

Incorporating Indigenous Practices to Support Social Emotional Learning

Elementary classroom educators balance academic and social emotional growth for all students within their classroom through direct instruction and integrating skills across multiple content areas. Teachers are able to build affirming learning environments within their classroom and support learning design and instruction to ensure all students are successful.

All students benefit by learning accurate information about Native students, families and communities^{4,11}. Students are engaged more and achieve success when schools promote Indigenous student-centered practices. Native American students benefit socially and academically by promoting identity, agency, engagement, and a sense of belonging for all children¹³.

In Washington state, there are 29 federally recognized Tribes and over 61,000 students who identify as Native American⁷. Each of these tribes have their own unique government, language, history and values for its people. Many Native American students and families experience negative or inaccurate historical and modern portrayals of themselves and lowered expectations of their academic success¹⁴.

This affects students' belief in their own academic potential and sense of belonging in the classroom and future careers⁸. It can also affect their relationships with peers and adults⁵. It is important that teaching techniques and resources address bias and confront negative stereotypes.

Used in partnership with the 2021 brief¹⁵, this infographic is designed to provide you with ideas and resources to incorporate into your classroom to promote culturally responsive SEL. These suggestions also assist you to support quality social and emotional development for all including Native and non-Native learners.

Support Adult SEL practices by:

- **Promoting strong relationships** with students and families through learning about tribal identity, beyond race, as political/legal sovereign nation citizens and about the experiences of colonization.^{5,10,13}
- **Connecting with tribal education or cultural directors** to learn about historical and current events that may affect students' self-perception and values.^{5,13}
- **Integrating traditional practices**, such as morning greetings or talking circles to build community^{3,4,11}. Additionally, schools can promote SEL and support Indigenous survivance¹⁴ by including lessons about restoring Native languages, land-based education, and integrating culture and spirituality⁶.

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Indian or Native American?

Over the years, Native people have thought about respectful terms to describe a large group of diverse people across many nations. There are many different opinions, but most are OK with either term – Indian or Native American. A lot of Native organizations, such as the National Congress of American Indians, use the word Indian in their names, and Native people commonly refer to “Indian country” when they talk about reservations or the national network of Indian communities. What most Indians really prefer, however, is to be identified as members of their own tribe. For instance, they would like you to say “my friend Denny is Skokomish” rather than “My friend Denny is Indian.”¹²

Special thanks to the Washington educational leaders and team members that helped to inform through their expertise, practice and research to promote Native voice, experience, and strengths to promote quality SEL for all students. Patsy Whitefoot (Yakima), Arlie Neskahi (Diné), Maegan Rides At The Door (Assiniboine-Sioux), Sara Marie Ortiz (Acoma Pueblo), Mary Wilber (Osyoos Band), Zoe Higheagle Strong (Nez Perce), Mandy Smoker Broaddus (Ft. Peck Assiniboine), Kellie Harry (Pyramid Lake Paiute)

Affirming Learning Environments

Affirm Native student presence and resilience by incorporating current events and positive examples of Native influences in content areas, such as Astronaut Nicole Mann (Wailacki) bringing a dream catcher on the International Space Station as the first Native woman in space.¹¹



Warmth and Support

Encourage co-creation of solutions by engaging Native students in efforts towards mastery through routines and feedback processes in which mistakes are expected as part of the learning process^{4,8}.

Example: Include opportunities to develop multiple solutions for a math problem, in which students actively reflect on steps in the process and articulate where mistakes occurred and how they adapted to solve.



Youth-Centered Problem Solving

Engage students to review rules and expectations to be more culturally responsive and to be applied consistently and fairly^{2,4}.

Example: Have student focus groups review classroom rules and consequences to address potential issues that cause disproportionate suspension and expulsion rates.



Responsibility and Choice

Nurture meaningful input from Native students on including resources and information such as traditional stories, that may counter dominant-culture paradigms, textbook information, or previously held theories^{5,6,10}.

Example: Use Native research and stories to dispel persistent myths, such as the Bering Strait theory with new information from recent DNA findings¹.



Power of Language

Encourage student effort and reinforce pro-social behaviors by including consistent check-ins and follow up actions with students^{2,5}.

