

Culturally Responsive and Sustaining Instructional Materials for Indigenous Students

When selecting instructional materials for your lessons, it is helpful to include Native American authors and Native American knowledge frameworks or epistemologies grounded in specific places. This will help students connect lessons to their real lives and communities.

Why is it important to include Native American authors?

Native American authors convey perspectives and values that reflect the experiences and worldviews of Native peoples. They often portray Native American characters and contexts in ways that resonate with students' own experiences, which helps validate their identities and engages them in the learning process. Seeing Native American writers' works alongside other significant literature is both affirming and beneficial to all students.

Resonating with Native values and epistemologies

Classroom materials should resonate with Native American values and epistemologies—how students think about, make sense of, and organize their knowledge. Various materials can align with or demonstrate the core organizational ideas in Native American frameworks and values. The content could also be framed to reflect specific epistemologies, incorporating the following principles:

- Local community
- Sense of relationality
- Responsibility to self and community
- Rootedness in place
- Responsible use of power

At some point, you'll want to review your existing materials and any new materials through these lenses.

Organization of instructional materials

Consider how the organization of instructional materials supports students in developing content understanding. For instance, do the materials prioritize a top-down or bottom-up approach? Native American knowledge frameworks are typically oriented toward the big picture and meaning, in contrast to a focus on smaller parts that make up the whole. Connections and interrelations between living beings and the natural world are central to

understanding and living in the world. Therefore, it's crucial to consider these perspectives when selecting materials.

The importance of culturally relevant materials

Native American students are less likely to thrive in an educational environment that relies on a generalized or universalized curriculum devoid of references to local places and communities. Materials that reflect students' lived experiences, such as those incorporating place-based activities, are more likely to engage and resonate with them. Appropriate materials can be sourced not only by teachers but also by students, parents, and other community members.

In culturally responsive and sustaining classrooms, materials are likely to:

- Come from a range of resources (local, national, and global)
- Draw on diverse perspectives and forms of communication
- Include a range of media
- Incorporate local culture and ways of knowing
- Be sourced by teachers, students, parents, and community members
- Encourage collaboration
- Be shared among students
- Be perceived as relevant and useful
- Expand students' approaches to learning

References

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