



PORTRAIT OF A NEVADA LEARNER

Piloting the Portrait Case Study

School Name and District

Natchez Elementary: Washoe County School District

Names of Individuals and Roles

Erika Rasche - 1st grade teacher
Marci Brodock - 2nd grade teacher
Jetta Wacker - K teacher
Deanne Moyle-Hicks - 5th grade teacher

Introduction

Investigating Identity is the opportunity, resources, and experiences for all students to research and engage in exploring their identity, ancestry, culture, geographical background, and historical events and behaviors tied to their cultural identity. We believe that building a culturally inclusive curriculum that allows students to research and engage in their culture can help improve student identity, which directly supports their success both academically and socially.

Natchez Elementary is a rural school on the Pyramid Lake Paiute Reservation in northwestern Nevada. Our small school community of 125ish students serves a population of over 98% Native Americans from multiple tribal affiliations. The Pyramid Lake Paiute Tribe (PLPT), and other Native communities have rich cultures and as a school community we feel it is our responsibility to support and nurture our students' growth and understanding of who they are, and how their identity includes both their tribal life and that of westernized culture.

Natchez is a public school on tribal land, and as such we are held to the same standards as all other public schools in Washoe County. Academic expectations for our students are high and we recognize the importance of education being the great equalizer, providing opportunities for our students to impact their community in positive ways. We also recognize and appreciate the historical trauma and how it impacts our students ability to thrive in learning environments. As a profession we know that students perform better for teachers they believe care for them, and research also indicates that teachers who build relationships with

their students provide better instruction. Through these relationships and personal connections, the expected outcomes have a higher percentage of being achievable.

Intended Impact

Our innovation project of Identity Investigation allows our community to:

- Our project allows for students to construct a strong foundation in building and sustaining relationships that connect them to both the school and tribal community.
- Over the course of a student's educational career at Natchez our plan supports students' ideas of how their contributions make an impact in their lives and into the community.
- Investigating Identity activities build upon each other over the course of years, providing just the right amount of developmental productive struggle as a means to build the tools our students will utilize to thrive.
- The “soft skills” above are the foundation that allow all students the opportunity to engage in learning from a safe and supported environment so that we learn about each other at the same time that we grow in our learning.

Project Work

This project came to fruition because the members of the committee were already engaging students in isolated identity work. After realizing that we were each working to build student identity we decided that we would have a greater and deeper impact if we combined ideas and created a systematic approach to supporting identity over the 7 years students are at Natchez. Some of the work started in the fall, while other students have been working on some identity work throughout the year.

In middle May the committee approached the staff, asking everyone to use the starting K/1st grade activities to begin the discussions about identity this year, this way next year ALL returning students will have some experience with the concept.

After much discussion about the activities that had already been implemented we agreed upon the following succession:

Driving questions and connected activities:

PreK/Kindergarten: Who am I? Who is my Family?

- All About My Culture Family Packet
- Identity Inquiry (Celebrations, Food, Sports, Hobbies)
- Compare/Contrast Identity Inquiry with peers
- Create a self portrait of identity to be saved and used with 5th grade capstone project

First Grade: Who am I? Where Have I Been?

- More About My Culture Family Packet
- Identity Inquiry Extension (Important places, Values, Traditions)

- String Web Map (Marking where students were born, where they have lived, where they live now)

Second Grade: Who is my tribe (my people)? Where is my family from (ancestry)? Who are my parents?

- Habitat of Where My Family is From
- Student/Parent Interview (Students building questions...What did your parents want to be when they were younger? Did that happen, why or why not?)

Third Grade: Where does my "tribe" fit into the world? Where do I see people like me in the world?

- Food Map
- Person Study (Study a person from their culture)
- Geographical Study of Where My Family is From

Fourth Grade: Who is Pyramid Lake? Why Pyramid Lake?

- PL Driving Tour
- Model of NV
- Compare/Contrast PL Vs. other places

Fifth Grade: What is the future of my culture? How does my identity fit into my culture? How will I continue to connect and belong to both my culture and the world outside my culture?

- Capstone Project - Promotion project: each student presents a speech at promotion, their speech includes the evolution of their identity over the years.
- Native American of the week project
- Photo shoot project - How does my identity fit into my culture and how do I belong to both my culture and the world outside my culture.

*Encouraged for all grades:

- Record/Write Student Stories

Lessons Learned

Starting with what each of us were already doing to build identity with our students we met to discuss what a scope and sequence could look like over the course of the years, building a structure so that all students could take yearly steps to document the growth of their identity. We then created an introductory lesson plan for all teachers in the building to implement in their classroom so that all students in the building would have an introductory experience. We anticipated some push back as our school focus is very skills driven. This approach allows for a more fluid and student centered approach. We are unsure of how many teachers used the lesson plan with their students or how important they believe the project to be.

Next Steps

- Wrap up what students have completed this year
- Determine ongoing storage for student samples
- Build out the scope and sequence lessons for additional grade levels
- Order necessary materials for each grade level
- Have discussions with staff regarding implementation of the lessons throughout the next school year and into the future

- Design different ways each year for students to represent their identity (dreamcatcher, half face, half drawing, mask, photograph of student (half normal, half cultural identity, poem writing, where am I from?))

Lessons Learned

- Our enthusiasm and state of urgency for a project is not always the same for everyone else in the building
- We need time to work together, and discuss what students are producing and saying to build a greater culture within the building

Project Artifacts: Case Study Information