

# CROSS-CULTURAL TRAINING RECOMMENDATIONS

## TRIBAL REVIEW OF THE WASHINGTON PYRAMID MODEL

In this report, Swan Innovations provides an initial review of the *Washington Pyramid Model (WAPM) Coaching and Training Materials*, and recommendations to adapt for use in Native American communities.

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## OVERVIEW

The Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction Department of Early Learning has asked Swan Innovations to review existing professional development materials related to the Washington Pyramid Model (WAPM) and make recommendations on how those materials can be adapted for use in Native American communities across Washington state. The Washington Pyramid Model is a comprehensive and multi-tiered approach designed to support children's social and emotional health. In addition to reviewing written materials, Dr. Martina Whelshula and Cree Whelshula had the opportunity to observe a 2-day virtual training of trainers facilitated by Ariane Gauvreau and Mackenzie Weintraub of the University of Washington Haring Center. Attending the training provided a valuable opportunity to observe the nuances of the model which weren't available by merely reviewing the material.

In this review we examine the model and practices through an Indigenous epistemological lens to examine what elements can be adapted to Native American Tribal early childhood programs. We will indicate what elements are in alignment with Tribal values and practices and make recommendations for modifications where needed.

## BACKGROUND

For nearly a century, Native American students have experienced some of the poorest educational outcomes of all races in Washington state and nationally. In the 1969

Kennedy Senate Report on national Indian Education, it was discovered that one quarter of elementary and secondary school teachers (by their own admission) would prefer **not** to teach Native American children.

The average Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) score for American Indians is approximately 50% higher than for individuals who identify as White. (National Native Children's Trauma Center, 2021) Native American student enrollment in Washington public schools is only 1.3%; however, the Native American discipline rate among kindergartners is the highest among all races at 5.3% compared to White kindergarteners at 2.0% and Asian kindergarteners at <1%. (OSPI Report Card 2019-20) The United States Department of Education Office for Civil Rights reports that American Indian and Native- Alaskan students represent less than 1% of the student population but up to 3% of suspensions and expulsions. Percent of Native American preschoolers entering kindergarten ready in all six areas of development and learning is 34.6% compared to White preschoolers at 57.5% and Asian preschoolers at 63.0%.

These statistics reflect a history of trauma from colonization, significant cultural differences, and a public education system that has failed to meet the emotional, psychological safety and educational needs of Native American children. We will explore these challenges and remedies in the context of colonial trauma and an Indigenous epistemology.

## CHALLENGES

### NATIVE AND NON-NATIVE EDUCATORS

In reviewing the WAPM, we have come to realize that the recommendations for adaptation of the professional development materials will vary depending on if the training is for Native American educators or non-Native educators. For example, for non-Native educators, it is important to understand the historical and ongoing persistence of colonial trauma and their own implicit and cultural bias. For Native educators, they may need more support in reflective practice around their own colonial trauma and strategies on how to work through triggers and internalized oppression. This shows up as giving more value to Eurocentric pedagogy as opposed to more traditional cultural pedagogy.

## DISCUSSION

After attending the 2-day training of trainers, we were struck by the potential the Pyramid Model offers for transformation in Native American early childhood programs and in the lives of Native American children and their families.

Both modules are rich in content and practice that reflect the most current research and evidence-based practices in early childhood social-emotional health. Even better, it is deeply grounded in trauma-informed practice which is so needed in the education of Native American students. In addition, the Pyramid Model addresses not only explicit viewpoints on concepts such as race, culture, and ethnicity for working across cultures, but it also addresses implicit assumptions and worldviews within social and philosophical frameworks.

The most striking discovery at first glance, is the fact that on the 5th slide, right after the Welcome and Introductions, is the section on Embracing Equity. We were surprised to see the acknowledgement of the impacts of colonization on the Tribes of Washington state.

We embrace equity as a foundation of and driving force behind our work by listening to, learning from and sharing power with families and communities.

We take responsibility for eliminating racial and ethnic disparities and disproportionate impacts on the Black, Indigenous, and People of Color we serve.

By embedding principles of equity and culture into our training and discussion, we take action. We recognize that the land we inhabit is Indigenous land. It is important to remember the lasting impacts of colonization in Washington State and strive to act in undoing the harm. Please take a moment to acknowledge the Indigenous land you are on. We encourage you to learn about and partner with the Tribes whose land you are occupying. If you don't already know, you can find out at [Native-land.ca](https://www.native-land.ca) or text your zip code to 907-312-5085.

And on the 8th slide, The Power of Language reads, "...there is power in language and that language has been used by the dominant culture to harm and continues to cause

harm in communities. Using harmful language has contributed to historical trauma and feelings of othering and continues to perpetuate White Supremacy culture.”

