with teachers. She said:

One of the best things about our school is that our teachers connect with us. That really helps students get to know their teachers because they share some of their
personal experiences and we relate to [those experiences]. They are real people, not just adults lecturing and pointing their finger. It’s one of the best parts of coming to school here.

Nicholas acknowledged these connections. He said, “Teachers are connecting with students all the time … I like that.”

Tali described the various contexts where student-teachers connections occur. She said, “I think every student has a [connection] with at least one teacher, whether it’s a teacher who leads a club we’re in, teaches a class we take, or coaches a sport we play.”

Cindy agreed and further described the contexts outside of the school’s structure where these connections are strengthened, saying:

We have opportunities to connect with teachers on a deeper level [out of class], whether at lunch or during their [planning time]. Our connections really take root during those times. It’s nice to have conversations about life and experiences. It shows they care about us.

There were many opportunities for student-teacher connections to develop. These opportunities included those initiated by teachers. Nicholas said:

Some teachers, especially our international teachers, really take the time to get to know students. They eat with us during lunch and leave their door open throughout the day. I feel like some teachers here will go the extra mile to support us.

Malcolm recalled when a teacher went the extra mile to support him. He added:

Ms. Minter will just walk with me in the hallway sometimes. If she sees me walking by myself, we are suddenly walking together and talking about random
things. It shows we do have teachers that go out of their way to find out if something is [troubling students] and what is going on in our lives. Teachers support me with a lot of things.

The effort of teachers to connect with students supported their learning as well.

Ashley described a connection with her health teacher, and how that connection supported her learning. She said:

In health class, my teacher always helps me remember concepts by including his personal views and experiences. He makes the concepts real, and it’s more than just memorizing facts, I feel like we are interacting with the subject. I learn more about him and the subject matter. I think we learn better through stories that relate [content] to real life. My teacher knows that supports our learning.

Nicholas talked about the support he received when new material presented a challenge. He said:

I was having a hard time with a set of equations, and I would visit my teacher after school. She took the time to work with me through the challenge. She helped me develop the confidence to be successful. When she sees me in the hall, she’ll give me this look that says, ‘I knew you could do it.’ I get motivated from those [connections]. I think it’s because of that teacher that I’m enrolling in an advanced math class next year.

Nicholas’s story spoke to the motivation that transpired from a teacher’s support. Skye complemented Nicholas’s story when he shared how a teacher motivated him. He said, “In JROTC, Sergeant Major tells me that he wishes there were more cadets like me; cadets who put their studies first, are disciplined, and know about our program. He
motivates me to be the best cadet I can.” The student-teacher connection was one where teachers supported learning by motivating students.

The support from teachers was also present when the participants believed it was related to reaching their future goals. When Pattie believed her future goal seemed unreachable, there was a teacher to support and encourage her. She said:

I remember when Mrs. K supported me when I was trying to get into Exeter. I didn’t think it was going to happen, but she knew some of my circumstances and let me come to her classroom during lunch to work on my admission application. It was all [online]. She wasn’t going to let that get in the way. I really believe I was able to attend the summer program at Exeter because of her support.

Pattie appreciated the teacher who would not let the circumstances of her home-life impede her ability to reach her goal. Dylan acknowledged Pattie’s comment and offered how a teacher assisted him in moving past potential barriers to progress toward his goal. He said:

My English teacher is a really smart man. He opened my eyes to new ways of thinking about the world. His stories were really inspiring for me. He would share poetry he wrote and stories of India. He would also talk about college and playing football at Harvard. I thought that is where I want to go. He knew my goal of being a Senator, and made me believe that a gay kid from the reservation could make it. He told me no one would argue with an education from Harvard. He always supported me and even wrote an amazing letter of recommendation for me.
Dylan’s teacher mentored him toward his goal. Malcolm also spoke of a teacher who pointed him to a way of reaching his goal. He shared:

I want to be a Park Ranger and live with a lot of wildlife. I didn’t realize I could incorporate technology and biology into my love of being outdoors. I had a really awesome teacher [my freshman] year. She is the one that showed me how my interest in computers and biology could turn into a career.

Skye complemented the combined stories of student-teacher relationships when he said, “What I see from our [stories] is that teachers take the time to learn about us. Whatever support we get is what we really need.”

The sense of community at TCHS was found in the relationships among students and with teachers. These relationships were described as connections, providing support. The sense of community connecting people to TCHS also encompassed the reservation community as well. In the following section, I present how sports became a rallying point to bring the reservation community together.

A sense of community in sports.

Against the backdrop of a cold, dark northern Arizona winter’s night sky, the glow from TCHS’s pavilion reveals hundreds of dirt covered pickup trucks parked in any available piece of dirt off the paved road. This setting is typical on nights where there is a home basketball game. On those nights, close to 2,000 people come together to watch TCHS students compete, where a collective pride in TCHS provides a unifying force that brings the reservation community together. In the following section, I share the sense of community fostered through TCHS interscholastic sports competition.
Cindy, a cross-country runner, described the role of sports in creating a sense of community at TCHS. She reported the story of a cross-country team from the 1970’s. She shared their story:

Back [in the 1970’s] there was a lot of racism against Navajos in the border towns [off the reservation]. There was a [cross-country] meet at one of those towns. Three of our runners were leading the race, but slowed down to wait for the other two runners to catch up. They came across the finish line together holding hands.

I think of that every time I run.

Ashley, who also runs cross-country, added:

Our coach was one of the runners. He says they got disqualified for throwing the race. He uses the story to remind us that we are running for TCHS and [its people], we are representing those runners and what they stood for. Older people still talk about that cross-country team.

As cross-country runners, Cindy and Ashley shared stories of a past cross-country team. Nicholas and Malcolm, both basketball players, followed with stories of the 2001 boys’ and girls’ varsity basketball teams and the affect of their championship season on the community.

Basketball was identified as a forum where people in the reservation community come together. Stories of the 2001 boys’ and girls’ varsity basketball teams’ championship season were shared by Nicholas and Malcolm as examples of the power of sports in bringing together the reservation community. Nicholas, a starting forward on the varsity basketball team, said, “To know that sports can bring the whole community together like it did [in 2001] makes me proud to represent TCHS on the [basketball]
court. The whole city was proud of TCHS, they came together to support the school.”

Malcolm, who is the starting guard on the varsity team, shared a story his grandmother told him of the 2001 basketball season. He said:

> My grandmother remembered all the signs during that time. One sign, right when you were leaving town read ‘last person turn off the lights.’ It meant that no one was left in town; everyone was going to Phoenix [to support the team]. I get chills when I think of that sign.

Signs are part of how people on the reservation cheer for TCHS’s teams.

Handmade signs, either on large pieces of butcher paper or painted on plywood, are fixtures along reservation highways and intersections. These signs are a form of communication for people on the reservation. They welcome Navajo veterans home from serving their country, advertise rodeos, dances, chapter house meetings, and communicate support for TCHS’s sports teams.

Cindy described these signs’ importance. She said, “Creating signs or arranging rocks at the junction is how people show they’re together with us. Signs mean something to people [on the reservation] and to us.” This meaning was not lost on the athletes. Nicholas shared, “We [athletes] know to look for the signs when we take the long ride to other parts of the reservation or down to Phoenix for state tournaments. It shows me that people are with us even if they can’t come watch us play.” These signs meant something to Ashley. She said, “It shows us we are [playing] for something bigger than ourselves. People count on us and I think they show it by creating these signs and taking the time to put them up where everyone can see them.” When TCHS sports teams are doing well,
these signs communicate pride. This was recently evident when the 2012 girls’ varsity volleyball team won the state championship.

Pattie recalled the affect of this championship on the community, “There was a collective pride felt among everyone in the community when [the girls’ volleyball team] won.” A sign painted on a large sheet of butcher paper congratulating the team clung to the west-facing fence at a busy intersection. Tali added, “The sign congratulating the team hung on the corner at the four-way stop until the wind ripped it off. To me, that showed love and respect [by the community].” Dylan further described the significance of the sign and the championship the sign celebrated. He said, “Someone made the sign, but no one touched it. Even when you couldn’t make out the names of the players because of the dirt, it stayed up. That championship meant something to the community.” Malcolm spoke of his wish to sustain this sense of community. He said, “I want to see the community come together like that again. I’m still a sophomore; I got two more years. I will win another championship for the [community].”

Sports served as a forum that brought people together to cheer for TCHS’s teams. The signs that people put up in town and along the reservation highways were part of how the community supported TCHS’s sports teams. Participants’ combined stories spoke of how people in the community have, and continue to come together.

Summary of finding one.

The sense of community at TCHS was first described being embedded in school spirit. During times when school spirit was experienced, students were brought together during school-based activities and school-based clubs. These activities were described as
an important means of building relationships to foster a sense of community among students.

The capacity of relationships to form among students was identified as an unexplored strength of the people within TCHS, where mutually supportive relationships were able to develop independent of differences among students. The support participants received also came from their teachers, where connections occurred throughout the school day to support and motivate students. In addition, the support for TCHS came from the reservation community. Through sports, the sense of community extended to include people connected to TCHS. These relationships, and the school experiences that integrated the reservation community into TCHS activities, provided evidence of Bellah’s (1985) notion of shared values and goals binding the people connected to TCHS to a community.

**Finding 2: The participants co-constructed a compelling vision for the future academic achievement for students at TCHS.**

The participants engaged in conversations about TCHS’s potential and the possibilities for the future. In these conversations, they constructed a vision for the future academic achievement of TCHS. I adopt the U.S. Department of Education’s definition of the phrase academic achievement as the extent to which students experience success while at school, measured by their academic performance (Aud, et al., 2011). As part of their vision for future academic achievement, the participants constructed a positive image of the future of TCHS. This image of TCHS provided a context where future students are learning. They described a vision for future academic achievement grounded in the learning experiences of students of TCHS. In the following sections, I share the
narrative of a compelling vision for future academic achievement through the combined stories of: (1) TCHS’s positive image of the future, (2) the learning experiences of future students at TCHS, (3) and learning experiences available off the reservation.

**Positive image of the future.**

In AI, the use of imagery provides a projection of an organization’s potential (Cooperrider, 2000). The positive image of the future of TCHS was illustrated in terms of its potential in academics, technology, and support systems. Malcolm shared the conditions that would create a supportive learning environment. He specified conditions that would allow students to receive support from their teachers:

> I wish for smaller class sizes in the future. This way, teachers can really get to know their students. They will know what interests them or what troubles them. Then, teachers would be able to support students the best way they can.

