

# Project Accomplishments

*Between 2009 and 2011, the Native TEACH project team:*

- Created a written survey exploring perspectives on the relationship between health and the environment, important issues within native communities, and the prospect of collaboration with larger universities.
- Collected surveys from 60 NWIC students and jointly analyzed results to identify major themes and core concepts.
- Adapted the written survey for use in two student-facilitated talking circles at NWIC;
- Administered the written survey to over 100 tribal college students and staff at the American Indian Higher Education Consortium (AIHEC) student conference in Missoula (March 2009). 30 different tribal colleges were represented.
- Involved students from both NWIC and UW in our partnership activities with the understanding that these students are our future tribal leaders and/or future researchers.
- Hosted a series of informal discussions with elders with the Lummi Nation and NWIC community, culminating in a presentation of our culminating story to a gathering of over 100 Lummi elders.
- Presented our findings at two national and one international Native health research conferences
- Supported the development and piloting of a class on community-based participatory research methods at NWIC.

## Contributors & Contact Info

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## Native Tradition, Environment, & Community Health

A Summary of Our Research



**Native Tradition, Environment, And Community Health Project**  
A partnership between **Northwest Indian College**  
and the **University of Washington** (NIEHS Grant# ES07033)

## Our Story, “THE RETURN”

This is a story of a woman who knows that her baby is coming soon and she wants to take advantage of the late summer and finish gathering berries. And so she finds a beautiful place full of all different sorts of berry bushes. There's a path through the land and she follows this path and begins to fill her basket with the sweet berries. As she's gathering, a bright circle buried deep within a bush catches her eye. She reaches in and pulls out the circle, and sees that it's a table – a round kitchen table. She stops her picking to look at what she's found. The table is made from heavy, dark wood that is worn smooth from much use. She rejoices in the fact that this table is big enough not only for her and her new baby, but also for her family and her community. It is a place where people can come together to solve problems, to share stories, to cry and laugh and help one another. ***This table is community.***

The woman begins picking again and soon a bright circle draws her attention from deep within a bush. She reaches in and pulls out the circle and sees that it's a drum. She stops to rest from her gathering and look at this new gift she's been given. The drum is perfect in form and she holds it to her to warm it and feels how the drum carries mystery of life and creation. It reminds her of the baby she carries and how she and he are separate, but connected. What she eats, he eats. What she drinks, he drinks. We are like that with the earth too, she thinks. It is our womb and we are so dependent upon her for survival. How we treat Mother Earth is the most important legacy we leave our children. ***This drum is wellness.***



The woman continues picking. When her basket is full and she is ready to rest, another circle of light catches her eye. She reaches in and pulls out the circle, and sees that it's a nest – a round, delicately woven bird's nest. She stops to look at what she's found. The nest is made from tiny, fragile reeds and twigs, but the nest is strong and sturdy because of how wisely these are joined together. She imagines the baby birds that were raised in this nest, and hears the harmony of their voices joined in song. She rejoices that the nest will remind her to raise her baby to seek balance and harmony and the power of unity. ***This nest is Inter-Relationship.***

Several winters pass and now her baby is playing at her feet. He plays with the three circles she found so many summers ago. Her baby plays with the table, and her baby plays with the drum, and her baby plays with the nest.

One summer day she decides to return to the beautiful place to show him where she found his playthings – he's curious and she wants to show him everything. So she takes him by his hand and leads him there, only to find that a tall, hard fence now surrounds the berry bushes and she can't climb over it and she can't climb under it. There's no way in. The fence has spaces between the boards, and through these openings she can see that the land is brown and dying. There are no berries left. Everything is sick. The woman sits down on the hard ground and cries, for she wanted to show her baby how beautiful it was and she wanted to show him the gift of abundance that Mother Earth provides, but now there's nothing there.

As she sits weeping, her baby gently gathers up the basket with the playthings and slips through a space in the fence. He goes over to the land and carefully returns the table, the drum, and the nest to the ground. As soon as the last plaything has been returned, everything flourishes. The bushes turn bright, apple green with fresh new growth. Flowers bloom, drop their petals, and ripen to rich, red berries. The baby laughs and begins picking the berries and placing them in the basket. The woman sees the tradition carried on through her baby and her tears turn to tears of joy and pride.



Watch a 10 minute video montage of the story at:  
<http://vimeo.com/24837612>  
Password = TEACH2011

More at [http://depts.washington.edu/ceeh/community\\_teach.html](http://depts.washington.edu/ceeh/community_teach.html)