

The Weathering Willow Project: Relatives Honored

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Context

Willow bark is a medicine that effectively relieves pain. This fascinating tree also symbolizes fertility and new life; for instance, a new tree will grow by transplanting a willow branch into the ground. Its ability to grow and survive is powerfully symbolic, showing how we can thrive in various conditions. Likewise, weathering is a term taken from the idiom: weather the storm. The storm is what people must endure when difficult situations arise. Using this analogy, students transferring to school in Flagstaff will have to deal with certain trials and tribulations unique to their lives. Still, they will continue growing in a strong yet flexible way, like a willow. A key component of their thriving in this group is to explore stories of their family and other relatives to gain a cultural understanding of success. The storm, on the other hand, could represent anything adverse or inuring, but because we are currently in the wake of the covid-19 pandemic, this group will discuss things or people we have lost and how this affected our lives. Although indigenous students remain resolute in developing their minds when they choose to attend school in Flagstaff, we will explore family as a culturally responsive intervention concept to strengthen this transfer.

The Flagstaff Bordertown Dormitory, or Kinlani Dormitory, was constructed in 1957 and rebuilt in 2007. And, in the Navajo language, Kinlani means many buildings, describing Flagstaff as a town. The term Bordertown signifies racial and socioeconomic relations between Indians and non-Indians. This Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) peripheral residential hall houses high school students throughout the school year. On average, some 80 to 160 Native high school students per year attend Flagstaff High School from Flagstaff Bordertown Dormitory. Over the years, thousands of Native American children made this trek to Flagstaff to challenge themselves holistically: cognitively, socially, emotionally, and spiritually.

In Ponderosa Pine, The Flagstaff Bordertown Dormitory is nested at the base of the San Francisco Peaks (Dook'o'osliid in Navajo, Nuva'tuka'ovi, In Hopi), a sacred mountain for the southwest tribes of the Colorado Plateau. Flagstaff, a mountainous college town on historic route 66, is known for outdoor activities. Situated near Mars Hill, the dorm, a two-story structure with four wings, each set of 20 rooms, is conjoined to a bathroom, totaling a 160-bed capacity. This non-profit organization employs between 23-30 employees on average. Three to four locally elected board representatives meet monthly to govern the dorm. The dorm operates under the auspices of the Department of Diné Education (DODE) and the Bureau of Indian Education (BIE). Students vie to enroll for various reasons, including the opportunity to take a gamut of advanced classes, i.e., pre-advance placement, advanced placement, honors, CAVIET, JROTC, welding, culinary, photography, theater, Navajo, and others. Academic aspiration is stressed at this stage of life; however, preserving their identity and remembering who they are is equally important in their formative years. And this emphasis on gaining a rigorous education in tandem with learning about Native American values and preserving language is outlined in the dorm's mission statement.

The dormitory management team observes the 25 CFR Part 32 Indian Education Policies Student Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) as a guided framework for developing our policies and procedures. For our dorm enrollment criteria, students must complete an application along with

some documentation. For instance, students must show proof of tribe membership when applying to the dormitory, with a birth certificate, transcripts, and any legal-related documents, if applicable. Students are mainly from Navajo and Hopi Reservation households, while we also get Havasupai, Hualapai, Apache, and other tribal nations. Once students get accepted at the dorm, they begin the Flagstaff High School enrollment process.

A typical day at the dorm for a student includes attending study hall for one to two hours, depending on academic progress reports. After dinner, students have an opportunity for free time to take part in recreational activities. The dormitory's residential advisors ensure students stay on schedule and complete their daily assigned chores. (i.e., public and room). A lot of the student's feelings about the routines of dorm life have changed, but only slightly since John Chilcott wrote about the dorm in the 70s. For instance, student-athletes are discouraged from joining sports programs that the school did not sponsor, yet they enjoy competing against other dormitories. Furthermore, students also noted that they enjoyed the teacher's amicable disposition but were reluctant to receive a chore violation once they returned to the dorm. The unstructured weekends were sometimes considered boring, except for going on a pass (Chilcott, J., 1970). However, the current dorm weekly schedule is busy with staff-sponsored cultural enrichment activities mixed with activities sponsored by community partnerships.

In the 1950s, the administration of the newly integrated school system in Flagstaff, along with the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), worked to pave the way for the dorm's existence with the sole purpose of educating Native American children. As someone in the helping profession, this history is paramount in understanding why students come specifically to Flagstaff Bordertown Dormitory location instead of other options. Also, for others' intent, it is just as vital to recognize each student's background from a cultural perspective as their connections to clans, land, and family is a practiced obligation steeped in traditions without understanding why Flagstaff and looking at their roots more closely. Other approaches to know students include reading their written application essays and daily conversations and administering Resilience and Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) and Resiliency Screenings as a screening to get familiar with students' backgrounds and goals.

My counseling role includes talking to students about emotionality, like helping them to assuage their angst and resolving quotidian interpersonal concerns in tandem with addressing more significant emotional/behavioral issues and academic preparedness. While establishing rapport, culture is a factor to consider when talking to Native students as a counselor. However, diversity and discussing similarities and differences is always good to keep in mind when talking to each youth and to empathize with their unique blend of shared cultural beliefs and family constellation. I also facilitate various projects, i.e., Coping and Skills Training (CAST), Talking Circles, Wellbriety, and Dook'o'osliid Youth Council, created in-house by students. In contrast, others are grant-funded projects from the Native American Community Action (NACA), typically through the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). Case management with the high school social workers, Native American counselor, Dorms CEO, manager, and academic advisor.

