

**Incorporating Environmental Awareness and Protection in Teaching English Language
Arts to Second Graders**

Cindy C. Severino

Culturally Responsive Schooling Within Indigenous Communities

Professional Development Program 2023

Author Note:

Cindy C. Severino is a Grade School teacher at Moencopi Day School. Correspondence about this practice guide can be addressed to Cindy C. Severino at Moencopi Day School, 322 Highway 264, Tuba City Arizona 86045
Email Address: cindyseverino75@gmail.com

Context / Introduction

At present, I am teaching second grade at Moencopi Day School in Tuba City, Arizona. Having spent 15 out of 27 years of my teaching life in the Philippines in the second grade made me more confident to accept the challenge of handling this grade level.

Moencopi Day School is a community grant school located in the village of Moenkopi, on the Hopi Reservation. It is the westernmost village of the twelve villages that comprise the Hopi Tribe across First, Second and Third Mesas. It serves students in K-6th grades from the Upper and Lower Moencopi Villages, Coalmine Mesa, which is approximately 10 miles east of the school, and from the Tuba City area, with an enrolment of 96 students for SY 2022-2023. According to R. Tollefson (personal communication, June 13, 2023), for many years, lack of housing, lack of consistency of a CSA (Chief School Administrator), lack of certified teaching staff, lack of certified bus drivers and its location from Hopi service have been among the major challenges that the school community is facing.

In the second grade where I teach, English Language Arts and Math are the main subjects. English Language Arts (ELA) focuses in Phonics, Reading, Grammar and Writing which hit the competencies in informational text, reading comprehension and spelling. Meanwhile, Math includes algebraic thinking, numbers in base ten, fundamental operations, geometry and measurement and data. Activities and daily routines vary depending on which strategies work best for a particular topic or lesson. In the list of competencies that need to be targeted, none of which speak about the native Americans' culture nor practices that show their culture. The curriculum used is one that points to generalities, not the way of how native Americans live. And though the students get to know more about their roots and language because they have a Culture class, this may not be sufficient for them to have an in-depth understanding of how to live out that particular way of life which their respective clans expect of them. The Culture class also focuses on Hopi language, setting aside the Navajo language.

I do believe that our world is made up of diverse beings and cultures. Recognizing that there is a large amount of cultures that exist, respecting each other's differences, acknowledging that all cultural expressions are valid, and valuing what cultures have to bring to the table are the essentials in understanding what culture really means (Nair, 2022).

Being in a Native American Indian grant school in the Hopi reservation is both a blessing and a great challenge for a Philippine teacher like myself. Though the school where I am employed is in the Hopi land, 60 % of the students are Navajo while 40 % are Hopi. Both Hopi and Navajo students belong to different clans and have different language. There are also specific practices that show and depict their own distinct culture. The practices that they have are greatly connected to the land where they are living. The dances either ask for blessings for the coming season or celebrate events or seasonal changes. They also promote community interaction and meditation which are deeply rooted on the bounty that they get from the Earth. However, the beliefs that they have need to be known and understood for foreign teachers like myself to be able to make classroom preparations and student engagement more relevant and meaningful for the learners. Students learn best when the lessons and activities speak of what they know, believe and practice. And I, as an educator, have to make sure that as they perform their daily roles in

their respective communities, they also take into consideration the importance of environmental care and protection.

Rationale

In this unit, environmental care and protection will be incorporated in the daily lessons of English Language Arts, particularly in the lesson about verbs, to make the students aware of the importance of taking care of the planet as they interact with their immediate home and school community and as they perform their rituals, dances and practices. Environmental care and nurturance should be a common base point for everyone, whatever culture, belief and practices a person has or to whatever clan he or she belongs. And though the second graders, considering that they come from different communities and clans, also have different languages. However, the things that they do daily at home and in school, which directly or indirectly affect the environment can be their common way of expressing their care and concern for their 'common home', the earth. In performing daily obligations, it is most of the time the environment which is abused, taken for granted and neglected. Communities can only be empowered if people live in a safe, green and clean environment. The more people take care of our environment, the more the environment becomes a habitable home (Courier, 2021). Alongside that, it is a universal understanding that life is sacred and it comes from the land, which means to say that Mother Earth is divine. Native Americans operate under the conviction that all objects and elements of the Earth-both living and nonliving-have an individual spirit that is part of the greater soul of the universe (Faust, 2019). In addition, Professor Bryan Brayboy in 2023, stressed that in the indigenous knowledge systems, cosmology reminds us of our origin. And as such, the land is not only the place where we live but most importantly, a living memory and a lived experience that tell stories of our relationships with other living and nonliving components.