Right up front, the trainers are confronting the racial-colonial foundations of our education system. It’s a great first step in unraveling the harmful patterns of oppression and the White Supremacy system. Our initial reaction was one of surprise and then feeling a sense of validation. It is a very powerful opening for a training that truly confronts racism and discrimination.

In this following section, we give feedback on the larger topics by identifying strengths, providing additional context for understanding through a Native American cultural lens, and make recommendations for moving forward. More detailed recommendations will come in the final report.

## 1. TRAUMA-INFORMED CARE

### a. Strengths

- i. Trauma-informed practice is integrated at every level of the Pyramid Model.
- ii. The Pyramid Model has information rich resources to support educators in understanding the impacts of trauma.
- iii. The National Center for Pyramid Model Innovations (NCPMI) acknowledges disparity and equity in trauma.
- iv. The NCPMI recognizes that educators' reactions to trauma responses can be punitive in nature and compound trauma.
- v. The Pyramid Model gives educators knowledge, skills, and strategies throughout the framework that supports building resilience for children.
- vi. Resources for educators in their own self-care such as introduction to mindfulness practices.

### b. Additional Context

- i. While all children may experience trauma, Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) children experience trauma disproportionately, with Indigenous children being the demographic most impacted by trauma, statistically. While NCPMI acknowledges disparities, we did not see representation for Native American children. It is important for educators to understand that:

1. Trauma experienced by Indigenous children and families is rooted in colonial trauma and not in any way linked to Indigenous culture, values, or practices.
2. There is a saying by Resmaa Menakem that, "Trauma decontextualized in a person looks like personality. Trauma decontextualized in a family looks like family traits. Trauma in a people looks like culture [bodies of culture]."
  - a. This is important to understand because oftentimes Native American children, families, and communities experience implicit bias from local school districts for how trauma manifests in the community and families.
  - b. It is important to understand that Native parents can act out of their own trauma responses but are not active abusers of their children.
3. Positive and supportive adult-child relationships is the number one resiliency factor for children who experience trauma.
  - a. Due to epigenetic inheritance and experienced trauma, Indigenous youth have disproportionate rates of suicide. By being a supportive and compassionate adult in these children's lives, particularly in the sensitive periods, educators can literally save lives.



- ii. Epigenetic inheritance can cause an increased risk for psychiatric disorders like post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety, depression, and suicide ideation. (Brockie et al., 2013). In one study from Canada, they found an increased risk for suicide ideation in First Nations people who had one generation of family attend residential school. In First Nations people who had more than one generation attend residential school, the risk of suicide ideation increased even more. (Wilk et al., 2017).
- iii. It is important to contextualize trauma experienced by Native American children and families as rooted in colonial trauma. Colonial trauma is a series of traumatic events experienced collectively over time and persists in Indigenous communities to this day. Examples of colonial events that cause harm to Native American people include, but is not limited to:
  - 1. Disease epidemics - Loss of 90% + of Native American populations in Washington state
  - 2. Indian Wars
  - 3. Indian Hangings
  - 4. Land Theft
  - 5. Sexual Violence - Native American women and girls were stolen from their families forced into prostitution in brothels. Modernly, there is "Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women", sex trafficking, and are disproportionately affected by sexual abuse.

6. Native American culture/spirituality was outlawed - Indian religions have only been legal since 1978.
7. Reservation Confinement
8. Boarding schools and policies - Children experienced torture, physical abuse, sexual abuse, neglect, malnourishment, and experimentation.
  - a. Native American boarding schools were the first school experiences of Native American people. At many boarding schools, once a week the child who had the most "demerits" would have to run down a long hallway lined with other children who held belts. The children with the belts had to strike the child running as hard as they could. If the children did not comply, they would then be forced to run down as well and get hit. This was called "running the gauntlet".
9. Termination and Relocation Policies
10. Indian Adoption Project - While boarding schools were starting to be recognized as abusive, the government still wanted to continue the assimilation process of Native American children by removing their children from their families and giving them to white families.
11. Forced Sterilization - Some Native American women did not realize until adulthood that they were given hysterectomies

as children under anesthesia from other medical procedures.

c. Recommendations for Moving Forward

- i. It is likely that all Native American children are at minimum impacted by epigenetic trauma in addition to the high and disproportionate rates of developmental trauma. Educators working with Native American children should be trained in the more intensive trauma-informed practice of the Pyramid Model in addition to understanding the historical context of this trauma.
- ii. Educators should understand that by being a positive and supportive adult presence in a child's life who is experiencing trauma, they can literally help the child with coping skills that will last throughout the lifetime and could quite literally save their life.
- iii. While factors for resilience are integrated throughout the model, there is one factor that would benefit from being explicitly stated as a resilience factor. According to the Center on the Developing Child there are 4 primary factors, "facilitating supportive adult-child relationships; building a sense of self-efficacy and perceived control; providing opportunities to strengthen adaptive skills and self-regulatory capacities; and **mobilizing sources of faith, hope, and cultural traditions.**" (Harvard University, 2015) For Native American children, this means (re)connection to their culture/language. There is an abundance of scholarly articles and

research around trauma for Native American youth and protective factors, and a protective factor that is always present is culture.