Born and raised in Fort Belknap, a reservation located in north-central Montana, I understand living on the "rez" from this United States region. I attend the University of Montana for

undergraduate and graduate school. Before that, I went to Fort Belknap tribal college. I have always worked with Native children in some capacity or another. Throughout the years, I learned much about the human experience by majoring in psychology, but more importantly, the Indigenous student experience as a first-generation college student who dealt with acculturation issues and how to reach out for help. In 2008, I was hired as the Behavioral Health Counselor at Flagstaff Bordertown Dormitory. My experience with my father's boxing club impressed the value of comradery youth people could potentially form. For instance, I saw the growth transformation in the kids who participated in this club. In short, we built a community of fully supportive parents. I worked in various programs, grants, group homes, and schools, but it came down to the cadre of kids in the boxing that motivated me to be a counselor because I saw hope, happiness, and pride built from the ground up.

As a northern Native in the southwest, learning more about the tribes here is a natural and ongoing learning experience. I constantly learn about culture, language, and history from co-workers, students, in-laws, and community members. In addition, my wife and our two sons are enrolled in the Navajo Tribe, so recognizing nuance next to prominent differences between tribes is necessary. For instance, the emphasis placed on patriarchal and matriarch societies and other customs and knowledge in ceremonies and clan systems. "The value of clan systems inherent a high level of social integration, a protective factor" (Middlebrook et al., 2001). In the Aaniih tribe, the archaic clan system revolved around seasonal activities like hunting and no longer holds barring in kinship interrelatedness. However, the Navajo and Hopi are progressive while keeping many traditions, like clans, and knowledge of the clan systems intact.

Traditionally, I witnessed how acknowledging an extended family (K'e) support system enables those affiliated to help one another. Connecting with a group is a protective factor. Being an integral part of society is vital to a fulfilling life in various communities; even in westernized society, these clans form deep ties that manifest a sense of strength and purpose. Knowing you are is important for the indigenous community, and the clan system plays a beautiful part in preserving a connection to your people.

Rationale

Validating the natural drawbacks of change and, in tandem some degree of loss by coming to the dormitory must be examined. Students are rarely upfront to talk about what is bothering them, especially regarding loss. To determine if a student has lost someone to something close to them, Sometimes, I'll ask what is wrong, but a parent or relative usually mentions that this student was out of school for personal reasons and then explains. Because students are sometimes reluctant to talk about grave matters, a group where they can build trust with peers is an ideal place to start the process.

Continued support while students are away from family is vital. For example, a student told me a relative was in the hospital, and it didn't sound good, but my mom said to wait for the weekend to get picked up and focus on classes for now. These types of phone calls have been made to students while in the dorm, and they need support as they regulate their emotions. Encouraging students to understand themselves more from a culturally connected society will, in the long run, lessen the chances of ascribing to a maladaptive coping strategy when challenges arise. Often,

when students are having a challenging time in the dorm, it is because of a pressing matter at home, unresolved grief, or they are worried about the wellbeing of their siblings or, in some instances, pets being fed. Awareness of bias, even if it is a trivial matter for one person, the opposite may be true for another.

These situations, if not dealt with properly, may ruminate in their mind and seem to compete for the energy needed to concentrate on their academics. Because of this inner commotion, they may lose focus if they do not address it properly. Dealing with social and emotional issues can be done by sharing with others how we feel. A lot about how we feel is how our family is doing, especially when away from school. The curriculum honors and confirms our bond with family and gives them time and space to focus on that crucial part of our lives. It is critical to reflect on those who helped them, developing empathy, and going through these sessions can encourage young people to find a sense of direction. Connecting family with academic aspirations is ideal because it enables us to advance ourselves further. These students think about relatives who were encouraging them or wanted to (deceased or alive). Students need to feel that they not only made the right decision in transferring to a new school as a step toward a better education but also concurrently actively integrate themselves into this new academic-social setting. When students arrive, their response to forge a meaningful experience becomes clear, but only sometimes is this the case, and that is where interventions like Weathering Willows may help.

It is important to understand what Loss is. Loss occurs when something is left behind by choice or by circumstance. Children and adults experience loss at many different levels, and even though it is broadly defined, it speaks to our feelings about grief and many other types of loss (Micsky, T., 2022). Grief may be a considerable part of this loss, and much of the time, it is; however, it should not be held as the centerpiece of this curriculum because of the sensitivity about this matter from a cultural lens, so, therefore, the phrase: honoring our relative is more of an appropriate, indirect way to capture the “remembering” of those important to us whether or not they are still alive. A relative can be still alive, but due to how they once when can be identified as a loss. For instance, a relative could succumb to drug use or mental health issues, which could be a loss. Another example is when parents go through a divorce, or the family moves to a different town. A lot of the time, when we live is part of our identity and affiliations. These examples are less concrete than those of grief and losing someone in the physical sense. The main purpose of the dormitory is to ensure that more Native American students attend postsecondary institutions (Office of Educational Research and Improvement, 2003). However, there are socioeconomic disadvantages, disparities in educational resources, and considerable differences in indigenous learning styles. Discerning these different learning styles is important because Native American students typically learn from concrete experiences and reflect on these experiences. In contrast, learning taught in the classroom is mainly based on a Eurocentric-type curriculum (Ornstein and Hunkins, 2004). Because of the timeframe to carry out an intervention and the emphasis on remembering a lesson. Therefore, storying or storytelling is a method for Native Americans to grasp a concept in a brief time frame. There is always an underlining message to convey to the listener in these stories that relate to the truth and the natural order of things. For example, seeing animals at a specific part of our lives is considered sacred, and what impression they leave on us is a spiritual moment. These concrete moments cannot be generalized to be taught in every classroom in the country; however, in a small group, even though the veracity of a story is accepted at face value, the merit of the lesson holds up. Whether