Ashley agreed and also spoke of the personal knowledge teachers can gain about students with smaller class sizes. She said, “With smaller class sizes, the interactions are not only more frequent, but teachers will have more authentic conversations because there won’t be 30 students needing simultaneous support. The support students get will be more meaningful and personal.” Dylan talked of the importance of a supportive learning environment in realizing future academic achievement. He said, “The vision of the future has high expectations for [academic achievement]. Having the supports in place for students would make [our vision attainable].” The expectations of the future included all students leaving TCHS prepared for college.
Dylan described the college bound focus of the academic program. He said, “The classes students will attend will be difficult. They won’t just get a lot of work, but work that gets them ready for college.” Nicholas agreed:

Students who go to TCHS will be confident they are being prepared for college. They won’t have to worry about taking remedial classes or failing their first year because they are not ready for the [rigor] of college. TCHS will be known as the leader in Native student [college attrition].”

Skye continued to portray TCHS as a leader in preparing students for college. He said, “Colleges will know if students from TCHS apply, they will have what it takes to be successful at any college or university.” TCHS student success in college also meant the academic program of TCHS will integrate technology.

Malcolm offered what the integration of technology would look like. He said, “The academics [at TCHS] will integrate technology. There will be TV’s, laptops, [interactive whiteboards]. Students will get to use all of this in [their learning]. That would make learning relevant in the future.” Nicholas agreed:

Technology is part of our lives now, it is starting to get that way at [TCHS] with the iPads and [interactive whiteboards]. It will only increase. A big difference [between now and our vision] is that every student will have an iPad or laptop and be able to take it home.

Cindy recognized the potential of bridging the technology gap between school and home.

She said:

In order for this to work, for students’ use of technology to not be limited to school, the entire Navajo Nation will be wireless. I think that technology being
used only at school would be limiting; being able to use it at home would be much more powerful.

Pattie, who currently lives in an area with no Internet access, imagined:

TCHS will change the way technology is used on the Rez. It will become part of students’ lives at school and they will learn how to use it. [Technology] will become part of their life outside of school. Students won’t have to worry about not getting work done because there is not internet at home, they will have access to information anywhere, even [in the deeper parts of the reservation.]

The ability of future students to access information was part of Skye’s vision. “Students will be able to access information anytime and anywhere. [TCHS’s] library will be online. Students will be successful because they will not be in the dark; they will be connected.”

Tuba City High School’s image of the future depicted the school as being responsive to the technological demands of the future. Participants spoke of what TCHS might look like, describing the innovations that result from an academic program leading the nation in students applying for and attending college. Within this context, the learning experiences of future students are driving academic achievement.

**Vision for future learning experiences.**

Participants imagined what the most effective learning experiences might be in their vision for future academic achievement. They co-constructed a vision for learning where in-class activities and other experiences built into classwork provided an enriching learning experience for students of TCHS.
Ashley’s vision included different learning experiences for students. She said, “There should always be something new and different every day. Every class won’t sound or look the same. Students won’t just read out of a textbook, I don’t even like textbooks.” Cindy agreed and shared the need for different experiences to support for future academic achievement. She added, “I see students learning with different techniques, engaging in their learning in different ways. By being exposed to these learning experiences, students will learn a variety of skills to make them successful in all subjects.”

Malcolm defined how different activities would look. He said, “I see teachers bringing in movies and pictures to help students visualize, students can work in groups and with hands-on activities; there are different ways to [support future achievement].” Nicholas showed his support for different learning experiences when he described his ideal learning setting. He said:

We all learn differently today, that won’t change in the future. We are embracing these differences in our vision for future learning. All students will have the chance to be successful when there’s something for everyone. My ideal academic learning setting for TCHS is for students to learn in the way they learn best [embracing differences].

Skye speculated that hands-on activities could be an important part of future academic learning student experiences. He said, “I see students still using their hands to work on experiments in science classes. There will probably be engineering classes where students will work on solar panels or windmills for sustainable energy for the Navajo Nation.” Ashley considered hands-on learning experiences as a way to integrate
the strengths of the Navajo heritage. She complemented Skye’s story by sharing her belief that sustainable energy projects will be part of Navajo traditions. She expressed the thought:

Navajos work with their hands, we always have. We weave rugs, silversmith, shear, and build. Students will always use this strength in school. The integration of traditional Navajo culture into a modern system is what will make [TCHS] successful. I like what Skye said, I imagine future students bringing electricity to homes in the [interior] of the Rez that are totally off the grid by setting up solar panels and windmills to get energy and water. That’s my ideal learning experience.

Pattie envisioned experiences and activities built into future learning. She said, “Students will get to go to plays, especially Shakespeare performances to [complement] their reading of Romeo and Juliet or Macbeth, and go to museums to see artifacts they are studying in History or Native American studies classes.” Dylan agreed. He envisions future academic learning to include activities and complementary experiences:

I think it’s important for students to get out there and experience what they are learning. For example, students can get out there and see what history has produced, especially artifacts from our Native ancestors, to really understand our past. They could go to museums, but also go to places like Canyon de Chelley or Navajo Monument. Our own homeland would provide experiences for learning.

Skye, who grew up on the reservation, added, “I have never even been to those places. I only hear about how things were, but for students to see it would make a difference in [future academic learning]. Students will really understand.”
According to Nicholas, in-class learning activities were equally important as the academic experiences outside of TCHS. “The learning in class should be just as stimulating as experiences that will take students out of school.” He continued to describe how in-class discussions would support future academic learning. He said:

Class discussions would allow students to [interpret] topics from different points of view. I see more discussions happening in class. Students are [interpreting] topics from different angles and embrace them as a part of learning. Activities like this will open students to a wider range of [perspectives] and consider how other people are [represented].

Pattie agreed, “I think class discussions would get students more involved by participating in discussions. Students will feel like their opinion matters.” The idea that more students will be involved in the learning process resonated with Ashley. “Instead of having the same few students raising their hands to answer a question, all students are involved when they are able to interact with each other. I think interactions between students are important.”

Student interactions/discussions in learning were described by Cindy when she described her ideal learning setting:

I would describe my ideal learning setting as students becoming involved in their learning. Their opinions and experiences are embraced and their thinking is really being pushed. I see students getting involved in their learning. They are interacting, communicating, and learning from each other. To me, that would make [future students] successful.
Dylan agreed and shared how debates would give students a platform to interact and learn from each other. He said, “Students can learn a lot from each other. I think debates on whatever issues will be relevant to them could occur. This would get students interacting with each other in the classroom to support each other’s [academic achievement].”

The terms “group work,” “group projects,” and “working together” were used to typify situations where student interactions are occurring in learning. Pattie said, “Group projects and group work will get students interacting with each other [in their learning].” Cindy added, “Group work would get students to work together. It would get students out of their comfort zone. More students will be engaged in their learning if they are participating in group projects.” Dylan agreed, “Some students who don’t always participate in class would feel more comfortable if they could interact with a few students at a time.”

Dylan continued to describe how student-driven support would result from group activities, “These intimate interactions would really get students to support each other.” Skye affirmed this type of learning by sharing his own learning preferences:

I think more students would experience success if students worked together. It would make it easier for students to ask questions and learn. I know I am pretty shy. I don’t really like being the center of attention and asking questions in front of the whole class or sharing my ideas, even if I know they are good. I know I’d appreciate it if I could interact with a few students at a time.

Ashley agreed:

All students should be able to talk to one another and help. A future where students are supporting each other would make a big difference in their academic
achievement. I see students working together, answering each other’s questions and learning with and from each other.

Nicholas added, “A future that lets students interact with each other will help drive the support they give to each other. This would create [the conditions] where students are [owning] their learning.”

The idea of students “owning” their learning resonated with Pattie. Her ideal learning experience for future academic learning includes students assuming ownership over their learning, whether independently or collaboratively. She said, “Teachers will provide students with an example and some directions, but teachers will let the students take control. I see students doing things themselves, really owning their learning. I think that would push students to be successful.” Cindy agreed and described how this type of learning could manifest:

At first, teachers would explain to the students what they’re going to do. Then, teachers would guide students, but let them go, and more or less supervise.

Teachers would make sure things are going well and students are safe, but letting the students experience failure and success on their terms.

Sky expressed how greater student autonomy in their learning should be a part of their vision. He shared an experience when he felt a sense of autonomy over his learning. He said:

In JROTC, the cadets are doing everything on our own. We are working together. Sergeant Major will give us one set of instructions to get us started, and let us take it from there. We are not just copying what he is doing. He tells us that Marines
are problem solvers and committed to each other, that Marines do things on their own, things no one else can do because they rely on each other. Ashley, while listening to the combined stories of Pattie, Cindy, and Skye, nodded her head and quietly said, “Learning by doing. I like that.”

The participants’ co-constructed a vision for future academic achievement grounded in the learning experiences of students at TCHS. When imagining what the most effective learning experience could be for future academic achievement, they described future learning enriched by experiences and in-class learning activities. From their experiences and wishes for the ideal learning experience, they defined their vision with examples of how learning could support future academic achievement. This vision for academic achievement was supported by off-reservation learning experiences.

**Off-reservation learning experiences.**

Dream Stage protocols engaged participants in envisioning a future for academic achievement that expands their imagination. Their vision went beyond the sacred mountains of their land to give future students experiences in places of learning across America.

The ability to participate in summer programs was one thing Nicholas wished future students experienced. He said, “I hope that future generations are able to experience summer programs.” Pattie agreed, “My hope is the same as Nicholas’s. I wish future students to have experiences outside of where they come from; especially, off the reservation.” During summer programs, students attend a four to six weeks long learning program housed at a university. Students attend these programs with other students from
across the country, live in dorms, and attend classes together at the university. Dylan spoke of the value of these experiences:

Experiences off the reservation provide a different perspective on what life can be like, how places look, and how students can be learning. You meet different people and learn how different life can be in other parts of the country. Having an experience like that will have a lasting affect on students. Even when it’s over and they come back to the Rez, they know what it takes to achieve at a high level.

