



2023
INDIGENOUS
LEADERS IN
SCHOOL
PSYCHOLOGY



Nora Neztosie Ed.S.

Diné School Psychologist in Kayenta Unified School District within the Diné (Navajo) Nation



What advice would you share to the next generation of Indigenous scholars and practitioners entering the field of school psychology?

When working with Native youth, rooting them with a sense of identity, a sense of belonging, a sense of safety, and a sense of purpose is crucial. Valuing who they are and where they come from is the heart of their existence and cornerstone of resilience. Culture and language are their protective factors. Reframe identities. Use a strength-based approach. Inform stakeholders' of students cultural assets and thread cultural assets in their educational learning in order for students to feel acknowledged and valued. Identify a network of support. Provide a safe and sacred space for healing. In valuing culture and language, students will emerge with a voice, strong identities, and be resilient. Furthermore, advocate and promote cultural sensitivity, culturally responsive practices, decolonizing practices, culturally relevant service delivery, conduct culturally and linguistic appropriate assessments, parent collaboration, consultation, parent-school partnership, support administrators on positive and culturally relevant system change, and foster resilience. Valuing culture and language in a system restores harmony for our future generation and promotes resilience. There are no problem children, only problem situations. Be the change to restore harmony as well as to sustain Indigenous sovereignty and identity. You are the essential source for system change.

What was your initial exposure to school psychology, what led to your entrance into the field?

In working in a small Native community (Hualapai community) as a Diné Bilingual special education teacher and special education acting director, many students with IEPs experienced not only educational culture mismatch (students' cultural background and westernized education) but also a lack of mental health support leading to significant achievement gaps. Students yearned for connectedness and interdependence. Due to cultural mismatch and lack of support, including other factors, many students with IEPs challenged the system leading to school discipline. Many students were being sent home. Many students experienced adverse childhoods. The community was bombarded with substance abuse due to being a border town. The lack of community service support for families baffled me and was a personal struggle for me. At first glance, it felt like a dysfunctional community but as I looked deeper, these were students' daily realities. With that enlightened view and perspective shift, it helped me understand my role and purpose. This was the birth of compassion and empathy for me. My role and purpose was to provide a compassionate and empathetic service utilizing cultural teachings. Due to a lack of mental health support within the school, I started counseling students with IEPs on a sense of belonging, a sense of safety, a sense of identity, and a sense of purpose. Over time, I started to build trusting relationships and provided a safe space to share. It was an enlightening journey. Wanting to know more about how to better support Native youth in the aspect of counseling and psychoeducation, I pursued school psychology.

Mark Standing Eagle Baez Ph.D, LSP, LCDC, CCBT, MS/MA.

Assistant Professor of Clinical and Counseling program at

Bemidji State University



What advice would you share to the next generation of Indigenous scholars and practitioners entering the field of school psychology?

Acknowledging their successful completion of a fantastic program (School Psychology) will allow them opportunities for positive change (Native and non-native students). I stress the importance of advocating for those who cannot advocate for themselves. To be grounded in their identity and hold fast to their cultural teachings. This reminder that culture is the heart of who we are, who we belong to, where we come from, and how we relate to one another. Culture is the collected teachings of our ancestors. It is the basis of traditions, customs, values, spirituality, ceremonies, language, ways of knowing and being. We are connected to this land and the life-sustaining resources of the land. If you need support, guidance, or motivation in this field of school psychology, I would encourage you to connect with a Native school psychologist or practitioner. Respect others you work with and know that we, as Indigenous people, must help others, especially our people. Smudging, praying, and self-care are important steps to weave into your daily routine for protection and success. You are Sacred. Thank you for what you will do for our people.

What was your initial exposure to school psychology, what led to your entrance into the field?

This journey was not always clear or easy for me. Even throughout my academic journey, I had to accept a Western position of thinking and learning, which I was told was the 'correct way.' I knew my first exposure to school psychology was as a school counselor on the Navajo Reservation. I appreciated all facets of working with the student, parent/guardian, and school. In addition to being able to administer psychoeducational evaluations and assessments. I know that this was an amazing opportunity for positive change (academic/behavioral) that I can provide for the student, especially when working with American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN) students and having a culturally responsive approach to assessments. As a Native professional, I knew the interventions I could plan to design for behavioral problems would incorporate culture as a prevention. I also knew how researchers portrayed AI/AN students and, by only focusing on negative results, missed the essential strengths and resilience of our Indigenous communities and cultures. Culturally responsive research and evaluation from school psychologists could help shift narratives to address current community strengths and highlight protective factors. This is when I knew I wanted to be in a position of change (school psychologist)

Website: <https://www.bemidjistate.edu/directory/facstaff/vp2955ia/>

Additional Articles:

Cultural-Emotional Learning and Mental Health Challenges among American Indian/Alaska Native students

<https://digitalcommons.usu.edu/kicjir/vol11/iss1/1/>

Sweetgrass Method: A Culturally Responsive Approach among American Indian and Alaska Native K-12

<https://digitalcommons.usu.edu/kicjir/vol10/iss2022/3/>

Loren Houle Psy.D, NCSP, BCBA

PhD Graduate Student in School Psychology at Oklahoma State University



What advice would you share to the next generation of Indigenous scholars and practitioners entering the field of school psychology?

