

Teaching Core Subjects and Traditional Food Knowledge through Farm-to-School (F2S) Curriculum: The Usability and Cultural-Relevance of Garden Lessons serving Diné youth at an Off-Grid Charter School in Leupp, Arizona.

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The urgency for culturally-relevant, decolonizing, and Indigenizing farm-to-school (F2S) educational offerings is prevalent in a Western-dominated educational system in the U.S. This participant-oriented, curriculum evaluation case study aimed to determine how classroom teachers at a primarily Diné (Navajo) serving charter school may incorporate and utilize the Service to All Relations (STAR) School Garden Lessons (SSGL) into their existing core subject curriculum and in teaching Diné culture, language, and traditions. Teacher insights were collected via an online survey instrument and optional follow-up interview(s) were conducted.

Key Findings:

- 1. Participants primarily identified as White/ Non-Hispanic, early-30's and Female.** Classroom teachers' demographics are very important to note while facilitating SSGL with Diné youth. The overall race demographics of STAR School classroom teachers are reported as 67% white/non-Hispanic and 33% American Indian (i.e. Diné) via STAR School administration data. The race demographic of the entire STAR School teacher population is noted as a limitation when discussing the integration of Diné culture, language, and food traditions into the SSGL.
- 2. Participants reported underutilization of SSGL and described perceived barriers in utilizing SSGL.** The COVID-19 pandemic was identified as an external environmental constraint. Out of the six (6) respondents, five (5) reported not utilizing the SSGL before the COVID-19 pandemic (83.3%) and one (1) respondent was unsure (16.7%). Additionally, three (3) of the five (5) respondents weren't using SSGL due to not being employed at the STAR school prior to the COVID-19 pandemic ; one (1) respondent was unaware of the curriculum and one (1) always wanted to create F2S programming.



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3. Participants provided valuable insights on teaching SSGL while connecting core subjects and Diné language, culture, and traditions.

There was equal distribution for SSGL use into English; Math; and Core Subjects as either as a theme or arithmetic in planting. Additional core subject and Diné culture/traditions integration included Social Studies, Language Arts, and Diné Language, identification of traditional Diné foods/plants, Diné storytelling, and full-circle planting to consumption of traditional Diné foods.

4. Participant follow-up interview insights displayed need for cultural competency trainings rooted in critical consciousness and decolonizing.

These findings display teachers' genuine desire for learning about Diné history, language, and traditions, although implicated significant avoidance mentalities when asked about perceived encounters among Diné students' inquiring about Diné culture, traditions, and language.

Recommendations for Practice:

- Provide continuous cultural competency trainings rooted in critical consciousness and decolonizing for non-Diné educators.
- Provide unlearning/relearning spaces for non-Diné educators to unlearn certain implicit biases and adopt critical consciousness as change agents (Freire, 1974).
- Inclusion of U.S. government violence, policies, and actions in SSGL curriculum to acknowledge the historical significance of U.S. scorched earth tactics on Diné peoples via the Long Walk.
- Facilitate careful, truth-telling, culturally-relevant and empowering F2S lessons through educator trainings and SSGL curriculum revisions.
- Conduct additional participant- oriented, qualitative case studies to gather more diverse teacher SSGL insights.

Rybin, Jaclyn (2022). *Teaching Core Subjects and Traditional Food Knowledge through Farm-to-School (F2S) Curriculum: The Usability and Cultural-Relevance of Garden Lessons serving Diné youth at an Off-Grid Charter School in Leupp, Arizona.* (Unpublished masters thesis). University of Arizona, Tucson, AZ.