Ashley related how this experience can influence students’ academic achievement at TCHS:

Those experiences can make students better people and students, to see life from a different perspective is a big opportunity for someone from the reservation. You carry that with you and it changes how you approach things at home. Future students can go and gain new knowledge. It will definitely that they can help their learning at [TCHS] because they will have the confidence to achieve.

Cindy agreed with the idea that off-reservation learning experiences would influence academic achievement at TCHS:

Experiences [at summer programs] would make a big difference in student achievement at TCHS. It will give students opportunities to learn in different ways and socialize with different people. Students may not have those experiences here [on the reservation]. If they get these opportunities, they will know what it takes to get to college, they’ll put in the effort needed.

Dylan reported the influence of these experiences by describing the confidence that students would receive. He said, “Students will be challenged at these programs. The
programs will build confidence to learn at an [advanced level], making them successful at TCHS.”

Cindy recognized that not all students might have the means to attend these programs. “I know this is our vision, but I can’t help but think we are leaving a lot of students out. That’s why I want to include supports [aids] TCHS will have for everyone to have this opportunity.” Malcolm agreed and described these supports:

I believe [future students’] ability to go and be successful at these programs begins [at TCHS]. Because of the rigorous program we will have, they will be confident that can go and learn with people from different parts of the country. But, like Cindy said, they will get the support they need to go, including the information and financial aide.

Nicholas further defined how students will receive aid to provide off-reservation learning experiences. He said, “I see more scholarships for funding so students can go to summer programs. Counselors will be getting students the support they need by helping with financial aid and applications because many students’ parents can’t support in that way.” Ashley added:

Counselors will be involved and get information out to all students, not just the students who are always at the top. Counselors will recognize all students have potential and will be active in getting them information and supporting them.

Sometimes it just takes someone to recognize potential.

Pattie referenced the support she received, “Students will need support, especially from teachers. I know I could not have gone if it wasn’t for the support I got here.”
Participants’ vision for future academic achievement included learning experiences off the reservation. They projected how these experiences could exist through summer programs, where students could gain confidence in their ability to perform at a high level.

**Summary of finding two.**

The study’s data revealed a vision for the future academic achievement of students at TCHS. Their belief in the potential of TCHS was captured in the positive image of the future. TCHS’s image includes a high level of academic achievement characterized by a high rate of college attrition, integrated technology, and innovation. This image provided the context where future students are learning through enriching learning experiences.

As participants shared their experiences and vision for future academic achievement, they defined the learning experiences of future students with examples. These examples included different activities and experiences to support student learning, including those off the reservation. Their vision communicated a supportive learning environment to enable future academic achievement to be attained.

**Chapter Summary**

Chapter 4 detailed the two salient findings that emerged from the analyzed data collected in my study. The two salient findings based on analysis of data were: (1) The participants identified and described a positive core within TCHS; and (2) The participants co-constructed a compelling vision for the future academic achievement for students at TCHS. In Chapter 5, I present the two salient findings of my study along with a detailed discussion of these findings. Additionally, I provide implications for future
research, a relationship of my findings to relevant theory, recommendations for praxis for school administrators, and a conclusion to my study.
Chapter 5

My study was designed to facilitate academically successful Navajo adolescents’ participation in the first two stages of the AI 4-D Cycle (Discovery and Dream). Participants identified and described the positive core related to learning that exists within TCHS and co-constructed a vision for future academic achievement at TCHS. I organize Chapter 5 by restating the purpose of the study, summarizing the literature review, methodology, research design, and research questions. I then provide a summary of the findings and present a discussion of the salient findings of my study. I conclude the chapter by presenting implications for future research and praxis, relationship of findings to relevant theory, significance of the study, and summary and conclusions.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of my study was to identify and describe the positive core related to learning that exists within TCHS and Navajo adolescent’s vision for future academic achievement.

Summary of the Literature Review

The literature review began with an overview of the conceptual framework of my study. The conceptual framework is comprised of the epistemology of social constructionism, my professional education experience, and the theoretical perspectives of appreciative inquiry (AI) and resilience theory. As the epistemological basis of my study, social constructionism maintains that the source and maintenance of all knowledge
is generated from social interaction. Social constructionism refers to the construction of meaning by people’s interactions as they negotiate the world around them (Berger & Luckman, 1966).

A deeper understanding of social constructionism informed my belief that all students have the capacity to create a new reality of their choosing, potentially breaking through the glass ceiling to create a new belief system where academic achievement can emerge from an economically disadvantaged context. I believe that Navajo adolescents can create and sustain this future of hope and possibility. By affirming and validating the positive core related to learning, Navajo adolescents can identify and describe the conditions, relationships, and interactions that empower them to achieve academically. The potential of positive and affirming interactions connect social constructionism with the principles of AI.

Appreciative inquiry is a theoretical research perspective and research methodology used to initiate organizational change through a positive inquiry approach. As a theoretical research perspective, AI seeks to understand what people value about themselves and their organization. As a research methodology, AI provides the structure for initiating whole organizational systemic changes by emphasizing the generation of a vision of the future and a collectively constructed design for the organization. Using AI as a theoretical research perspective allowed me to describe how focusing on the positive core related to learning that exists within a public high school on the Navajo Nation served as the basis for Navajo adolescents to construct a vision for future academic achievement.
Navajo adolescents who achieve academically despite the risks present on the Navajo Nation underscores their resilience. A theory of resilience posits that healthy or positive development can occur despite adversity and risk (Fergus & Zimmerman, 2005). Resilience theory has been applied to various fields of science to describe the persistence of natural and human systems in the face of potentially debilitating changes (Antonovsky, 1979; Holling, 1973). In social science research, the construct of resilience has been derived from the field of developmental studies on the risk of children in disadvantaged or dangerous circumstances who achieve positive developmental outcomes despite their elevated risk of later developing a problem (Garmezy, 1974). Resilience theory is associated with a shift from deficit-based thinking towards an increased emphasis on strengths (Rak & Patterson, 1996). The strengths-based focus of resilience aligns well with AI. Together, AI and resilience theory comprised the theoretical research perspectives I applied to my study.

To place my study within the landscape of emerging AI empirical research in education and towards the expansion of American Indian educational research, I conducted a review of the empirical research germane to my study. I delimited my search for empirical research that applied a positive line of inquiry or that described the personal resilience of American Indian/Alaska Native adolescents, including the use of an AI theoretical research perspective or research methodology. A series of database searches were also conducted for empirical research applying a positive form of inquiry to describe the academic achievement of Navajo adolescents specifically. I also conducted a search to understand the impact AI had as a theoretical research perspective and research methodology in the field of education.
The review of the relevant empirical research found that the personal resilience of American Indian/Alaska Native students who overcome adversity to achieve academically share the following positive characteristics: (a) good self-concept; (b) strong sense of direction; and (c) tenacity (Bergstrom, et al., 2003). The development of these characteristics are related to family, school, community, and cultural influences (Bergstrom, et al., 2003; Hare & Pidgeon, 2011; LaFromboise, Hoyt, Oliver, & Whitbeck, 2006; Laquer, 1998; Nalls, et al., 2009; Pharris, et al., 1997; Powers, et al., 2003; Stiffman, et al., 2007).

The cultural influences that developed the personal resilience and school success of American Indian/Alaska Native students were described through the construct of enculturation. Enculturation includes three important dimensions: (a) involvement in traditional activities - knowledge of the culture and participation in it; (b) cultural identity - the degree to which a person’s self-concept incorporates the culture; and (c) traditional spirituality - knowledge and practice of spiritual ways and values (Whitbeck, et al., 2001). At least one dimension of enculturation was present in empirical evidence describing the positive affect of cultural influences on developing American Indian/Alaska Native personal resilience and promoting school success.

A review of the empirical research applying a positive line of inquiry with Navajo adolescents found positive influences towards the development of personal resilience and school success among Navajo adolescents. Empirical research retrieved in my search found that enculturation and peer and adult relationships were positively related to Navajo adolescents’ personal resilience and school success (Dole & Csordas, 2003; Jones & Galliher, 2007; Wadsworth, et al., 2004; Willeto, 1999).
My review of empirical research applying an AI theoretical research perspective and research methodology in the field of education found that AI had been used in several contexts to bring about organizational change. AI was used as a research methodology in K-12 educational settings (Calabrese, 2006; Calabrese, et al., 2005; Calabrese, et al., 2010; Calabrese, Hummel, et al., 2007; Calabrese, Patterson, et al., 2008; Doveston & Keenaghan, 2006; San Martin & Calabrese, 2011); higher education institutions (Boerema, 2011; Calabrese, Roberts, et al., 2008; Calabrese, Zepeda, et al., 2007); and for large scale change initiatives (Smith & Neill, 2005; Steyn, 2012; Willoughby & Tosey, 2007). Although AI has had an impact on education, to date, AI has not been applied toward examining American Indian education. There are no studies focusing on the positive core within reservation schools.

**Methodology and Research Design**

My study used a qualitative case study design to identify and describe academically successful Navajo adolescents’ discovery of the positive core related to learning that exists within TCHS and Navajo adolescents’ vision for future academic achievement through their involvement in the AI process.

I used an AI theoretical research perspective and methodology to guide my study. AI was used because of its affirmative approach and capacity to facilitate interaction and collaboration with others (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2003). An AI methodology typically involves a 4-D Cycle: Discovery, Dream, Design, and Destiny (see Figure 1.5). For the purposes of my study, students were engaged in the first two stages of the 4-D Cycle: Discovery and Dream.
The Discovery stage is the first stage of the 4-D Cycle in which students inquired into what gave life to their school and contributed its positive core. They begin to discover their positive core related to learning by appreciating the best of “What is?” in their organization (Cooperrider, et al., 2008).

The Dream Stage is the second stage of the 4-D Cycle in which students envisioned a future of academic achievement using the positive core identified and described in the Discovery stage. Their collective vision for the future academic achievement of students at TCHS described “What might be?” (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005).

My research used the first two stages of the AI 4-D Cycle (Discovery and Dream) to facilitate the discovery of the positive core related to learning that exists with TCHS and Navajo adolescents’ vision for future academic achievement at TCHS. Although not part of my study, the remaining two stages of the 4-D Cycle are Design and Destiny. The Design stage is the third stage in which participants take the positive core and the vision of an ideal future to design a model that illustrates how the organization looks at its best. The fourth stage is the Destiny stage where the shared vision allows for the implementation of the design, creating the energy to move those plans forward within the organization (Cooperrider, et al., 2008). The four stages used as a whole comprise the entire AI 4-D Cycle.