1. Depending on the community, there could be a number of potential challenges, solutions, and recommendations for this:

- a. Challenge: Indigenous languages and traditional practices are at least endangered, if not, dormant due to colonization. It can be difficult for even Native educators to have access to resources and materials to utilize in the classroom.
- b. Challenge: Culture has varying levels of sensitivity. Some cultural practices led by non-Native educators would be inappropriate, while other practices would be okay.
- c. Challenge: Native communities are still dealing with the psychological repercussions of boarding schools and lawful punishment of cultural practices. This results in some Native people experiencing internalized oppression and may view language/culture as “not relevant” or “not useful in the real world”.
- d. Possible Solutions:

- i. Validate Indigenous language/culture as the complex, deep, intricate valuable knowledge systems that they are.
- ii. Create spaces and opportunities for language/cultural activities, events, discussion, and praise.
- iii. Consult and/or partner with local Tribal departments such as Language/Culture programs, History, Archives and Records, or Senior programs to access or develop curriculum and resources to utilize in the classroom.
  - 1. While non Native participation in cultural activities is usually okay, cultural practices need to be Native led.
- e. Recommendation: Develop training (or implement existing; if applicable) on how to approach and work with Tribes for support.
- f. Recommendation: Develop training for Native educators on how to implement cultural practices into the classroom.
- iv. It would be beneficial to explicitly explain how trauma impacts the brain and also how to build trust with children to build resilience.

1. Children who's fear response system is chronically activated can lead to a brain that is wired to be in a fight or flight state and feel unsafe in safe environments. Trauma can also cause chemical reactions that physically injure the brain in the following ways (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2015):
  - a. Decreased brain size
  - b. Decreased connectivity
  - c. Reduced volume in hippocampus (learning & memory center)
  - d. Reduced volume in corpus callosum
  - e. Decreased volume of cerebellum
  - f. Smaller prefrontal cortex
  - g. Overactive amygdala
  - h. Decreased electrical activity
  - i. Less development of upper brain
2. Here are some activities that produce the hormone oxytocin to promote bonding and trust:
  - a. Taking a genuine interest in the lives of the children
  - b. Laughing together
  - c. Singing together
  - d. Listening to soothing music (It can just play in the background. It would be great to have student choice here)

- e. Going on adventures together
- f. Appropriate physical touch (high five, fist bumps, et cetera.)
- g. Group meditation
- h. Give sense of purpose

## 2. RELATIONSHIPS

### a. Strengths

- i. The primary focus on relationships with children, families, communities and colleagues is another one of the most notable elements of the model. One of the core values in Native American culture is the Sacredness of Relationships. These include not only human relationships, but the relationships with all of Creation.
- ii. The value of human relationships extends to family, community, and Tribe. The Pyramid Model's priorities on building, honoring, and nurturing family partnerships is in direct alignment with Tribal values and is highly commendable.
- iii. As mentioned in the section around trauma, "The single most common factor for children who develop resilience is at least one stable and committed relationship with a supportive parent, caregiver, or other adult." (Harvard, 2015) It is refreshing to see so much of the framework focused on coaching educators to be positive, supportive, co-regulating, and compassionate.
- iv. In many Indigenous cultures, children are considered sacred. To paraphrase an Elder in our community, you teach children to hang up their personal belongings because you do not want to even step over their belongings; they are **that** sacred. Positive adult-child relationships and honoring children where they are at is in alignment with Indigenous values.

### b. Additional Context



- i. Colonization brought about far reaching trauma as the government tore Native children, sometimes as young as three years old, from their families and communities for generations. The experience Native parents have with public education has generated a pervasive distrust. The most egregious educational outcomes for Native students exist to this day as a result of a systems failure.
  - ii. During the boarding school era, entire generations of Native American children experienced disrupted attachment and experienced physical, emotional, and psychological abuse from the people who were charged with their care. This developmental trauma has created psychological impacts that affected their own ability to parent in healthy ways. This is called “intergenerational trauma.” “Toxic stress in childhood from abandonment [forced removal] or chronic violence has pervasive effects on the capacity to pay attention, to learn, to see where other people are coming from, and it really creates havoc with the whole social environment. And it leads to criminality, and drug addiction, and chronic illness, and people going to prison, and **repetition of the trauma on the next generation.**” (Noonan, 2017)
- c. Recommendations for Moving Forward
    - i. Help educators understand the origins of distrust that Native American families experience with the education system. An educator may have to earn the trust of the family by being

supportive and suspending judgment over an extended period of time. They will need to exercise patience in the process.

