



Equity Spotlight Podcast Series

Transcription of Episode Three: Brian Jackson— Centering Equity in Culturally Responsive and Sustaining Learning Environments for American Indian Students

Center Speaker: Welcome to the Great Lakes Equity Center Equity Spotlight Podcast. This podcast series will highlight organizations and individuals in Wisconsin, Minnesota, Illinois, Michigan, Ohio, and Indiana who are working to advance equitable practices within school systems. This is the third episode in the Centering Equity in Educator Effectiveness podcast series. Each episode in this series will focus on demonstrating equitable practices in curriculum, instruction or the learning environment.

Center Host: My name is Nickie Coomer, I am a graduate assistant with the Great Lakes Equity Center, and I will be hosting today's podcast. Today we will be discussing the support of American Indian students by creating safe, inclusive and responsive learning environments with Mr. Brian Jackson. Mr. Brian Jackson is president of Wisconsin Indian Education Association (WIEA). The Wisconsin Indian Education Association is an organization that is proactively engaged in issues that affect Indian education. The WIEA hosts legislative breakfasts where board members have the opportunity to directly share with state legislators concerns on issues that affect Indian people in Wisconsin including incorporating Wisconsin Indian history, treaties and tribal sovereignty into the public school curriculum, restoring the Wisconsin Indian Grant, Indian Grant, addressing the use of Indian mascots logos and nicknames in Wisconsin p-public schools and the distribution of gaming revenues under the gaming contracts. The WIEA also oversees the disbursement of scholarship monies for American Indian students in Wisconsin. Welcome Mr. Jackson.

Mr. Jackson: Oh, thank you. Glad to be here.

Center Host: Great. Um, I know a major accomplishment of the WIEA, um, is requiring all Wisconsin public schools to provide instruction in the history, culture and tribal sovereignty of the federally recognized tribes and bands in the state, um, and I was hoping you could share with us why it is so important that schools recognize, include and embed the histories and cultures of American Indian students?

Mr. Jackson: Well, I'll, I'll give you a quick snapshot. Um, you know, if you could paint this picture of 1980's, 1988, um, Northern Wisconsin, in this time of year around April when the lakes are, uh, you know, they're all thawing out. The Ojibwe tribes are exercising their treaty rights, one of those treaty rights is to spear fish off reservation. And so, the Tribal boys from Couderay they actually this, uh, legal document, uh, at University of Alaska in Duluth, that they had in their back pocket when they were exercising their treaty rights in the late 80's. And so when you had DNR, the Department of Natural Resources, coming out there, and, uh, arresting the Tribal boys and the Tribal boys came over and they had this document that he had this document saying we could exercise our spearfishing treaty rights,

and so that really began the journey of, uh, you know, what is now considered, um, the Wisconsin Statute 31 that came about and from the late 80's there when you had 22 law agencies gathered out on the boat landing on the Wisconsin, um, from National Guard to FBI, other law agencies, uh, Tribal police, um, you're talking hundreds of law enforcement agencies were, uh, keeping the peace and the safety of you know, more so for Native speakers that were going out into the lakes. Uh, what they were experiencing gunshots, slingshots with rocks coming through the water, uh, a lot of racial slurs, as they were entering the waters, uh, so that really created a lot of controversy in the 80's which led to folks saying, "Ok, we don't, we don't understand why these Indian people have this special right to be spearfishing, uh, at night time, when the lakes are thawing out, why do they have this privilege."

So a lot of history began from the Tribal boys that got them in the late 70's and what said we could exercise, you know, from the 1842 treaties, uh, and on the territories now different lakes in Northern Wisconsin. So as a result of that, it caused that, they call the Walleye War controversy. Um, state officials and, um, Tribal communities were concerned that school districts not understanding what treaties are about, that really began that journey then to 1991 when Wisconsin 31 was actually incorporated in the statute of Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, uh, stating that the 424 public schools in Wisconsin had to provide some kind of Native American Studies in their district. Now that could range anywhere from a school district having no non- Native students in their schools, to having a half day of Thanksgiving Pilgrim, you know, elementary-type of program, saying that that one day is the curriculum for the year.

Versus in today's times we have a couple exemplary folks from the Prescott, uh, school district, and also Black Falls school district here in Wisconsin, and they have infused, uh, into the history, social studies, and science and uh, and their local tribal histories year round. Which those two gentlemen really have, uh, really set the bar, when, you know, we are talking about creating that awareness of history and treaty rights, contemporary times, our ways of being, so that's really what, uh, you know, Wisconsin Act 31 is about, um, you know, and as a WIEA board we been engaged in a lot of different efforts, so, you know, the mascot local issue, where Governor Walker two years ago had vetoed the Mascot Logo Law which were, which was created around that time we had 33 schools in Wisconsin change their mascot, um, logos and their, um, you know, their, um, team mascots, and so...that was really one of the turning points for us as a board, um, you know, of understanding.

