

A Guide to Indigenous Pedagogies

Save California Salmon

Place-Based Learning

Indigenous people practice a land-based culture, so to accurately represent the unique tribal culture near you it is important to practice place-based education. Our curriculum is representative of Northern California Tribes, depicting the culture and knowledge developed in this place. We encourage teachers to look into curriculum or content representing the unceded territory of the Tribal lands they occupy.

Learning-by-Doing

The content in our curricula provides students with the opportunity to learn by doing. We have developed lesson plans for students to create public testimonies, blogs, campaigns, hands-on cultural activities, and field trips to provide real-life experiences that have an everlasting impact. The learning-by-doing approach follows Indigenous practices of education where Indigenous children would learn through apprenticeships rather than in a traditional classroom setting. We see students as capable leaders who have the potential to make an immediate impact in their communities and we hope our lesson plans bring out this potential.

Identity

The content in our curricula provides activities for students to explore their identities alongside their teachers. Once students understand how their identities inform their perspectives, they can begin to engage with the material in our lesson plans critically. Exploring identity will involve difficult conversations around settler colonialism, environmental racism, genocide, etc. In order to confidently guide students through difficult conversations, we encourage teachers to examine their own identities before and while teaching our curriculum. The ability to recognize how our identities inform our perspectives will open us up to higher levels of understanding one another and the world around us.

In a Good Way

Indigenous people believe that the emotions we experience internally will manifest externally in the quality of our work. Indigenous peoples define this belief as being in a “good way” and it is often practiced when creating regalia, medicine, or gathering, but can extend to all aspects of life. We ask that teachers and students come to this learning space in a good way to encourage thoughtful participation in our lesson plans.

Adaptability

Knowledge is continuously growing as our perspectives shift and realities change. Our curriculum is a living document that can be adapted to accurately represent current events and new knowledge, especially considering our topics are continuously in flux. We ask teachers to practice being adaptive with us by being open to changes in our curriculum. Teaching our curriculum will also involve moving away from some of the teaching methods found in a traditional Western classroom. For example, we encourage teachers to remodel their standards by allowing students to choose their own medium to present their knowledge. We realize that stepping outside of the Western structure is intimidating, but you may be surprised by the creativity of your students or see students who are typically disengaged become passionate learners. Teachers' ability to adapt to changes in the curriculum or classroom structure will determine students' ability to engage in our lesson plans meaningfully.

Learning Together and Building Community

Teachers and students will practice learning together and build community when implementing our curriculum by allowing everyone to share their knowledge as equals. Students' ability to recognize their own and their peer's experiences, talents, and knowledge will create a classroom that is capable of collaboration. In our curriculum, many of the activities center on group work to ensure that students are equipped with team-building skills that will prepare them for real-world experiences. We also recognize that learning can happen in and outside of the classroom which is why we provide plenty of opportunities for students to engage in their local community. Save California Salmons curriculum has been designed by a community of Indigenous peoples and experts in their fields. Our curriculum developers have provided students with lesson plans on community engagement that support lifelong relationships starting in the classroom.

Purpose

To effectively incorporate our curriculum into your classroom, you must identify the why before the what and how. Teachers and students need to identify the reasons they are choosing to learn from our curriculum by asking questions such as:

- Why is it important to teach Indigenous knowledge alongside Western knowledge?
- Why is this curriculum important to me?
- Why do we benefit from having this knowledge?

Addressing the “why” will help to identify the “what” and the “how” when implementing our curriculum. Teachers can pull or shape lesson plans catered to the values of the classroom identified by the why exercise. Including an Indigenous curriculum in your classroom means they you are a part of significant social change, and identifying why this change is necessary is important for both you and your students.

Language

Throughout our curriculum, you will find words from the Hoopa, Yurok, Karuk, and Wiyot Tribe. Including Indigenous languages in the classroom is a part of a larger effort for language revitalization. Teaching our curriculum involves reclaiming the classroom from systems that previously and currently oppress Indigenous peoples. The Western classroom has been perhaps the biggest suppressor of Indigenous languages; thereby, it is crucial for Indigenous languages to be included in the classroom when discussing Indigenous history and knowledge.

Relationality

Our curriculum emphasizes understanding the world as relational, with this single curriculum having the ability to span multiple academic disciplines. Our curriculum is designed for students to begin identifying broader themes within their class subject. For example, a student learning about food sovereignty in their culinary class may begin to see the science behind traditional food and how food can become political. The interdisciplinary nature of our curriculum encourages cross-collaboration between teachers to share their expertise on subjects like food sovereignty. The beauty of relationality is that it can help teachers to simplify complex topics like climate change for their students. We emphasize that if the salmon are not in good health then the entire ecosystem will be unhealthy. All things in this world are connected and this connection creates a relationship of interdependence.

Storytelling

Knowledge is gained and shared through experience. Many Indigenous cultures practice an oral history in which knowledge is passed down from generation to generation through stories. To keep this tradition alive, in our curriculum, we include materials that highlight stories from the voices of Indigenous people. We also make room for students to recognize that through their own life experiences, they have gained knowledge that can be shared in the classroom. Students' ability to introduce their own stories into their coursework encourages them to practice independent learning and provides them with a sense of agency in their educational experience.

Indigenous Pedagogies Examples

Place-Based Learning:

- Representation of local Indigenous scientist
- Field trips led by local Indigenous peoples
- Including academic resources that represent the culture, history, and presence of local Tribe(s)
- Allowing students to practice independent learning by observing and reflecting. We refer to this as letting the environment be the teacher

Learning by Doing:

- Writing Public Testimonies
- Participating in labs that involve going out into nature
- Creating multimedia to advocate for social/environmental issues (dam removal, Salmon run, environmental policy, etc)

Identity:

- Provide the space for students to share their culture, knowledge, and experience
- Facilitating conversations around identity and privilege
- Center BIPOC voices and autonomy in the classroom

In a Good Way:

- Allowing students to step away from the assignment if they are feeling emotionally distressed
- Prioritizing mental health in your classroom
- Reframing from forcing lesson plans when students are inattentive
- Developing your own set of skills to teach in a good way

Adaptability:

- Provide multiple options for students to show their knowledge in their assignments
- Frequently build on our curriculum by including recent events (i.e new water policy)
- Creating space for Indigenous voices to regularly enter the classroom. Consider that presenter availability might not coincide with your schedule.

Learning Together and Building Community:

- Allowing students to share their knowledge before going into the lesson plan
- Develop activities that have students engage with their communities
- Teaching students skills to work together in a group setting
- Develop your own relationships with local Tribes and Indigenous peoples

Purpose:

- Identifying a list of reasons why you are implementing Save California Salmon curriculum with your students and post it on the wall
- Ask students how their project or the lesson plan can be used in the real world
- Incorporate asking students why it is important to talk about the topic before going into the lesson plan

Language:

- Refer to local areas using the place names of the local Tribe
- Incorporate as many local Indigenous languages as possible
- Discuss the importance of language with your students

Relationality:

- Understand that environmental justice is social justice
- Identify the present impacts of historical events
- Incorporate activities that have students identify a chain of impacts from a single events

Storytelling:

- Understand traditional storytelling as a prominent form of transferring indigenous ways of knowing, traditions, and values
- Inquire about storytellers in the community (i.e students' families, Tribal leaders)
- Plan activities for students to create their own stories (i.e children's book on water advocacy)
- Allow students to share their life experiences and recognize the knowledge that comes from this.