or not a person attests that a spirit presents itself in a fictional story, a dream, or real life, it is an intrinsic belief from an Indigenous perspective that our relationship to God through the natural world is at play, and this may be possibly an attempt to convey a message.

These concrete experiences also apply to the interplay of spirits, intangible yet intricate, and real influence on mental illness. Western medicine only recently began to confirm this process by referring to specific behaviors by Indigenous clients as a cultural concept of distress or even duress. The specificity of the said syndrome was an adaptation in conceptualization from one culture to another. The APA guidelines included this signal of distress to ensure that Native Americans receive the right services in counseling that confirm their understanding of their state being effects of something in the natural world (Mezzich, Kleinman, Fafrega, & Parron, 1996). This is the American Psychology field's attempt to resolve underlining biases when working with Native Americans' cultural-bound syndromes like talking about animals. This is intriguing growth in the DSM because giving precedence, or at least, be awareness in the school and dormitory settings when working with indigenous students. This explanation of learning from concrete experiences gives storytelling its rich educational value because it allows the listener to forge meaningful inferences. The mind can create a visual landscape, and when students listen to elders talk, the content is ingrained into their memory as teaching to live by and cherish.

Indigenous children's equitability has never really gained any solid footing in state or federal policies vis-a-vis finances to fund Indian schools or programs to do this, mainly because these old practices are newly being touted as effective. This failure includes lacking tribal consultation and collaboration at the decision table in curriculum development. In this effort, a programmatic issue arises, and a calling for systematic fixes continues to present; hence supportive interventions and models are forever encouraged for this population. Finding a better approach to preserve their tribal affiliation regardless of where they live and when they left, and this tribal affiliation understands their language and cultural roots. Tribal nations often share universal ideas and practices while others are a stark contrast from one another, specific to that region. Mitigating these differing degrees of cultural practice variations needs a way to address their current state healthily. That is, to have these students look at their cultural upbringing and recall of their traditional teachings by attending these sessions. The Weathering Willows guide will help them better understand their own culture to help them transition to being in the dormitory. The group facilitator will use the RESPECT Model (source) when formulating questions for each participant and respect who they are as unique, multifaceted people. The RESPECT model's ten factors proved great tools for understanding the depth and breadth of a person because it considers a multiple-dimensional approach. To gain a detailed view is to know who they are from a holistic sense of being a human. This brand of counseling framework addresses the need for a comprehensive model of human diversity that has practical utility for the work of mental health professionals. Being culturally yet individually confirmed elicits a salient experience in a school setting to belong and simultaneously supplies a safe place that also evokes meaningful connections.

Most, if not all, Native communities ascribe to an assimilative version of the acculturation style. By readily acculturating, if not forcibly, adapting modern customs and standards and not relying initially on traditional-type teachings to ascribe to their moral scruples. Unfortunately, because neither westernized counseling services nor counsel from a traditional healer or woman is not

pursued by many, the underpinning of social-emotional needs in healing, health, and maturity was not called for to deal with personal problems. Because of character defects like shame, embarrassment, or ignorance, and, thus, being stuck in a middle ground, mental health in the indigenous communities goes unchecked. However, resorting to traditional healing practices would be fortuitous to help resolve issues like relationships, stress, depression, angst, and grief. Still, few studies talk about the benefits of these agents of change. Today, for those who stay in the dorm, the choice to be in this type of setting proves to be a protective factor in the form of creating boundaries and a place of safety by limiting the chance of engaging in unsafe conduct like consuming alcohol, taking drugs, premarital pregnancy, and violence. The daily schedule and the staff monitoring create a structured routine with expectations. Much has been written about alcohol and drug use among youths, with rates higher than any other ethnic group except among Mexican Americans (Goldston, 2004, Goldston et al., 2008). One study of American Indian completed suicides found alcohol involved in 69% of the cases (May, Van Winkle, Williams, Mcfeeley, DeBruyn, & Serna, 2002). Alcohol not only being addictive substance but also have many health risks.

Language always follows in tandem with cultural preservation discussion because keeping or restoring our native tongue is a part of our healing journey. For example, priests and nuns once told Indigenous mothers to refrain from speaking their native language. Native language acquisition by the children would then cease. Indigenous parents assumed neither they nor their kids would integrate into society as quickly, so, unfortunately, because this bias has been indoctrinated, the language stopped for the love of their children and their future. However, on the contrary, research on multilingual abilities on brain development is rendering promising results, particularly in cognitive control and executive functioning (I.e., attention, working memory, inhibition, decision making) and other brain structures (Maurits van Noort et al., 2019). However, Native communities are in a catch-22; for instance, when students have an opportunity to learn their language, only some choose to engage. Therefore, counselors must adhere to a culturally relevant practice when working with a Native student population to prevent language attrition. Using language and integrating it into practice gives merit to a culturally rich education and social-emotional intelligence by stressing language. Because the teachers can relay instruction emphasizing the student's traditions, which include their cultural identity, language is sometimes secondary to cultural education or teachings but sometimes the centerpiece. In other words, not setting aside language is part of the progress we celebrate. Therefore, sustaining their language is as much needed as learning English to build the brain's sophisticated neuro networks further.

