

Identity-Creating Camps

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There is a crying need for healing among Alaska Native people and an essential element of the healing process is the need to retain our unique Alaska Native identities. This is best done through the use of the Native language because it thrusts us into the thought world of our ancestors and their ways of comprehending the world. With the use of the Native language, we begin to appreciate the richness and complexity of our traditional philosophical and spiritual world views. It is for these reasons that we need to pay more attention to how we can draw upon our Alaska Native languages to serve as the foundation for the various science and cultural camps that we sponsor. To gain the full expression of our languages, identity and way of life, the camps must also take place in all the seasons of the year with the Elders being the prime movers. Their description of traditional activities through the local language best conveys the relationships between a Alaska Native concept and its practice.

The following are a few suggestions on how we might approach and design camps for different purposes. Three types of Native cultural camps are described and each may be revised and adapted to suit the local situation and needs.

Cultural Immersion Camp

For students who have a good command of the Native language or dialect in a particular region and thus can be immersed on all aspects of the local culture.

1. All activities are done utilizing the Native language only and the focus is on in-depth learning of the things one needs to know to make a life and a living.
2. All planning and implementation includes local Native Elders and other knowledgeable Native people explaining what and why things are done the way

they are for cultural adaptability and survival. This can include the following topics:

- a. Use of and relationship to plants and animals: times for harvesting; how and why certain rules are followed to ensure continuation of species; explain the traditional preparation and preservation techniques; how does the process contribute to natural diversity and cultural adaptability?
 - b. Medicinal plants: their use and how they have been preordained by Ellam Yua (Spirit of the Universe) to have power to heal certain diseases; harvesting process—preparation and preservation; how to use them, being mindful of the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual inclinations of the person being treated; how do they contribute to natural diversity and cultural adaptability?
 - c. Explore the nature-mediated technology of the Alaska Native people: materials; preparation methods; explanations of why certain parts of materials are used; how the idea for the technology came about; functioning of the various parts; use and care of the item; does it utilize refined or unrefined natural resources and why; is it biodegradable; what are its spiritual aspects; how does it contribute to natural diversity and cultural sustain-ability and adaptability?
 - d. Explore the natural sense-makers of nature for weather, seasons, flora and fauna.
 - e. Discuss time and its measurement.
 - f. Navigation techniques: finding direction using nature and celestial objects.
3. Use song, dance and drumming for transmission of culture, especially its spiritual aspect; develop a realization that everything a Native person does is a form of prayer and paying homage to Ellam Yua (or whatever name a tribe has for the Creator.)
 4. Use mythology and stories for value-creation and teaching what it means to be human; the entire experience should be value-creating and give a cultural orientation, an identity.
 5. Live off the land as much as possible, using traditional techniques and technology.
 6. The scheduling must be flexible and determined by the Elders to do things when it feels right.

Language Development Camp

For students who have little or no understanding of the Native language or have little or no speaking ability. Thus the focus is on learning the language itself in a setting where it has inherent meaning.

The process is best determined on a day-by-day basis by the Elders and teachers, but it could range from full immersion as outlined above, to gradual immersion starting with the Native language being used with English interpretations, then progressing to an hour or two in which only the Native language is used. In either case, the goal would be to have the last week be all in the Native language. Otherwise, all of the suggestions outlined for immersion camps would apply.

Bridging Science Camp

Same as above but incorporating aspects of a Eurocentric viewpoint. The bridging camp should include not only the Native language and cultural practices, but also the Eurocentric scientific concepts and practices.

1. Most of the activities outlined above apply, but with the addition of a comparative perspective. All activities are coordinated to best achieve understanding. The traditional activities are not separate activities from Eurocentric mathematics and sciences, but are planned to be compatible and complementary with one another.
2. Identify some of the most used Eurocentric scientific terms and coin corresponding Native words with help from Elders and students.
3. When using Eurocentric science knowledge, concepts or theories, explore how they may add to or detract from one's Nativeness.
4. Examine whether the Eurocentric knowledge is useful and applicable in the place you are situated or is it extraneous know-ledge in that context. When and where is it useful?
5. Use traditional estimation and intuitive measurement techniques; explore recognition of pattern and symmetry without mathematical equations to confuse the issue—the universe is not all numbers.
6. Use computers and other technological tools sparingly; explore the implications of the statement, “our memories are becoming obsolete.”

7. How does adding Eurocentric knowledge to the traditional ways of knowing enhance or detract from natural diversity and cultural adaptability?
8. Examine ways in which technological tools may add to environmental and mental pollution.
9. Examine ways in which the camp activities foster values of cooperation and harmony or competition and individualism.
10. The camp planners and implementers should always have the local list of Native values in front of them for guidance in determining what to include from the modern world.

The bridging science camps are intended to incorporate the Eurocentric mathematics and scientific concepts along with the local knowledge base of the Elders. All daily activities should be coordinated to effectively and efficiently teach and validate both thought worlds. The students should gain a keen understanding of Eurocentric scientific research since many of the findings corroborate Native observations and have helped to identify globally-stressed arenas that explain why Mother Earth is suffering. This makes it absolutely necessary that students learn Eurocentric concepts as well as their own ways of recognizing patterns, utilizing symbols, employing estimation and intuitive measurement and developing a keen observation of place.

The Native students have to realize that our ways of knowing are identity-building processes. They can then pursue careers in mathematics and the sciences buttressed with a nature-mediated world view giving them a kind and polite disposition to the world in which they live.