

# Indigenous Ways of Knowing

By Evangeline Warwick

Institute for Native Educators

Indian Community School Leadership

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## Context

*Shi Evangeline Warwick gonzee, shi Tugain nshii, shi Chilwozh gonshlji, shi The University of Arizona yu óltag, shi Theodore Roosevelt School na'izlig.*

My name is Evangeline Warwick, I am from the White-Water Clan, I live in Whiteriver, I went to school at The University of Arizona, and I work at Theodore Roosevelt School. I am an Apache Educator. I have had a lifetime of experience in education from daycare to college. I am a mother, grandmother, great grandmother, sister, aunt, and many more family titles. My greatest experience is being a grandmother and great grandmother, there is no other experience that tops being called grandma, shiwóyé.

Theodore Roosevelt School is a tribally controlled school on the Fort Apache Indian Reservation in Northeastern Arizona. The students I serve are from the surrounding areas on our reservation. Theodore Roosevelt School has dormitory facilities that are run by the Bureau of Indian Affairs. Theodore Roosevelt often has tribal members who attend the school from Phoenix or Tucson.

Theodore Roosevelt is a middle school serving grades six through eight with a limit of one hundred fifty students or fifty per grade. The school has a cap on student enrollment because it is an old school, one hundred years old, and the classroom can only accommodate twenty-five students.

Theodore Roosevelt is at historic Fort Apache about five miles south of Whiteriver, Arizona. The school is open to all students on the Apache reservation, but enrollment is limited, and acceptance is determined on a first-come basis according to open enrollment guidelines. Each year Theodore Roosevelt has a waiting list and attendance rates are over ninety percent.

Fort Apache is my community. I was born in Fort Apache, but my parents moved away to go to college. In addition to growing up and coming back to Fort Apache, I have lived in Kentucky, Texas, and New Mexico. I left the reservation at three years old speaking Apache and returned at ten years old with a hillbilly-Texan accent and was no longer speaking Apache. After returning to the Apache Reservation, I finished fourth through twelfth grades at home then left for college.

After two years of college, I returned home, married, and had my second son. I started working as a teaching assistant at a junior high school. After working for two years, I wanted to return to college because I witnessed teachers calling our students dumb and stupid. I knew I could do a better job. After twenty -years of working and going back to college many times I completed college and taught at our local high school.

The positions I have held are teaching assistant, Head Start teacher, Day Care Director, Tribal Youth Council Coordinator, Girls Camp Director, Tribal Scholarship Coordinator, certified English Teacher, Counselor for Higher Education, Apache Language Teacher, GED teacher for NPC, & Upward Bound teacher for NAU (Northern Arizona University). After many years of teaching, I decided I could make an even greater impact by becoming an administrator. Through an opportunity that came about, I took advantage and went back to school to receive my educational leadership degree and certification. After becoming an administrator, I held the position of Assistant Principal, Educational Specialist-Reading Coach, Principal-Elementary School, Academic Coach, Substitute teacher, Apache Language Curriculum Developer, and now Assistant Principal.

My vision and passion is to update my knowledge of Indigenous knowledge systems and culturally relevant schools to further research what works for our Indigenous students. I want to produce a guide for teachers and teaching assistants on ideas, websites, and information for professional development for all staff members at my school.

## **Rationale**

I selected “Indigenous Ways of Knowing” as this leadership practice guide because Indigenous ways of knowing are based on Indigenous teaching, sharing, and language. This is important to our communities because too many times we get a “cookie cutter curriculum” that may go against established Indigenous belief systems. To fully implement culturally responsive schooling Indigenous schools and communities must go back to our natural belief systems, teaching, and the use of more of our language with our students. Often traditional or westernized learning systems take students far away from what already was in place at the onset of our cultural being. Through this leadership practice guide, I want to remind our students what was a vital part of our living and survival.

A significant part of this leadership practice guide's intent is providing guidance and advice for educators that educate Apache students on the Apache Nation. As with most cultural significant learning, we learn best from information in our backyard or community. This leadership practice guide will focus on the “Apache Do’s and Don'ts Etiquette List” to use as a guide toward Ways of Knowing.

This topic is important to culturally responsive leadership in primarily Indigenous Apache communities because many of our students are no longer taught traditional ways of learning both at home and school. Most of the materials that Indigenous students are taught with at school

has extraordinarily little, often one page or less or even as simple as a paragraph about Indigenous people, let alone their own tribe.

In addition, a growing issue amongst Indigenous students are societal and family influences such as behavioral issues, dysfunctional home lives, substandard housing, and students who are living in conditions below the poverty level. Our Indigenous schools have a responsibility to help our students survive in a positive way. Knowing the Indigenous ways of knowing can help everyone that surrounds and impacts Apache students understand how to help each student learn about their culture and the cultural norms of the Apache Way!