Indigenous youth rely on support to navigate their education experiences. While most students have this support intact from family, others do not. "Integrating the family into the intervention process is necessary to foster systemic change in the child or adolescent." ("Best Practices in Providing Culturally Responsive Interventions"). Even though students practice independent living, their legal guardians still provide extended care by monitoring and advising. For those who lack adequate support, seek adult surrogate caregivers (dorm or high school staff to aunts and uncles) to help them navigate this part of their lives.

Topic Summary

“If you want to change the world, go home and love your family” - Mother Theresa. Mother Theresa emphasized kin in the spirit of change, which even applied to the conceptualization of family for some Indigenous people to canvas other connected people like our relatives, tribe, and ancestors. Moreover, although growing up means embracing these changes, family is our foundation, a medicine that empowers our ability to navigate the world around us. That is essentially what this curriculum addresses. This guide can help students assuage their emotionality when faced with these abrupt changes and losses as they transform a place. To endorse a culturally responsive intervention that addresses social-emotional needs helps students process unavoidable occurrences. The students gain insight and understand how the impression of change from inadvertent loss is irrefutable. This understanding of themselves expresses their empathy and resolve; emotional resolve includes acceptance when losing a loved one, social support, or a role. Some students even look for a healthy resolution when family pets die. The immutable truth of mortality has an impact on each of us. Losing people in our lives is inevitable and natural.

Theresa Boone-Schuler, the Flagstaff Bordertown Dormitory Chief Executive Office CEO office, has a small stack of magazines. I read a story about raising our food by Robert Sombrero, Jr in Tuba City; he writes: “I was six years old when I started school. A BIA pickup truck came to get me. I rode in the back; It was cold then. I attended Navajo Mountain Boarding School for one year...I wanted to be a medicine man, and my dad taught me a lot, but it didn’t stay with me. My western schooling erased almost everything. I feel bad that I don’t remember the stories when I want to teach my grandchildren”. Eventually, he became a criminal investigator and worked in law enforcement in various parts of the country. Still, because of school, he lost a part of his identity because he couldn’t recall the stories, which changed him. There are other teachings in this discontinued magazine, *Leading the Way: The Wisdom of the Navajo people*). I wanted to include this story because Mr. Sombrero, Jr’s. is what I and others sacrifice our time when we go out to get an education; we lose out on important cultural teachings. And when our teachers pass away, i.e., parents, uncles, aunts, and grandparents, there is no going back to ask for clarification.

Death is a part of the life cycle in many respects, but not always easy to understand from a cultural perspective, sometimes not even from a personal one, as it is considered uncomfortable or even culturally ruled taboo subject matter by some to discuss. (long sentence) In the *Weathering Willow* project curriculum, we will briefly discuss a matter related to grief and loss that has lasting effects on a person, along with the stages. Nevertheless, we will focus on the connection to their relatives and have that as the focal point. As noted earlier, discussing grief is sensitive and requires varying sensitivity. We all deal with loss uniquely and sometimes in an unprescribed way; however, unresolved grief can be a recipe for prolonged effects on relationships and health. “Although grief is a unique experience, Nationwide studies of bereaved teenagers and young adults have documented increased risks for self-injurious behaviors, suicide attempts, and death.” (T. Bylund-Grenklo et al., 2016). For instance, losing a loved one, i.e., a parent, a child, or a sibling, is undoubtedly among the worst things that can happen to us. However, the researchers also noted that grief is that regardless of an individual’s age, people do eventually find some degree of resolve from bereavement naturally and make the necessary adjustments. (awkward) However, unfortunately, others can succumb to a heightened reaction to stress. For instance, there are four patterns of grief which range from normal (or adjusted,

typical, non-traumatic) versus complicated (or maladjustment, atypical), to absent (or inhibited) or delayed (or dammed-up). Furthermore, primarily in adults, a more resilient form of grief has been noted in reaction to losing people we know.

Maladaptive coping as a response to unresolved grief can be infectious to living a productive life. According to research, bereaved teenagers engage in self-injurious behaviors, suicide attempts, death, and chronic illness, and unfold in other intergenerational trauma-based behavioral patterns (T. Bylund et al., 2016). It is better to get to the root of the problem early and to have students act as their agent of change in managing their behavior, i.e., dysphoria, anger, hallucinations, emotional numbness, and insomnia, through learning skillsets like self-regulation techniques or talking about the cycles of grief and process it with a supportive person. Students with a developed understanding of self are more apt to combat the dire effect of historical trauma (i.e., isolation, addiction, abuse, neglect, mental illness, and accidental death). Dealing with problems maladaptively is costly to the individual, others who care about him or her, and society. To mitigate these personal problems, seek an effective way to foster social-emotional development in school. School administrators or curriculum teams often feel their campus is not ideal for addressing such topics. However, when we examine the underlining issues, i.e., loss and change of life events have significant red flags when an uptick in absenteeism emerges, and academic progress drops. According to Pharris et al. (1997), it takes only one caring, trusted adult to help youth; a person to talk to is all a student needs to not only make it but also avoid things like suicide and find direction through proper and genuine mentorship. For Indigenous children, coupling this curriculum with their traditional culture creates a convergence of maturity growth mindset whom one day can achieve self-actualization and balance (Lafromboise, T., 1995). Merging socio-emotional education with indigenous culture validates the culturally rich past and their ancestors; it is who they are, and this past needs to be rectified, then celebrated. “By work on social-emotional efficacy is best to promote the development of children by preparing them for their future roles in society.” (Marcin et al., 2012).

