**Results**

The results of the study were remarkably consistent between both groups of participants. I identified six overall themes, three with subsections. Each theme is supported by comments from teacher interviews first and comments from the online survey responses.

1) Above all else, it was deemed essential for teachers to learn about the people and culture where they would be teaching.

Teacher Interview Responses:

* “A part of my approach, since I do teach outside of my tribe, is that I enter into a community with the mindset that I am the least knowledgeable person in the community about the people who live there, their history, their story, their way of life, and what is important to them. So, my job is to learn as much as I can so I can help guide and support the students in moving forward in their education.”
* “Anyone working in Native communities in an educational capacity should take it upon themselves to educate themselves about the history of Alaska Native people, so they understand what has brought our people to the current circumstances we are facing.”
* “One of the ways I showed respect is by learning their language.  I am not fluent but they could see me trying.  The more I learned the more they got on board with me.”

Survey Responses:

* “My high school teacher was knowledgeable about village issues and state issues and the connections between them all.”
* “From the time he got there he was so committed to learning about our people. His life outside the classroom is what made all the students feel comfortable with him inside the classroom.”

2) Learning about the people and culture was key to establishing a student/teacher relationship. Participants overwhelmingly agreed that a positive relationship between teacher and student is the best path towards engagement of Alaska Native students.

Teacher Interview Responses:

* “Engage them as they enter your classroom. Learn their names and what they like to be called. Many Native children have nicknames but some do not like them, so learn what they like to be called. Be ready with compliments. Don’t just sit at your desk.”
* “I start off by telling them about myself, where I come from, some of the experiences I had growing up, and why it is I care so much about education, which is why I am here in the first place.
* “My biggest challenges came when we would get a student who was new to the community and I would presume upon a relationship that I hadn’t actually built. These students were less willing to do what I asked, where my other students who I had established a relationship with would do just about anything I asked because they knew I believed in them, or at least they would try because they knew I would not be asking them to do it if I didn’t think they could succeed.”

Survey Responses:

* “A sense of openness from the teacher that you knew you could talk to him/her about anything.”
* “A teacher should make sure he/she knows their students. Take time to smile and make them feel welcome right away in the beginning of class/semester, so that students feel comfortable to raise their hand and ask questions or debate.”

3) How a teacher approaches discussion and disarms shyness is instrumental in whether or not Alaska Native students will contribute. Two key strategies highlighted in approaching discussions is the use of small groups and allowing for student “think time”.

Teacher Interview Responses:

* “A lot of my techniques are rooted in our cultural techniques and values. This way, students are growing in both their western knowledge, but also in their cultural knowledge of their land and the way of life of their people. It is a double benefit and more natural way to connect to Alaska Native students. Non-Native teachers can bring someone in from the community to help with this.”
* “My approach in education is helping to establish healthy relationships between the whole group of students, where there is an atmosphere of shared knowledge.”
* “There are not as many shy Native students as people believe. Silence is used when one is not comfortable, but is overrated as a cultural communication wall. When one is comfortable they are not silent.”

Survey Responses:

* “The shy factor was a major issue with me.  If more teachers had tried to work with students like me, it would have helped me greatly.  I would have spent less time being nervous in class and more time paying attention.  I would skip classes when I knew that I would be required to talk in front of people.”
* “My senior year, my teacher didn’t make me speak in class.  She let me write it down and secretly picked up the paper so everyone wouldn’t know it was me.”

**Small Groups**

Teacher Interview Response:

* “Alaska Native children follow the chain of command but if you put then into groups then they form those chains of command in those groups and start asking questions. They can more freely dialog.”

Survey Responses:

* “Working in small groups I gradually gained more confidence in speaking or joining in conversations with the larger classroom.”
* “The teacher had us work in small groups, it was less intimidating, and we could connect with each other more easily and more quickly.”