This topic is dear to me because I lived a generous portion of my childhood off the reservation and lost my language. As a result, it is my passion to re-engage our schools with the responsibility alongside the parents and community, in restoring the language and teaching the traditional way of knowing.

As an anecdote to this leadership practice guide, I will share a recent experience that involves the Indigenous way of knowing. Recently, I attended a traditional ceremony. At the ceremony's close, an extra ceremony was performed to remove and put away the traditional head gear of our Mountain Spirit Dancers. Preparations were made for the head gear to be put away. Head gear is meant for only that one puberty ceremony. A tarp was laid on the ground, each dancer had to put his head gear down in a particular place to be blessed by those who wanted to bless the head gear. The water drums from the dance were also placed to the side with their homemade drumsticks. These instruments were also blessed. Each dancer stood at the top of his head gear along with the other regalia, bells, eagle feathers, his skirt, his moccasins, his dancing sticks, and pine tree branches. The last dancer, called the clown, went through the crowd asking all to stand. Everyone stood and the regalia, crowns, and dancers were blessed with yellow pollen, first by the men and then the women. Everyone had to take off any hats, if worn, eyewear, and women had to remove their, earrings, necklaces, and anything bold and shiny. After the blessing, the medicine men and the singers began to sing with the water drums and drumsticks. They would sing four songs.

When the drumming and singing began, we were blessed by those who prayed and blessed by the songs. The drums beat in unison, and everyone was mesmerized by the drums and the singing. Our hearts beat together, we all danced together. The dancers picked up the crowns and danced around in the circle blessing us again. The crowns were just held by the faces of the dancers. It is a feeling you only get a few times in your life and is so lifting and joyful. This happened for four songs and the ceremony was over. This is the feeling I want for our students when they are at school. Proud of our culture, proud of our ceremonies and proud of our language. Indigenous students should be learning with all their senses, feeling good about themselves and their tribe and especially their culture and language. I want our Apache students

to feel and learn more about ourselves and the world around us. The beat of the drum and the beat of our heart, a natural connection to the Indigenous way of knowing!



**(White Mountain Apache Crown Dancers, Mountain Spirit Dancers, my dad in the middle, my sons and my nephews. At the Grand Canyon)**

### **Topic Summary**

Indigenous people throughout the world have sustained their unique worldviews and associated knowledge systems for millennia, even while undergoing major social upheavals as a result transformative forces beyond their control. Many of the core values, beliefs and practices associated with those worldviews have survived and are beginning to be recognized as having an adaptive integrity that is valid for today's generations as it was for generations past. The depth of Indigenous knowledge rooted in the long inhabitation of a particular place offers lessons that can benefit everyone, from educators to scientist, as we search for a more satisfying and sustainable way to live on this planet.

Early literature on Indigenous education, much of it authored by non-Indigenous scholars, often aimed to encourage Native people to adopt a Western worldview (Darnell, Orvik, and Barnhardt, 1974). While Native people may indeed benefit from understanding Western society, it is essential that they retain their own knowledge and the unique ways they have come to know it. Original approaches are emerging that deepen our understanding of the relationship between Indigenous ways of knowing and those found in Western society and formal education systems.

Indigenous people have had their own way of looking at and relating to the world, the universe, and to each other (Ascher, 2002; Eglash, 2002). Their traditional education processes were carefully constructed around observing natural processes, adapting modes of survival, obtaining sustenance from the plants and animal world, and using natural materials to make their tools and implements. All of this was made understandable through demonstration and observation accompanied by thoughtful stories in which the lessons were embedded (Kawagley 1995; Cajete 2000).

To bring significance to learning Indigenous setting, the explanations of natural phenomena are best understood by students if they are cast first in Indigenous terms to which they are familiar and then explain in western terms. All learning can start with what the student and community already know and have experienced in everyday life. The Indigenous student will then become more motivated to learn when the subject matter is based on something useful and suitable to the livelihood of the community and is presented in a way that reflects a familiar world view (Kawagley 1995; Lipka 1998; Battiste 2002).

It is the diversity and dynamics of Indigenous societies that enrich our efforts as we seek avenues to integrate Indigenous knowledge systems in a complementary way with the system of education, we call schooling.

## **Implementation Plan**

In this leadership practice guide pertaining to the etiquette of Apache Do's and Don'ts, there will be four Do's and four Don'ts to describe Indigenous ways of knowing. The focus of the guidelines for Indigenous knowing shall demonstrate how one conducts themselves and relates the ways of knowing to others.