- ii. Help educators understand how intergenerational trauma might be affecting the families they are working with and that the families themselves may need support as well in developing healthy relationships with their children.
- iii. It is a common cultural practice to provide food as an invite to gather. Offering food is equivalent to offering a relationship, and accepting the food offering is equivalent to accepting the offer of friendship/relationship. It is recommended to provide meals for families as an invite to the program.

### 3. CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE

#### a. Strengths

- i. Not only does the Pyramid Model prioritize culturally responsive relationships with children and their families, it goes even further into anti-biased and anti-racist practices. Anti-racist agendas are typically left out of planning in educational practice in favor of more broad brush, superficial conversations.
- ii. The Pyramid Model emphasizes self-reflection and challenges educators to look at their own beliefs, values, and biases.

#### b. Additional Context

- i. "All instruction is culturally responsive. The question is: to which culture is it currently oriented?"

Slide 22 notes: "Or, it might be responsive to the culture of a different group of people - BIPOC, same-sex parents, single parents, foster families, adoptive families, disable parents, multigenerational families, multilingual families and more." We would assert here that in this country, all curriculum is Eurocentric and responsive to a western paradigm, but they get adapted in an attempt to be more supportive for other racial/ethnic/gender experiences.

The most fundamental concept of brain development is that experiences shape the brain. "There is clear evidence that cultural values and experiences shape neurocognitive processes and influence patterns of neural activation and may even affect neural structures. The study of the 'cultural brain' is a critically important topic that demonstrates how fundamental cultural values and practices are at influencing thought." (Park & Huang, 2010). The western paradigm is so pervasive that individuals who grow up speaking only English and in a western public education system may mistake a western paradigm as universal human behaviors (smiling is an example of one of the most universal human behaviors). Individuals whose own heritage comes from western cultures may perceive that their own values, beliefs, perspectives

are universal and not cultural. It's the universality of the western European worldview

Zhu, Zhang, Fan, and Han (2007) reported that both East Asians and Westerners showed robust activation in the medial prefrontal cortex (MPFC) and anterior cingulate cortex when making judgments about self. When the same participants made judgments about their mother, the East Asian subjects showed more MPFC activation than did Westerners, reflecting the more collectivist view of self, in contrast to the Western individualistic representation. (Park & Huang, 2010)

One of the places to find cultural values and worldviews is within language. In fact, it is Salish languages that get in the way of linguists finding universality of how languages work. "It is usually claimed that languages contain at least two major word-classes, nouns and verbs. However, Salishan languages of Northwestern North America cannot be described in these terms." (Kinkade, 1983). Other examples from many (if not all) Salish languages are that, prior to colonization, there is no word for please or sorry. Please is often found in hierarchical cultures and considered a politeness marker when there is a difference in status and title. According to Elder speakers, we do not have a word for please

because it implies that you are making the person beg for what they need or want. If a child needs something, you give it to them freely to show them generosity and kindness so they will be generous and kind. For sorry, you would never do anything you would be sorry for. If you did something to someone to hurt them on purpose, you would have to fix it with your actions. If it was an accident, you would say "excuse me" or "I made a mistake".

Indigenous culture and spirituality was punishable by law, up until the late 1970s. In boarding school, children were physically abused for just speaking their language. Survivor accounts describe witnessing other children die on impact from being struck (sometimes with a board) because they spoke their language. These experiences had lasting effects that span generations. Many boarding school survivors urged their own children to not speak their language and to get a western education so they would not experience the same abuse. Even in most Tribal/language immersion schools, the curriculum is a Eurocentric model that gets translated into an Indigenous language with surface level cultural activities added. This is, in large part, due to Tribal/language immersion schools needing to adhere to state standards which are Eurocentric.

Inclusion of the Indigenous child's culture into an education setting is very important. Historically, images of Native American people have been either absent or damaging.

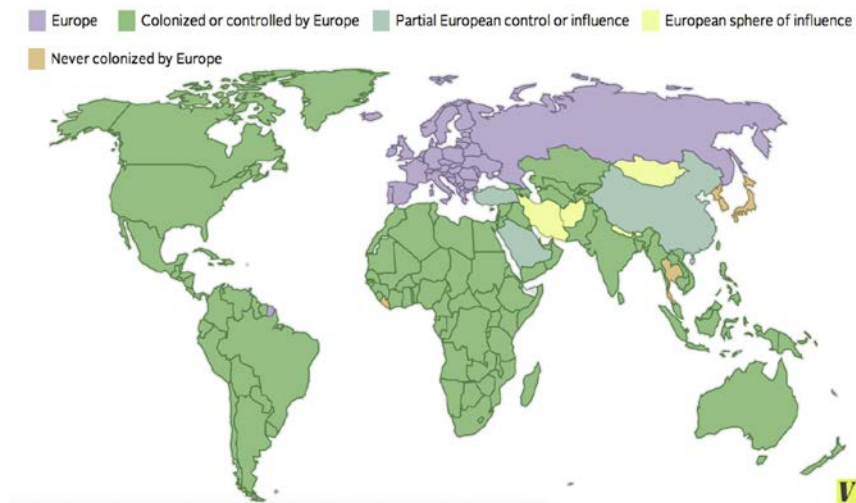
...personal and collective self-esteem have a considerable impact on school success for Aboriginal and minority children, and that this is connected to the presence of appropriate cultural and linguistic representation in the classroom. In cases where the child's heritage language or culture are absent from the school or represented poorly, the result is often insecurity and lack of engagement. (Morcom, 2017)