“Emotional intelligence includes competencies that allow students to recognize and manage emotions, solve problems effectively, and establish positive relationships with others” (Zins & Elias, 2006). Living in a residential hall necessitates emotional regularity for times of stress by taking time to seek out others for help. Students have access to several available counseling services: an in-house counselor and other counselor or social worker who coordinate their services at the high school in Flagstaff or even at their home community.

As a result of a smorgasbord of federal grants centered around youth, we had earlier prevention programs at the dorm, either through the 21st-century program or community partners like the Native American Community Action (NACA) organization, Child and Family Support Services, non-profit organizations like Native Rise, and Boys and Girls Club. Targeting social skills in prevention programs may reduce undesirable, harmful behavior, attitudes, and characteristics. Moreover, simultaneously fostering both sets of skills in the social and cognitive domains can be practical tools in educating our youth with a more balanced, well-rounded education. For instance, emphasis on social competencies holds weight later in one’s career as students realize people skills often translate to being more marketable in their chosen fields.

People deal with loss and healing from loss uniquely, and there is no right way or timeframe to bereave. When addressing the grief, Evelyn Bahe, a colleague, noted that when she missed her late father, she would visit his brother because he said a specific thing that reminded her of her father, which was a good thing. Rebecca Malone-Little Owl and her siblings Pamala Malone and Michael Malone would acknowledge hummingbirds as a visit from their late mother and noted that when they see hummingbirds that remind them of their mother, they would be intrigued. In Montana, my mother, Delores Stiffarm, would see eagles as a visit from our brother or other family members when more than one appeared. Then, she would pray and place tobacco on the ground as an offering.

Briefly, Indigenous people from different parts of the country deal with grief differently. It is the Navajo way to refrain from talking about someone who passed after four days after the event (Evelyn Bahe, 2022; Curley, T., 2022; Malone, D., 2022). There is more to it, but our reverence for the culture is the extent I would like to share out of respect. In the Gros Ventre way, we would cut our hair, refrain from dancing, or engage in any ceremonial activities for a year to close our mourning, which is a family's collective lamentation. The ending of the mourning is signified by a giveaway of items collected throughout that time. (Preston Stiffarm, Gerald Stiffarm, 2010). For those students whose families have this cultural belief, it is prudent to inquire about their beliefs about those who passed beforehand and respect this rule moving forward. Each tribe and even different families within a tribe have specific approaches to losing (losses?); therefore, moving forward, we will adhere to respecting boundaries and cultural beliefs. In most tribes, death is just another part of the continued life cycle where there is neither a beginning nor an ending.

Covid-19 catastrophized communities; not only took the lives of many in Native communities, but also many families worldwide met similar fates. In response, most places became lax in their requiring mask-wearing as the world adjusts to the reality of Covid-19; however, this is not the case with the Navajo reservations; donning a mask is mandated on this reservation is symbolic of a sensible mindset.

For those affiliated with the dorm, a few students and staff lost parent figures, brothers, sisters, aunts and uncles, and grandparents. The impact of the Covid-19 crisis and its reverberations dealt with a shock for family dynamics and rearranged communities from a psychosocial perspective. As a result, things seem topsy-turvy, with certain familiar people no longer walking the earth.

There is another emergent crisis: a mental health challenge. In the wake of this pandemic, more people are dealing with the continued residual effects of this global endemic, and it is no different at the dorm. Unfortunately, it is unnerving that some of our residents remain silent about the impact of covid-19 on their lives, and silence is defining. Unfortunately, their lack of verbal communication can be related to the management of their emotionality or lack thereof. In addition, because of specific developmental characteristics such as distrust, immaturity, or ignorance, disclosure can be stymied. For instance, it may not be the "tough thing to do," or they fear getting ridiculed by others. Furthermore, this approach may stem from the boarding school days where being tough is how Native kids survived. For example, in the *Pine Ridge Psychosocial Screening*, some students replied to the question do you have a friend or two to