Research Questions

My study was driven by an overarching question and guided by two specific research questions. The overarching question that framed my study was: How can Navajo adolescent students of a non-AYP, high-poverty public high school on the Navajo Nation

199
discover and apply the positive core related to learning and create a vision of future academic achievement? The following research questions guided my study:

1. How do Navajo adolescent students at TCHS identify and describe the positive core that exists within TCHS?
2. How do Navajo adolescent students at TCHS describe their vision for future academic achievement?

Summary of Findings

There were two salient findings revealed through my study:

Finding 1: The participants identified and described a positive core within TCHS.
Finding 2: The participants co-constructed a compelling vision for the future academic achievement for students at TCHS.

Discussion of Findings

Finding 1: The participants identified and described a positive core within TCHS.

The participants identified a strong sense of community embedded in the positive core within TCHS. A community is created based on the shared values and shared goals of a group (Bellah, 1995; Bellah, et al., 1985). A sense of community is referred to as the feeling of belonging created among the people, that people matter to one another and are committed to each other (McMillan & Chavis, 1986). The participants’ combined stories shared the importance of relationships among the students and with teachers. They described when the inclusion of the reservation community during school-based activities created a sense of community. Their words and experiences were consistent with Bellah’s definition of community. The construct of community can be expanded to
include characteristics essential for a true community to exist: Inclusivity, realism, contemplation, a safe place, compassion, graceful fighting, leadership, and a spirit (Peck, 1987). I believe the analyzed data reveals the depth of community at TCHS further explained through the following characteristics of a true community: Inclusivity, a safe place, and contemplation. Contemplation refers to the reflection among members of a community, particularly an awareness of the world outside of themselves, inside themselves, and the relationship between the two (Peck, 1997).

The sense of community at TCHS can be explained by the concept of inclusivity. Inclusivity refers to the acceptance members of a community feel toward each other, transcending their differences (Peck, 1987, 1997). The inclusivity of TCHS’s community was demonstrated by: (1) the participants’ highpoint experiences that occurred through school-based activities and (2) the unexplored strength among the people within TCHS to build relationships.

A strong sense of community was felt among the participants during highpoint experiences when they experienced a sense of connection with other students; some may refer to this solidarity. One avenue to promote this sense of connection was through school-based activities associated with homecoming. These activities blended aspects of the Navajo heritage with the school culture. During these activities, traditional and non-traditional students were united as Navajo students of TCHS. Research describing the achievement of a sense of community posits that membership, a sense of belonging to, and identification with a larger community is integral (McMillan & George, 1986). Students’ identification as Navajo students brought them together under the umbrella of their Navajo heritage. In line with existing research, this finding suggests a positive

The sense of community the participants experienced extended to other school-based activities. When describing the affect of school-based clubs on the students, the participants used phrases such as, “Bring students together” and “Make me feel part of something.” School-based clubs provided one context for students to interact and build relationships with one another and their teachers, further describing the inclusivity of TCHS’s community.

The quality of human interactions and relationships among members of a community is strongly related to a sense of community (McMillan & George, 1986). The participants appreciated their interactions and relationships with other students as an integral part of their positive school experience at TCHS. The power of their peer friendships transcended students’ differences, describing a level of acceptance and tolerance for diversity at TCHS. This tolerance demonstrated the inclusiveness among students, likely contributing to the sense of community felt among the participants. The role of student-teacher relationships in creating a community within TCHS can be explained by the concept of a safe place.

A safe place refers to the opportunity among members of a community to develop a shared vulnerability and take risks (Peck, 1987). The concept of a safe place helps describe the sense of community that existed in student-teacher relationships. Participants believed their teachers created many opportunities for students to connect with teachers.
The opportunities outside of the school’s structure, whether during lunch, after school, or at other points where teachers “left their door open,” created a safe place for students to develop connections with teachers. Participants shared their connections with teachers where they confided in and trusted teachers. These connections enabled participants to be vulnerable in terms of their academic and personal development. They shared their personal issues, including those unrelated to school and those related to learning. They felt supported by teachers, which often resulted in feeling genuinely cared for and motivated to take academic risks. Researchers posit that having supportive relationships encourages the positive adaptive patterns and affect of adolescents (Crosnoe, Johnson, & Elder, 2004; Davis, 2010; Eccles et al., 1993; Galliher, Rostosky, & Hughes, 2004; Osterman, 2000) and academic achievement (Battistich, Solomon, Kim, Watson, & Schaps, 1995; Davis & Duper, 2008; Klem & Connell, 2004; Pretty, Conroy, Dugay, Fowler, & Williams, 1996; Vieno, Santinello, Pastore, & Perkins, 2007). I believe the teachers understood the importance of creating a safe place within the school that supported student learning.

The support participants found in their relationships, both with their peers and teachers, was integral to their success. This support illustrated the supportive environment experienced at TCHS. Researchers suggest that supportive school environments foster positive development among adolescents, specifically in relation to their school success (Battistich, et al., 1995; Pretty, Andrewes, & Collett, 1994; Vieno, et al., 2007). As a measure of a true community, contemplation can also help explain the sense of community at TCHS.

The participants’ contemplative reflection of their place at TCHS and the Navajo
reservation illustrated their awareness of the world outside of themselves, inside
themselves, and the relationship between the two (Peck, 1997). Through stories that
resonated with them, and their experiences, the participants described their awareness of
how TCHS affects the reservation community; people in their community are connected
through TCHS. By sharing stories when they believed TCHS was most effective and
capable, they shared moments when the sense of community present among students
encompassed the reservation community. Through sports, the reservation community was
integrated into school related activities. The athletes believed that they had the ability to
bring people together and instill a collective pride among people in the community. The
signs they described being part of the sports culture on the reservation showed
participants that this is possible. I believe that by understanding how TCHS has affected
the reservation community, the participants, particularly those who were athletes,
demonstrated an awareness of their role as athletes in bringing the reservation community
together.

Finding 2: The participants co-constructed a compelling vision for the future
academic achievement for students at TCHS.

An underlying theme of the participants’ vision for the future academic
achievement of students at TCHS was student engagement. I refer to student engagement
as the connection students have toward their learning, characterized by the persistent
involvement in their learning despite challenges (Shernoff, Csikszentmihalyi, Schneider,
& Shernoff, 2003). Three indicators of student engagement present in the literature that
appeared in the analyzed data were: (a) The activation of varying learning processes; (b)
social interaction and collaboration, and (c) the concept of flow, where attention is given
to learning outside of the classroom that possibly benefits the community (Ingram, 2005; Kearsley & Shneiderman, 1998). Researchers suggest that student engagement leads to increased academic achievement (Goodlad, 1984; Gordon, 2006; Hopkins, 2005; Johnson, Johnson, & Smith, 1991; Rowan & Miller, 2007; Stoll & Fink, 1996).

One feature of student engagement includes the inclusion of varying learning processes. Varying learning processes refer to the many ways students learn, most commonly associated with learning styles or modalities, to support engagement (Barbe & Milone, 1981; Tomlinson, 1999). Participants’ preference for learning included experiences built into in-class activities. Embedded in these activities exist variety and different ways of learning. Therefore, future learning experiences can capture the attention, curiosity, and interest of students.

Participants envision future ideal learning experiences that include more choices with integrated technologies. They want technology to be a part of the everyday experiences of students, and envision TCHS closing the technology gap on the reservation. Technology usage facilitates student engagement where students become more actively involved and more intrinsically motivated with authentic learning (Hargis, 2001; Kearsley & Shneiderman, 1998). Researchers suggest that students’ social practices in the usage of technology may influence the teaching and learning process (Rheingold, 2002; Roschelle, 2003).

The participants anticipated that students’ different learning preferences would continue to influence the teaching and learning process (Tomlinson, 2002). Participants’ preferences for learning were group-based and hands-on. They believed that a hands-on way of learning is responsive to the strengths of the Navajo culture. The collectivism that
has been identified as a cultural value among Navajo students was present in their ideal learning experiences (McCarty, 2009; McInerney, et al., 1997; McInerney & Swisher, 1995; Pewewardy, 2002). They desired an academic environment where all students were equally involved in the learning process. As a way to increase student involvement, the participants described the use of a collaborative model of learning.

A second measure of student engagement that appeared in the analyzed data was the social interaction and collaboration participants envisioned that promoted student engagement. I refer to student collaboration as students interacting with one another to create a learning setting where they feel connected to each other in support of their academic achievement (Antil, 1998; Kortering & Braziel, 2008; Slavin, 1983). Participants described the use of student collaboration to (1) increase student participation, and (2) leverage student-driven support. I believe that the participants’ openness about a future where all students are involved, interacting, and supporting one another is grounded in the inclusivity embedded in TCHS’s positive core. The participants’ vision speaks to the value students place on their social relationships and the ability of these interactions to positively influence learning. Researchers suggest that students’ social practices can influence the learning process by facilitating meaningful student interactions (Rheingold, 2002; Roschelle, 2003).

A key feature of student collaboration is the positive interdependence it creates among students; they form strong connections over this type of learning, strengthening their relationships and empowering them with a sense of autonomy (Johnson, Johnson, & Holubec, 1998). Autonomy is a common indicator of student engagement and refers to the sense of ownership students feel about their learning (Appleton, Christensen, &
Furlong, 2008). The participants described an ideal learning setting where autonomy is present. They provided examples of when they felt ownership over their learning, defining how autonomy could manifest for future academic achievement, which included individual autonomy and that felt by the students as a group.

The third indicator of student engagement that appeared in the analyzed data was the concept of flow, where attention is given to learning outside of the classroom that possibly benefits the school (Shernoff, et al., 2003). Flow has been applied to describe motivation and refers to the sense of satisfaction that emerges from full involvement in an activity, where all attention and emotions are guided toward a specific purpose (Csikszentmihalyi & Rathunde, 1993). The participants envisioned future students engaging in learning experiences off the reservation that could benefit achievement at TCHS. They shared how experiences built into in-class activities would create an enriching learning experience for future students. They desired an academic environment where students attended plays, national parks, and museums; these examples illustrated learning away from school that has the potential to further student achievement. The participants, as academically successful Navajo students, experienced off-reservation learning experiences through summer programs, which were woven into their vision for future academic achievement.