Native Americans live for and with the land. For them, it is not just a piece of land but also a sacred space where they nourish their bodies and souls from conception to birth. Throughout their long histories, American Indian people have thrived on, respected, and protected the environment that make up their homelands. And, being good stewards of the environment remains important to American Indians up to this day (Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian, n.d.-b). Land acknowledgement is a traditional custom way back centuries in many native communities. Today, it is used by both natives and non-natives to recognize the indigenous people who now live on the lands. Fasting, singing, praying in the ancient languages and engaging in ceremony are common practices that native Americans do to show their relationship and being one with nature. These practices also depict endurance in times of suffering, respect and non-interference with others to avoid dispute (Wikipedia). In the Hopi cultural presentations, the Kachinas, whether in the form of dolls and masked dancers, represent the spirit of everything from plants to animals to ancestors and sacred places. The snake dance is performed by the dancers by carrying a snake in his mouth and the other to distract the snake with an eagle feather. They also have the butterfly dance, corn dance, buffalo dance. Aside from showing an innate and respectable respect for oneself, and making them a traditional tool for teaching the Navajo dances and rituals, they also show a connection to their surroundings and nature, a means to continue a community and sense of culture.

Since all the resources come from nature, everything that people do involves nature. It is therefore very important to note that in performing these ceremonies and everyday activities, nature must be considered, whether that thing is done on green (land) or in blue spaces (water). And, considering that children in school, especially those in the primary grades, learn best by doing, they should be trained to do things that protect the environment. Letting them do things that protect the environment will help them create a lifelong relationship with the things in their surroundings and become proactive in caring for the Earth which provide them and all people their needs. Hence, in the parts in this unit that follow are examples of activities that educators can use to incorporate environmental care in their daily English language Arts lessons. Although all information is communication and not an abstract system of bits and bytes, but a means by which people interact (Language/Action Perspective, Wikipedia), language is also embodied action—we do things through and with it (National Council of Teachers of English, 2023).

Topic Summary

It is important for the students and their families to understand that the rituals and practices that they have can affect the bigger community in general. As a primary grade educator, it would be helpful to incorporate environmental awareness and protection in the students' lesson together with telling a story or recounting an experience and identifying real-life connections between the words and their use. These activities can also become part of the performance tasks that students can perform as authentic assessments such as making compost pits, upcycling and recycling to recycle biodegradable materials. Authentic assessments evaluate whether a student can transfer the knowledge and skills gained in the classroom over a certain period of time (Authentic Assessment/Institute for Teaching Excellence, n.d). These assessments do not only build and sustain relationships with the people around them but also with the land where they live.

Prior to incorporating environmental awareness and protection to the lesson on verbs, a preliminary lesson on 5Rs and minimizing the waste of useful materials was given to the students during the discussion on nouns. This would prepare them to understand deeply the discussion on the things that they can do to help save and protect the environment. 5Rs include reuse, reduce, recycle, repair and recover. These are the things that the students and their respective families are expected to do with their household materials so that nothing goes to waste.

To make the curriculum practice guide relevant to the lives of the learners as well as their respective communities and clans and aligned with the teaching standards, several steps were taken. Then, second grade Arizona standards of English Language Arts where the topic on environmental awareness and protection can be incorporated were identified. This was done by going over the Arizona's English Language Arts 2nd Grade standards and competencies. The following competencies were identified:

Language standards: Conventions of Standard English

d. Form and use the past, present, and future tenses of frequently occurring regular and irregular verbs (e.g. sat, hit, and told)

Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas

2.SL.4 Tell a story or recount an experience with appropriate facts and relevant, descriptive details, speaking audibly in coherent sentences

Vocabulary Acquisition and Use

2.L.5 Identify real-life connections between words and their use

Next, a student engagement plan through a lesson plan was made to show how the topic on environmental awareness and protection is incorporated in the lesson on verbs, together with telling a story or recounting an experience with appropriate and relevant facts, and identifying real-life connections between words and their use. The appropriateness of the activities to the intended students is being considered to make sure that they are easy to understand and do. In this manner, the activities become meaningful to the students since they are able to contextualize them in their day-to-day living. The students should already have prior knowledge on verbs so that an in-depth discussion on environmental awareness and protection can be emphasized. In this part a short discussion on the environmental principles will be presented. The students also share in class the things that they do at home and in school that make use of the Earth's resources, thus directly or indirectly affecting the environment.

Finally, a set of examples and activities on environmental awareness and protection were made. These examples and activities were incorporated in the lesson on verbs, story-telling or recounting an experience with appropriate facts and relevant, descriptive details and identifying real-life connections between words and their use. These examples and activities are the best practices done by students and families in many schools not only in the Philippines but also in the different parts of the world. These best practices are also endorsed by many environmental experts and advocates all over the world.

