

“Embracing Native American Quilts”

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## Topic and Context

My counseling practice guide that I found powerful to discuss is “*Embracing Native American Quilts*.” I chose this topic because growing up on the Navajo Nation reservation gifting quilts is culturally exceptional for graduations, birthdays, traditional ceremonies, and weddings. My focus is to create a colorful wall in Hulet Elementary School library located in Holbrook, Arizona, by using coloring pages on Native American quilts. Not only will my students be coloring their quilt designs but additionally I will read out loud about Native American quilts while students are designing their own quilts. Every student in second, third, fourth, and fifth grade classrooms will be given the opportunity to express, pattern, and fashion their own quilt design.

I am a school counselor working in the Holbrook Unified School District (HUSD) on the Navajo Reservation. According to Arizona School Report Cards (2023-2024), the total number of student enrollment from Preschool to Grade 5 in HUSD is 358. The racial composition includes Hispanic: 33.8%, Multiple Races: 7.54%, and Native American: 31.84%. To clarify, what opportunities are available for all Indigenous students at Holbrook Unified School is attending “Meet Your Teacher” at the beginning of the year, athletic program, counseling, educational field trips, and free tutoring. Above all, free and reduced lunch and breakfast programs are also included. This is announced from Holbrook Unified School District website with food services.

As a first year Elementary School Counselor with Holbrook Unified School District, the students that I serve are second through fifth grade. I respect my role as a School Counselor by obeying the American School Counselor Association National Model. Such as providing individual and group counseling, classroom lessons, goal setting, referrals for long term-support. collaborating with families, teachers, the principal, and the community for student success. My reasoning to work at and serve Hulet Elementary School is because of the high needs with students in areas of depression, severe mental illness, suicidal ideation, and anxiety. Even though the school and community is diverse there are many children in the area which they go through physically, mentally, emotionally, and social changes.

## Rationale

I find it important to embrace Native American quilts because beginning with the first stitch to completing a quilted design, there is a story to share behind the hidden creative details. Creating a counseling practice guide that highlights traditional and contemporary quilt designs is a great way to incorporate culturally relevant material for social emotional learning. Specifically, to build family connections, student identity, and communication skills. In my personal Elementary School Counselor experience, cultural relevancy is important to Native Americans because I find it meaningful and important to acknowledge all students and families with their needs and concerns when it comes to validating students' backgrounds, cultural traditions, and experiences. According to an article on “Elements of Cultural Competence: Applications with Native American Clients” Weaver (1997) explains “the process of striving for cultural competence requires personal development as well as intellectual growth. Therefore, helping professionals need to be aware of their own biases in addition to learning about other cultures.”

This is essential for Elementary students to explore their creativity and bring culture awareness into their lives. I have learned within my research that there is a difference between traditional quilt design and contemporary quilts. Caron (1998) explained that “today quilts are sometimes used for beds but for entirely different reasons. It is clear that there are many names assigned to the styles and sizes of quilts being made.” Caron (1988) found that “wall quilts” refers to any quilt made to hang on a wall. Then during the 1970’s and 1980’s, shadow quilts were made, which is a lightweight fabric to make quilts”.

According to Carson (1988) “while the overall appearance of quilts has changed, many contemporary quilt makers keep coming back to traditional patterns. For example, spider’s web patchwork pattern has been confused with the spider’s web quilting motif. Even though they share the same name, each is a separate technique.” Meanwhile, “Susan from Ohio designed a contemporary version of a traditional spider web’s pattern and it was made of bands of black satin, bright colored satin, velvet ribbon, and made into eight sections. Susan called her contemporary quilt “Nova” which means exploding stars, warm colors, and blended with shimmery fabric.” The goal is to give the Hulet Elementary students the opportunity to express their emotions, designs patterns, and fashion their own quilt designs on paper. As a result, the counseling curriculum will help to reveal strengths, provide calmness, and protection.

I intended to share a powerpoint by introducing J.J contemporary quilt designed on a PowerPoint slide. Along with presenting other contemporary and traditional quilt designs from the book on “Contemporary Quilts from Traditional designs.” Another noteworthy reason, I selected my topic about “Embracing Native American Quilts” because quilts have stories behind them. As explained by Lawrence and Paige (2016) “as our ancestors knew, storytelling is a holistic process that engages the heart, body, and spirit along with the mind. Telling our stories is one way of making sense of our own experiences. Listening to others stories also helps us to understand ourselves as we identify with their experiences.” In a later interview, I got to visit and interview my mother’s cousin sister and J.J who shared with me the last quilt that she made back in March (personal communication, May 18, 2025). After she designed, fulfilled and finalized her daughter’s quilt, she gifted it to Kimberly. J.J revealed that it took her a full day and a half to achieve. J.J and her daughter showed me the quilt, and it was charming. Not long after, J.J disclosed that she makes quilts for fun and money. She doesn’t remember what age she began making quilts; however, she learned herself. Later, she informed me that she would use needles, yarn, thin sheets of blankets, and pants given by the churches to make quilts back then. J.J expressed that by using pants for quilt making, it would take her at least two days to complete. In closing, J.J told me that she would also use quilts back then to put her blue bird flour into.

