

A Social Work Perspective on American Indian Education in Wyoming

Remi A. Bullock with Dr. Kirsten K. Havig

The University of Wyoming Social Work Program

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Abstract

The history of education about and for American Indians in the United States is rooted in cultural elitism. Beginning in the 19th century and continuing into the 20th century, American Indian children were forcibly taken from their families and placed in boarding schools for assimilation. These boarding schools were run by the U.S. government and evidenced the U.S.'s goal to rid the country of American Indian culture; this was a matter of public policy. Racism plagued the U.S. education system for decades, and despite contemporary legislation to move away from this marginalization of American Indian perspective in education, the social injustice in many ways persists. According to the ethical code enforced for the social work profession, social workers must be frontrunners in the promotion of social justice. Because of this ethical obligation, a social work lens must be utilized to understand the current state of addressing the injustice of marginalization of the American Indian perspective in education across Wyoming. Wyoming Enrolled Act 119 was passed in 2017 and is currently being implemented with a final implementation date of 2022. The goal of this project was to analyze the impact of American Indian Education policy and programming for greater inclusion of and knowledge about the experiences of Native people in Wyoming. Furthermore, a social work perspective was used in this research to frame the analysis. This social work perspective additionally provides a pathway for the continuing promotion of social justice around issues related to historical oppression and contemporary absence of the American Indian perspective education in Wyoming.

A Social Work Perspective on American Indian Education in Wyoming

The following exploratory research addresses the historical social injustice of the intentional erasure and extermination of Native culture, history, and contributions of American Indians. Key to this issue is contemporary and historical injustice of limited American Indian perspective inclusion in public-school education. This research unearthed the United States' history relating to American Indian education and revealed the United States' current inclusion of American Indian perspective in education. The purpose of this research project was to apply a social work perspective to the injustice of limited American Indian perspective in education and to identify that this perspective could also be utilized to provide a pathway for addressing this social injustice. The argument relating to education in Wyoming was created based on research regarding the inclusion and exclusions of American Indian perspective in education across the United States, resulting in the perpetuation of stereotypes about Native people and a lack of knowledge about the richness of Native culture. The aim of this research is to demonstrate that applying a social work perspective to the historical social injustice of limited American Indian perspective in education can also provide a pathway to securing social justice for unrestricted American Indian perspective in Wyoming public-school education in the future.

Terminology

The term "American Indian" can scarcely be defined, as native persons and tribal nations retain the agency and sovereignty to define their own culture and identity in their own ways. In fact, many native peoples resent the idea of individuals attempting to group American Indians together under a legal definition of "who they are" or how they represent themselves (Two Eagles, 2011, para 1). American Indian writer and member of the Yankton Sioux Tribe, Vince Two Eagles, describes through his writings in *Partnership with Native Americans* that the search

to define “American Indian” leads a person to “the middle of the sometimes hidden agendas and conflicting opinions and motives of international, national, and state entities as well as tribes themselves” (Two Eagles, 2011, para. 2). The Bureau of Indian Affairs describes “Indian” as anyone who has a “blood degree” from Native ancestry and is federally or tribally recognized as having such blood degree; additionally, the Bureau of Indian Affairs describes there is “no single federal or tribal criterion or standard that establishes a person’s identity as American Indian,” and such definitions can be subjective (Bureau of Indian Affairs, 2019). Indian Health Services, for example, does not utilize a definition of blood quantum/degree to define American Indian, but instead requires enrollment in a federally recognized tribe to fulfill such definition (Indian Health Services Manual, 2019, chapter 3, section 7 [7-3.1E]). Because there is no clear definition of American Indian peoples, defining “American Indian” is an abstract process. The use of the term “American Indian” in this research paper refers to any person in the past or in the present-day with blood relation, cultural relation, or any other self-identified, specific relation to the indigenous persons that originally inhabited the modern-day North Americas. Additionally, the term “American Indian education” utilized in this research paper refers to the history and present-day information about American Indians that is being taught in public schools to both native and non-native students. Finally, the term “justice” utilized in this paper, when in reference to American Indian perspective in education, refers to the equitable inclusion of American Indian perspectives in public school education through avenues such as Native written texts, Native curriculum creation, Native pedagogy, Native unique cultural contributions, or Native language classes, including the Native understanding and experience of colonization.

“Social work perspective” is defined in this research paper as the stance which social workers take when identifying, assessing, and addressing social problems in the world; this

perspective is rooted in nine core competencies of social work education and the National Association of Social Workers *Code of Ethics*. Additionally, social work perspective contains the research-based theories and stances that social workers learn in their education and apply to their work in the field. The nine core competencies in social work and the National Association of Social Worker's *Code of Ethics* will be defined, explicated, and applied to this historical social injustice later in this research paper. Additionally, the "sensemaking" theory and the "anti-oppressive practice" stance utilized in social work practice will be defined, explicated, and applied to this historical social injustice later in this research paper to fulfill the argument that applying this social work perspective can provide a pathway to securing social justice to unrestricted American Indian perspective in education in Wyoming.

