

DEVELOPING CULTURALLY INTEGRATED CONTENT LESSONS GUIDELINES FOR AMERICAN INDIAN CONTENT

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1. **The cultural information needs to be tribally specific.** References that are general or generic such as "The Native Americans" need to be avoided if possible. Ideally, lessons should be focused on particular tribal groups. Even if topics focus on cultural regions such as Plains, Northwest Coast, or Plateau Tribes, tribal nations within those areas should be identified. Tribal names commonly used are often those that were given by non-native historians or anthropologists. Using the name that the tribe identifies themselves with gives students a deeper understanding of tribal identity and the diversity among tribal groups. An example would be to use the reference of Nakoda, Dakota, or Lakota when speaking about tribes often referred to as "Sioux." Comparing native and nonnative tribal names is a lesson in itself.
2. Historical and cultural information needs to be accurate. The traditional knowledge included in classroom lessons needs to be accurate and maintain the cultural integrity of the tribe being represented. If you are using a written text for content information, look for references that suggest appropriate scholarship such as primary source documents. If you are in doubt about a source, contact someone who may be able to provide you with some insight. Many tribes have education departments, culture committees, tribal colleges, etc., that can serve as valuable resources for evaluating books or curriculum. If at all possible, utilize a tribal member to assist you in gathering information.
3. Represent Indian people in a balanced context between the past and the present. Much of the existing curriculum about American Indians is focused in the past - usually the 1800s. This portrays Indian people as artifacts of the past and perpetuates the "vanishing American Indian" myth. While learning the broader history of this country's indigenous people is extremely valuable, the study needs to continue on to include Indian people today both individually and as tribal nations. History provides an important context to give people a true understanding of the contemporary context that Indian people live in today.
4. Lessons need to provide real meaning and understanding. What has been published as multicultural curriculum has often been shallow activities that revolve around a food, craft or holiday. Some of these activities may be authentic, but if there is no substantial learning about the people they come

from, real understanding has not taken place. Two examples are the ever popular pictograph paper bag writing and the decorated tagboard tipi. Many well-intentioned teachers confuse pictographs and winter counts. Because the activity is art oriented, students usually enjoy the drawing aspect of the lesson, but rarely learn anything about actual winter counts, or tribes that specifically used them to document events. Many pictograph sites are considered sacred and are still used for religious purposes. Perhaps if young people learned the deeper significance of them, the current vandalism of many of these areas might be decreased.

5. The content needs to have a meaningful connection to the curriculum. In an effort to provide multicultural content, teachers often find themselves having to search for materials. Given the constraint of time and available materials, lessons tend to have some cultural component vaguely attached. Adding a "cultural story" does not always provide the integration necessary and appropriate for district and state standards. Educators must look at content standards for authentic connections. Content should begin with the tribes specific to the school's region and then branch out to the state and nation. I have often heard Indian students wonder why they always learn about Aztecs and Incas and never about their own tribal communities.
6. The content/concepts need to address problematic curricular areas. In addition to adding missing content, it is important that educators begin to address problematic curricular areas. Many social studies texts still provide students with stereotypical, negative, or inaccurate portrayals of Indian people and historic events. A few examples: The continual use of the Bering Land Bridge as a definitive statement of how Indian people came to be in America; Explorers as "Discoverers" of America; Thanksgiving as pilgrims initiated celebration with "Native Americans"; Manifest Destiny; etc.
7. The teacher needs to consider the students' prior knowledge. A first consideration in planning a lesson is identifying the continuum of knowledge that students possess. This includes thoughtful analysis of student attitudes and perceptions about the content. If lessons challenge a stereotype or common misinformation, the teacher needs to be prepared to support students through moments of disequilibrium.
8. Assessment should match what was taught. Assessment does not have to be a formal test, and often a pen and paper test may not give us a clear idea of what students actually learned. We may assess through informal observations, learning journals, student drawn diagrams or charts, student created videos, PowerPoints, etc. Assessment should have the purpose of instructing us as teachers how well we did in providing the learning opportunity, and instructive to the student in how they interacted with the opportunity presented. When the purpose is to instruct and inform rather than judge, assessment becomes more authentic.