

Revitalizing Native American Education through Arts and Crafts

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Introduction

Hello, my name is JayLissa Mockta, I am an enrolled member of The Hopi Tribe, my clan is Fog and Corn clan. Soongopavi, better known as Second Mesa, is where my home is located about 120 miles NE from Flagstaff on the Hopi Reservation. I live in Flagstaff, Arizona and currently work with the Flagstaff Unified School District as a Native American Interventionist. My position is offered within the Native American Education Support Program (NAESP), and my job is to work with Native American students and families to see what I can contribute to them to ensure that they are getting quality education, and services. This is my first year in the Indian Country School Counselors Institute (ICSCI) Program, and I joined this program to collaborate and see how other counselors in a variety of areas' workload is like, and if we may be experiencing common situations with our Native students and how we can better support each other.

Context and Rationale

Classroom Description

Within this study, I will be focusing primarily on one of my school sites, Lura Kinsey Elementary School which is located on the westside of Flagstaff, Arizona. Kinsey's mission statement is "Providing learning experiences inspired by the environment, cultures and community of Northern Arizona through the core values of integrity, collaboration, engagement and wonder." Kinsey serves grades pre-kindergarten to fifth grade. Some of Kinsey's special characteristics are, "Kinsey provides unique learning experiences that take part through experiential learning. Students are provided with outdoor and cultural opportunities to enhance the K-5 experience. Our excursions are designed to enrich academic goals and support becoming a global citizen. The journey begins with our Kindergarten's Forest Fridays and culminates with 5th graders Kayaking the Verde River. It is our goal to give an undeniable enriched academic experience that includes place-based outdoor learning, exploration of cultures, stewardship of our resources, and project-based learning" (See AZ Report Card). Kinsey serves low-income families and is a Title 1 school, which provides tutoring through 21 Century, which is an after-school program for students. The student enrollment from the 2020-2021 school year was 49.4% Native American, 23.35% Hispanic/Latino, 20.96% White, and 6.29% Multiple Races. Working in this urban community. We serve a variety of students who come from various backgrounds, with 42 different Native American Tribes from around the United States. Our biggest population within the Flagstaff Unified School District is the Navajo Tribe at 88%, The Hopi Tribe at 7%, and 5% of other Native American Tribes. We have some students who belong to two or more tribes.

These students are experiencing the urban influences in addition to keeping their traditional teachings and learning alive. The students are trying to learn how to balance their new urban teaching they are learning in school while the parents are still wanting their children to continue their native culture. When I ask the students what it means to be Native American or why it is important to continue to acknowledge where they come from and identify with who they are, some students are not well informed on where their family comes from and may lack extensive cultural background and to practice it first-hand. Personally, I have experienced my culture first-

hand. However, I did not grow up on the reservation, I grew up in this Flagstaff urban community. Living in this urban society does tend to take away from the old traditional ways of life. In my youth, my family and I did not celebrate the Culture days that other reservation schools would. We did not want to dress in our traditional clothes to school because it was not common to see other Native peers dress up. It made us feel out of place, and for our non-native peers, who did not have the culture understanding and did not know the why behind what we do. This made us turn away from our traditional ways and become more intact with what we felt was “normal” in the urban community because we did not want to be looked down on and made fun of. Today, it is hard to continue to show off the different ways of continuing the Native lifestyles in an urban community because it makes the non-Native students question the Native ways. So, this makes our students afraid of showing who they really are and scared to share the great significance of being Native American. My goal is to show and tell my Native students to be proud of where they come from and how special they are to know and experience something that their peers may never get to experience. With parent involvement, we have decided to continue learning our culture and traditions alive through speaking our language, creating a variety of arts and crafts, and teaching real historical events that we feel is important for them to know.

Why Arts and Crafts?

The reason I chose to do hands-on activities is because I feel a lot of our students are visual learners and will do better if they are able to physically touch and create something with their own hands. In this way, they will create and understand with more meaning behind the activity. For the activities, I chose a variety of hands-on activities such as beading, language preservation, weaving, literature-focused reading and comprehension, understanding what social-emotional activities look like, and giving the students a chance to make their own traditional foods. For beading, this helps to implement different types of designs using math skills by counting beads, and learning how to create a designed pattern using graphing paper.

