

Indigenizing Early Childhood: Engaging Young Native Minds with a Holistic Approach to Learning

In the past, formalized schooling in Indigenous communities was a tool of colonization and cultural genocide, forcing Native peoples to assimilate to western norms, values, and knowledge. However, contemporary Indigenous communities have managed to reclaim and reshape education for Native youth, utilizing innovative methods and technologies, as well as drawing upon generations of traditional and indigenous knowledges to create environments, that promote academic achievement alongside culture (Keene, 2016).

Culturally responsive practice is often defined as using the experiences and perspectives of children and their families as a tool to support them more effectively (Gay 2002). Families may also share information about their child's temperament, primary play partners, and home language (NAEYC 1995). For Indigenous cultural groups this means that they must consider what constitutes a culturally appropriate early education for their children; they must be clear about their beliefs and socialization practices; and they must consider whether anything needs to be modified in order to successfully prepare their children for eventual entry into the society's schools (Mary Eunice Romero-Little, 2010). Therefore, we must assert our educational sovereignty through relevant and responsive curriculums that include language immersion settings to ensure our young children acquire the confidence to participate in diverse spaces.

In this seminar, we will rethink early childhood instruction by centering Indigenous knowledge through place-based stories, circle learning, language acquisition, and traditional teachings that connect Native communities with their traditional spaces and homelands. Topics we will explore in this seminar include (1) Indigenous ways of knowing through outdoor play and language development, (2) dual language and non-textual emergent literacy, (3) oral tradition & intergenerational learning, and (4) home and place-based learning. Teachers will research these topics with the goal of writing a culturally responsive curriculum unit that integrates their learning and shows evidence of dual-language instruction.