The participants described a benefit to achievement at TCHS coming from these learning experiences. They shared how increased confidence and an awareness that come from learning with other students at a high level would influence student achievement at TCHS. Participants believed these experiences would empower students with the ability
to visualize themselves in college, and motivate them to achieve at TCHS to reach this goal.

**Implications for Future Research**

My study opens several lines of inquiry. One line of future inquiry could focus on extending involvement in the AI process to all students of a school. Participants of my study were delimited to academically successful Navajo high school students of TCHS. Extending involvement to all students of various academic standing to participate in the AI process could empower more students as change agents in schools and strengthen student relationships. Data from my study revealed the unexplored strength of mutually supportive student relationships among students of TCHS. It would be beneficial to utilize the power of human relatedness, at the core of the AI process, through further studies using the AI 4-D Cycle to identify and describe the best in students, teachers, and other stakeholders within schools.

My study focused on the first two stages of the AI 4-D Cycle, Discovery and Dream, with students of a public high school on the Navajo Nation. Future research could focus on the experience of teachers on the reservation and how they describe the positive core and articulate their dreams for advancing academic achievement.

My professional experience has largely been situated on the Navajo Nation as a teacher and administrator. There, I witnessed teacher attrition and the frequent use of substitute teachers to fill teaching positions when no highly qualified candidate applied. I was also able to witness teachers from the community come back to teach as well as international teachers enjoy their teaching experience at reservation schools. Even as someone who is not Navajo or from the reservation, I experienced the power of the
human spirit among the people on the reservation to create a vital learning community. I suggest applying an AI theoretical research perspective and research methodology to involve teachers in the co-evolutionary search for the best in students, teachers, and stakeholders within reservation schools and communities in order to understand the retention of teachers on the reservation.

Another area for future research is to use the generative nature of AI to empower students, teachers, and stakeholders across Indian Country to transform Indian education. The participants described the positive core within TCHS and how the academic achievement of future students could be realized; particularly, through cultivating a sense of community and leveraging the power of their peer and teacher relationships. Bandura (2001) posits that learning is most likely to occur within a relational context, through social interactions with other students and teachers. While the findings may not be applicable to all tribes, the generative nature of AI can have a lasting impact on Indian education. Given the diversity inherent in the American Indian/Alaska Native population, the AI research methodology provides a replicable methodology that can be applied to identify the positive core within schools across Indian Country, and to identify the best practices that would support the academic achievement of students from any tribe.

The generative nature of the AI process can be used by schools to build a culture of respect, appreciation, and mutuality among people within a school. AI focuses on the strength of positive relationships, where students, teachers, and stakeholders within a school come together in a larger scale study known as an AI Summit. In an AI Summit, whole groups of people ranging from 50 to 2000 participants are trained to positively impact their organization (Whitney & Cooperrider, 1998). Existing AI research involving
whole groups has shown that AI can strengthen and mature positive relationships within organizations (Willoughby & Tosey, 2007). The possibility of an AI summit, involving stakeholders from across the Navajo Nation can begin to transform Navajo education and strengthen the education of all Navajo students.

**Limitations**

Throughout my study, some unanticipated limitations occurred. All participants engaged in all AI protocols, except on Day 2, a female 9th grade student voluntarily left the study for personal reasons prior to presenting her individual metaphor. I informed the student of the remaining protocols and thanked her for her participation.

Another unforeseen limitation occurred regarding the methodology employed to collect my data. I initially began with semi-structured paired interviews, using group discussion as a method of debriefing. Participants requested that they work more as a whole group instead of semi-structured paired interviews. I made the decision to use more focus groups where participants responded more openly and deeply, adding richer data. The use of a focus group aligned with the participants’ sense of community and Navajo traditional of sharing narratives in a public venue. I followed the same protocols that would have been used in the semi-structured paired interviews, including member checking throughout all protocols of the Discovery and Dream stages. I recorded all sessions for transcription and kept detailed field notes throughout the study. Upon completion of transcribing the data from the study, I met with the field observer to member check the field notes generated. Once data were analyzed, I presented the findings to the field observer and participants who confirmed the accuracy of the findings.
Relationship of Findings to Relevant Theory

Appreciative inquiry is an asset-driven, strengths based theoretical research perspective and research methodology that discovers what gives life to an organization when it is most effective and capable in economic, ecological, and human terms (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005). During the AI process, people have the power to connect and collaborate with those around them towards valuing their potential and that of their organizations. The participatory approach of AI posits that human relatedness is at the center of an organization’s positive potential, where people’s connections to each other are strengthened through the AI process (Calabrese, 2006). The belief that organizations have the potential to be highly effective and cohesive ties AI to the theories of community capacity building and social capital.

Appreciative inquiry has historical connections in organizational development (OD). While the problem-solving model of facilitating change has dominated OD, AI offered a complementary approach of moving organizations forward by focusing on their strengths and the collective capacity of individuals within organizations (Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987). As a theoretical perspective, AI assumes that in every organization, something works. AI makes the deliberate choice to identify and understand this positive core. Community capacity aligns well with AI as theoretical research perspective.

Community capacity building is a branch of OD that has adopted a strengths-based perspective towards reinforcing a community’s ability to maintain its well-being and become self-reliant (Craig, 2007; Labonte, Woodard, Chad, & Laverack, 2002). Community capacity is referred to what is working when communities are well-functioning (Chaskin, Brown, Venkatesh, & Vidal, 2001). Community capacity building
seeks to identify and strengthen its capacity, or what is working within the community. Strengthening the capacity of communities to initiate or sustain positive change has been applied for large scale change initiatives (Asdere, 2005; Browne, 2004; Labonte, et al., 2002; Snyder, 2009; Willoughby & Tosey, 2007; Zacharakis & Flora, 2005). At the center of this initiative, is increasing social cohesion and social capital to sustain positive change (Chaskin, 2001; McGinty, 2002).

The totality of connections between and among people is referred to as social capital. Social capital has been applied by researchers to examine the connectivity between and among people, including the trust, shared values, and shared norms that enable those connections to benefit communities (Coleman, 1988; Putnam, 1993). I use the concept of social capital as it evolved through Coleman (1987). The concept of social capital first appeared in Hanifan’s (1916) study of a rural community center. He posited that individuals alone are helpless in building a strong community; the community will benefit greater from cooperation of all its members. Although interpretations of the concept have varied since 1916, social capital consistently refers to the resources embedded in a community’s social relationships that can be used to leverage additional resources (Lin, 2001). There are specific attributes that contribute to the totality of social capital.

Social capital can be distinguished between bonding, bridging, and linking capital. Bonding capital refers to the common experiences and backgrounds people share that connect them to each other (Brisson & Usher, 2005; Putnam, 1995). Bridging capital is what exists that connects people from different backgrounds and social experiences (Putnam, 2000; Woolcock & Narayan, 2000). Linking capital refers to the connections
that are formed between or among people, groups, or communities to achieve a common goal (Pelling & High, 2005). There was evidence of bonding and bridging capital in the findings of my study.

Bonding capital represents the intracommunity ties among members of the same group or network. It refers to the network of trusting relationships, or the social cohesion among members of the same group (Brisson & Usher, 2005). Within the context of my study, the participants’ mutually supportive relationships with their peers and the sense of community felt when students at TCHS were brought together were examples of bonding capital. The common experiences, such as those among participants at TCHS as Navajo high school students, create a strong sense of community and reinforce cultural identity (Granovetter, 1973; Portes, 1998).

Bridging capital refers to intercommunity ties, representing the connections between two groups or more groups, allowing for meaningful opportunities that otherwise would not exist (Putnam, 2000). In my study, the participants described the connections between students and teachers. Intercommunity connections merge the efforts of both groups in the best interest of a common purpose (Leana & Pil, 2006). The generative power of bridging social capital has the ability to connect teachers and students coming from different backgrounds and social perspectives to increase student achievement (Calabrese, Hummel, et al., 2007).

**Recommendations for Praxis for School Administrators**

I propose three recommendations for praxis:

1. I recommend school administrators become intentional in creating a culture of belonging and community among students and staff.
2. I recommend school administrators co-construct an engaging learning environment with stakeholders.

3. I recommend school administrators broaden their scope of diversity.

**Recommendation 1.**

I recommend school administrators become intentional about building a positive school culture of belonging and community within their school. A school’s culture can have a significant impact on students’ lives, including their academic and character development (Elbot & Fulton, 2008). Administrators can be intentional about creating a community that binds stakeholders not leaving it to random chance. The AI research methodology allowed students to discover the unexplored strength among the people within TCHS in creating a sense of community. They discovered the aspects of their school’s culture that created many opportunities for students, teachers, and the community to feel connected to the school. One way that a culture can be intentionally built is through use of rituals. American Indian tribes have engaged in rituals to mark accomplishments, transitions, and change. The data from my study revealed that when engaged in rituals that were part of the school’s culture, the sense of community was experienced at higher levels.

**Recommendation 2.**

I recommend school administrators, teachers, and students co-construct an engaging learning environment. The participants in my student engaged in the first two stages of the AI 4-D Cycle (Discovery and Dream) to discover the best of the past and present in their school. The data from my study revealed that student engagement characterized participants’ highpoint learning experiences, which informed their vision.
for future academic achievement. Administrators can use the AI process to bring together all stakeholders with students to discover highpoint experiences related to the teaching and learning process they experienced. This collective discovery can facilitate a generative discussion towards a collective dream of the ideal learning environment that engages students.

**Recommendation 3.**

I recommend school administrators broaden their scope of diversity, and how diversity can add to the academic mission of a school. While the participants in my study shared the connections among each other and other students grounded in similarities, such as cultural identity, they were keenly aware of the diversity within their school community. They shared the differences among students’ learning preferences, sexual orientation, interests, and adversity. Some of these differences can be targets for bullying. As schools seek to create safe learning environments, given current trends of bullying and school violence, there is a sense of urgency among school administrators to address the well being of all students. I recommend that school administrators remain open about how differences among students manifest, and how to leverage these differences to create a community among students. One way to create a greater acceptance of diversity among students is to incorporate AI groups into classrooms and other school settings to generate a mutual respect among students and celebrate their strengths.