Language preservation is in high demand with the parents who would like their students to learn the basics. I have made a point to teach the importance of introducing yourself in your language because that tells others who you are and where you come from. It holds much sacredness in such a few words. When it came to doing these activities with students, they were shy to speak few words in their native language, but this brought up an historic event, briefly talking to them about our ancestors who were physically hurt for speaking their language in boarding schools they were sent to against their will. I reminded them what an honor it is to continue another language other than the English language. This again, reminded them of how special they are and how different they are from the majority of their peers. We continued with basic Navajo and Hopi words dealing with colors, animals, numbers, what we call our family members, (mother, father, brother, sister, grandma, etc.) and simple but common praises. An article I read said, “There is international and widespread recognition that early childhood education must be fully inclusive and based on the language, culture, and epistemology of local Indigenous communities (Kitson, 2010). Early childhood education (ECE) programs can only deliver on the promises of culturally responsive schooling (Castagno & Brayboy, 2008; McCarty & Lee, 2014) when “staff members understand cultural expectations, relationships, and the subtleties of communication, including non-verbal communication” within the community (Kitson & Bowes, 2010, p. 86). Furthermore, we know that “culture affects the ways children respond when entering early

childhood settings” (Kitson & Bowes, p. 83; Ball & Pence, 2000). But all too often, educational programs are developed and implemented as if culture either doesn’t matter or is universally shared.” This statement is very accurate with what I’ve experienced first-hand here in the Flagstaff community because with our Native children, they may be growing up in a dual-language home environment. This tends to create confusion for them when it comes time to talk, leading the children to comprehend language differently than those who are speaking English only. In some cases, I’ve seen the students have a speech impediment, which then they are needing Second English Language (SEL) intervention. Overall, I see that educators are starting to understand what a Native home lifestyle is like for these students and teachers are now seeking assistance in how they can help their students succeed and have that sense of belonging and are wanting to create more opportunities for their students to share their cultural background.

Implementing these different activities have provided more opportunities for students to learn not only the significance behind each art and craft but also provide and gain confidence. Doing these activities will help build confidence, they are acknowledging who they are (identity) and where they come from. Having that feeling of belonging and connection to what our ancestors have created from natural resources and how we can continue to keep the traditions alive. To have something to show others, and they will learn to understand why these variety of activities help identify them as a person. To be proud of the unique way of Native life and culture. Cultural identity is most commonly known to represent one's ethnicity or race. But it also includes more than that, it represents religious or spiritual connections, family background and history, and shows unique characteristics (Cultural Identity Model).

Topic Summary

Hands-on Activities

Navajo and Hopi Language Preservation

The significance of this activity is to provide a basic understanding of the students’ native language. In these lessons, students will be learning more about the language basics. This included learning how to introduce yourself, learning where you come from, and what clan you belong to. I feel this activity held the most significance because it was personalized to each student, and it helped to show any possible relations. The students’ learned numbers, colors, animals, and common phrases. The reason I chose language is because a lot of Native American tribes are looking for language preservation, and I feel this is a very important subject to teach the younger generation, so it can be continued for years to come. I feel the students learn best when they are given the chance to see the native language, being written, being spoken by a native speaker in that language, and to practice writing this, sounds that they hear and take an emphasis in What they can hear within the language. The words that were used in the lessons were common words that they can use in their day today, education and communication with their peers. In an older article I read it stated, “ The loss of language is closely tied to a loss of culture. As Reyhner points out: "Our languages contain a significant part of the world's wisdom. When a language is lost, much of the knowledge that language represents is lost" (1996, p. 4). Fishman concurs:

The most important relationship between language and culture that gets to the heart of what is lost when you lose a language is that most of the culture is in the language and is expressed in the language. Take it away from the culture, and you take away its greetings, its curses, its praises, its laws, its literature, its songs, its riddles, its proverbs, its cures, its wisdom, its prayers. The culture could not be expressed and handed on in any other way.... That is, you are losing all those things that essentially are the way of life, the way of thought, the way of valuing, and the human reality that you are talking about. (1996, p. 81).”

I feel this has connected to so many of my Native students and their families are doing their best to keep their language within their family. Language is very important and will be a very unique characteristic for students to have, that others may not get the chance to experience. The objectives within this activity are as follows:

- I can say the names of at least 4 colors in Navajo and/or Hopi
- I can count to ten in Navajo and/or Hopi
- I can identify and say at least 4 family members in Navajo and/or Hopi (mother, father, brother, sister, grandmother, grandfather, aunt, uncle, etc.)

Introduction into Weaving

Weaving will help them in concentrating and taking the time to step back and to learn more patience. Teaching a togetherness bond within this activity has created a greater understanding that if you can sit and put your mind to something so detailed, you can also use these same skills in everyday life. Understanding the different methods of coping with anxiety, stress, or doubt a student may be experiencing this can be a positive coping strategy. Included in this introductory lesson, the students were able to identify weaving tools in Navajo, and how you can make your own loom, how to shear, dye, and spin the wool in traditional ways. Students will learn the beginning stages of how to start a woven project. The objectives within this activity are as follows:

- Understand the natural resources of how to color dye black, red, and white in the baskets
- Understand the wool process before starting a rug
- Understanding the overall use of weaving, and what it can be created into. (Dresses, rugs, blankets, etc.)