To assess their understanding, the students, together with their guardians or parents will fill out or accomplish an EEP (Environmental Education Program) self-monitoring checklist so they can keep track of their commitment to help conserve the resources and preserve the environment.

Timeline:

Task 1:

The topic on the 5Rs and minimizing the waste of useful materials is incorporated in the discussion of the lesson on verbs. The main purpose of this is to allow the students to deeply understand the importance of environmental awareness and protection.

Task 2:

The second grade Arizona standards of English Language Arts where the topic on environmental awareness and protection can be incorporated were identified. This was done by going over the Arizona's English Language Arts 2nd Grade standards and competencies.

Task 3:

A student engagement plan through a lesson plan was made to show how the topic on environmental awareness and protection is incorporated in the lesson on verbs, together with

telling a story or recounting an experience with appropriate and relevant facts, and identifying real-life connections between words and their use.

Task 4:

A set of examples and activities on environmental awareness and protection were made. These examples and activities were incorporated in the lesson on verbs, story-telling or recounting an experience with appropriate facts and relevant, descriptive details and identifying real-life connections between words and their use.

Task 5:

The students accomplish or fill out the self-monitoring checklist so they can keep track of their commitment to help conserve the Earth's resources and preserve the environment.

Student Engagement

Language is essential for an effective classroom interaction. It promotes communication, participation, mental development, good relationship, vocabulary building, easy content learning and critical thinking. As a teacher, I can use language effectively by creating an engaging and inclusive learning environment that supports students' academic and social growth and increase their performance. Through the lessons and assessments, both the teacher and students can emphasize the richness and precision of expression for effective storytelling and the ability to convey intricate ideas and emotions. It also allows both the teacher and students to deepen cultural knowledge and understanding, thus enabling them to explore and appreciate cultural heritage, literature, traditions and values and in the end preserving cultural identity and fostering intercultural understanding.

In this lesson plan, all the necessary learning objectives, skills, values and attitudes are laid out, including the essential question and resources herein. These things are presented to the class before the formal start of the lesson so the students become aware of the goals and objectives and hopefully, will allow them to go back to these things when everything is done so that they are able to check whether the class has been a success. The lesson starts with the engage part which will motivate them to appreciate that the earth is indeed worth caring for and think of ways of how to make it a better place to live in. In this part, the students express, in their own language and artistry, an analysis of their rituals and what they practice at home that they consider ways of making the earth a habitable home. Second is the explore part, where the main lesson comes to life. In this part, the teacher and students point out the verbs (past, present and future tenses of frequently occurring verbs and irregular verbs) and expound on those that they do that make the earth a better place to live in. Here, the students can deepen the understanding of how their native language can serve as a foundation for learning additional language since they will be asked to use terms in their own native language and then the class translates the terms used into the English

language, which is the common language for everybody in the class. Third is the explain part, where the students verbalize specific actions that human beings do that badly affect the earth and deplete its resources, after watching the video “Man”. After doing such, they evaluate their practices and rituals as to whether these also badly affect the environment. They also identify which of these practices and ceremonies are ideal for the environment or those that help save and conserve the earth’s resources. To help them validate their responses, they then engage in deep analysis by getting to know the environmental principles. Then, in the next parts, elaborate and evaluate, the students immerse themselves in real-life applications. They tell stories and recount experiences about their own practices and ceremonies at home that help save and conserve the earth’s resources. This time, this is done in a much smaller group, ideally, in a dyad where they get to express their own life stories in a more relaxed way. They use this opportunity not only to tell about what they do at home as a Hopi or Navajo but also to demonstrate their ways of life in whatever clan they belong. To further validate their claim about the environmental practices that they have, the students, together with their parents or guardians, accomplish the EEP (Environmental Education Program) self-monitoring checklist online once every week for a duration of 9 weeks.

Lesson Plan

English Language Arts 2 Lesson Plan

Learning Objectives:

Within the given period, the students will be able to:

- form and use the past, present, and future tenses of frequently occurring regular and irregular verbs by pointing out the activities that they do that show environmental care and nurturance
- tell stories or recount experiences about their own practices at home that help save and conserve the Earth’s resources
- identify real-life connections between the ideal environmental practices and the activities that they do at home and in school that help save and conserve the Earth’s resources

Skills:

- forming and using the past, present, and future tenses of frequently occurring regular and irregular verbs
- telling a story or recounting an experience showing practices and activities that help save and conserve the Earth’s resources
- identifying real-life connections between the ideal environmental practices and the activities that they do at home and in school that help save and conserve the Earth’s resources

Attitude:

- loving and caring towards the environment

Values:

- environmental care and nurturance
- stewardship

Essential Question:

How can our actions affect the environment?