After practicing as a school psychologist for 9 years, I found many connections through networking with other school psychologists and work towards common goals. As a new grad student (again), I would say that networking with my cohort has also been beneficial in finding their passions and offering ways to support them. For Indigenous scholars, it is imperative that you work to develop relationships with your peers so we can share our experience and knowledge to develop each other so we can best serve all students.

What was your initial exposure to school psychology, what led to your entrance into the field?

Accident. A dear friend, now colleague, introduced me to the field during my undergrad. I eventually followed in his footsteps and was admitted into the program a year later. It was the professors who were most inspiring, however, each of them influenced how I thought about the field and how I could contribute to it. Nowadays I'm working on a PhD and I still remember the learning and support I received during my masters and specialist program and hope one day to serve in a similar role as faculty.

Bryanna Kinlicheene Ed.S.

School Psychologist



What advice would you share to the next generation of Indigenous scholars and practitioners entering the field of school psychology?

Entering the field of school psychology brought out many aspects of myself that had been untouched. The strength instilled within my family, and experiences we came across, prepared us for this journey of me becoming a school psychologist. One thing I wish I knew, and engaged in reflection on, was to be fully prepared for what the school psychology field entailed. Ask the questions and be clear with the responsibilities of the role. Also, practicing and recognizing the cultural groundings I possessed and actively engaging with those ways of being for my own wellness and those around me really supported my journey through training for this profession. I wish I knew that I would go through hardships on this journey, that laughter and joy through the journey was a protective factor, and I would get through. I learned that it was important to “Challenge yourself, protect yourself, and advocate for yourself.” My identity flourished in this journey, and I am grateful that those around me had encouraged and motivated me at every moment of imposter syndrome. I didn’t get to this position on my own, it was a collective effort with care, and it continues to be that way.

What was your initial exposure to school psychology, what led to your entrance into the field?

My initial exposure to school psychology was with a Native school psychologist who lived a town over from me. He opened up his space and practice to me without question. He told me every aspect of being a school psychologist from his perspective and his experience with balancing his responsibilities of the role, but also being a family member and member of the community. Also, my own family members, Diné school psychology trainees, interns, and school psychologists, and the Native American and Indigenous Scholars Project directed by Dr. Carol Robinson-Zañartu through San Diego State University who shared their experiences within the profession, it made it pretty clear that this profession was already a part of me.

Lisa N. Aguilar Ph.D.

Assistant Professor, University of Minnesota - Twin Cities



What advice would you share to the next generation of Indigenous scholars and practitioners entering the field of school psychology?

Come to this field as your full cultural self. School psychology has a lot to learn from you. You are a knowledge holder. And know that there are programs and people who value you as an Indigenous person and value the community you come from. Find those people and know that there is a space for you. We are waiting when you are ready!

What was your initial exposure to school psychology, what led to your entrance into the field?

A graduate student from the University of Wisconsin - Madison visited a psychology class I was taking as a senior in college. From there, I spoke with my McNair advisor (Shout out Dr. Kristine Kovack-Lesh!) about it and she helped me work through the pros and cons of applying to clinical and school psychology programs.

Website:

<https://edpsych.umn.edu/lisa-aguilar>

@IndigScholar on Twitter

Resources

- **NASP Position Statement. Effective Service Delivery for Indigenous Children, Youth, Families, and Communities**
- **NASP Podcast. Centering Indigenous and Oppressed Voices in School Psychology Teaching and Practice**
- **The American Indian and Alaska Native Society of Indian Psychologists**
- **Apology to People of Color for APA's Role in Promoting, Perpetuating, and Failing to Challenge Racism, Racial Discrimination, and Human Hierarchy in U.S.**
- **Historical Chronology: Examining psychology's contributions to the belief in racial hierarchy and perpetuation of inequality for people of color in U.S.**
- **Indian Health Services, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services**
- **Mental Health Association - Native And Indigenous Communities And Mental Health**
- **Native American Heritage Month**
- **National American Indian and Alaska Native Addiction Technology Transfer Center (ATTC)**
- **National American Indian and Alaska Native Prevention Technology Transfer Center (PTTC)**
- **National Congress of American Indians**
- **Centers for American Indian and Alaska Native Health (CAIANH)**
- **One Sky Center**
- **The National Museum of the American Indian Native Knowledge 360 Educational Resources**
- **Tribal Training and Technical Assistance Center (TTAC)**

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