Children are very smart and understand that school teaches the foundational knowledge needed to be "smart" and "successful". If the child's culture is not present, it sends a message that the heritage culture/language of their people is lower status, and they inherit this devaluation for themselves.

Native American culture is complex in that there is pre-colonial culture which are the values, beliefs, worldviews, and practices of our ancestors prior to colonization. Then there is modern culture which still carries a lot of the foundational elements of pre-colonial culture but is still affected by colonization. Not all Native Americans

are connected to their Tribal practices or languages, but can still carry the values, interpersonal behaviors, et cetera. at a deeper unconscious level.

## Countries that have been under European control



*(Fisher, 2014) This image is to help illustrate how much of the world has been colonized by Europe, leading to a false sense of universality of western paradigm of culture and behaviors.*

- c. Recommendations for Moving Forward
  - i. We recommend developing a stand-alone training on culture and cultural bias. Just as much as educators need to practice self-reflection on implicit bias and being anti-racist, there also needs to be self-reflection specifically in cultural-bias and being anti-colonial.

- ii. In addition to the above mentioned training, local Tribal consultation for non-Native educators serving Native students is important to include.

#### 4. SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENTS

##### a. Strengths

- i. Having a well designed and organized learning environment can truly prevent or mitigate a lot of behavioral issues and lead to a more emotionally and physically safe learning environment. It can help remove power struggles between adults and children; which is where many Native American children experience the most trauma in educational settings.
- ii. In Unpacking the Pyramid Model, there is a great section on creating learning centers which is great for supporting child initiated learning.

##### b. Additional Context

- i. Native American children were introduced to the concept of a classroom through residential boarding schools.
- ii. Prior to colonization, Native children learned through a highly contextualized process by exploring the land, observing nature, and unselfconscious imitation of adults.

##### c. Recommendations for Moving Forward

- i. While we recognize that the WAPM supports child-initiated activities; however, we recommend promoting child-initiated



learning models (ex. Waldorf). Research suggests that healthy children are born with an intuition and drive to master developmental skills.

Instinctual optimism is a quality that we believe is genetically driven in our species. Instinctual optimism explains why children, absent any knowledge of their capacity or potential for success, are willing to try again and again to master developmental tasks. All children come into the world with instinctual optimism. It is the engine that drives their daily quest to understand and master the world around them.  
(Goldstein & Brooks, n.d.)

When the teacher selects the activity in direct instruction, it can then create power struggles between the adult and child and create more “withdrawals” than deposits. As stated in Unpacking the Pyramid Model, “Historically, one of the most challenging times of the day for teachers is large group teacher directed activity...” (Mary Louise Hemmeter et al., 2020, p. 82) By creating an environment that is rich in learning opportunities and utilizing the environment as the third teacher, educators can shift from an authoritative figure to a supportive collaborative figure and help

build resilience in children. In addition, child-initiated learning models are more culturally appropriate for Indigenous families.

We also recommend promoting nature-based education as feasibly possible given each program's unique circumstances. In one case study, they found that young children who participated in the child-initiated exploration classroom naturally focused on building foundational developmental skills as shown in the image below.

Table 2: Key Themes and Sub-Themes

| Key Themes   | Sub Themes   |
|--|--|
| <b>Foundational skills children were developing</b>                                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Social/Interpersonal</b></li> <li>• <b>Language/Literacy</b></li> <li>• <b>Math</b></li> <li>• <b>Science</b></li> <li>• <b>Construction/Engineering</b></li> <li>• <b>Kinesthetic</b></li> <li>• <b>Other Cognitive Skills (including visual-spatial and intrapersonal)</b></li> </ul>  |
| <b>Characteristics of the NEC that supported child-initiated skill development</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Space</b></li> <li>• <b>Materials:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Abundance</b></li> <li><b>Open-ended</b></li> <li><b>Natural</b></li> </ul> </li> </ul>   |
| <b>Teacher’s role in supporting child-initiated skill development</b>              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Physical placement of teachers near children</b></li> <li>• <b>Offering observations</b></li> <li>• <b>Asking thought provoking questions</b></li> <li>• <b>Allowing children to take the lead</b></li> <li>• <b>Trusting children to make decisions</b></li> <li>• <b>Facilitating children’s engagement without taking over</b></li> </ul> |