Learning Materials/Resources:

PowerPoint presentation about the lesson

Song “What a Wonderful World”

Video clip “Man”

Teaching-Learning Experiences:

A. Engage

1. The students sing the song “What a Wonderful World”.
2. The teacher asks the following questions:
 - What makes our world wonderful?
 - What do you do to make our world a wonderful place to live in?
 - *The students are expected to enumerate the things that they do at home and in school that make the world a better place to live in. (ex. sweeping the ground, putting the trash in the bin, keeping things in order, turning off the faucet when not in use, etc.)
3. The students take note of the action words that are used to describe the things that they do to make the Earth a better place to live.

B. Explore

4. The students review the lesson on verbs: past, present and future tenses of frequently occurring regular and irregular verbs
5. They point out action words that they previously mentioned to describe the things that they do to make the Earth a better place to live.
 - Ask: Which of these actions did you do before? (past)
 - Which of these actions are you still doing? (present)
 - What other things are you planning to do? (future)

Note; *Students are encouraged to use terms in their own native language and the class translates the words into English language.*

C. Explain

6. The class watches a short video clip “Man” by Steve Cutts
7. The students explain what they see and understand in the video shown. They also tell the problem presented in the story. They point out specific actions that human beings do that badly affect the Earth and deplete its resources.
 - Ask: Which of these actions presented in the video have you already done?
 - Are the things that you have done good for the environment? Why or why not?
 - *The students identify which of the real-life practices and ceremonies are ideal for the environment or those that help save and conserve the earth’s resources.
8. The students get to know the Environmental Principles
 - Nature knows best.
 - All forms of life are important.
 - Everything is connected to everything else.
 - Everything changes.
 - Everything must go somewhere.
 - Ours is a finite Earth.
 - Nature is beautiful and we are stewards of God’s creations.

D. Elaborate

9. The students tell stories or recount experiences about their own practices at home that help save and conserve the Earth's resources.

They answer the *essential question*: How can our actions affect the environment?

10. Buzz Session: The students share with a partner (dyad) the real-life connections between the ideal environmental practices and the activities that they do at home and in school that help save and conserve the Earth's resources.

E. Evaluate

11. The students accomplish the EEP (Environmental Education Program) self-monitoring checklist to find out the activities that they adopt at home that show environmental care and protection.

Ex. **Segregate** biodegradable from non-biodegradable materials

Compost biodegradable materials

Recycle plastic bottles and containers

Upcycle reusable materials

Hike or bike in going to places with short distances

Application to Real Life Situation:

Our daily activities and actions can greatly affect the condition of the environment. We should always be mindful of our **actions** in everything that we do so that the Earth can continue supporting human life.

Assessment

Shaped by their distinct histories, cultures and experiences, indigenous peoples and native Americans are specific and unique in several ways. They have a deep connection to their ancestral land and environment. Their cultural, spiritual, and economic practices are often rooted in a profound understanding of the land, its resources and the interdependence between humans and nature. Indigenous peoples and native Americans encompass an array of distinct cultures, languages, traditions and belief systems. However, they also have faced and continue to face a range of challenges, including colonization, displacement, forced assimilation, loss of land and resources and cultural erasure. Their experience of resilience, resistance and survival in the face of these challenges have shaped their unique perspectives and struggles. That is why, they often assert their rights to self-determination, sovereignty and self-governance and most communities have distinct political structures and decision-making processes that are designed to protect their well-being. They have a strong emphasis on oral tradition, storytelling, and intergenerational knowledge and cultural wisdom, passing down their teachings and experiences to younger generations which contributes to the preservation of their language, histories and worldviews.

As reflected in the student engagement part, an environmental education self-monitoring checklist will be provided for the students to fill out. This will be done once per week for a period of one quarter and preferably to be administered towards the end of the school year. The longevity of the checklist will be strictly monitored by the teacher to establish consistency of the responses. The parents or guardians will assist the students in filling out and checking the activities done by the students' respective families since it is understandable that the second