**Significance of the Study**

My study’s significance is illustrated in extending the use of an AI theoretical research perspective and research methodology to Navajo adolescents of a public high school on the reservation to participate in the first two stages of the AI 4-D Cycle:
Discovery and Dream. The use of AI as a theoretical research perspective and research methodology in a public high school on the reservation is significant in providing a unique perspective of Indian education by focusing on the strengths of the system instead of its deficits.

My study will help readers understand how the Discovery and Dream stages of the AI 4-D Cycle can empower students with a voice towards reframing how Indian education is viewed. My research facilitated opportunities for academically successful Navajo high school students to share stories of teaching and learning when they felt most alive and engaged. They shared their highpoint learning experiences, identifying when they felt part of their school community. My research allowed participants to focus on the conditions within the school that supported their success, including the relationships that empowered them to be successful. Applying an AI model that focuses on the discovery of the positive core may be of significant benefit to schools concerned with intentionally building a positive school culture and learning community.

My study also provided a model for empowering Navajo high school students to enhance pedagogical practices and promote student engagement. Increasing the use of varied learning processes, leveraging student relationships, and providing valuable learning experiences could have a major impact on how students learn on the Navajo Nation. My research facilitated opportunities for academically successful Navajo high school students to describe how student engagement can enrich the learning experience of students at TCHS in pursuit of academic achievement. The AI 4-D Cycle, as a replicable methodology, can be a catalyst for schools to identify the best practices to meet the unique needs of their students.
Summary and Conclusions

Two salient findings emerged from my study: (1) The participants identified and described a positive core within TCHS; and (2) The participants co-constructed a compelling vision for the future academic achievement for students at TCHS.

Metaphorically, Indian education may be viewed as a pendulum, vacillating between possibility and restraint (Lomawaima & McCarty, 2002b). Indian education has been caught in a tug of war with competing federal Indian policies: From those of termination to the cultural and political renaissance of the 1960s and 1970s. Throughout the evolution of federal Indian policy, a deficit-based perspective has been applied to understand Indian education (Meriam, et al., 1928; U.S. Department of Education, 1991; U.S. Senate, 1969). Too often, the student and the educational process have adopted a negative context focused on fixing problems. While the intentions of federal reports were to catalyze improvements, they perpetuated a belief that Indian education was a failure; success was improbable and poverty insurmountable. My study involved academically successful Navajo adolescents attending a high-poverty public high school on the Navajo Nation.

My research began when my positive experiences as a teacher on the Navajo Nation were met with the discovery of AI as a theoretical research perspective and research methodology. My study focused on the positive core that exists within a reservation high school and the potential of that school to move towards a better future. As Indian education continues to fall under scrutiny, now under the auspices of NCLB, I believe it is time to use the power of AI to build high achieving, healthy schools across Indian country. I believe AI can continue to empower American Indian students with a
voice in their school’s educational change efforts and that of Indian education, swinging the pendulum towards possibility.
List of References


222


Calabrese, R. L. (2006). Building social capital through the use of an appreciative inquiry theoretical perspective in a school and university partnership. *International


230


240


Appendix A: Study Approval by Superintendent
November 13, 2012

Dear Mr. Cohen:

The Governing Board, upon my recommendation, approved the proposed research with volunteer students at Tuba City High School. I understand that the purpose of the research is to identify and describe the positive core (attitudes, beliefs, and experiences) related to learning that exists within Tuba City High School and Navajo adolescents’ vision for future academic achievement.

The Governing Board and I are aware that the research involving the collection of data from Tuba City High School students will occur over two school days. The actual dates for the collection of data will be approved by the Tuba City High School principal.

I look forward to the results of this study conducted at Tuba City High School. Please feel free to contact me if you need further information.

Sincerely,

Dr. Harold Begay
Superintendent
Tuba City Unified School District #15
Appendix B: IRB Consent Approval Letter
January 15, 2013

Protocol Number: 2012B0846
Protocol Title: AN APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY STUDY OF SUCCESSFUL NAVAJO HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS ON THE NAVAJO NATION, Raymond Calabrese, Erik Cohen, School of Educational Policy & Leadership

Type of Review: Initial Review—Expedited
IRB Staff Contact: Jacob R. Stoddard
Phone: 614-292-0526
Email: stoddard.13@osu.edu

Dear Dr. Calabrese,

The Behavioral and Social Sciences IRB APPROVED BY EXPEDITED REVIEW the above referenced research. The Board was able to provide expedited approval under 45 CFR 46.110(b)(1) because the research meets the applicability criteria and one or more categories of research eligible for expedited review, as indicated below.

Date of IRB Approval: January 15, 2013
Date of IRB Approval Expiration: January 15, 2014
Expedited Review Category: 6, 7

In addition, the research was approved for the inclusion of children (permission of one parent sufficient).

If applicable, informed consent (and HIPAA research authorization) must be obtained from subjects or their legally authorized representatives and documented prior to research involvement. The IRB-approved consent form and process must be used. Changes in the research (e.g., recruitment procedures, advertisements, enrollment numbers, etc.) or informed consent process must be approved by the IRB before they are implemented (except where necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to subjects).

This approval is valid for one year from the date of IRB review when approval is granted or modifications are required. The approval will no longer be in effect on the date listed above as the IRB expiration date. A Continuing Review application must be approved within this interval to avoid expiration of IRB approval and cessation of all research activities. A final report must be provided to the IRB and all records relating to the research (including signed consent forms) must be retained and available for audit for at least 3 years after the research has ended.

It is the responsibility of all investigators and research staff to promptly report to the IRB any serious, unexpected and related adverse events and potential unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects or others.

This approval is issued under The Ohio State University’s OHRP Federally Approved Assurance #00006378.

All forms and procedures can be found on the ORRP website – www.orrp.osu.edu. Please feel free to contact the IRB staff contact listed above with any questions or concerns.

Steve Beck, PhD, Co-Chair
Behavioral and Social Sciences Institutional Review Board

hs-017-06 Exp Approval New CR
Version 01/13/09
Appendix C: IRB Continuing Review Approval Letter
December 30, 2013

Protocol Number: 2012B0546
Protocol Title: AN APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY STUDY OF SUCCESSFUL NAVAJO HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS ON THE NAVAJO NATION, Raymond Calabrese, Eric Cohen, School/Edu Policy & Leadership
Type of Review: Continuing Review—Expedited
IRB Staff Contact: Kellie Hall Phone: 614-292-0369 Email: hall.1451@osu.edu

Dear Dr. Calabrese,

The Behavioral and Social Sciences IRB APPROVED BY EXPEDITED REVIEW the above referenced research. The Board was able to provide expedited approval under 45 CFR 46.110(b)(1) because the research meets the applicability criteria and one or more categories of research eligible for expedited review, as indicated below.

Date of IRB Approval: December 30, 2013
Date of IRB Approval Expiration: December 30, 2014
Expedited Review Category: 6, 7

In addition, the research has been approved for the inclusion of children (one parent sufficient).

If applicable, informed consent (and HIPAA research authorization) must be obtained from subjects or their legally authorized representatives and documented prior to research involvement. The IRB-approved consent form and process must be used. Changes in the research (e.g., recruitment procedures, advertisements, enrollment numbers, etc.) or informed consent process must be approved by the IRB before they are implemented (except when necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to subjects).

This approval is valid for one year from the date of IRB review when approval is granted or modifications are required. The approval will no longer be in effect on the date listed above as the IRB expiration date. A Continuing Review application must be approved within this interval to avoid expiration of IRB approval and cessation of all research activities. A final report must be provided to the IRB and all records relating to the research (including signed consent forms) must be retained and available for audit for at least 3 years after the research has ended.

It is the responsibility of all investigators and research staff to promptly report to the IRB any serious, unexpected and related adverse events and potential unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects or others.

This approval is issued under The Ohio State University’s OHRP Federally Assured #00006378. All forms and procedures can be found on the ORRP website – www.orrp.osu.edu. Please feel free to contact the IRB staff contact listed above with any questions or concerns.

Michael Edwards, PhD, Chair
Behavioral and Social Sciences Institutional Review Board
Appendix D: Parental Permission Form
The Ohio State University Parental Permission
For Child’s Participation in Research

Study Title: An appreciative inquiry study of successful Navajo high
school students on the Navajo Nation

Researcher: Dr. Raymond L. Calabrese (Principal Investigator)
Erik Cohen (Co-Investigator)

Sponsor:

This is a parental permission form for research participation. It contains important
information about this study and what to expect if you permit your child to participate.

Your child’s participation is voluntary.

Please consider the information carefully. Feel free to discuss the study with your friends and
family and to ask questions before making your decision whether or not to permit your child
to participate. If you permit your child to participate, you will be asked to sign this form and
will receive a copy of the form.

Purpose:

The purpose of the study is to identify and describe the positive core related to learning that
exists within Topeka City High School and Navajo adolescents’ vision for future academic
achievement.

Data collected from this study will be reported in a doctoral dissertation at The Ohio State
University, and may be published in a peer-reviewed academic journal and/or presented at
academic scholarly conferences. Data may also be used to illustrate how the appreciative
inquiry process can facilitate collaboration in small or large group settings to promote positive
change. Regardless, participant and organizational confidentiality will be maintained.

Procedures/Tasks:

The entire duration of the study will take place on the campus of Topeka City High School in
Topeka City, Arizona. A selected group of academically successful students will be asked to
voluntarily participate in a qualitative case study. Participants will provide a representative
sample of academically successful students and participate in an abbreviated appreciative
inquiry (AI) Summit 4-D Cycle: Discovery and Dream.
During the Discovery Stage, participants will identify and describe their high-point learning experiences, which may include the instructional practices, relationships, opportunities they feel contributed to their success, and other ways the school helped facilitate their success.

During the Dream Stage, participants will describe their ideal learning environment within the school; e.g., how they best learn, relationships that empower them for success, and school-sponsored activities that promote achievement at their school. The descriptions shared by participants will be audio recorded.

Participants will participate in an abbreviated AI process will occur over two school days in the winter of 2013. Participants will be identified by Mr. Ralph Navarro, principal of Tuba City High School, and June Birdsong and Debbie Yellowman, counselors of Tuba City High School. Participants will be involved in all AI activities (focus groups, paired interviews, and group discussion). Meetings times for the study will occur during the school day, with the length of each meeting lasting approximately 5 hours, from 9:00 a.m. – 2:00 p.m. Participants will have been excused from school during this time to participate in the study. Data will be collected through field notes from direct observation; all data will be recorded and transcribed.