Not questioning what the schools are not doing, but to really focus on what schools are doing. And so that's when we had, uh, our last conference here on April, um, beginning of the month was to address, to address and to honor those two school districts those two gentlemen, uh, for their exemplary work what at both non-Native and then, then...the cool thing about Prescott school is they actually come to Lac De Flambeau here on the reservation for four days in the summer and, uh, part of their social studies and history class, it's not the first 15 students that raise their hands. These students actually had to write a paper which are reviewed by a corps of teachers there, and from those 15 students....so those 15 students they-they want to be here in the community for four days so they're immersed, uh, in different areas in the community, they're-they're captive in one of the villages, you know, uh, in Zaasijiwan village, uh, and so they have a lot of different questions, um, and so wh-what a great experience, talk about creating that- that awareness for, uh, that particular school district.

Now in the community where I live, where, you know, the Walleye Wars stem from, you know, uh, that controversy I mentioned earlier was that we still have work to do here, here in the high school. Um, you

know, myself, I am in the high school, uh, once a week, um, with a boys group, and, uh, these high school boys are non- Native, or a Native boys, you know, they tell, tell me stories of racial slurs, and all this, uh, different challenges they still face, uh, and so I've been able to, uh, capture their testimony and, and really addressing, um, these initiatives through their voice, um, you know, I have the superintendent that is part of this journey with us, so we're moving in a good direction, and one of the things that he had we had actually talked about last week was how can Lakeland Union High School be in that conversation with those other exemplary schools because Lakeland Union High School, uh community, is actually, you know, the community where we're that was initiated from. So that's what we're moving towards, you know in Statute 31. Um, you know, act more like one. There's no really black and white, we still have a lot of grey, uh, because in the in the language, there's no language here that it mandates, and that's one of the things how I'm...who actually wrote Act 31 from Menominee Nation that was one of his downfalls where he had, uh, two days to write this and then submit it to the state. Where he just wanted to provide awareness at that time. And so, um, you know, not having the language of mandating school districts is, uh, what we're trying to push for. Um, we are grateful because we are actually going into the 27th year of its existence. Uh, we've been celebrating it for the last 3 years, um, in different communities.

Center Host: Wow. Ok, great, thank you. It sounds like it was a huge step, and like you said, you know, still, um, there's still progress to be made, but that it was a pretty landmark. Um, so thank you for sharing that, and thank for you for sharing, you know, the example that you shared with us, um as well as the exemplary, you know, the exemplary school district and, um, some of the things that they're doing. I am gonna, um, I am actually wondering maybe what are some other things that exemplary school districts are doing, that, um, you know, if, if we have listeners who are hearing this and they're kind of wondering, "Ok so what can I take back to my school or what can I take back to my classroom?" um, do you have any advice for people that might be thinking those things?

Mr. Jackson: I guess particularly in Wisconsin, you know, what I work on all the partners we have with the Department of Public Instruction and also at WIEA website we've been working hard where are we with our website specifically is that providing resources, um, bits of pieces of curricular models, um, in partnership with DPI David O'Connor, who is the American Studies Consultant, he's really availed their website for a wealth of resources. I think it's really a thing that, you know, folks could take away is looking at some of those different resources, uh, in contemporary contexts, uh, you know, and now, you know, one of the things that Dave O'Connor and I both agree on. You know, as uh, you know as folks have their perception of American Indians where we all got Casinos we're all, rich we all get procaps, we know the communities still have, uh, do they have running water, you know, those types of thoughts, um, you know, we're we're contemporary just as the next person- that's one of the misconceptions, you know, in that thinking of contemporary times and all and, um, now so, you know, what community they have for casinos but it now goes back in their communities. You know, where I live there's a lot of money that goes back into the health program, the dental program, our education, our natural resources, our, uh, you know, our, um, other business ventures that the tribe has going on. So a lot of our curriculum communities actually have lots are the biggest employer - when you think about the 11 tribes in Wisconsin in that small knit community they are the biggest employer, uh, you know, how much, um, opportunities within working until you start to see it from those lens as well of opportunities working for curriculum communities.

Center Host: Right, yep, well, as teachers in Wisconsin, um, you know, when they have American Indian students in their classroom, if they can recognize some of the unique lived experiences that American Indians actually bring to their classroom, um, you know, and so...

