



EXPANDING THE CIRCLE

RESPECTING THE PAST
PREPARING FOR THE FUTURE

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CURRICULUM INTRODUCTION

Transition is a passage from one place or time to another. In educational settings, students make many transitions: from home to Head Start, from Head Start to preschool and kindergarten, from kindergarten to first grade, from elementary school to middle school, from middle school to high school, AND from high school to postsecondary experiences. Although all of these transition periods can be difficult for students and family, no transition quite compares to that of leaving the formal K-12 school setting and launching into adulthood. This period of transition requires particular attention because, unless prepared for, it can be an uncharted course full of challenges and changes.

Brief History of American Indian Education

There are many research studies that support the need for transition strategies for American Indian students. In 1990, among those in the population 25 years and older, 66% of American Indians had completed high school, compared to 75% of the total U.S. population; 9% had attained a bachelor's degree or higher, compared with 20% of the total U.S. population; and 3% held graduate or professional degrees, compared to 7% of the total U. S. population (Pavel, et al., 1993). In 1992, the dropout rate for American Indians was 56% and 46% for Alaskan Natives (Cahape & Howley, 1992). In 2000, in the state of Minnesota, where this curriculum was developed and piloted, the statewide high school graduation rate for American Indians was 42.6% compared with 82.8% for Caucasian students; the high school dropout rate for American Indian students in Minnesota in that same year was 34.4% compared to 9.2% for Caucasian students.

There are a multitude of reasons for these statistics. The status of American Indian student achievement has its roots in history. Trainers and students must be aware of the historical impact on the state of American Indian education today. While there may have been collaboration in some communities, federal policies did not support cooperation on a national level. Federal policies for American Indian cultural assimilation were implemented after policies of extermination and removal were set aside. Indeed, an industry of assimilation was supported with federal and faith-based resources, targeting the children of American Indian nations in particular.

One historical occurrence that has had long lasting and far-reaching impact on the education of American Indian people was the formation of the American Indian boarding school. The American Indian boarding school, as an institution of assimilation, was designed to suppress the culture, language, and spirituality of American Indian nations throughout the United States. Such institutions were built

Cahape, P. & Howley, C.B. (Eds.). (1992). *Indian Nations at risk: Listening to the people*. (Contract No. RI-88-062016). Charleston, WV. ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools.

Pavel, D.M. & Padilla, R.V. (1993). American Indian & Alaska Native postsecondary departure: An example of assessing a mainstream model using national longitudinal data. *Journal of American Indian Education*, 32, (2), 1-19.

and operated throughout the country, controlled by non-American Indian government agents and churches. During the late 1800's and into the mid-1900's, boarding school attendance was mandated. Thus, from the age of 5 through 18, American Indian children were removed from their families, for month or years at a time, and placed in the boarding school where a harsh indoctrination occurred. A systematic suppression of American Indian culture occurred during this era, which included the banning of American Indian spiritual practices and the speaking of native language, all of which held severe punitive repercussions.

The Indian boarding school served as a means to assimilate American Indian children and to train American Indian students as laborers. For the most part, the level of education and training afforded American Indian students prepared them for menial vocations. As a result, most American Indian students today do not have several generations of professionals, such as doctors, lawyers, or bankers to emulate. Today, it is often the first or second generation of the American Indian professional that is being encountered, not because of cultural inferiority or academic indifference, but because of the lack of a dignified, humane system of education. Indeed, many of the psycho-social ills that persist in American Indian communities today can be traced to the boarding school era and the systematic enforcement of child maltreatment. While not as prevalent, the American Indian boarding school still exists, although attendance is voluntary. Most schools now work closely with surrounding American Indian tribes, employing tribal members as staff and reflecting the culture of American Indian students as part of its educational programming.

A summary of additional key events in the history of American Indian contact with the U.S. systems of government and education can be found on page 9 for review and reference. Despite these historical factors, American Indian tribes throughout the United States have maintained their culture, language, and spirituality. This chapter in American history is seldom discussed or presented.

