



Podcast Transcript: Curriculum Development Strategy

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Kaci Morgan: Welcome to the third podcast of the Native American Language Resource Center summer series on How to Create an Immersion School. I am Kaci Morgan and today I'm here with Crystal Redgrave from the Fort Peck Reservation who will share her expertise in curriculum development. Welcome, Crystal. So glad you could be with us today.

Crystal Redgrave: Hi, Kaci. I'm glad to be here.

Kaci Morgan: Stories are central in Indigenous cultures. So, we're interested in starting with, you know, a little bit of your story. Talk to me a little bit about your journey to working in education so our listeners can better understand kind of the context of your work.

Crystal Redgrave: Okay, well my journey as an educator. I've been working in the field of education for over 20 years. I've been able to serve the Diné, the Anishinaabe, the Tsitsitstas and So'taeo'o, the Absalooke, and the Nakona and the Dakota communities. So, I have experience serving high density Native American public schools, bureau-regulated schools, tribal schools, and private schools. I have a PhD in curriculum and instruction and a master's degree in instructional design. I have a bachelor's degree in elementary ed and a bachelor's degree in English. These experiences and acquired skills and knowledge over this whole time has been highly beneficial to me to understand and become part of today's Indian education system.

Kaci Morgan: Thank you so much for sharing. I think, you know, it's important to also really center our why because that often leads our work or drives how we design our work. And so, move to where you are currently. How would you say that that current work is helping meet the needs of that community?

Crystal Redgrave: The work that I do is for my community. It is for all my relatives. It's to honor those who have passed and also to provide hope for those who are yet to come. It's boundless.

Crystal Redgrave: I've had online teaching and also brick and mortar teaching. I live in Billings, Montana right now. I have a home in Wolf Point on the Fort Peck Reservation, and I go back and forth. So, I work in the community right there, hands on, and I also work online and I'm able to reach an extensive audience. I've had students, adult and children learners, in Florida, California, Washington, the state of Montana, South Dakota. It's just



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been a variety of people who have joined to participate in this who have been part of my classes.

Kaci Morgan: I know you've developed a curricular model that you've described as being designed to teach educators how to open their hearts and eyes to better serve the students that they teach. And so, what really inspired you to develop this model?

Crystal Redgrave: Well, you know, being in education and also just growing up in this education system, I always felt that there was something missing, and it took me years to articulate exactly what was missing. Every day I observed, you know, children and teachers, administrators, support staff, parent, community members, board members, tribal officials, and every kind of stakeholder. And I watched and I observed, I listened, and no matter what, in every position that I held, from a teacher to a superintendent, it just seemed that the Indigenous communities did not fit with the education system. In 2007, I realized that the limitations of Western knowledge, these are the pieces that are missing. These are the pieces that make us whole. So, I started to ask myself, what are these pieces? In serving the communities, I asked the community members, parents, I said, I asked them, what do you want your children to know and be able to do?

Kaci Morgan: I know you speak about the model in depth in Session 3 of our series, but just for context here, can you give us just a brief overview of the model?

Crystal Redgrave: I literally woke up one morning and I just started filling in colors and putting boxes all around the circle. It was almost like a cathartic moment. It just happened. And each compartment, I put a color. And these colors, they came to me in a dream when I was 17, and then again in 19. Every people have a different, you know, understanding of the circle. But this is how I depicted it. Each quadrant represents a stage of development. The first experience we experience is the emotional state followed by the physical, cognitive, and spiritual states of being. Though they appear to be static, they're actually in constant motion. They're multi-dimensional and they're continually overlapping. We have sustained for millenniums, and we are going to continue. Creativity to me is the highest form of thinking. When we think beyond the scope of what exists, that is to create something new. And to me, that's an amazing undertaking. The model fosters a creative mind. It also fosters a collaborative mind. The next is the communicative mind. In the dual world, both Indigenous and Western world, we must effectively communicate in both systems. And finally, the thinking mind.

Kaci Morgan: Yeah, I love the idea of layers. I love how you thought about, you know, the different kind of ways that we exist. That's a really beautiful way to describe that, I think. And so, thank you for that overview. As you thought about how to structure your model, were you influenced by any other programs or models or maybe any particular existing cultural understandings?



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Crystal Redgrave: You know, in reflection, each of those components, when I really drill down, when I do a whole presentation of it, each of those components tied to some sort of experience I had or something I have observed or read or learned about. And so, you know, I can't say it was all brand new information because it's tied to everybody else and that knowledge, that is not just mine, but it belongs to everyone.

Kaci Morgan: So, your model has, you know, there's a lot to it. How long did your development process take from start to finish? I know you sat down and made that initial model in 45 minutes and then from that point, really fleshing it out, how long did that process take you?