### **ETIQUETTE OF APACHE DO'S AND DON'TS**

#### **By White Mountain Apache Elder Group**

##### **Apache Do's**

Rise early with the sun and pray,

Work.  
Pray as often as possible.  
Share.  
Be friendly and courteous.  
Communicate.  
Respect people—the elderly, in-laws, ceremonies, mother nature and the deceased.  
Maintain language and culture in teaching children.  
Tell stories in the winter.  
Help one another.  
Wear white or red bead if you are female.  
Wear blue or black bead if you are a male.  
Pray when you are digging up herbs and plants.  
Feed family.  
Keep your home clean.  
Advise children of life.  
Use correct term names.  
Encourage others.  
Give thanks.  
Learn about clans.  
Marry outside your clan.  
Obey rules (children).  
Forgive.  
Stay sober.  
Plant, corn, beans, squash, and sugar cane.  
Take care of pets and animals.

### **Apache Don'ts**

Stare.  
Point.  
Whistle at night.  
Gossip.  
Be unkind.  
Be destructive.  
Misuse words when angry.  
Waste food.  
Panic.  
Make fun of people.  
Make fun of deer.  
Push another person.

Spit on people.  
Bump people on purpose.  
Step over people.  
Argue.  
Marry in same clan.  
Threaten people.  
Act smart and snobbish.  
Use facial makeup.  
Chew on fingernails.  
Get drunk.  
Lie.  
Steal.  
Touch physically unnecessarily.  
Plan.  
Make fun of traditions.  
Pull another person's hair.  
Be jealous.  
Kick.  
Count the stars.  
Make faces.  
Be Lazy.

Bother with things you do not know about, especially crown dancers.  
Apache females do NOT participate in sweat hut ceremonies.

The following explanations summarize the “Dos” of Indigenous ways of knowing

***Rise early with the sun and pray.*** This is quite common in many Indigenous ways of knowing.

***Maintain language and culture in teaching children.*** Language is the foundation of our traditions because many ceremonies are only conducted in our Indigenous language. Our children are an extension of the parents and their families, so one of the most important teachings is to learn our languages.

***Advise children about life.*** All the most critical teaching for children needs to come from the parents and family. In our traditions we are taught to pray, in ceremony prayer is always conducted in the Indigenous language. That is why it is important for



students to learn the language so they can understand and say their own in their language, if not taught by family.

***Every Indigenous group is taught to be friendly and courteous.*** When visitors come to your home you welcome them in and share food and a drink with them. If they ask for assistance with other matters, you help as much as possible. This is how we were taught by the elders. We strive for peace among all people, so our belief is to be friendly and courteous.

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The following are explanations of the “don’ts” of Indigenous knowing systems.

***Be unkind.*** This is common for all races, be kind and treat others with respect.

***Don’t Make fun of deer.*** All Indigenous people have animals that represent knowledge and teaching for life skills and ceremony. The deer is respected this way.

***Don’t Marry the same clans.*** All Indigenous groups do not allow the practices of marrying with your family group. This too is universal.

***Don’t Make fun of traditions.*** Our traditions are still with us today because they were passed on through generations. This is how we survived as Indigenous People.

Making fun of what has helped us survive for hundreds of years is destroying our belief system and who we are.

Indigenous knowledge is conveyed formally and informally among kin groups and communities through social encounters, oral traditions, ritual practices, and other activities. Knowledge is often passed on through regular Indigenous performances—including oral traditions, song, dance, and ceremony—that convey both literal and metaphorical truths about relations. Skilled individuals and families are entrusted to maintain these traditions; some are specialists who protect esoteric knowledge. Although many aspects of traditional knowledge have been identified and recorded through ethnographic and ethnographic research, some are still unknown to outsiders.

Indigenous knowledge can be envisioned as a hereditary system of learned awareness and skills that enables wisdom to be gained and tools to be constructed, as needed, from the materials at hand. This knowledge is rooted in a particular place or ecosystem, but they are not necessarily static or fixed.

Some traditional understandings are common knowledge, shared by all members of a tribal community, ethnic group, kin network, or family. Many of these are learned through phenomenological experience and everyday activities.

Traditional ecological knowledge can be defined as practical applied Indigenous knowledge of the natural world. This is more than a mere collection of primitive survival tactics; it is a system of awareness that offers both moral guidelines and practical advice.

We are taught not to be unkind to others, most Indigenous people believe this will come back to you or a family member. Our customs and traditions have been told and hold true for those who believe. Family members may shun you for being unkind or with children they are talked to by their parents or grandparents.

Traditional belief systems were set in place hundreds of years ago and passed down in our stories and beliefs. Traditional ways do not make fun of our traditions. In some traditions you are punished harshly for making fun of traditions or other consequences are placed on that individual. This is currently happening with those who believe in the western religions and is seen a conflict to many who are traditional. Although there are current religious beliefs that openly accept the traditional belief and accept it as a part of spirituality. On my reservation those groups are the Catholic and Bahias.