A New Direction for Today's Students

American Indian youth continue to develop goals, educational aspirations, persistence, and skills — like those provided in this curriculum. Clearly communities want to support their youth. Therefore it is extremely important that the American Indian community, including tribal leadership and community-based programs, play a proactive role in assisting families to support their youth. The core of the activities in this curriculum are centered around the involvement and participation of community members, elders, tribal leaders, and positive role models to support American Indian youth in their process of looking to the future. In this curriculum American Indian youth participate in transition activities and have the opportunity to interact with adult role models in business and education. Members of the American Indian community act as mentors and help bridge the gap between high school and adulthood.

At the core of the resilience of American Indian communities is spirituality. Because of the spiritual nature of all aspects of American Indian life, teachers, trainers, and facilitators must stress the concept of spirituality during the lessons in this curriculum. Some of these shared concepts include —

- Belief in or knowledge of unseen powers.
- Knowledge that all things in the universe are dependent on each other.
- Humor as a necessary part of the sacred.
- Relation to the earth and the inter-relatedness of all creatures.

Development and Principles of the Curriculum

The *Expanding the Circle* curriculum was developed as a result of the development of summer and school year transition activities for American Indian youth throughout Ojibwe and Dakota reservations and communities in Minnesota. Since 1996, with the assistance of federal funds from the U.S. Department of Education, work has been done with community members, teachers, administrators, tribal governments, students, and American Indian education staff in Minnesota to develop programs and activities specifically designed for American Indian high school youth to support them in their transition from high school to postsecondary life.

Transition curricula are not new to the educational field. A wide variety of transition materials were originally developed in the disability community. There is an impressive array of curricula to address the freshman year experience in college for those students who come to college under-prepared for the academic rigors. A variety of materials also exist about the educational and cultural needs of American Indian students in the school setting. However, little has been developed to combine these components to address the specific and particular needs of American Indian youth in their transition to the post-high school experience.

This curriculum is designed to offer a structured process and a set of culturally relevant activities that will facilitate successful transition for American Indian high school students. Lessons are designed for use by adults with formal teaching licensure as well as elders, community members, or paraprofessionals who may work with American Indian youth. Although the materials are designed for high school American Indian youth, particularly those 14 and older, the activities may also be beneficial for middle school students or those in their freshman year of college.

The core principles of the curriculum include —

- The belief in the resilience in American Indian youth and their communities.
- The value of humor in American Indian culture.
- The importance of the product and the process. Some activities have products while others are more reflective in nature. The authors of the curriculum believe that the process and reflection are just as important as the products that are created.
- The awareness of sensitive topic areas. There are some areas in the curriculum that some individuals may feel are too sensitive or controversial, yet it is the belief that without addressing these issues, the transition process would not be complete.
- The conviction that although not all of the postsecondary options may be appropriate for all students, the purpose of exploration is to develop educated consumers who can make informed choices.

Organization of the Curriculum

The curriculum is organized into four themes. Within each theme are topical units, and each unit has multiple lessons. The themes and units are as follows —

Theme I: The Discovery

- Unit I: The First Day
- Unit II: Social Supports
- Unit III: My Family
- Unit IV: My Community
- Unit V: About Me
- Unit VI: Responding to Change

Theme II: The Framework

- Unit I: Goal-Setting
- Unit II: Self-Advocacy
- Unit III: Problem-Solving
- Unit IV: Organizational Skills
- Unit V: Communication Skills
- Unit VI: Diversity Awareness

Theme III: The Choice

- Unit I: The Vision
- Unit II: Postsecondary Education
- Unit III: Career Development
- Unit IV: Military Training

Theme IV: The Reflection

- Unit I: Bringing It All Together

Each unit of the curriculum includes lessons approximately 30–60 minutes to complete. Some activities can be ongoing and are noted as such. The lesson plans in the curriculum are organized in the following manner and contain the following information —