Crystal Redgrave: The full components was a lifelong experience from my personal experiences and then also myself as a teacher. I can say I even drew from my experience being a mother. I have five children. I got to see firsthand their development. So, it was a combination of all my experiences and knowledge that I have gathered up to that point. I draw from my cultural teachings, my language. I draw from the Western knowledge system and all the classes I've taken in education and even far extensive than just education, but it's everything. It's taken me a lifetime to get to that point for understanding.

Kaci Morgan: Yeah. If someone wanted to create their own model, what kind of advice would you have for them?

Crystal Redgrave: If we don't have a vision for education, then we run the risk of duplicating the current system. We have to imagine something that doesn't currently exist. We have to draw from the past, and then we have to consider the current context. And also, we have to provide hope for the future. That step took me a long time. But it had a lot of self-reflection. It had a lot of experience that went with it. But I'm quite sure there's many people who are at that point that have that understanding within their communities. Because the vision is so vast and expansive, it would take multiple generations to teach and learn everything in that vision. The aim has to be narrow and has to be focused. And we have to consider how we are going to measure ourselves. We have to consider the structural limitations and the opportunities that we may have.

Kaci Morgan: I think something that has been striking as I've learned more about your model is the relevancy that is woven through every piece of it throughout the process, the materials, the assessments that you've shared with us. And so, I kind of want to broaden that idea of relevancy for our listeners because it's so important for our kids. What suggestions would you have for ensuring relevancy in things like materials and assessments?

Crystal Redgrave: Well, you know, every group of people, we have a uniqueness. And what makes us unique is where we're from, our environment. When I was down in the Tohono O'odham Nation, the mountains, the cactus, the heat, even the salt, that shaped their identity and their culture. And then when I was over in Anishinaabe country, they had wild



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rice and they had humidity and these tall trees that shaped who they were as a people. You know, on the plains, we have the full sky and the sun. We have the buffalo, we have our wamaagiska, we have the animals, that shapes our identity. And so, weaving those into our curriculum, drawing from what's around us, you know, and putting that in our curriculum, making it relevant for our learners so they become ecologically skilled and knowledgeable about their environment. I believe we are shaped by our environment, and it's important that we engage with our environment, and we become part of it. The contents of that curriculum, whatever it is, should align to our environment, our place where we live, where we come from.

Kaci Morgan: Everyone says culturally relevant and culturally responsive, and we don't I think sometimes stop to consider what that really means in practice. It ends up kind of coming out in very stereotypical ways sometimes. And so, I love the concept of how relevancy really is tied to the environment, especially for our cultures. I think, you know, we're so place driven and that connectedness and relation to everything around us is important. Something else that I've noticed is the coherence throughout your curriculum in the sense of how it's designed at a lesson level and how the assessments reinforce what is important. How can someone make sure that their curriculum has that kind of a flow and a cohesion amongst the different parts?

Crystal Redgrave: Well, the curriculum has to be well-planned, and the tools and resources must be readily available for students, and they have to be student friendly. Knowing the magnitude of curriculum, we just can't just haphazardly throw it together. We have to be very deliberate in this. For myself, I cannot go into a school not knowing what I'm going to teach that day. And moreover, I cannot go into a school with a short-term sporadic plan. To me, every day in a child's life is important, and every day a child is going to learn something. So, for educators, we have to ensure that we have relevant cultural language and land-based education. We have to map out a curriculum that makes sense for the community that we're going to serve. We have to always keep in mind, you know, our past and also our future, because eventually one day we're not going to teach language the same way. My hope is that we don't have to teach language at all. It would just be something naturally that is done in our homes and then we would continue on in the schools. But you know, having it well planned, I think is the key and working together with those around you.

Kaci Morgan: Absolutely. So, a lot of our listeners are engaging in immersion school development and their communities are interested in engaging and developing an immersion school. And so, we've noticed there's kind of two different, I guess, groups or two different approaches to curriculum in those schools or in the development of those schools. Some of them are developing their own curriculum, which I think you've given a lot of great insight on. And then there are others where they're assessing existing curriculum, or they're trying to decide if there is a curriculum that they can use potentially



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in their schools or adapt. If you were to evaluate or adapt a curriculum, what are some key things that you might look for?

Crystal Redgrave: If you're looking into a curriculum, I recommend that curriculum be web based. The resources, whatever it is, should incorporate sounds. I am fortunate to have my grandfather import his words and his thoughts into my curriculum. I also really support local people drawing and importing their images into their instruction so they can be part of that curriculum. And so, I would recommend looking at a curriculum that has multiple facets to learning. And I think that's a really important one. Drawing from the people within your communities, because there is a depth of knowledge of people that's so readily available. And I believe it has to come from us. It has to come from our communities for our children.