As I reflected upon J.J’s interview, I discovered that she designed a contemporary quilt by embracing two cartoon characters such as Winnie the Pooh and Tigger onto the quilt. Even though J.J is battling health concerns, she was able to pursue, dream up, and fashion a magnificent quilt for her daughter. Seeing the quilt in person, every inch was colorful, creative, and different patterns were outlined.

My topic is important and meaningful because I want to share my mom and aunt's story with my Elementary students and I would like my students to design, create, and color their own quilts by

choosing either a contemporary or traditional coloring page for themselves. I feel that I am making a connection with my topic by listening to personal stories from family members and learning the difference between traditional and contemporary designs for quilts. I also found it interesting that Caron (1998) discovered that quilts back then were used for “animals in the barn, used as an additional mattress, and used for cold winter nights”. In our world now, quilts are being used differently for gift giving, traditional ceremonies, decorations, and prices are way higher. My perspective with quilts signifies strengths, calmness, and protection because it resembles who I am and where I came from. As an Elementary School Counselor, my trust of knowledge that I bring to our Elementary students is promoting a safe school such as responding to crises. I feel that our Holbrook community could serve as a resource to grow my knowledge by having me meet the rest of the other school counselors at the JR high and high school. This is where I believe culturally and responsive practices can be used, shared, and available.

Furthermore, Withrow (2004) gives an overview about art therapy. He defines that it can “prove superior to talk therapy in accomplishing this goal, because it allows us to experience rather than verbalize our feelings.” For example, “color therapy went out of style for the past two centuries and was widely avoided by the scientific community in general. Later, research discovered and proved that color has profound effects on the emotions, behavior, and body.” In the same article, Withrow (2004) explains “Paper Quilts”. He acknowledges that it is a “useful activity for family or classroom counseling. First, each member creates colorful decorative papers, which are later cut into and eventually personalities will find their place in the overall scheme of the quilt, producing a beautiful unity out of a seemingly irreconcilable array of pieces. The results are bound to astonish and please.”

Personal disclosure, not long after my arrival to attend college at Haskell Indian Nation University located in Lawrence, Kansas I began to identify and see the likeness with other Indigenous tribes around the world how attractive, artistic, and historic quilts can be. My personal experience recognizing new culture awareness sparked by quilts is when Haskell Indian Nation University honors and celebrates seniors graduates for recognition on senior night or graduation.

Leaving home for college the first time, I felt terrified to leave the Navajo Nation reservation because I never pictured myself attending college. College was never forced upon me and my siblings because both of my parents never completed school themselves. Despite these challenging circumstances, my parents lived a traditional life. For example, my mom taught me to respect my elders, and my dad taught me how to chop wood for the winter season. Both of these traditional teachings gave me the strength to embrace my culture and traditions. For me, the first time I encountered a quilt is when me, my mom, and dad attended a song and dance event. This is a social event where many people gather and wear their Navajo traditional attire.

Men and women wear turquoise jewelry and moccasins to sing, dance, and celebrate during gatherings. Elders are often gifted at the end of the ceremony with quilts, and baskets in appreciation for attending. According to I.N (personal communication, May 17, 2025), the first time she saw a quilt was at her grandma's house, when she was six years old. She expressed that the quilt had many different colors and it was pretty. The quilts came from the churches, and she would use it to sleep in. The second time she saw a quilt was at her grandpa's house, the colors

were gray, and quilts also came from the churches. However, her cousin designed quilts by using pieces of clothing from the churches, sold them, and she would use her own hands to fashion quilts. Based on I.N (personal communication, May 17, 2025), interview her cousin sister does not design any more quilts due to her health condition. I.N shared that she has never designed a quilt herself, but she admires the colors. In fact, I.N (personal communication, May 17, 2025), indicated back then quilts felt heavier and warmer, now she notices that quilts are much lighter and expensive. After all, a lot of work was put into quilts back then by hand like cutting out materials, using needles/threads, and doing measurements. Nowadays people are using a sewing machine.