- **Activity Name**
 - States the name of the activity
- **Student Outcome**
 - States the intended learner objective
 - Written in language of what student will do/be able to do
- **Portfolio Placement (*Onaakonan System*)**
 - Indicates where, if appropriate, the student could/should place product from activity in their portfolio (*Onaakonan System*).
- **Time Frame**
 - States estimated time needed to complete activity

- **Size of Group**

- Indicates the size of the group of students that is appropriate to complete the activity as intended

- **Before You Begin**

- Provides information that is important to the facilitator prior to beginning the activity
- May include background information, purpose of the activity, awareness of sensitivity of activity/topic area, and activity modifications

- **Directions**

- Lists step-by-step directions for the facilitator to follow for completion of activity with students

- **Discussion**

- Provides list of discussion questions/topics for during and after completion of activity with students

- **Closure**

- Provides suggestions for journal and/or community circle topics to be used at the end of the activity

- **Additional Suggestions/Resources**

- Provides additional relevant information or resources that may be helpful to the facilitator in expanding a topic or activity

An additional component of the curriculum is the *Onaakonon System* (OS), a portfolio filing system for students to organize their personal records and information gathered and developed throughout the curriculum. A sample OS is included with this manual and additional copies should be purchased for each student. Several lessons incorporate the OS, beginning with Theme 1, Lesson 1, Lesson 3.

Tips for Successfully Using the Curriculum

As you plan to utilize the curriculum in your program, here are some tips that are essential for the success of the program and the well being of the students.

- Select a skilled facilitator/trainer to implement the curriculum. Many of the activities require someone who not only can complete the activities with students, but also someone who is able to facilitate effective post-activity discussions.
- Create a program where the students feel safe by —
 - Providing a culturally welcoming environment.
 - Hiring staff that know the students and know how to work well with American Indian students.
 - Scheduling carefully and following through on all activities.
 - Over-planning with more activities than you think you will need.

- Respect the individuality and culture of students by meeting them “where they are” so they can learn to be more accepting of themselves and others.
- Provide positive American Indian role models on site, either as guest speakers, staff, or community elders who are asked to participate.
- Ask the community and students to help select the activities so they reflect the local culture and needs of the students.
- Actively participate in all activities with the students. Do not act as an “onlooker” who is observing, but not interacting.
- Take the time to develop a personal relationship with the each student. This is a “nice” aspect of learning for most students, but essential for most Indian students.
- Require that the students attend the program in its entirety...every day for every activity. This prepares them for the importance of attendance on the job and for higher education classes. Emphasize that attendance is a critical element of learning.
- Expose students as often as possible to postsecondary education options and career options during your program. It is safer to assume that there has been little or no exposure to such opportunities than the reverse.
- Be consistent in your interactions with everyone in the program — staff, students, and administrators. This includes follow through and consequences for behavior.
- Plan a daily schedule with structured activities throughout the day.
- Revise/adjust the schedule as needed to continually improve the program.

Minnesota Graduation Standards Chart

During the development of the *Expanding the Circle* curriculum, effort was made to connect the lessons and activities to the Graduation Standards for students in the state of Minnesota. Students completing the curriculum activities as part of a summer or year-round program at the Minnesota program sites were often able to receive high school credit for work completed. While graduation standards vary across states, a chart reflecting the connection of curricular activities and Minnesota Graduation Standards has been included for review and reference (page 13).

Concluding Remarks

Individuals who prepare for the transition from high school to postsecondary experiences based on a clear understanding of themselves and their mental, physical, spiritual, emotional selves are more likely to weather this transition smoothly. Add to this awareness and development the ability to set goals, organize, communicate, self-advocate, problem solve, and work in teams, and young adults are able to face the challenges of the future.



HOW DO YOU COPE?

Student Outcome

Student will identify varying coping strategies for anger management.