Mr. Jackson: Yeah, and, you know, that's a tough one too because you have a high percentage that live in urban areas, whether it's Green Bay area, Milwaukee area, you know, uh, Lacrosse area, Au Claire, you know, some of the bigger communities they have American Indian families living in those area versus reservation life. So reservation life, when you're- you're talking non-Native teachers that, uh, have those opportunities because it's part of their employment with some of these school districts there's an orientation process that will give them some awareness, some basic foundations to go on, you know, some shared resources to understand their local community for example in Lac de Flambeau we been, uh, strengthening our numbers to provide some immersion type uh, 1-2 days for teachers at the end of the year and the beginning of the year, um, take them around the reservation so they know the different historical parts of the reservation, um, the dynamics, you know, that we all face as a society in general, you know, talking about drug and alcohol abuse and other substance abuses and that plays out of our students. But I think if you look at that demographics of Indian communities, we're, um, the per-percentages is greater and higher for poverty. I know in Lac de Flambeau we're probably around, you know, 35% are employed, you know, of, and the rest are doing other types of behaviors and not working, and so, I mean, when you, when you think the other side is that urban Indians that are kind of lost, and not understanding their ways of, who they are, you know, growing up as a concrete Indian that's been labeled, you know, not able to come up here and participate in some of the things that we're doing, like right now, spearfishing season is going on, maple sugar goes on during this time of the year, uh, the different seasons of hunting, uh, in the fall, uh, just continuous fishing that goes on throughout the year, you know, so a lot of these families in the urban areas don't know about these opportunities to experience some of the reservation life. So you have those, you know, those equations that, that could hinder, um, you know, a non-Native teacher to be able to identify, especially if you're in an urban area, you know, to really, um, face the same, uh, whether it's poverty or whatever may be going on. Some of those some of those, some of those issues, so. So I think it's, uh, it comes down to orientation, you know, in school districts, you know, to really ask that question to where administration and leaders are able to provide, uh, you know, a really strong beginning point for them [teachers].

Center Host: Great, thank you. Um, so something that I have, or something that you mentioned, that I, um, I am curious about, is the work that you've done with uh, the, uh, addressing, um, mascot logos and the mascot logo law? One of the issues that I came across while I was while I was doing the research to write some of these question for our interview, um, did have to do with addressing American Indian stereotypes in schools, um and so I know that addressing, that addressing mascots is a piece of that. Um, would you mind giving-- telling me a little bit more about that?

Mr. Jackson: Yeah, um, being associated with, you know, the WIEA board since 2005 I have written and had the opportunity to be under the wing of Barb Munson, who is really a guru, she's one of our elders, and she's been doing this work for what, 25 years now. Uh, creating change for mascot logos within school districts, and, uh, really being the coordinator of a lot of different events including, which all includes the Redskins professional football team, when they had a game in Green Bay, or some folks

from over there were protesting the Redskins. So when you think of those different, um, professional sports that trickle down, you know, to high school. For example, if the Atlanta Braves or Cleveland Indians baseball teams, you know they got their Tomahawk chops going on, and a how those carry into schools in different, uh, you know, students putting their hands over the mouth, going ooh-ooh-ooh, you know, some of those types of gestures, you know, um, to, hard as that really impacts Indian students, you know, which as a big impact, uh, where years ago, with the boarding school era where we were forced to have our languages took from us, you know, as Indian people, you know, we talk about historical trauma, all of that still plays in the same, whereas that period of time, and we're late 80's, 90's, you know, a lot of Indian people were almost, uh, ashamed of being Indian because of all the things that were going on against us in which included mascot logos, you know, and how that, uh, created, you know, shame for students walking through school doors, you know, seeing a big Indian up on there or whatever logo there was, mascot, you know, walking through school and seeing that, or having big pep rallies and students, you know, making these gestures, you know, and being a small percentage of the American Indian population across United States and we're a small people to begin with, you know, and so when you really look at a crowd of, if they're in a school district of 12-1500 students, and, you know, it's probably maybe you luck if you got 10 in some schools, you know, 10 Indians, you know, how they're really put to in a corner of, thinking of really wanting to be a part of that, you know, big tomahawk chop or, you know, different gestures that are being made, you know.

And so there's that whole process of those generations that went through that, you know, and, you know, and, how that's played out and today, there's a lot of educators that have made that stance, you know, to really understand that those traumatic um, consequences that students face, you know, and um, some of the work that we've been able to do as a board with our mascot logo. Um, I mentioned Barb Munson, she's the head of our task force and has went into school districts to try to create that awareness. Another gentleman from Oneida, name is Richie Blass, where they have a display, we're talking about a lot of art- articles, a lot of artifacts of a lot of Oneida articles, I mean it's a really cool setup, there's a lot of racial articles on there, um, even the Walleye Wars we were talking about, uh, spear, spear, I mean Indian, I mean Walleye killing with spears so there were those types of messages. So but ultimately what she was able to do over the years was looking at um, Dr. Reiburg's work on mascot logos issues of how that, um, affects students' learning. You know, when they walk through those doors.