<p><i>tša'qapta,</i> <i>inpihoya</i> (Hopi) <i>utensils-tša'</i> (Navajo) <i>aaku</i> (Hopi)</p>									
<p>2. shops with reusable tools instead of making more garbage with plastic bags. <i>garbage-ts'iilzéí</i> (Navajo) <i>mötsikvu</i> (Hopi) <i>plastic-tó doo bináká nílíní</i> (Navajo) <i>bag-momokpi,</i> <i>tutuventatangpi</i> (Hopi)</p>									
<p>3. buys items not packed in throw-away plastics.</p>									
<p>4. composts food scraps to return nutrients to the soil, promote plant growth and reduce greenhouse gas emissions. <i>soil-Łeezh</i> (Navajo) <i>tutskwa</i> (Hopi) <i>plant growth-ch'il</i> (Navajo-plant only) <i>uuyi wungwa</i> (Hopi)</p>									
<p>5. reuses old notebooks and/or school materials</p>									
Be Best—Waste Less									
<p>6. I shut off lights and electronics when they're not in use (such as television, computer, tablet, cellphone) to conserve energy. <i>shut off lights-</i> (Navajo) <i>qöohit tookya'a</i> (Hopi)</p>									
<p>7. I take quick showers and turn off the faucet while brushing teeth to save water. <i>quick showers-taa'adigiis</i> (Navajo) <i>pisok naavahoma</i> or <i>sunaqvahoma.</i> (Hopi)</p>									

8. I dry clothes and towels naturally to make helping the planet a breeze. <i>planet-jóhonaa' éí yináádáígíí</i> (Navajo) <i>tutskwa</i> or <i>tuuwaqatsi</i> (Hopi)									
Urban Gardening									
My family...									
9. uses space at home/in school to grow plants. <i>home-hooghan</i> (Navajo) <i>kihu</i> (Hopi) <i>school-ólta'</i> (Navajo) <i>tutuqayki</i> (Hopi)									
10. puts our plants in a place where they can get sunlight. <i>plants-ch'il</i> (Navajo) <i>uuyi</i> (Hopi) <i>sunlight-sháńdíín</i> (Navajo) <i>taavi</i> (Hopi)									
11. digs to loosen the soil where our plants grow.									
12. takes out the weeds that grow around our plants.									
13. protects our plants from stray animals. <i>protects our plants-bich'ááh</i> <i>naaghá ch'il</i> (Navajo) <i>nakwapnani</i> (Hopi) <i>uuyit tuuwala- aw</i> <i>tunatyawta</i> (caring for our plants)									

After 9 weeks, when the monitoring checklist has been completed, the responses will then be collated. The students as well as their respective families will be informed of the results and a follow-up action will be done.

Resources/References/Bibliography

Online Sources:

Courier, C. (2021, May 26). Why we should take care of our environment. *Coastal Courier*. <https://coastalcourier.com/news/why-we-should-take-care-our-environment/>

Faust, M. (2019, May 20). *Nature's role in American Indian Culture - Faust Gallery*. Faust Gallery. <https://www.faustgallery.com/natures-role-in-american-indian-culture/#:~:text=The%20world%20and%20its%20natural,Mother%20Earth%20is%20also%20divine>

Language/Action Perspective. Wikipedia. <https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki>

Nair, M. (2022). What is cultural diversity and why is it important? *University of the People*. <https://www.uopeople.edu/blog/what-is-cultural-diversity/#:~:text=Cultural%20Diversity%20%E2%80%93%20Defined&text=Recognizing%20that%20there%20is%20a,to%20bring%20to%20the%20table>

Statement on Language, Power and Action, National Council of Teachers of English, c1998-2023, cccc.ncte.org.

Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian. (n.d.). *American Indian responses to environmental challenges*. <https://americanindian.si.edu/environment/#:~:text=Throughout%20their%20long%20histories%2C%20American,communities%20are%20making%20a%20difference>

Authentic Assessment | Institute for Teaching Excellence
(n.d.). <https://www.njit.edu/ite/authentic-assessment>

<https://www.azed.gov/sites/default/files/2016/12/ELA%202016%20Final%202nd%20Grade.pdf?id=585aa8a3aadebe12481b8435> (Arizona Department of Education: Arizona's English Language Arts Standards-2nd Grade)

Foundation for the Philippine Environment - Researches - Ecology - Starting with the basics: Ecology defined. (n.d.). <https://fpe.ph/ecology.html/view/starting-with-the-basics-ecology-defined/all/0>

Online Videos:

What A Wonderful World - Louis Armstrong - Lyric Video [Video].
YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p-T6aaRV9HY>

Steve Cutts. (2012, December 21). *Man* [Video].
YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WfGMYdalCIU>

Brayboy video, Indigenous Knowledge Systems.mp4. (n.d.). [Video]. Google

Docs. <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1vKepl5srHHTKp2xovkzzH3U6EdzFqszg/view?usp=sharing>

Textbook:

Galang, AP. 2003. Seven lenses or environmental principles as if adults mattered. Makati City, Philippines: The Bookmark, Inc.