(Veselack et al., 2010)

Not only does nature-based education benefit all children, but it also has unique benefits for Indigenous children. First, connection

to the land fosters a sense of identity and belonging as many Indigenous cultures view themselves as part of the land or nature. For example, the Colville band of the Colville Confederated Tribes refers to themselves as *sx̣ẉỵiṭpx* in the language, which literally translates as “people of the sharp pointed trees”. Indigenous lands, nature, and animals are all part of the Indigenous child’s community. Connecting Indigenous youth with the land and nature supports stability, which is a basic need that has been disrupted by colonization. “Stability comes from family and community. ...Kids and families should be a part of larger units to give them a sense of belonging, tradition and cultural continuity.” (Children's Hospital Colorado, 2019).

Similar to how people from East Asian cultures’ brains do not separate themselves from their mother, we would hypothesize that Indigenous people do not separate themselves from their homeland. Around the world, new research is revolutionizing the way healthy relationships or attachments can be developed. Health and wellbeing are being viewed differently for children and families, beginning with how we ‘attach’ to not just people, but to all things living. Over the last decade, scientists have chronicled the lives of children in their relationship to nature. They found, over time, children would begin to relate to natural places in a special way, a sacred way. They began relating to them with love,

like the love they had for a mother or someone dear to them. Through this interaction, scientists found that children learned how to socialize, how to greet and co-exist with other species and other life forms.

[https://depts.washington.edu/hhwb/Thm\\_Place.html](https://depts.washington.edu/hhwb/Thm_Place.html) is a great resource to learn more about place-based attachment.

In order for learning to occur, one needs to be in a relaxed state of mind. This is difficult for a person who has a brain wired for fear or experiencing a trauma response. Being in nature buffers stress and research suggests that the higher the nature exposure, the greater the benefits (White, 2019). Many Native people traditionally lived along water sources such as lakes or rivers. Water, in particular, has a powerful effect on creating a relaxed state of mind. The sight and sound of water triggers a brain response to produce “happy chemicals” as well as increasing blood flow to the brain and heart (Nichols, 2015, p. 59).

It is also important to note that non-Native educators do not need to lead any cultural activities with the child. Just simply providing the opportunity to interact and engage with nature, positively, can support this. That being stated, Native educators leading cultural activities on the land has the most benefits.

## 5. SOCIAL - EMOTIONAL LEARNING

### a. Strengths

- i. The primary focus on social-emotional health and learning is a highly commendable element of the Pyramid Model. The potential for healing from intergenerational trauma through social-emotional learning is increased significantly. Social-emotional health can aid in healing the hindbrain where trauma-responses reside and begin to build healthier neural pathways in the mid and cortical areas of the brain.
- ii. There is an abundance of resources such as visuals, phrases, activities, and stories to support social-emotional learning in a way that is engaging and interesting to young children.
- iii. Social-emotional learning activities in the Pyramid Model utilize storytelling to understand emotions and to explore problem solving. Culturally, many Indigenous people also utilize storytelling to convey core values, teachings, and to assist in exploring various socially acceptable and unacceptable behaviors and consequences.
- iv. Social-emotional learning is proactive and meets the child where they are at developmentally and psychologically.

### b. Additional Context

- i. Colonial trauma has impacted families for generations through intergenerational transmission and epigenetic inheritance. In 2014,

the Department of Justice reported that Native American children experience PTSD at the same rate as combat veterans returning from the Iraq and Afghanistan wars. This trauma has been compounded by the punitive actions of teachers and school staff. As stated earlier in this document, Native American students are expelled from kindergarten at 5.3%, higher than all other races in Washington state.

1. Maltreatment in early childhood can damage executive function. One of the primary roles of executive function is inhibitory control and **emotional regulation** (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2015).
- ii. Northern Plateau Tribes of Washington are Salish speaking Tribes. The Okanagan Salish language is referred to as a *language of the heart*. When people greet each other, they will ask, "What is in your heart?" or, "How is your heart feeling?" The word for *thinking* or *thought* has a root which refers to feelings; a kind of "knowing" from feelings. Many Tribes have deep understandings of social-emotional relating. Much of that has been disrupted as a result of colonial trauma.
- c. Recommendations for Moving Forward
    - i. Encourage Tribal early learning programs to integrate their Tribal languages into the social-emotional curriculum and practice. This will strengthen the practice and increase acceptance by families.