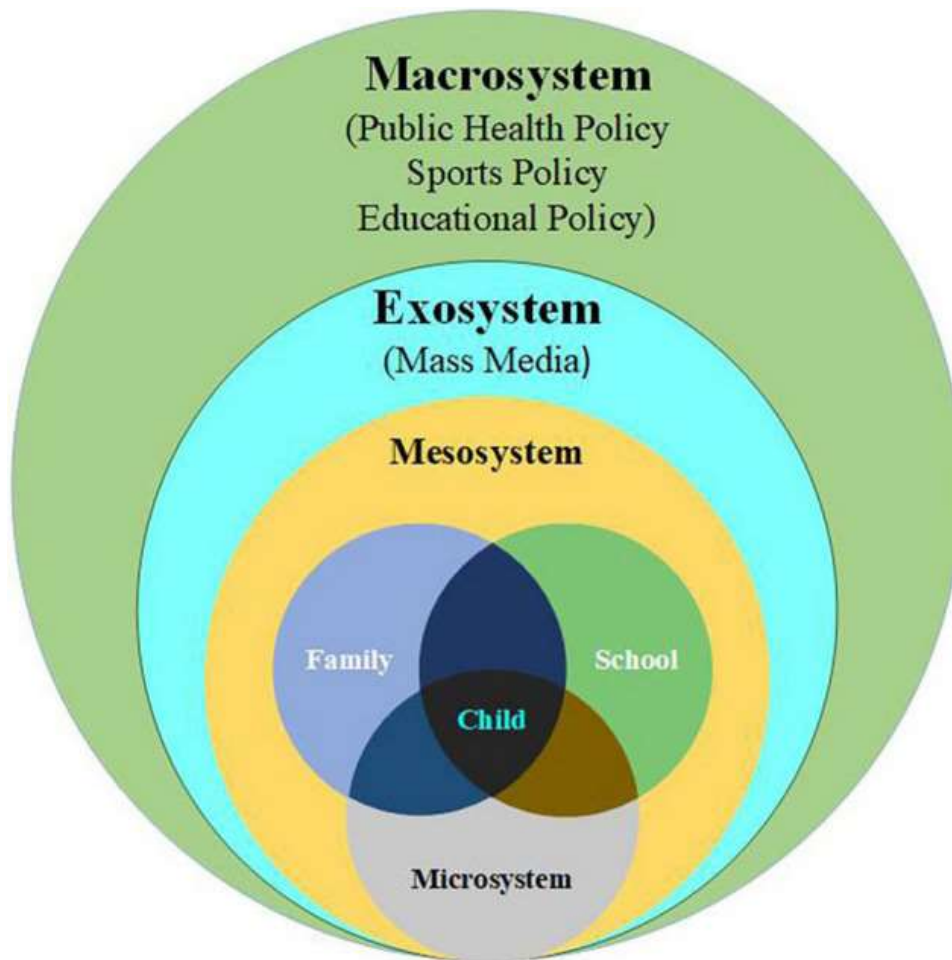
whom they can talk about important matters? Unfortunately, a few students replied “No” to this question.

While some students mention that neither their friends nor their parent reacts in a supportive manner when they need to talk to someone, they are either busy or minimize the situation. Bouts of depression from isolation by being alone to the anxiety of the unknown that stems from this unrest. This intervention deals with change after a loss by focusing on processing emotions and working on their voice.

An ecological system of theory development by Urie Bronfenbrenner offers a framework through which we can see individual relationships in a boarder scope. This theory coincides with the web of life concept of much Native American understanding of how everything is connected. “The Medicine Wheel and other Native American teachings tell us that everything is interconnected. When we make changes and untangle our lives, we need to do so with an understanding of the interconnectedness and natural order” (Wellbriety, 1995).

For instance, in Bronfenbrenner’s theory, there are five distinct types of system relation: Microsystem, Mesosystem, Exosystem, Macrosystem, and Chronosystem to describe links and connections an individual play in a varying degree, and this is important because this understanding offers validity on the influence of an extended web of people. For example, adjusting to a new school can be stressful for students from the reservation. That is why the dorm can be considered a catalyst of support. Similar research findings show that culturally related stressors may impact minority students. Therefore, being near their culture (Language Classes, Native American advisors, or being in class with other Native American Peers may help them cope better with stress and adjustment. For example, in this study, Latinos and Latinas comfort level within an educational setting has been associated with academic difficulty and consideration of withdrawal. (C. Prieto, 2015).

Often this view of interrelatedness from the Native American perspective can extend broadly into nature: animals, insects, birds, trees, and everything that is living or animates, including plants, rocks, water, the sky, and the earth. Each connection we make is spiritual. This theory of interconnectedness emphasizes what the Maori call Wanaka, a word for Sacred Knowledge or a place of learning (The History of Wanaka Website). We relate to each other in a larger scheme, share standards, and greatly influence our health and well-being.



Vis-à-vis this ecological view, the RESPECT model (Aycock, Dawn M., et al., 2017) is proper for those students who think in these terms about clans and broad-group affiliations as well as the dorm and school.

Albeit storytelling is a didactic teaching method, it elicits mental imagery, and because of the value storying has in an Indigenous community, it is at the root of this secondary intervention program. Indigenous view of stories falls in line with what westerner regard as parables. When a point needed to be made, an individual would refer to a “teaching” from an elder. For example, this person would say, “I was told by my grandmother...preceded by the lesson taught.” to share amongst others. “Storied methodologies can help develop rich, locally relevant insights that may better guide culturally responsive understanding in the health experiences, (Caxaj, C. S., 2015).” A delightful story can capture anyone’s attention; however, in Indigenous communities, because of the level of respect earned by the storyteller, it is sacred and welcomed at a deeper level because the story is culturally tied.