**Duration:**

The estimated time requirement for each participant will be a 30-minute informational meeting to describe the study and distribute consent forms to student participants and parents and/or guardians, as well as answer any questions. The actual study will be conducted over two school days and the typical length for each meeting will last approximately 5 hours, from 9:00 a.m. until 2:00 p.m. The total estimate of time required from each participant will be approximately 10.5 to 11 hours between interviews and observations over the course of the two days. There is no long-term follow-up or commitment required for this study.

Your child may leave the study at any time. If you or your child decides to stop participation in the study, there will be no penalty and neither you nor your child will lose any benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Your decision will not affect your future relationship with The Ohio State University.

**Risks and Benefits:**

There are no anticipated risks associated with this study.

Your participation in this study has the potential to benefit Tuba City High School toward building an empowering and positive culture to generate and maintain a commitment to academic achievement. The experiences you share can aid the school in identifying the specific instructional practices, learning opportunities, relationships, and strengths within the school to facilitate the success of Tuba City High School and its students in the future.
Confidentiality:

Due to the nature of focus groups, confidentiality can only be guaranteed to the extent that all members of the focus group maintain one another’s confidentiality.

Efforts will be made to keep your child’s study-related information confidential. However, there may be circumstances where this information must be released. For example, personal information regarding your child’s participation in this study may be disclosed if required by state law. Also, your child’s records may be reviewed by the following groups (as applicable to the research):
- Office for Human Research Protections or other federal, state, or international regulatory agencies;
- The Ohio State University Institutional Review Board or Office of Responsible Research Practices;
- The sponsor, if any, or agency (including the Food and Drug Administration for FDA-regulated research) supporting the study.

Incentives:

No incentives will be provided to participate in this study.

Participant Rights:

You or your child may refuse to participate in this study without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you or your child is a student or employee at Ohio State, your decision will not affect your grades or employment status.

If you and your child choose to participate in the study, you may discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits. By signing this form, you do not give up any personal legal rights your child may have as a participant in this study.

An Institutional Review Board responsible for human subjects research at The Ohio State University reviewed this research project and found it to be acceptable, according to applicable state and federal regulations and University policies designed to protect the rights and welfare of participants in research.

Contacts and Questions:

For questions, concerns, or complaints about the study you may contact Dr. Raymond L. Calabrese, principal investigator, by phone at (614) 247-1633 or email at calabrese.31@osu.edu. You may also contact Erik Cohen, co-investigator, by phone at (928) 606-5578 or by email at cohen.429@osu.edu.
For questions about your child’s rights as a participant in this study or to discuss other study-related concerns or complaints with someone who is not part of the research team, you may contact Ms. Sandra Meadows in the Office of Responsible Research Practices at 1-800-678-6251.

If your child is harmed as a result of participating in this study or for questions about a study-related injury, you may contact Dr. Raymond L. Calabrese, principal investigator, by phone at (614) 247-1633 or email at calabrese.31@osu.edu.
Signing the parental permission form

I have read (or someone has read to me) this form and I am aware that I am being asked to provide permission for my child to participate in a research study. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and have had them answered to my satisfaction. I voluntarily agree to permit my child to participate in this study.

I am not giving up any legal rights by signing this form. I will be given a copy of this form.

Printed name of subject

Printed name of person authorized to provide permission for subject

Signature of person authorized to provide permission for subject

Relationship to the subject

Date and time

AM/PM

Investigator/Research Staff

I have explained the research to the participant or his/her representative before requesting the signature(s) above. There are no blanks in this document. A copy of this form has been given to the participant or his/her representative.

Printed name of person obtaining consent

Signature of person obtaining consent

Date and time

AM/PM
Appendix E: Student Assent Form
The Ohio State University Assent to Participate in Research

Study Title: An appreciative inquiry study of successful Navajo high school students on the Navajo Nation

Researcher: Dr. Raymond L. Calabrese (Principal Investigator)
Erik Cohen (Co-Investigator)

- You are being asked to be in a research study. Studies are done to find better ways to treat people or to understand things better.
- This form will tell you about the study to help you decide whether or not you want to participate.
- You should ask any questions you have before making up your mind. You can think about it and discuss it with your family or friends before you decide.
- It is okay to say “No” if you don’t want to be in the study. If you say “Yes” you can change your mind and quit being in the study at any time without getting in trouble.
- If you decide you want to be in the study, an adult (usually a parent) will also need to give permission for you to be in the study.

1. What is this study about?

The purpose of this study is to identify and describe the high-point experiences related to learning that exist within Tuba City High school and your vision for future academic achievement. The descriptions you provide regarding your high-point experiences related to learning will be audio recorded.

2. What will I need to do if I am in this study?

If you decide to participate in this study, you will be asked to actively engage in discussion through focus groups, paired interviews, and as a whole group. You will be asked to share how you feel TCHS helped promote your academic achievement along with other members of the group. There will be twelve students, including you. All participants will be identified by Mr. Ralph Navarre, principal of Tuba City High School, and June Birdsong and Debbie Yellowman, guidance counselors at Tuba City High School.
3. **How long will I be in the study?**

The group will be from approximately 9:00 a.m. until 2:00 p.m. for two school days. It will be an excused absence from any classes missed.

4. **Can I stop being in the study?**

You may stop being in the study at any time.

5. **What bad things might happen to me if I am in the study?**

There are no foreseen bad things that will happen to you in this study. Protecting your confidentiality will be very important through this study. It is important to note, however, that due to the nature of focus groups, confidentiality can only be guaranteed to the extent that all members of the focus group maintain confidentiality. If anything makes you feel the least bit uncomfortable, you have the right to be excused from the study and not participate.

6. **What good things might happen to me if I am in the study?**

If you choose to participate in the study, you will have the opportunity to reflect and share the positive school experiences that you have had at Tuba City High School. The experiences you share will be used to create a dream of future academic achievement at Tuba City High School. The experiences you share have the potential to help the school replicate the success you have had for other students. You will also have the opportunity to build or strengthen positive relationships with other participants in the study.

7. **Will I be given anything for being in this study?**

Lunch and afternoon snacks will be provided to you during this study.

8. **Who can I talk to about the study?**

For questions about the study you may contact Dr. Raymond L. Calabrese, principal investigator, by phone at (614) 247-1633 or email at calabrese.31@osu.edu. You may also contact Erik Cohen, co-investigator, by phone at (928) 606-5578 or by email at cohen.429@osu.edu.

To discuss other study-related questions with someone who is not part of the research team, you may contact Ms. Sandra Meadows in the Office of Responsible Research Practices at 1-800-678-6251.
Signing the assent form

I have read (or someone has read to me) this form. I have had a chance to ask questions before making up my mind. I want to be in this research study.

Signature or printed name of subject ____________________________ Date and time ____________________________ AM/PM

Investigator/Research Staff

I have explained the research to the participant before requesting the signature above. There are no blanks in this document. A copy of this form has been given to the participant or his/her representative.

Printed name of person obtaining assent ____________________________ Signature of person obtaining assent ____________________________ Date and time ____________________________ AM/PM

This form must be accompanied by an IRB approved parental permission form signed by a parent/guardian.
Appendix F: Consent Form
The Ohio State University Consent to Participate in Research

Study Title: An appreciative inquiry study of successful Navajo high school students on the Navajo Nation

Researcher: Dr. Raymond Calabrese (Principal Investigator)
Erik Cohen (Co-Investigator)

Sponsor:

This is a consent form for research participation. It contains important information about this study and what to expect if you decide to participate.

Your participation is voluntary.

Please consider the information carefully. Feel free to ask questions before making your decision whether or not to participate. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to sign this form and will receive a copy of the form.

Purpose:

The purpose of the study is to identify and describe the positive core related to learning that exists within Tuba City High School and Navajo adolescents' vision for future academic achievement.

Data collected from this study will be reported in a doctoral dissertation at The Ohio State University, and may be published in a peer-reviewed academic journal and/or presented at academic scholarly conferences. Data may also be used to illustrate how the appreciative inquiry process can facilitate collaboration in small or large group settings to promote positive change. Regardless, participant and organizational confidentiality will be maintained.

Procedures/Tasks:
The entire duration of the study will take place on the campus of Tuba City High School in Tuba City, Arizona. A selected group of academically successful students will be asked to voluntarily participate in a qualitative case study. Participants will provide a representative sample of academically successful students and participate in an abbreviated appreciative inquiry (AI) Summit 4-D Cycle: Discovery and Dream.

During the Discovery Stage, participants will identify and describe their high-point learning experiences, which may include the instructional practices, relationships, opportunities they feel contributed to their success, and other ways the school helped facilitate their success. The descriptions shared by participants’ will be audio recorded.

During the Dream Stage, participants will describe their ideal learning environment within the school; e.g. how they best learn, relationships that empower them for success, and school-sponsored activities that promote achievement at their school.

Participants will participate in an abbreviated AI process will occur over two school days in the winter of 2013. Participants will be identified by Mr. Ralph Navarre, principal of Tuba City High School, and June Birdsong and Debbie Yellowman, counselors of Tuba City High School. Participants will be involved in all AI activities (focus groups, paired interviews, and group discussion). Meetings times for the study will occur during the school day, with the length of each meeting lasting approximately 5 hours, from 9:00 a.m. – 2:00 p.m. Participants will have been excused absence from school during this time to participate in the study. Data will be collected through field notes from direct observation; all data will be recorded and transcribed.

**Duration:**

The estimated time requirement for each participant will be a 30-minute informational meeting to describe the study and distribute consent forms to student participants and parents and/or guardians, as well as answer any questions. The actual study will be conducted over two school days and the typical length for each meeting will last approximately 5 hours, from 9:00 a.m. until 2:00 p.m. The total estimate of time required from each participant will be approximately 10.5 to 11 hours between interviews and observations over the course of the two days. There is no long-term follow-up or commitment required for this study.

You may leave the study at any time. If you decide to stop participating in the study, there will be no penalty to you, and you will not lose any benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Your decision will not affect your future relationship with The Ohio State University.