This leadership guide is just a beginning to explore and initiate Indigenous Ways of Knowing This guide is to help educators begin a critical conversation about the status of Indigenous education within their perspective communities. Indigenous Knowledge should also provide insight from the people these learners represent, what they truly value in life, whom they really trust in their communities, and what topics really matter to them about the future of their children. As a member of the school staff, we need to learn what our students are learning at home and in our Language and Cultural classes. We also need to understand Indigenous Ways of Knowing is taught at home by family and reference that if it is being taught in school.

## Assessment

### Assessment Framework

To evaluate the effectiveness of Indigenous Ways of Knowing implementation in our school, I have developed three interconnected rubrics that align with our Apache values and educational goals.

#### Rubric 1: Cultural Integration Assessment

*For evaluating how well Indigenous Ways of Knowing are incorporated into daily school practices*

<b>Component</b>	<b>Exemplary (4)</b>	<b>Proficient (3)</b>	<b>Developing (2)</b>	<b>Beginning (1)</b>
Language Use	Apache language is regularly integrated into instruction and school communications	Apache language is sometimes used in instruction and communications	Apache language is rarely used beyond specific cultural lessons	Apache language is not integrated into school practices
Elder Involvement	Elders regularly participate in school activities and their guidance shapes programs	Elders are sometimes invited for specific cultural programs	Elders are rarely involved in school activities	No elder involvement in school programs
Cultural Protocols	All staff consistently follow Apache Do's and Don'ts in their interactions	Most staff follow cultural protocols with occasional oversights	Staff show basic awareness but frequently miss cultural protocols	Little awareness or practice of cultural protocols
Seasonal Teachings	School calendar and activities align with traditional seasonal knowledge and practices	Some activities reflect seasonal teachings	Limited connection to seasonal teachings	No consideration of traditional seasonal practices

#### Rubric 2: Student Connection Assessment

*For measuring student engagement with Indigenous Ways of Knowing*

<b>Area</b>	<b>Strong Evidence (4)</b>	<b>Good Evidence (3)</b>	<b>Some Evidence (2)</b>	<b>Limited Evidence (1)</b>
Cultural Pride	Student actively shares cultural knowledge and shows pride in Apache identity	Student participates in cultural activities willingly	Student participates when required but shows little initiative	Student resists participation in cultural activities
Language Development	Student attempts to use Apache language and seeks to learn more	Student shows interest in language but hesitates to use it	Student learns required phrases only	Student shows no interest in language learning
Traditional Knowledge	Student connects traditional teachings to modern life	Student understands traditional teachings	Student recognizes basic cultural concepts	Student shows minimal understanding of traditions
Community Engagement	Student participates in community events and brings learning back to school	Student attends community events when encouraged	Student rarely participates in community events	Student does not engage with community activities

### Rubric 3: Teacher Implementation Assessment

*For evaluating how effectively teachers incorporate Indigenous Ways of Knowing*

<b>Criteria</b>	<b>Consistently (4)</b>	<b>Usually (3)</b>	<b>Sometimes (2)</b>	<b>Rarely (1)</b>
Cultural Integration	Seamlessly weaves Apache culture into daily lessons across subjects	Regularly includes cultural connections in lessons	Makes occasional cultural connections	Teaches content without cultural context
Respectful Practice	Demonstrates deep understanding and respect for Apache protocols	Shows general respect for cultural practices	Basic awareness of cultural practices	Limited awareness of cultural protocols

<b>Criteria</b>	<b>Consistently (4)</b>	<b>Usually (3)</b>	<b>Sometimes (2)</b>	<b>Rarely (1)</b>
Community Connection	Actively builds relationships with families and community members	Maintains regular communication with families	Communicates with families when required	Minimal family/community interaction
Student Support	Creates inclusive environment that validates students' cultural identity	Generally supportive of cultural expression	Allows but doesn't encourage cultural expression	Discourages cultural expression

## Using These Rubrics

These assessment tools should be used:

- At the beginning of each semester to establish baselines
- Mid-semester for progress monitoring
- End of semester for final evaluation
- As self-reflection tools for teachers and staff
- In consultation with tribal elders and community members
- To guide professional development needs
- To inform curriculum and program adjustments

This leadership guide is just a beginning to explore and initiate Indigenous Ways of Knowing. This guide is to help educators begin a critical conversation about the status of Indigenous education within their perspective communities. Indigenous Knowledge should also provide insight from the people these learners represent, what they truly value in life, whom they really trust in their communities, and what topics really matter to them about the future of their children. As a member of the school staff, we need to learn what our students are learning at home and in our Language and Cultural classes. We also need to understand Indigenous Ways of Knowing is taught at home by family and reference that if it is being taught in school.

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