To explain more in depth, I.N and J.J quilting stories will be shared by me to establish a strong place for empathy in the classroom. This relationship connects to the article on “Tribal Critical Race Theory in Education” Brayboy (2005) unravels “when stories are heard, they lead the hearer to explore the range and variation of possibilities of what can happen and has happened. Additionally, one must be able to feel the stories. You tell them and feel them- establishing a strong place for empathy and for getting it” (p. 440). Ultimately, the students from Hulet Elementary School will recognize I.N and J.J quilting stories for their legendary, dedicated, and enthusiasm for honoring American Indian ancestral practices to this day.

First, I expect to implement elements of culturally responsiveness by facilitating positive interpersonal relations among students from diverse cultural backgrounds. Such as modeling pictures of contemporary and traditional designs of quilts around the world. According to Lee (2001) he shared “having students from diverse backgrounds explore with each other the nature shows importance of positive interpersonal relationships”. Secondly, I look forward to introducing sustaining practices with my Elementary students by letting them openly share their own quilt experiences with the classroom. As explained by Termin (1997) “In reservation schools, Lakota graduating seniors are presented with star quilts to commemorate the occasion. Quilts are given away at a variety of special events such as weddings, anniversaries, powwow, and basketball tournaments. Quilts are prominent at giveaways”. Lastly, revealing different quilts from all around the world will validate Indigenous cultures and traditions by embracing strengths, calmness, and protection.

## **Instructional Guide**

The purpose of my topic is “Embracing Native American Quilts” is to meet the social and emotional needs of students in 2nd through 5th grade. The learning objectives align with the Arizona School Counselor Association standards. Mindset Standards. *M.1*. Belief in development of the whole self, including a healthy balance of mental, social/emotional and physical well-being, Behavior Standards Learning Strategies: *B-LS 1*. Critical-thinking skills to make informed decisions. Self-Management Skills: *B-SMS 3*. Independent work. Social Skills: *B-SS 10*. Cultural awareness, sensitivity and responsiveness. Most importantly, students will learn the following counseling strategies; build listening skills, demonstrate empathy, and reflect.

My counseling practice guide will fit in my schedule at the beginning of the school year once I meet with each grade level teacher during professional development meetings. I will introduce

my curriculum and ask the teachers if they have any questions, concerns, or suggestions. I do anticipate having four or five sessions.

The materials needed for all lessons are coloring pencils, markers, and crayons. Materials the facilitators need access to the internet, a laptop, and a projector. The following learning resources I intended on using is American Children Quilt Books online and the same with- Coloring Books on Contemporary or Traditional Quilts.

### *Session 1*

The first session will be about getting to know one another. The session includes the introduction of self, session goals, and sharing the purpose of the counseling. The introduction session will have two activities with an estimated time of 30 minutes for the (individual, group or guidance lesson) session. The objective for the first session is about traditional life and building identity. I will write on the board the objective for the students: "Today I will learn about my family identity and who I belong to. I will learn about the importance of elders and how I show respect." I will distribute a blank paper, a pencil, (list material to be used). I will ask each student from the classroom to draw me a picture of how they take care of or respect their elders. This will lead them to share openly their thoughts, ideas, and collaborate among each other.

An additional activity, students from Hulet Elementary School will practice and utilize belly breathing inside the classroom. This technique will create a calming environment and students can use it for themselves when needed. I will demonstrate first by standing up. Positioning both of my hands on my belly. Closing my eyes. Imagining I'm blowing out my birthday cake (5 deep breaths). Then open my eyes. My goal is to have Hulet students practice and implement the strategies on their own.

As the counselor, I will share my personal knowledge on quilts. Quilts signify strengths, calmness, and protection from my Navajo culture. On the Navajo Nation reservation gifting quilts is culturally exceptional during graduations, birthdays, traditional ceremonies, and weddings. I will read a book about Native American quilts while the students are designing and coloring their own quilts. Counseling strategies will be used during the classroom lesson for instance students will validate listening, demonstrating empathy, and reflecting. Previously mentioned, students will be given the choice to pick either a contemporary or traditional quilt design while I read a book out loud on Native American quilts. As a result, students will display their lovely quilts in the library. For the assessment plan, my goal is to create five social emotional learning questions. Something like, what does "culture" mean to you? Did the school counselor present and plan the instruction well? Did you understand the school counselor lesson? Do you know where the school counselor office is located? and what culture would you like to learn more about?

## **Assessment**

The assessment I created is measure the knowledge of each student by looking at cultural identity. Therefore, my goal is to present and create five social emotional learning pre and post test questions.

1. What does "culture" mean to you?
2. Did the school counselor present and plan the instruction well?
3. Did you understand the school counselor lesson?
4. Do you know where the school counselor office is located?
5. What culture would you like to learn more about?

This assessment will pinpoint data to determine the effectiveness of school counseling services at Hulet Elementary School.

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