- ii. Due to the remote locations of many Tribal communities, steps will need to be taken to increase access to training.
- iii. Educators working with Native students should be aware that Native children may need more support in developing executive function skills and co-regulation support than the average child due to colonial trauma.

## 6. RULES AND EXPECTATIONS

### a. Strengths

- i. The Pyramid Model promotes engaging families in identifying rules and expectations.
- ii. The Pyramid Model has great strategies and tips on how to set up rules and expectations to prevent classroom management issues which will lead to less withdrawals in student relationships.

### b. Additional Context

- i. The ability to follow rules is part of executive functioning.

Most studies investigating preschoolers applied the DCCS [Dimensional Change Card Sort task] to test cognitive flexibility. In this task, children are shown cards with pictures displaying two dimensions (e.g., color and shape) and are told to sort these cards by one dimension (e.g., by color) (pre-switch phase). At some point, participants are told to sort the cards by the other dimension (i.e., by shape) (post-switch phase). While children from the age of 4 years are able to switch the rules, 3-years-old typically perseverate and keep applying the first rule when they should apply the second one (e.g., Zelazo, 2006; Doebel and Zelazo, 2015). (Buttelmann & Karbach, 2017)



This means that preschool age children may not be developmentally able to follow new rules and expectations without practice and continual support. This also means that Native American children whose executive function is damaged by trauma, may have a harder time following rules and expectations.

c. Recommendations for Moving Forward

- i. If a child is coming into the class with different rules and expectations from home, they need support in developing cognitive flexibility. The Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University has a great resource called Activities Guide: Enhancing and Practicing Executive Function Skills with Children from Infancy to Adolescence.
- ii. Educators should be aware that all areas of executive functioning are damaged in children who experience trauma. The three areas of executive function are inhibitory control (the ability to regulate emotions and not get distracted), mental flexibility (the ability to adapt to new rules and expectations) and working memory (the ability to hold rules and expectations in conscious thought).

## 7. REFLECTIVE PRACTICE

a. Strengths

- i. Adopting the principles of reflective practice in this model is one of the highlights. Reflective practice will encourage continuous growth in all areas of the model, and especially for implicit bias.

- ii. Breaking down reflective practice into specific professional goals such as: Identifying and reflecting on our beliefs, values, and biases; Knowing yourself; and Creating awareness and challenging our bias; normalizes challenging assumptions and critically evaluating their own practice and responses to the children and their families. Hopefully, it becomes institutionalized within the field.

b. Additional Context

- i. Native American students typically make up only 1% of any school's enrollment, except for those schools on or near reservations. Nationally, Native Americans are virtually invisible from public awareness. Media portrays Native Americans as a historical people living in the past; therefore, there is a significant lack of awareness about Native Americans and culture. Native American worldview is radically different from that of Western European worldview, which makes it challenging for non-Natives to fully understand the culture.

c. Recommendations for Moving Forward

- i. Training in Tribal worldview and values would be helpful for the educator. This kind of training would help in understanding deep culture and challenging stereotypes.

## 8. TRAINING AND COACHING

a. Strengths

- i. The focus of coaching the early childhood educator, in addition to training, is a highlight of the Pyramid Model and has the capacity to significantly improve the quality of early childhood education. In contrast to training, coaching is an individualized approach to professional development. Achieving the best results for professional development and implementation of the Pyramid Model requires intentionality and capacity-building in early

childhood programs. Professional educator coaching is now considered to be a benchmark of quality in early childhood education.

- b. Additional Context
  - i. Due to the remote locations of many Tribal early childhood programs, access to quality coaching may be a hurdle to implementation.
- c. Recommendations for Moving Forward
  - i. Solicit feedback from Tribal early childhood programs on barriers they face in creating coaching experts among Tribal programs.
  - ii. Develop a state-wide approach to support Tribal educators in coaching.

## 9. RESOURCES

- a. Strengths
  - i. The WAPM has an abundance of quality concrete tools, skills, and strategies to support educators in the classroom, such as “Hot Buttons”, “Snack Talk Tips”, and “Providing Positive Feedback and Encouragement”.
- b. Additional Context
  - i. Different cultures will approach communication in unique ways, such as providing feedback. Indigenous cultures, for example, *may* encourage children through more nonverbal communication, such as nodding. Similarly, verbal communication is expressed in unique ways. Here are some examples of Okangan Salish:
    - 1. way' k<sup>w</sup>u ʔaslspuʔus
      - a. Literally: We are of two hearts.