History of American Indian Education in the United States

To understand the present-day status of education about American Indians and for Americans Indians in the United States, the history of such matters must be clearly understood. The history of education about American Indians and for American Indians in the United States is rooted in cultural elitism. Upon the Europeans coming to the U.S., colonization overthrew the American Indians' land and way of life. Thomas Jefferson, upon deciding what to "do" about the American Indian peoples, said he believed the "Indian" to be of equal mental and physical capacity as the "whiteman" (Marchand, 2016 p. 34). Despite this belief of Jefferson's, he simultaneously believed American Indians required civilizing, so they could be in full likeness and equality with the "whiteman," believing their Indian ways of life were not civil on their own, but in need of refining; because "hunting was often still necessary for subsistence [for Indians] ...this semi-nomadic way of life... led Jefferson and others to consider Indians as 'savages'" (Marchand, 2016 p. 35). This derogatory view of the native peoples allowed Jefferson's

continual overtaking of the Indians to be justified in his mind and to the colonial settlers, as it was his purpose to “civilize” this people group, that they may reach their full potential to be like the “whiteman.” This belief about Indians having inherent potential like the “whiteman” led to hundreds of years of attempts to assimilate American Indians into the culture of the U.S., attempting to force American Indians to release their culture and fully embrace that of the U.S.

In the education of American Indians, this theme of forceful assimilation abounded. Because powerful groups are able to assert their norms and beliefs through education, it is clear that education of the American Indian was the U.S. government’s most influential form of assimilation. Beginning in the 19th century and continuing into the 20th century, American Indian children were taken from their families, forcefully, and placed in Christian boarding schools; these boarding schools were run by the U.S. government and evidenced the U.S.’s goal to rid the country of American Indian culture (American Indian Boarding Schools, 2008 p. 17). This placement in boarding schools was a matter of state policy, and American Indian families did not have a choice to keep their children and educate them at home; this was a great tragedy felt by all American Indian families and tribes across the country. In these schools, American Indian students were not allowed to use their native language, nor were they allowed to practice their native religion; these schools were wrought with sexual and physical abuse, molestation, starvation, and other violence (American Indian Boarding Schools, 2008 p. 18). The creation of American Indian boarding schools was altogether an attempt to remove the history and culture from American Indians and replace it with United States history and culture. It took many years for opposition towards incorporating American Indian culture to give way to integration in public schools, as the mindset of assimilation to U.S. culture was laid deep within the government.

Towards the end of the 20th century, the U.S. Special Senate Subcommittee on Indian Education finally decided that the U.S. education system ought to change for American Indians. In 1969, this subcommittee issued a final report called “Indian Education: A National Tragedy- A National Challenge,” which exposed the troubling realities of American Indian education in the U.S. (U.S. Department of Education, 2018). Next, the U.S. enacted the 1972 Indian Education Act. The Indian Education Act established “the Office of Indian education and the National Advisory Council on Indian Education;” the act also created grant programs for American Indian children and adults (U.S. Department of Education, 2018). In 1974, this act was amended to add a “teacher training program and a fellowship program” (U.S. Department of Education, 2018). In 1988, voluntary boarding schools funded by the Bureau of Indian Affairs became eligible to apply for grants, as well as the addition of “gifted and talented” student programs at these schools (U.S. Department of Education, 2018). The Indian Child Protection Act was established in 1990. The Indian Child Protection Act of 1990 directly addressed the safety of American Indian children in schools; the policy stated the following two main goals:

- 1) identify the scope of incidents of abuse of children and family violence in Indian country and to reduce such incidents; 2) provide funds for mental health treatment for Indian victims of child abuse and family violence on Indian reservations. (Office of the Law Revision Counsel: United States Code, 2018).

The policy also required certain increases in background checks for individuals who would be employed with the Bureau of Indian Affairs boarding schools, as well as create a mandated reporting system (American Indian Boarding Schools, 2008 p. 18). It was not until 1994 that Indian education was included in the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). This finally required schools to create “a comprehensive plan to meet the academic and

culturally related academic needs of American Indian and Alaska Native students” (U.S. Department of Education, 2018). In 2001, Indian education was ultimately included in the No Child Left Behind Act; this act rewarded formula grants to American Indian students based on a lack of meeting academic achievement and talent standards expected of all students, purposed to “assist Indian students in meeting those standards” (U.S. Department of Education, 2018). Finally, in 2015, President Barrack Obama enacted Every Student Succeeds Act; this act replaced the 2001 No Child Left Behind Act (U.S. Department of Education, 2018). This act, still enforced today, requires the contributions of American Indian tribes in making plans for educational programs for American Indian students, and requires tribal approval before implementing any programs for American Indians that are funded by the ESSA (Every Student Succeeds Act, 2015). This act also includes a native languages integration program for public schools (Every Student Succeeds Act, 2015). This act is still enforced today, and currently manifesting itself through the implementation of these practices and programs into state policies and schools.