And so what Barb's work, what she was able to do was it creates this core team over the years to go into school districts have these displays, uh, talking to leaders, superintendents, school boards, teachers, students, families, and how, how is this affecting both Native and non-Native? You know, not just Native students, it's on both sides. And so, people are actually beginning to understand of um, having their foot in our shoes, so to speak as far as people having those different types of feelings, uh, where she was able to create change, you know, 33 schools across the state, uh, before Governor Walker's veto. A-a- and part of that journey, that was part of that was three years ago, uh, I was invited down to Madison DPI to testify, uh, it was with the Oshkosh Indians. And so I kinda watched a number of folks ahead of me including Barb Munson and they had their legal team, you know, questioning credentials and education and background. And so they were kind of grilling Barb, you know, she had a Bachelor of Arts and some other degrees, and, in questioning her background she was saying what she was doing, for a number of years she was doing that, um, we had the Ho-Chunk Nation come in there and present, and, um, one of the ladies was given permission from their Tribal council and so I was sitting in the back and

listening to this lawyer from Oshkosh say, how do we know that the Ho-Chunk history is legitimate? And accurate in what you're saying to us? I was sitting in the back thinking, you know, she just explained to you that she was there to present the history. So by the time I get up there, you know, they ask who I am and what my role is and I explained to them what my role is and my background a little bit and um and I said, well I'm gonna finish answering some of the questions about my education if you want to know about it. And so when they asked me a few more questions and said what is your education, anyway, and I told them I was a doctoral student at the time, you know, now I'm a doctoral candidate in Business Education, and, um, their attitudes changed, you know, and suddenly I became Mr. Jackson. And you know when my testimony was over, I had the superintendent patted me on the back, and said "Oh-What is your dissertation going to be on, Mr. Jackson?" you know, and, uh, but he could see the whole demeanor change, you know, the higher the degrees went up you were on a level playing field working and so, that's, that's, that's been part of the struggle too with our Indian leaders of, um, being equal at the table with these different issues, um, you know, whether it's Statute 31 or mascot logo to things have taken a turn I mean there's a lot of momentum in Indian country, uh, across the United States, so we are just continuing to drive on.

Center Host: Thank you so much for sharing that. And so if, so if I understand it right, Governor Walker, he vetoed the mascot logo law?

Mr. Jackson: Correct.

Center Host: And that means that the mascots are okay?

Mr. Jackson: Yes.

Center Host: Alright, thank you for sharing that. Um, and your experience with testifying and everything. That is really powerful. Ok, well, I guess, you know, thank you so much, as we look to wrap up our interview here, um, you know, are there just some final things that you'd like to share that educators should know about creating supportive learning environments for American Indian youth?

Mr. Jackson: Well, you know, one of the things for, you know, for Wisconsin, I think we've been able to build upon is, um, DPI's American Indian Summer Institute, uh, it's a 5-day training, um, put on through the DPI and, um, so WIEA has been able to partner with them and, um, really promote that. Uh, so they average between 80 to 100 teachers that participate for that week, um, so there's opportunities, whether it's at a national convention, like at the '98 convention nationally, uh, it's gonna be in Reno, Nevada here this year, uh, go out there and there is a wealth of knowledge, uh, at that conference I mean, uh, national speakers and, you know, best practices best models and successful programs, um, you know, and the-the things about we're been able to distinguish is, you know, teaching culture versus teaching culturally.

You know, think about that for a second. So if you're an educator or a teacher, and you're teaching culture, are you're teaching culturally, so, you know, in our community when we teach culturally, you know, then you're talking about some of the things like our harvesting seasons, uh, how is that associated with science and math? You know, being out in the woods, um, the specs that go along with making a wigwam, the ventilation that goes in, you're talking project based learning is one of the uh, initiative across Indian country that's, uh, it's starting to take off, uh, cause as Indian people, I mean

generally we tend to be hands on people. You, know, that's our learning style approach. Um, not so much not so much of, um, state standards testing as it is I, uh, it's always there but that's not really the main focus, you know, it's more of about how our ways gonna continue, and how do we apply those to those subject matters.

Center Host: How wonderful. Yeah, thank you so much, um, all right great, well I think that that concludes our interview. Um, and again I just cannot express, like, my gratitude, and how grateful I am that you're willing to spend this time talking with me, and for the purpose of this podcast. Um, you know, and I so appreciate you sharing your experiences, you know, as much as your expertise. Um, your personal experiences. So...

Mr. Jackson: Yeah, no problem I mean, I appreciate being a part of the journey, you know, with um yourself and other folks being able to share, you know, I'm just one small piece of the puzzle, you know, a very small piece, uh, in a lot of the scope of things.

Center Host: Alright, well, thank you so much Mr. Jackson.

Mr. Jackson: All right well thank you, and have a good day.

Center Host: Thanks, you too.

Mr. Jackson: Bye.

Center Host: Bye Bye.

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