While an audience listens to a story told, having an audience member draw while listening to a storyteller can be considered a mindfulness activity. Sketching while listening to a story puts the listener in the present and a zone. Storytelling and sketching are both activities that Indigenous people enjoy doing; in this group, we put them together. During the storytelling, students sketch during this time. Students will sketch the storyteller’s portrait. Indigenous culture eluded many

art forms throughout the ages, from petroglyphs on a rock to pottery etchings housed in tribal communities and museums. Self-expression is a natural and ever-present facet of our life as Indigenous people, and self-expression, as well as cultural expression through art, allows us to enmesh ourselves in our tribal identity. Drawing during storytelling is also a way to assess non-verbal receptive communication. The doodles on paper can be indicative of what the student comprehended. “This is the reason why sketching during learning from text is helpful. Sketching acts like other constructive strategies, such as self-explanation, because it helps learners to identify relevant information and generate inferences; in addition to these general effects, sketching has more specific benefits due to the constructed pictorial representation.” (Scheiter, K et al., 2017)

Student Engagement

In this course, students will explore loss and change through life’s inevitable twists and turns, which wherein lies the beauty. Students will participate in seven sessions of the Weathering Willow Project at a rate of one session per week, regardless of how minor or significant, their belief in change seems. We will use four Native approaches: cleaning ritual through smudge, storytelling, talking circle, and art.

The first three sessions of this unit will ensure that students can listen to an account of Navajo culture from an oral teaching method. The group and storyteller will be given books to read from. And the guest will use the book as a literary anchor to start their conversation about what they learned from the book and how they relate to it. Listening to someone talk about their life elicits valuable sentiment contributing to an overarching lesson because the content conveyed in the story is unique. However, it can resonate with the participant’s background or elders’ teaching before class. The elders (speaker) will remind students what is essential and offer guidance to persevere in today’s times.

The formation of the conceptualization for the Weathering Willows Project is only possible with the involvement of the Indian Country School Counselor Institute (ICSCI) along with the years of support of dormitory staff and students. The availability of NAU resources and the ICSCI classmates and professors were all resourceful and supportive. For example, some think the counselor’s role can be narrowed down to simply talking. However, when listening to others discuss their work setting and stories, their experiences resonated with my understanding of working with schools, staff, and indigenous students. Ultimately, this understanding soon contributed to a healthy and productive discussion about our work with indigenous students, helping this population with emotional-social learning and developing these intertwined concepts from a cultural perspective.

Furthermore, learning from my co-workers through their words and actions is inspiring—the cultural confluence of learning Aaniiih (Plains Tribe) traditional ways meets learning southwestern tribal knowledge and traditional ways and discerning what is acceptable to teach. In these sessions, students will learn a healthy way to cope with change by disclosing their responses to these situations and helping them gain a voice in processing their occurrences. Talking about loss and change can help them navigate a morass of matters to succeed in the ever-

changing and sometimes complex environments: home, school, dorm, their home community, their circle of friends, and the town of Flagstaff.

The first goal is to motivate them by listening to storytellers who read a book and then talk about their lives and how relatives helped them. Meanwhile, students will sketch the person telling the story along with the things they mention in their story. There will be three different storytellers included. This first phase of our curriculum will include forming a listening circle with books on themes of the love of a grandmother. The second book is about a person who struggled yet became a hero by serving their community, and the third and final book is about a young girl discovering why her grandfather passed away. Some relatively short readings serve as a way to create a common experience.

The next phase of the group will be talking in a talking circle where we revisit some of the subject matter in the storytelling. For example, the grandmother is essential in passing down knowledge in many families. Although the grandmother holds much influence in the family, there are other relatives from whom we can seek wisdom and talk about these individuals in the group. The second talking circle will be about the book: "What Does Die Mean? In this session, we will think about the debilitating effect of certain conditions on our health and explore the health of others and what we know about staying healthy.

Students will learn about the Weathering Willow Project from posters in the dorm and emails sent to them and their parents. The groups would be limited to eight students per cohort, with two cohorts planned for the fall and winter months participating in a seven-week curriculum.

The Indigenous Serenity Prayer

We will recite our version of the Serenity Prayer in each closing session. e.g., Today, I pray to the holy ones for peace to accept things I cannot change, bravery, guidance, and protection to change the things I can, and live by my traditional teachings to know the difference.
-Beauty around me. Beauty around me. Beauty around me. Beauty around me.

Session one: Welcoming message: "Okay, it looks like everyone is here; let us start now." Provide the introduction to the *Weathering Willow Project*. "This next two months, we will focus on honoring our relatives. We will also listen to storytellers and learn to listen by drawing. Then we will create a collage of our family, a lesson they taught us, or important things." Ice Breaker: Three Things in Common: Break teams down into 2-3 students, then the teens need to find what three things they have in common. Prize to find the weirdest commonalities than the rest. Please talk about the theme: Allow others to share their experience with loss and change. Let them know to take a photo of their relatives, traditional backgrounds, and quotes that will make it into a collage at the end of the class. Students will get scissors to cut out things from paper to include in their collages. Students will be provided an Etsy artist link to send 50-100 images to have an artist create the collage from them. An Introduction to the idea of smudging with cedar will start each session. Establish group norms, introduce the theme and activities, and remind each participant that we have 10 minutes to share the effect of loss and change in their transition to the dorm. Close with the serenity prayer and mention the activities for the next meeting. Take a *Self-*

Worth Adult Interaction Coping Connections (SWIACC) pretest and Distribute folders with meeting dates and content.