Portfolio Placement

NA

Time Frame

30 minutes

Size of Group

Large or small group

Materials Needed

- Handout 5.1: "Coping with Anger"

Before You Begin

- Make copies of the handout for students.

Directions

1. Pass out Handout 5.1: "Coping with Anger." Discuss the various coping methods listed. Explain to students that the methods listed are unhealthy ways of managing anger.
2. Ask students to reflect on their personal coping strategies for anger.
3. Brainstorm positive ways for managing anger.

Discussion

1. Why do you think people react differently when they are angry?
2. Why do you think it may be difficult for some people to manage their anger?
3. What positive ways do you manage your anger? Where did you learn the strategies?

Closure

Journal/Community Circle — Ask students to share how support circles help people manage their anger.

COPING with ANGER

METHODS OF COPING	What It LOOKS LIKE
Withdrawal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➔ Go to sleep when things get bad ➔ Forget important facts ➔ Don't plan ahead ➔ Avoid challenges ➔ Forget about difficult things
Internalizing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➔ Never like to express feelings ➔ Keep in frustrations ➔ Try not to argue even if wanting to ➔ Prepare self for pressure and pain
Outbursts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➔ Blame others for own problems ➔ Blow up ➔ Irritable ➔ Know when feeling angry
Control	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➔ Don't recognize own achievements ➔ Feel impatient ➔ Worry about things ➔ Rushed on most things



GROUP PROBLEM-SOLVING

Student Outcome

Student will work as a member of a cooperative learning group to solve problems.

Portfolio Placement

NA

Time Frame

30 minutes

Size of Group

Large or small group

Materials Needed

- Papers with problems written on them
- Slips of paper with roles
- 8 1/2 X 11" sheets of paper
- Masking tape
- Pencils
- Markers

Before You Begin

- Before the group meets, think of a series of problems in school that need to be addressed to make life easier for everyone. There should one problem for each student in the group. Write each problem on a sheet of 8 1/2 X 11" piece of paper. These problems should be those that have come up in the group or are typical of students their age. Examples are: Making nasty remarks about someone's clothing; the teacher won't listen to me; someone picks on a family member, etc.
- Also, before the group meets, write on small slips of paper a "role" for each student to play in a team and put them in a bag. Each participant draws out one slip. Depending on the total number of participants, you may have one group of four or several groups. There should be enough slips for the entire group and an equal number of each role to be played. The slips should read: RECORDER, LEADER, REFUSER, or ARTIST. Each team should be made up of four people, one of each of these roles. The recorder will write the ideas of the group down on notepaper; the leader will tell the group what to do; a refuser will refuse to

participate in the group but sits with the group; and the artist writes the final answers on the paper to be hung on the wall.

Directions

1. Review steps of problem-solving with students.
2. Explain the problems and roles associated with the activity to students.
3. Form teams around the room after the slips of paper are drawn with the "roles." Then each team is randomly given one of the problems (the leader draws one out of a hat). Each team is also given notepaper and two clean sheets of paper.
4. Ask each team to read their problem statement and then, as a team, brainstorm solutions and consequences for each. The recorder should write all the options of solutions and consequences down on notepaper. Each solution should be a positive solution. Next the group discusses the choices that have been written down and chooses which one, as a group, they think is the best solution and consequence. The artist writes these final choices on the paper provided.
5. Instruct students to have the leader tape their papers up on the wall: first the problem — across from it the solution — across from that the consequences.
6. Have students go around the room to read the other groups' situations and solutions.
7. Discuss each group's work. Ask students to give additional suggestions for each set other than their own.

Discussion

1. How did it feel to play the role you were assigned: the recorder; the leader; the refuser; the artist? If these are not your natural roles, how hard was it for you to stay in your assigned role? Which role was the hardest to "live with" in the group? Why?
2. How did the groups come to agreement? Were all the voices heard? Were all the ideas valued? Were people criticized for their ideas?
3. How would you do this activity differently if you did it again?

Closure

Journal/Community Circle — Which role would you like to play if you had a choice?