Kaci Morgan: So, something in what you just said really struck me. A lot of what you said involves including other people and really using the resources that you have around you or have in your community and finding those people and those voices that you can really magnify through this process. I know you mentioned your grandfather. Beyond that, have you engaged tribal leadership, elders, or students along the way? And if so, how?

Crystal Redgrave: Over the years, I have always kept my tribal board members informed of what I'm doing. I presented several times, you know, almost annually to them in some capacity or another. I've kept my tribal community college abreast of everything as well. I keep the public schools in the local area informed. I always keep in contact with my state legislation representatives. And I also work with the state education department. So, you know, thinking of all those components, I think those are all important. But I've also worked at the community level, and I've had community meetings in Wolf Point. And I was able to, you know, gather information and also present information. Really great discussions right there in the community. And I've taught classes in the communities at the community halls for both adults and children. And I've also worked inside the schools for the last four years as a consultant. Every person I talk to, I ask them questions, I try to get information, I ask them for feedback. I'm always trying to get information to make my curriculum more receptive and more aligned to the needs of the community.

Kaci Morgan: That's fabulous. I think there's such an interest in really engaging the community in this work, especially around language. Another component of that or something that has come up a lot through this series is an interest in, what does a community do if they don't have a lot of fluent speakers? In terms of if I'm trying to teach the language to students or I'm trying to pass the language down, sometimes that can be a barrier in terms of having enough language teachers or having students exposed to it outside of the classroom or in their homes. How can communities increase the language proficiency broadly in their community?

Crystal Redgrave: Yeah, well, there's a couple parts here. You know, at the teacher level I'm working with the cohorts of teachers. I think there's almost 40 who are enrolled. And



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my hope is that they become language teachers. But at the same time, I have developed that student curriculum with sound so that a teacher who may not know the language so fluently or may need support, they can click on the sound right there and they can be actively learning the language. I think that's one of the pitfalls I plan for, and that's one of the reasons I put so much sound into my lesson. And the second part is, once an immersion school is created, the parents who enroll their students into the school learning at the same time their children are learning. So, it's more of a community effort is what I'm hoping and planning for. You know, it's not just an isolated student, but rather it's wrapping all the family members together and being able to learn and speak the language together, so it becomes really authentic.

Kaci Morgan: I know in the public schools that I've been in, it always felt like the school was very isolated or separate from the community and not really connected into what's going on. So, I think when you mentioned making it a family thing as far as learning the language and being immersed in the language, I think that's definitely a big area of opportunity in our education system.

Kaci Morgan: You've given us a lot to consider today, and we're very grateful for your expertise. As we wrap up our conversation, I'd like to talk through some reflections. So, reflecting on the development of your model, what has been your proudest moment?

Crystal Redgrave: It's when I asked the students to say in Assiniboine, did you see that horse last night, and they reply. That makes me proud when I have a student be able to know and reply in Assiniboine.

Kaci Morgan: Absolutely. And so, on the other end, what was your greatest challenge and how did you overcome that?

Crystal Redgrave: I'd say the greatest obstacle has been myself because I work and I work and I think and I think, I write, I research and I search some more and sometimes I feel like I'm making no change and no impact and it takes great effort some days just to continue the work but you know to help myself, what I do is before I go to bed at night, I always tell myself by the end of tomorrow, no matter what I'm going to complete something and whatever it is I'm going to complete, I say it. And what I say, I do it.

Kaci Morgan: If someone asked me what my greatest obstacle was, I probably would say the same thing. So, super relatable. Widening that reflection, what are some pitfalls that you think people could fall into that you might caution against?

Crystal Redgrave: Okay, so the greatest pitfall that I think anyone could fall into is replicating the Western education system. You know, we have to realize the differences between our Indigenous system with the Western system. And they're so vastly different, we have to do something fundamentally different. So, the question we have is, what do we do? We want our children to learn, but really, we have to really think about what is the



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outcome. If we do exactly what the Western system has already created, then we're just going to duplicate it and we'll get the same result. And for myself, I hope to do something different. You know, that's the pitfall is we have to do it ourselves from within ourselves. And, we have to draw from our prior historical knowledge.

Kaci Morgan: Wow, this has been a thoughtful and inspiring conversation. Wado for taking the time out to speak with us. Thank you. So, as we close, are there any final thoughts you'd like to share?

Crystal Redgrave: Well, Nakona wenshaakhaagayim, tawakhinahinkna, Nakona iyaabitawakhinam, Nakona jamacha. I love my culture, I love my language, and I am Nakona. So, pila maye, that means thank you.

Kaci: Awesome, thank you again, Crystal. And to our listeners, keep an eye out for our next podcast, which will feature a discussion on professional development. which will feature a discussion on professional development.