Session two: Welcome students to the class and start with a round of smudging with cedar. Grandma's storyteller #1: *Grandma's dress*. In this session, students will learn about the importance of grandparents and older generations. The student will get a sketchbook and a set of pencils in this session. The facilitator will instruct the students to sketch the storyteller while listening to the story. The guest speaker reads a story and then reflects on their lives related to the book. In these sessions, speakers will impart their knowledge and wisdom by talking about values, i.e., the four sacred mountains, the Coyote story, and the shooting star story. The students will listen and create art based on what they heard, along with essential things that were said. The facilitator will share these pictures with the group in the next session.

Session three: - Storyteller #2: Welcome students to the class and start with a round of smudging with cedar. Students will be given a copy of the last sessions drawing to see what everybody drew. Students will learn about grief and the natural life cycle. The facilitator will read the book "*What Does "Die" Mean? Ha'iisha Oolye Daaztsa? Words*" this book talks about a young girl's curiosity about why her grandfather is no longer around. Then, her grandmother explained how he succumbed to complications of diabetes and passed away. The students will learn about elders' health and health conditions in this session. This learning goal includes learning the process of life through a diagram in which they will draw a portrait of the storyteller and the story's content.

Session Four: – Welcome and smudge to start the class. Students will be given a copy of the last sessions drawing to see what everybody drew. Storyteller #3: Book: *Keeping the Rope Straight: Annie Wauneka's Life Service to the Navajo*. Although obstacles loomed in her path, she still preserved and helped, winning major awards for her service. In this session, the student will learn about overcoming hardship, becoming a leader, and growing up to help their people through Annie Wauneka's Story. The students will continue to sketch what they hear from the storyteller on their drawing pads. Non-verbal expressions will be encouraged for this part of the program.

Session Five: Welcome and smudge to start the class. Students will be given a collection of drawing from the previous class. And for this session, we will talk about social-emotional learning. Introduction to social-emotional learning and what it means from a cultural perspective. The student will learn about holistic health and create a journal. Next, the facilitator will introduce the Ripple Effect program to the students, and we will do one lesson on elders and families. The understanding that family is a source of strength and motivation to do well in school and life. Students will be encouraged to start working on their collage in this session. Students can use images of family, quotes, or cutouts of artistic images they find in magazines to collect and add to their collages.

Sessions Six: Welcome and smudge to start the class. First talking circle. In this session, we will learn about our elders and discuss why their words are powerful. To start, the students will listen to a chapter written in the Wellbriety book that a group of Indigenous elders did and reflect on this and how elders impacted their lives. In closing, talk about journal entries and discuss what

chapter in the Ripple Effect they covered in the assigned playlist: Healthy living. My Story Collage Project

Start the Family Collage: Submit 50-100 jpg file photos to the Etsy link to have an artist create a collage based on the submitted photos.

We are relative to many by blood, clanship, fellowship, natural order, spiritual order, and community, whom all helped us get to this point. Their names and faces are in the confines of our heart. Their expression, wisdom, and way helped me as I journeyed here and now between places. My culture, from family to ancestors, is all of this and more that I represent when it defines my purpose.

Sessions Seven: Welcome and smudge to start the class. Second talking circle. In this session, we will discuss personal health and living a healthy life. Talk about journal entries and discuss what chapter in the Ripple Effect they covered in the assigned playlist on Grief. Talk about how far along they are in their collages.

Sessions Eight: Graduation event. Students will complete the SWIAAAC posttest. Students get certificates of completion. Eat at Olive Garden as a group. Students will report a mood check for 2 PBIS rewards programs.

Student Assessment

There will be one formal assessment and three informal assessments to evaluate this curriculum. Students will be given the pre-and post-test of the Self Worth, Adult Interaction, Coping Connections (SWIAAC) questionnaire. This is a brief assessment of their connection to others for support. Support is rated 1-5 on a Likert scale of yes, no, or sometimes from their relatives, another caring adult, or friends. Students then complete five questions about their group experience. I would like to see the students benefit from participating in this group by gaining more confidence and being more knowledgeable about their families in the context of their culture. Knowing more about themselves, in turn, connects them to other supportive adults in the dorm or school because of the Clan System. Nearly every year, the Navajo Curriculum Committee provides opportunities to teach students how to understand family. When students transfer to Flagstaff Bordertown Dormitory, they forfeit life in their community. Participating in a group of peers who have all gone through a similar experience can help with the transition. This process is important because the Covid-19 effect is widespread, and this intervention can help mitigate mental health issues while they are not at home. The issues related to loss and change in the family.

The Weathering Willows Project has four Indigenous components to assess or to also ensure the effectiveness of the program.

1. Smudging with cedar is a ceremonial way to clean. For each lesson, the group will smudge with medicine. Students will learn to take the time for themselves to pray.
2. Storytelling is a way to learn from an Indigenous approach. Auditory listening is a concrete learning strategy to retain teaching (lesson). By listening to others talk about their life, students will learn about empathy and the value of respect. Per the books, the student will learn three themed lessons: respecting grandparents or elders, learning about health and mortality, and learning about leadership.

3. Sketching allows the listener to focus on the present, regulating their emotions by focusing on two things the story being told and the creative process taking place on their sketch pads. This is a mindfulness activity that students passively engage in to demonstrate visual-spatial, non-verbal comprehension. When the students get the mini-collage back, the students will learn about how different perspectives can form the same experience.
4. The final project is the collage-making that reflects on their family and traditions. Native Students will be able to take honor whom they are related to and use the guidance to visualize their assembly of influential people and the value of these people's spoken encouragement.

Resources

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