

Making Teaching and Learning Relative to Real Life and American Indian Culture

I have heard that an original meaning to education means to draw out what already lies within. This is the job of a teacher, to draw on what already lies within a student. A teacher must first understand that while going through school the depth and importance of what being a teacher really means. The power it holds to develop young minds and change lives. When one understands this then the journey to becoming a teacher can begin.

Teachers must know, you can not simply teach in a manner that is a, “I teach, you listen.” This approach as we know does not work well with American Indian students. Whichever discipline a teacher chooses to master, it is that teacher’s responsibility to teach that subject in a social context to keep students engaged enough so that they are able to share, teach and learn what they already know on that subject. It is important and necessary for a teacher to serve as a facilitator and then take that knowledge and elaborate in a captivating game of compare and contrast. When working with American Indian students you must go a step further and take that learning and relate it to American Indian culture. This is ideal when teaching American Indian students.

For instance can a teacher teach Social Studies without mentioning racism and the effects of racism on American Indian people? Or how about what racism looks like today and how it hides in institutions. Then going from a negative to a positive and providing them with some cultural coping mechanisms to deal with racism.

It’s important to start with what students already know on a subject and take those experiences, those ways of thinking and behaving, then create opportunities for significant dialogue and articulation to take place for each student as they pursue knowledge and understanding in and about life. Whichever subject is taught it must be interwoven into real life circumstances and entwined with American Indian culture for authentic teaching and learning to take place.

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