Introduction into Beading

For the beading lesson, I chose to teach the Peyote Stitch beading method. The reason I chose this method is because I feel the peyote stitch is a common beading technique that is often used throughout different Indigenous tribes. For this activity, we were able to start a basic spiral bracelet, using pony beads and yarn. In this activity, it included a lot of counting, patterns, and understanding how to create a pattern using beads. This activity was well done by a group of fourth graders, opposed to some first and second graders who needed a lot more assistance with the hands-on project. This gave me the chance to see what age is appropriate for these hands-on activities. The objectives within this activity are as follows:

- I can obtain in-hand manipulation skills: increasing strength and coordination in hands and finger muscles.
- I can express my creativity and imagination into my work and make unique designs

- I can understand how to create a design using graphing paper and comparing sizes and color schemes.

Self-identification

When it comes to identification, I wanted to focus on this particular lesson more because I want the students to acknowledge, learn, and incorporate the components of identity. This includes self-definition, importance, and how it can affect them. This is to show another unique part of them that may not be the same as another peer. Once they are able to identify themselves, and understand the great significance behind introducing themselves, leads them to more relations. In an article I read, it states, Identification in a broad sense can be constructed as the concept of identity and how one thinks of oneself, particularly within a context as an individual, how they relate to others, and who they are in terms of a group (Cooper & Thatcher 2010). Identification can simultaneously be both a verb and noun. Identification as a verb is the process of identifying oneself denoting how one references and/or defines themselves, and it depicts the process of becoming (Ashforth et al., 1987). As a noun, identification is a way or state of being, offering a sense of order and satisfying a need for belonging. The objectives within this activity are as follows:

- I can have a solid sense of how I want to define who I am and how I want others to know me.
- I can have a sense of belonging and being respected by others around me.
- I can have an understanding that I may connect with others on a cultural level.

Literacy Comprehension

During my Native American club, I wanted to be able to create different types of hands-on activities, this method was reading a book that was written by a Native author and creating an activity that references a part of the story the student is able to recall. This was done either by a questionnaire assignment, diagrams in which they can determine similarities and differences, this also included art activities that they would make from an event in the story. One of my favorite books was, How the Stars fell into the Sky by Jerry Oughton. With this book, I did a tear art picture of their favorite part of the book. Another activity that the students really enjoyed was using clay to make little pots, paired with this activity was Shaped by Her Hands: Potter Maria Martinez by Anna Harber Freeman and Barbara Gonzales. Students will learn the history of a variety of folklore, and realistic events from the past. Students will comprehend what lessons are being taught through these native authors and come to an understanding of their specific traditions and history. The objectives within this activity are as follows:

- I can summarize a story I read or was read to me
- I can visualize events within text that I can then recreate through arts and crafts
- I can understand background knowledge and reference back to it using a simpler explanation.

Student Engagement

There are many reasons why I chose these activities for the students to learn. Creating a basic understanding of the different types of creations our ancestors can make with natural resources

and with what was accessible to them. It is understanding the concepts to what these may have been used for around the house, or possibly for a ceremony. Weaving is very important to the Navajo and Hopi culture. As for beading, it was something that I feel the students would like to have the general knowledge of how-to start beading and to show how easily it can be created. Language I feel is most important because we are living in a new generation where our students are not practicing or having exposure to the Navajo and Hopi language at home.

With being in an urban community, this is not a subject that may be easily thought of to implement. Learning the introductory words, I feel were a great start, color, animals, family member relationships, and common phrases that may be used often at home. I feel this is the connection our students need, to have the exposure at home and at school. In the schools that Flagstaff serves, teachers are also wanting to know more about the Native American culture, language, and how best they can serve the Native population.

Creating this partnership with the teachers is important for both families and students. This gives the teachers the opportunity to learn more about the Native cultures, and the popular do's and don'ts. As a Native American Interventionist, I have seen many teachers and staff struggle with understanding how unique, and important it is that our Native students follow the guidelines we have when it comes to learning in the classroom. This is not limited to just learning about what type of animals our students can see, learn, and even touch. It is another part of life that teachers may not know about, nor understand until it is brought to their attention. So, creating these activities not only teaches the students the significance, but also sharing with the staff how unique, and the significance of these activities are to our Native Cultures.

Student Assessment

Throughout these different activities, the students have been able to comprehend and absorb a lot of new information. My focus was to share the traditional significance of these activities and have found out that there is also continued teachings at home. While teaching each lesson, there were some students who were able to share a personal experience. In this way, this gave them the opportunity to share their experiences and knowledge with peers. This gives them the boost of confidence they are so proud of. Most of my students are shy and quiet but teaching these classes has given them the opportunity to communicate more with one another and to create new kinship bonds. The overall experience of this curriculum was to continue on with the traditional teachings, and to create basic knowledge and understanding to the younger generation we are serving today. To show them the importance of how our ancestors have created these items by using natural resources available to them in their area. Most importantly, to show them to be proud and stay humble with all things we are surrounded by daily. To learn our relations with others, and to continue to be proud of who they identify with and continue to acknowledge where they come from and be proud of all the little accomplishments they make in their lives. If you set your mind and heart to something, and you are passionate about it, then make it the best they can to represent themselves with pride and respect.

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