**Risks and Benefits:**
There are no anticipated risks associated with this study.

Your participation in this study has the potential to benefit Tuba City High School toward building an empowering and positive culture to generate and maintain a commitment to academic achievement. The experiences you share can aid the school in identifying the specific instructional practices, learning opportunities, relationships, and strengths within the school to facilitate the success of Tuba City High School and its students in the future.

Confidentiality:

Due to the nature of focus groups, confidentiality can only be guaranteed to the extent that all members of the focus group maintain one another's confidentiality.

Efforts will be made to keep your study-related information confidential. However, there may be circumstances where this information must be released. For example, personal information regarding your participation in this study may be disclosed if required by state law. Also, your records may be reviewed by the following groups (as applicable to the research):

- Office for Human Research Protections or other federal, state, or international regulatory agencies;
- The Ohio State University Institutional Review Board or Office of Responsible Research Practices;
- The sponsor, if any, or agency (including the Food and Drug Administration for FDA-regulated research) supporting the study.

Incentives:

No incentives will be provided to participate in this study.

Participant Rights:

You may refuse to participate in this study without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you are a student or employee at Ohio State, your decision will not affect your grades or employment status.

If you choose to participate in the study, you may discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits. By signing this form, you do not give up any personal legal rights you may have as a participant in this study.

An Institutional Review Board responsible for human subjects research at The Ohio State University reviewed this research project and found it to be acceptable, according to applicable state and federal regulations and University policies designed to protect the rights and welfare of participants in research.
Contacts and Questions:
For questions, concerns, or complaints about the study you may contact Dr. Raymond L. Calabrese, principal investigator, by phone at (614) 247-1633 or email at calabrese.31@osu.edu. You may also contact Erik Cohen, co-investigator, by phone at (928) 606-5578 or by email at cohen.429@osu.edu.
For questions about your rights as a participant in this study or to discuss other study-related concerns or complaints with someone who is not part of the research team, you may contact Ms. Sandra Meadows in the Office of Responsible Research Practices at 1-800-678-6251.
If you are injured as a result of participating in this study or for questions about a study-related injury, you may contact Dr. Raymond L. Calabrese, principal investigator, by phone at (614) 247-1633 or email at calabrese.31@osu.edu.
Signing the consent form

I have read (or someone has read to me) this form and I am aware that I am being asked to participate in a research study. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and have had them answered to my satisfaction. I voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

I am not giving up any legal rights by signing this form. I will be given a copy of this form.

Printed name of subject

Signature of subject

Date and time

Printed name of person authorized to consent for subject

Signature of person authorized to consent for subject (when applicable)

AM/PM

Date and time

Investigator/Research Staff

I have explained the research to the participant or his/her representative before requesting the signature(s) above. There are no blanks in this document. A copy of this form has been given to the participant or his/her representative.

Printed name of person obtaining consent

Signature of person obtaining consent

Date and time

AM/PM
Appendix G: Day One – Discovery Stage PowerPoint
Some Ground Rules

- We appreciate, value, and respect each other and our contributions at all times
- All input and comments are valuable
- Everyone is encouraged to share their dreams and aspirations
- All dreams and aspirations are possible
- Together, we can create a new reality
- Focus on the best in your school, your teachers, and your peers
- Everyone participates
- Every problem we encounter will be transformed into a challenge to overcome
- All challenges can be overcome
- What happens in this room stays in this room
Introductions

Let’s take a moment to get to know each other and what we like.

- Describe your favorite movie.

- Describe what it is about this movie and its characters that makes it important to you?

Your Experience

Describe your experience at Tuba City High School.

- Describe what is it like coming to school every day

- Describe what it is like with your peers. With your teachers.

- How would other students, maybe in other classes, describe their experience?
Your Challenge

What would you like to see happening here at TCHS?

Try to come up with as many things as possible that you feel would create the absolute best school

Affirmative Challenge
What it Takes

Billy Mills

Oglala Sioux and raised on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation

Orphaned at the age 12

DID HE GIVE UP?

- He turned to sports as a positive focus in his life
- He attended a boarding school in Lawrence, Kansas where he discovered a love for distance running
- Attended the University of Kansas on a scholarship
- He was a commissioned as a lieutenant in the United States Marine Corps after college.
- He focused on military life and did not train for a brief period, but soon he returned to running and posted times good enough to qualify for the 1964 Olympics.
After training for 18 months Billy made the U.S. Olympic Track and Field Team in the 10,000 meters and the marathon.

He is the only American to have won the 10,000 meters

This is how he did it…

Billy Mills YouTube Video
At Your Best
Most Alive

Recall a time when you felt most alive
Together with your partner:

- Tell a story about a time when you felt most alive
- When it felt good to just be you.

Where? When? What was happening? Describe the feeling or emotions you felt.

Daring to Try

Think of a time when you dared to try something new.

You did something you dreamed about that you had never done before.

Describe the situation? What you did? How did it make you feel?
You are Important

- What makes you a good student?
- What makes you a leader at Tuba City High School

Whole Group Discussion

Another Perspective

What do other people value about you and who you are as a friend and as a student?

Teachers…
Friends…
Family…
Detective Work

- What history that you know about, or experience you have had, describes TCHS at its best.

When TCHS is:

- A place when it is at its best
- A place where I want to come every single day
- For athletics, academics, extracurricular activities

When is it at its best in creating an environment where people want to come and be a part of this experience
What are the things that are not quite great, but have the potential to be great?

The Recipe

- There are things that make the school successful when it is at its best.
- What are the secret ingredients?

Get together with your partner and come up with at least 4 key things that are special factors that make this school great.
What did we learn today?
Appendix H: Day Two – Dream Stage PowerPoint
Review of our ground rules

- We appreciate, value, and respect each other and our contributions at all times
- All input and comments are valuable
- Everyone is encouraged to share their dreams and aspirations
- All dreams and aspirations are possible
- Together, we can create a new reality
- Focus on the best in your school, your teachers, and your peers
- Everyone participates
- Every problem we encounter will be transformed into a challenge to overcome
- All challenges can be overcome
- What happens in this room stays in this room.
True Inspiration

Sometimes, we can be inspired by the actions of others. Rohan Murphy is one of those people.

He is a lot of things.

- He is strong
- He is dedicated
- He is accomplished
- He is fearless

Your Values

- Dependable
- Determined
- Passionate
- Hopeful
- Driven
- Supportive
- Resilient
- Proud
- Competitive

- Disciplined
- Versatile
- Perseverance
- Welcoming
- Helpful
- Takes the initiative
- Different
- Light-hearted
- Humble
Your accomplishments

- “I learned there’s a lot of things I did like” – Cindy
- TCHS is a place where we can feel unified, spirited, accepted, involved, challenged, and proud.
- “We have been that school...we can again” -Dylan

Affirmative Challenge

Tuba City High School is a technologically integrated, academically focused school that promotes and sponsors an individualized and equal learning experience, preparing students for successful post secondary engagement and providing students extracurricular opportunities through exposure to involved, engaged, and supportive teachers, counselors, and administrators in a trusting and vibrant learning environment challenging all students to go above and beyond their expectations.
You are Difference Makers!

A TCHS Difference Maker

- Fabulous
- Determined
- "I have a lot of positive memories here, I hope others have them"
- Supportive

Participant picture removed to protect confidentiality
A TCHS Difference Maker

- Resilient
- Engaged
- “Making the most out of what life gives you”
- “We have been that school that others looked up to so we can again”

A TCHS Difference Maker

- Hard worker
- Underdog
- “Who knows what could happen and how far we could go”
- “I want to try and bring that back, I’m still a sophomore, I got two more years”
- Dependable
A TCHS Difference Maker

- Honest
- “Students here don't see the full picture of what they can accomplish”
- Character: “It’s what you do when no one’s looking”
- Different

A TCHS Difference Maker

- Talented
- Caregiver
- Overcoming the odds
- Good listener
- Competitive: Driven to be better
- Role-model
A TCHS Difference Maker

- Driven
- Helpful
- Athletic
- “You only live once”
- Reliable
- Funny

A TCHS Difference Maker

- Determined
- Helpful
- Will get into the ocean at night
- “There's a lot for my future then I thought I’d have to do”
- Not as lazy as he thinks

Participant picture removed to protect confidentiality
A TCHS Difference Maker

- Resolute
- Loving
- Always there for friends and family
- Likes the unexpected
- “I get things done”
- “There's things we can change”

Getting off the Right Foot

Describe something good that happened to you between the moment you left our last meeting to the moment you came here today.
Make a Wish
What if you had the powers of a superhero. What would be the dreams you would have as:
A person
For your teachers
For your friends
For the high school

What it Takes
Time to check your references
What would it look like if you could visualize your values and accomplishments for all to see?
Personal Metaphor

Metaphors are important ways of visualizing what you value about yourself.

Choose a personal metaphor that captures the core characteristics, factors, or words that describe you at your best.

Why does your metaphor create strength for you?
Ready to Roll…

Dream Big…

Create your Dreams
Beginning the Dream

Describe the greatest dream you have for future generations of Warriors.

Recreate the Dream

Describe how you best learn by providing an example of that experience:

- Who was there?
- What was happening?
- What did you learn?
- What made this a magic learning experience for you?
Dreams in Action

Based upon how you best learn, how would you describe an ideal learning setting for students at TCHS?

- What would be happening?
- How would you be engaged?
- What would your teachers be doing?

The future...Today!

Imagine it's 2023.

What are you doing?

Imagine you are at a family reunion. All your family members are gathered around you asking what you achieved and how you achieved it.

Describe your achievement in detail with your partner.
Keep Looking Forward

It's still 2023.

The New York Times is spending a week in Tuba City to highlight what TCHS has accomplished in the past decade thanks to your work.

Create the front page of the Sunday Edition featuring a special story that highlights the major accomplishments of TCHS.

Each person in your group tells a part of the story to the New York Times reporter what this school has accomplished related to academics, athletics, scholarship, innovation…

TCHS Metaphor

- Using the entire whiteboard each person will contribute to group metaphor that captures the characteristics of TCHS that you described today (including the people, the experiences, and the potential).
Strength in Metaphor

- How do your values fit in?
- What element did you contribute to the metaphor?
- Describe what strengths your metaphor captures.
- How can you draw strength from your metaphor?

Making it Happen

- What did you learn today?
- What is one thing you are going to commit to doing when I leave here today?