

# Developing Culturally Revitalizing and Sustaining Pedagogies through Storywork



In our curriculum design, teacher planning, and launch of lessons, we actively build from Indigenous storytelling. We incorporate both traditional stories gifted to us from elders as well as spontaneous stories from teachers and students to build our theories and explain phenomena. This work is specifically utilized in the design and implementation of Indigenous science, technology, engineering, art and math curricula in Chicago and Seattle.

Participating as decision makers in the design and implementation of curriculum support our development of new theory and practice from community perspectives. In addition, it opens space for us, as teachers, to work in relationship with community-based and personal stories. We spontaneously rely on stories as we reflect on issues of knowledge production and representation in science, and this supports our journey in becoming more skilled at navigating between Indigenous and Western ways of knowing and designing hybrid spaces. As teachers, we reclaimed stories as a central part of science and repositioned science teaching and learning from being centered on so-called facts to being centered on processes, practices, and narratives that are co-constructed.

We share this practice in the hopes that those working with Native children, youth, and families in education can build from our experiences and stories to design their own unique ways of integrating stories, both traditional and personal into curriculum design and implementation.

*Native science is "essentially a story, an explanation of the how and why of things of nature and the nature of things.*

- Greg Cajete in *Native Science: Natural Laws of Interdependence*, pg. 13.



## CRITICAL CONSIDERATIONS

**Develop reciprocal relationships with elders and story tellers and always ask permission to share**

**Honor traditional stories by locating them within particular tribes, lands, and communities**

**Learn to listen as well as to tell**

**Encourage multiple understandings and meanings of a story**

**Embrace storytelling as a legitimate way to explain phenomena, knowledge, and feelings**

**Generate creative methods for creating and sharing stories**

PROCESS	ACTIVITIES	STORYWORK
<p><b>Listening, Learning, and Making Connections</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ Arrange for an elder and/or story teller to your meetings</li> <li>→ Ask for stories they believe will help shape the design/evaluation process</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ What meanings are in the story? What did you learn or take away?</li> <li>→ Make connections to current or future experiences, situations, or feelings</li> </ul> <p><i>Ex. What does a story about a girl learning to weave a basket have to teach us about the nature of learning?</i></p>
<p><b>Designing from Traditional Stories</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ Locate specific places in the story that explain phenomena/events/feelings related to program or curriculum goals</li> <li>→ Develop questions, lessons, or concepts from the connections identified</li> <li>→ Utilize Native language where possible</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ Work to design from stories rather than select stories that easily explain an aspect of pedagogy or curriculum already identified</li> <li>→ Look for indirect or subtle ways stories shape what we attend to and how we think and feel</li> </ul> <p><i>Ex. We initially asked for a story about sea stars because of a lesson we wanted to plan; we ended up with a story about raven and water as a way to think about reciprocal relationships and consequences of our actions</i></p>
<p><b>Launching Lessons Using Traditional Stories</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ Share the original story by either inviting elders or storytellers to lessons or practicing and reciting the story</li> <li>→ Utilize questions and concepts from design work to expand children's/youth's thinking</li> <li>→ Introduce the lesson, activity, and goals using the story to frame the objectives</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ Encourage youth/children to make connections between the story and their own lives</li> <li>→ Share personal stories as a way to demonstrate connections between traditional, current, and future Indigenous ways of knowing</li> </ul> <p><i>Ex. We used a story about a clay pot boy to frame our lesson on making and working with clay. It gave us a chance to talk about change, taking risks, and our identities as Native peoples.</i></p>
<p><b>Extending Lessons from Spontaneous Stories</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ Encourage youth/children to share personal stories</li> <li>→ Make visible connections between personal stories, traditional stories, and pedagogical objectives</li> <li>→ Facilitate explaining and reasoning through story telling rather than through fact checking or quizzing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ Plan creative and alternative forms of storytelling</li> <li>→ Recognize the unique gifts of each student by encouraging multiple opportunities to share stories in large groups, individually, or through alternate media</li> </ul> <p><i>Ex. In an activity extending from learning about the life cycles and interspecies relationships of plants we created a role playing game where students acted out various plants and shared their expertise about what they had learned</i></p>