

# Dr. Valerie Shirley

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Dr. Valerie Shirley is a member of the Navajo Nation. She received a Bachelor of Arts in Elementary Education from Arizona State University in 1999 and subsequently became a teacher for 3 years. She later received a Master of Science in Education, Curriculum and Instruction Program from the University of Wisconsin, Madison in 2004 followed by a Ph.D. in Curriculum Studies Program from Purdue University in 2011. Her education and experiences allowed her to critically examine the structure of westernized schools on the Navajo Nation and work toward integrating Indigenous knowledge systems, languages, and values into the schools and classrooms serving Native American students.

Dr. Shirley is now an associate professor in Teaching, Learning, and Sociocultural Studies at the University of Arizona and director of the Indigenous Teacher Education Program (ITEP). ITEP's mission is to increase the number of Indigenous teachers serving Indigenous students, schools, and communities. ITEP draws on the following framework to prepare Indigenous teachers: (1) Teachers as Native Nation-builders; (2) Indigenous Knowledge, Values, and Languages; (3) Critical Indigenous Theories and Pedagogies; and (4) Justice-centered Education. Her current research focuses on decolonial praxis which draws on Critical Indigenous Theories to inform teaching and curriculum development. Such frameworks assist teachers in creating curriculum around environmental issues that are overwhelmingly driven by capitalist aims of profit and are extractive and exploitative of natural resources and sacred sites in Indigenous communities. This approach to teaching also integrates the Indigenous knowledge, stories, and philosophies embedded in these environmental issues/landscape. These issues include food, water, and energy security and sovereignty.

Dr. Shirley plans to continue addressing the challenges associated with the current pandemic in terms of providing materials and workshops to ITEP teachers and their students. The pandemic has exposed inequities; yet, it has also provided opportunities for parents and other elder household members to contribute to their children's current at-home education with their own knowledge and cultural background. Lastly, since this year's ITEP conference, *Mobilizing Decolonial Praxis*, was postponed due to COVID-19, she plans to move forward with the conference when it is safe to do so. The conference is a space for educators serving Native students to engage in dialogue around reconceptualizing Indigenous education for Native students.