**“Think Time”**

Survey Responses:

* “He always gave ‘think time’ when it was time to dig deeper into a topic.”
* “The teachers I had were very demanding and impatient.”
* “Patience is one very evident characteristic I see within our cultures throughout Alaska. It is something we are taught to respect and cultivate as young children.”

4) For any of the above techniques to work, it was believed by the majority that a judgment free classroom, without labels, need to be the standard.

Teacher Interview Responses:

* “A lot of times I think Alaska Native kids feel, in the academic system, their views are not that welcome because village kids are raised to think one way and this way is often different from non-Natives.”
* “Looking at something and evaluating it logically and rationally and being aware of one’s own emotions in regards to it. A lot of time our Alaska Native students are subject to racial stereotyping.”
* “I remember when I was taking a graduate course through the university and one of the professors asked, ‘Do you think you should differentiate for Alaska Native students?’ Everyone raised their hand aside from me and one other person…to me this is the definition of racism…I do not need anyone’s sympathy or need anyone to compete at a lower level with me because I know I can out beat you on any level. I find it disrespectful that you believe I can’t.”

Survey Responses:

* “The teacher had a policy about criticizing others. If you were rude or disrespectful you were immediately dismissed from class and received a failing grade for the day.”
* “I was allowed to express my viewpoints no matter how odd, militaristic, religious, or argumentative.”

5) A feeling that non-Native teachers do not challenge Alaska Native students because of their racial profile was evident. Those deemed successful teachers of Alaska Native students had high expectations for their students, Alaska Native and non-Native alike, maintained a warm and encouraging attitude, and created a safe and relaxed classroom atmosphere.

**High Expectations**

Teacher Interview Response:

* “I feel like lower level questions are often directed at Alaska Native students, rather than the advanced critical thinking questions Alaska Native students would prefer to answer.”

Survey Responses:

* “I can distinctly remember being upset about missing the chance to talk about subjects I was interested in because the teacher felt like the subject was too advanced for our class and moved on quickly to another subject.”
* “He challenged us and allowed us to challenge him openly in class, he never showed us that we were inferior to him.”

**Teacher Attitude**

Teacher Interview Response:

* “I never thought that because I was older and I was the teacher that I knew everything and they knew nothing. An attitude of shared knowledge vs. transfer of knowledge.”

Survey Reponses:

* “She talked to us in a way I felt comfortable which made it easier to open up.”
* “His obvious passion for the subject matter was contagious.”

**Classroom Atmosphere**

Teacher Interview Responses:

* “When they feel safe and not in danger students will respond. Safe and comfortable. They must feel that when you are there, it is also their classroom. Even if they lash out at you for reasons, you do not understand. It usually has nothing to do with you but you have made yourself a safe target.”
* “I work on creating a space where students feel comfortable sharing, by letting them know I am here because I care, not because it is my job and I have been hired to do it.”

Survey Response

* “Keeping command of the class, while leaving a relaxed comfortable atmosphere.”

6) There was consensus among the Alaska Native adult survey respondents that they thrived in classroom discussions when their questions and opinions were welcomed and the teacher actively listened to their point-of-view.

**All Questions and Opinions Welcomed**

Teacher Interview Response:

* “Make sure you show respect if you expect to receive respect. Let them know through your actions that all are required to be part of the class and there are no dumb answers. Even if they are wrong, find something right in their answer, even if it is to just come back to them and thank them for their answer so they will not fear to try again.”

Survey Responses:

* “Soon we all started to contribute, knowing full well our thoughts and questions were appreciated and respected.”
* “Being told that there was not such thing as a dumb question.”
* “A classroom where students were not scared to stand up and tell us their opinion because we valued it.”
* “Teachers who believe diversity of opinions is important.”

**Active Listening**

Teacher Interview Response:

* “I also listened to their answers. Alaska Native students are far more interested in telling you their opinion if they know you are going to listen to them and value what they are saying.”

Survey Responses:

* “When a teacher listens, engages everyone, and asks questions they show they care. This simple act encouraged me to participate.”
* “Teachers and peers who listened and were attentive gave me the courage to speak up.”