- b. English Equivalent: We are in disagreement.
  - 2. təl' aspuʔús mi kʷ qʷlqʷilt
    - a. Literally: From your heart you speak.
    - b. English Equivalent: Use your words.
  - 3. way' ixíʔ xəsktʃpuʔús
    - a. Literally: That is good to have a heart.
    - b. English Equivalent: All feelings are okay.
  - 4. kn nstils
    - a. Literally: I feel
    - b. English: I think
  - 5. stim' aspuʔús:
    - a. Literally: What is in your heart?
    - b. English Equivalent: How are you feeling? What is on your mind? What is wrong?
- ii. Challenge: Due to colonization, it can become challenging to know how to elicit information from Elders and Knowledge Keepers. The question has to be articulated from the context of the Indigenous worldview.
  - 1. For example, using one of the phrases from above, I could technically say "kʷulmnt asʔaʔúms" which would literally mean, "use your words." The problem with that is, it takes the English language, which is grounded in a Western paradigm, and translates it into Salish. If I ask an Elder speaker, "How do you say, use your words?" they would

most likely do a direct translation like *kʷulmnt asʔaʔúms* instead of the Indigenous paradigm of *təl aspuʔús mi kʷ qʷlqʷilt* (from your heart you speak). It is best practice to ask, “If a child is crying or whining and you want them to express their feelings, what would you tell them?”

- iii. Challenge: Due to colonization, some tribes may no longer have first language speakers or Cultural Knowledge Keepers.
- c. Recommendations for Moving Forward
- i. Having a larger discussion with Tribal communities on how to approach developing resources without directly translating from English phrases and nonverbal communication into Indigenous languages and nonverbal communication.
  - ii. Fund a summit or meeting of Elders, Cultural Knowledge Keepers and early childhood educators from the Tribes in Washington to discuss how to maintain cultural fidelity in the translation of Tribal languages.

## SUMMARY

As is, the WAPM is a great framework to implement into tribal communities to build resilience in Native American children and combat the current trauma rates. If implemented correctly, first and foremost, it can create an emotionally and psychologically safe learning environment. The strengths of the WAPM for tribal communities are:

1. It focuses on educators reflecting on their own behaviors and implicit biases to be supportive, caring, nurturing, and positive co-regulators to children.
2. It provides an abundance of quality strategies, techniques, skills, and resources to:
  - a. Build Relationships
  - b. Prevent challenging behaviors which lead to withdrawals.
  - c. Teach children problem solving and coping skills.
3. That it promotes inclusion of and respect for the culture of the children and families.
4. Has materials that are easy to use and engaging for children.
5. Trauma Informed
6. Anti-racist and Anti-bias

It would be helpful to contextualize and understand the deep, pervasive, and largely subconscious manifestations of ongoing colonial trauma. The collective trauma of Native American people has been decontextualized over time resulting in implicit bias and cultural bias causing further harm to Native American students to this day. This is reflected in the current ACEs disparities and poor educational outcomes.

Contextualizing and understanding Native American trauma include understanding colonial trauma. To colonize, means to have legal/political control over a land or people. We define colonial trauma as, "Collective trauma experienced by Native American communities that has persisted across time intergenerationally as a result of ongoing colonization." Many people see colonization as a past event that Native



Americans should just “get over”. However, the state and federal government still has legal and political control over the education of Native American children which is by definition, colonization.

While the WAPM includes the promotion of culture, we feel this can be an area that can be strengthened. There is clear evidence in the research around neurobiology that culture shapes neurocognitive infrastructure. This is alarming as we assert that, in this country, all curriculum is Eurocentric and is merely adapted to reflect the surface behaviors of other cultures and experiences. This means our children are being colonized even at a neurocognitive level and changing their brains to be Eurocentric while our languages and cultures are at risk of being lost and for some, are already lost. To address this, we suggest the development of a training on understanding cultural bias and how individuals who come from western European cultures (which includes mainstream American culture) may mistake their own cultural values, beliefs, and paradigms as universal behavior and values. We also suggest funding some sort of summit or gathering of Tribal Elders and Cultural Knowledge Keepers to discuss how to approach some of these topics through an authentically Tribal lens versus merely translating the material.

We also recommend promoting Indigenous cultural practices as a protective factor which builds resilience. In an effort to unravel the centuries of colonial cultural oppression, we feel the Washington state Early Learning Department can elevate the value and importance of Native American cultures and languages in early learning environments. In order for early learning educators and leadership to fully understand

the power of culture in the cognitive, psychological, physical health, and overall well-being of Native children, we recommend training in the neurobiology of Native American culture.

In the short term, the WAPM is a great tool in halting the ongoing trauma that Native children are, and have been, experiencing. In essence, the WAPM would be instrumental in stopping the bleed caused by colonization. It is a valuable model for non-Native educators to utilize to support Native children without compounding their trauma. In the long term, to shift from surviving to thriving, Native children should have access to strong cultural programs led by co-ethnic teachers. Indigenous cultures already have within them, strong social-emotional frameworks that have existed since time immemorial. This would require systemic change, paradigm shifts, resources and funding to support Tribal efforts to recreate Indigenous child rearing practices from an authentically cultural perspective.

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