Example: Schedule short, consistent times to discuss with Native students on goal setting to address possible pre-conceived notions of disinterest in academics or other negative behavioral aspects.

Learning Design and Instruction

Review teaching materials and practices that include Native perspectives in both historical and contemporary contexts¹⁰. Plan and implement lessons that promote tribally specific resources and knowledge, to counter a pan-native false narrative such as, all Indians live in tipis, or that native students and families only live on reservations^{2,5,9}.



Cooperative Learning

Shift the focus from learning about Native Americans to learning from Native Americans^{2,10}.

Example: Monitor how student groups elicit and utilize the information voiced by Native students within the group and actively reflect on the perspectives of who is contributing to teaching materials, such as "Are these stories written by Native people, or just about them?"



Group Discussions

Challenge power dynamics and create opportunities for students to investigate Native perspective and agency^{11,14}.

Example: Incorporate instruction about the use and impact of treaties for people involved. Have students articulate whose voice or opinions are missing and why.



Self-Assessment and Self-Reflection

Use traditional stories as many tribal nations use characters and events to teach values and consequences of behaviors and actions^{8,11,13}.

Example: Read stories such as the Quileute stories of Báyak (Raven) as a trickster who is powerful, but often ends up in trouble due to his actions. Have students reflect on the actions and consequences, and how it might connect with their own lives and situations.



Balanced Instruction

Include place-based and land-based instructional opportunities^{3,8,16}.

Example: While teaching about seasons or nutrition, connect students with the use of seasonal calendars and food preservation.



SEL Competence Building Modeling, Practicing, Feedback and Coaching

Develop SEL skills as part of a community's social and cultural values. Native students' connection to the environment is part of cultural understandings for many tribal nations^{3,6,8}.

Example: Utilize SEL lessons that emphasizes the symbiotic relationship between plants, animals, land and people.



Expectations and Rigor

Expect and communicate high expectations of Native students by building partnerships with tribal governments and communities to cultivate and sustain understanding of Native people^{2,5,7,11}.

Example: Offer courses on Native language, to validate students and families dual language skills.



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Additional Resources

Washington Since Time Immemorial Curriculum

<https://www.k12.wa.us/student-success/resources-subject-area/time-immemorial-tribal-sovereignty-washington-state>

Since Time Immemorial: Tribal Sovereignty in Washington State or other tribally-developed curriculum is to be taught in all school (SB 5433, 2015) and OSPI provides multiple lesson units, teaching resources and Ready to Go Lessons for educators and families.

National Native Children's Trauma Center

<https://www.nnctc.org/tr-webinars>

National center providing resources for students, families, schools and others to understand and address the effects of trauma on individuals and communities. Recognizing sovereignty and strengths of Native people is key and critical to address trauma interventions for Native American children and families. Resources such as webinars and the curriculum, Bounce Back for Classrooms, are available.

GRuB Wild Foods & Medicine

<https://wild.goodgrub.org/>

Place-based educational tools that promote understanding of relationships to the land, history, traditions and sovereignty through resources such as the K-12 curriculum Tend, Garden, Grow teaching tool kit and resources, as well as the Plant Teachings for Growing Social and Emotional Skills toolkit and teaching materials.

Healthy Native Youth

<https://www.healthynativeyouth.org/>

Tools focused on supporting adolescents and adults, including an implementation toolbox, lesson plans, and curricula to support youth development, embrace cultural teachings and promote physical, spiritual, mental health and healthy relationships.

Culture-Based Prevention Resources- Good Medicine Bundle

<https://www.operationprevention.com/culture-based-resources>

Elementary and Middle school units that provide hands-on, academically integrated lessons grounded in Native aspects of wellbeing. Created with National Indian Education Association, Discovery Education and the Drug Enforcement Administration to prevent substance abuse and promoting positive self-identity and relationships.

Healing of the Canoe

<https://healingofthecanoe.org/>

Lessons focusing on the Pacific Northwest Tribal Canoe Journey as a metaphor for life. These lessons integrate traditional stories, cultural activities and speakers to promote self-identify, emotional resiliency, participating as part of a community member, setting goals and effective communication. Originally designed to promote life skills and prevent substance abuse, the curriculum is adaptable to community needs, including mental health support or job readiness.