In a study by Connor (2014), the intergovernmental relationships between tribes and public schools was explored in Oklahoma and New Mexico to denote the significance intergovernmental relationships have on the education about Native peoples and for Native peoples. Over 90 percent of American Indian students receive their education through U.S. public schools; Oklahoma contains 18.0 percent of all Native students enrolled in public school and New Mexico contains 11.1 percent of all Native students enrolled in public school (Connor, 2014, p. 48, 55). Connor (2014) utilized extensive qualitative interviews and survey data from Oklahoma and New Mexico to illuminate what makes a strong tribal and public school relationship. Connor (2014) unearthed five themes regarding what generates strong and helpful

tribal relationships with public schools. These themes include: a) public school officials valuing American Indian education; b) public school officials' education and qualifications for effectively working with Native peoples; c) the percent of Native students present within each school and district; d) the development of a financially reciprocal relationship between tribes and public schools; and finally, f) the oversight and accountability of public school officials in enforcing Native programs and activities in schools (Connor, 2014, p. 59-62). The strength of intergovernmental relationships between tribes and public schools, as is identified through the above-mentioned five themes in Oklahoma and New Mexico, is "critical in ensuring that local school officials adequately meet the unique cultural and academic needs of Native Students" (Connor, 2014, p. 48). This study clearly solidifies the importance of United States government working in conjunction with sovereign, tribal government.

This historical and political data relates to the historical social injustice of limited inclusion of American Indian perspective in education through denoting the American Indian progress through federal policy. The United States has an extensive history of this social injustice; American Indian perspective has moved from complete exclusion and expulsion to slow integration over the last fifty years. Despite federal legislation's slow integration of American Indian perspective into education over time, social justice must be secured to the unrestricted inclusion of American Indian perspective in education.

Recent Instances of the Social Injustice: A Literature Review

A study conducted by Rogers-Stanton (2014) describes a single, White-Anglo story provided by multiple widely-accepted textbooks across the United States. This literature displays the existence of recent social injustice relating to limited American Indian perspective inclusion in education. Rogers-Stanton selected five of the U.S.'s most popular history textbooks,

according to the American Textbook Council (ATC), to review information about American Indians and the general topic of “western expansion” described in these popular textbooks. Rogers-Stanton described that her research goal was to uncover disparities in how students in the U.S. are educated about American Indians, through the lens of their textbooks. Rogers-Stanton found that all the textbooks tended to “separate native peoples from the rest of the ‘Americans,’ thereby excluding native perspectives... [and] overemphasiz[ing] violence and lawlessness, while almost completely excluding peaceful events, efforts, and perspectives,” and furthermore naming non-natives’ brutal actions as “justified” (Rogers-Stanton, 2014 p. 658). Rogers-Stanton’s research provides a framework for inferring just how minimal and slanted many other U.S. history textbooks must be, given Rogers-Stanton only studied the nation’s top five textbooks of 2014. This article displays the U.S. education system’s ability to disregard the security of social justice relating to American Indian perspectives through the poor choice of text books being presented to students across the country. This study displays a need for a comprehensive plan to secure social justice relating to unrestricted American Indian perspectives in education.

In a study performed by Journell (2009), social studies curricula and standards were evaluated in nine diverse states: New York, California, Georgia, North Carolina, Indiana, Oklahoma, Texas, South Carolina, and Virginia. The study determined that all standards and curricula from each diverse state across the U.S. portrayed American Indians in a demeaning fashion, focusing only on oppression of the American Indian peoples, placing “little emphasis on cultural contributions, modern issues, or personification of American Indian groups” (Journell, 2009, p. 22). This publication points to multiple incidences of recent injustice regarding American Indian perspective inclusion in education. The social studies programs Journell

researched clearly did not include a pathway in place for securing the justice of unrestricted American Indian perspective in education.

In a study performed on Nebraska textbooks in 2004 to determine integration of American Indian perspectives, researchers Moore and Clark uncovered a common theme of social injustice relating to exclusion of American Indian perspectives in textbooks. Moore and Clark studied textbooks in Nebraska being used in 2004; each book ranged in publication dates from 1913-1999 (Moore & Clark, 2004, p. 18). Moore and Clark consistently found incidence and commonalities between all the text books that included descriptions and teachings that were only from a white, Anglo perspective; these teachings included American Indians being lazy men, losers of land, thieves, brutal, alcoholics, and users of magic (Moore & Clark, 2004, p. 19-20). This research performed by Moore and Clark further describes recent incidences of limited inclusion of American Indian perspective in education. If history is meant to teach society lessons about living today, it is important that the unrestricted inclusion of American Indian perspective in education is secured through the implementation of specific programs and pathways in education intended to secure this social justice.

Literature denotes several contributing factors to the historical social injustice of limited American Indian perspective in education. The first contributing factor to this injustice is the historically forced assimilation of American Indians into mainstream, Anglo culture by the United States. Rogers-Stanton (2014) describes in her research that the agency of American Indians has always been under attack in the United States, as this agency was “forcibly contained and constrained by policies that focused on relocation, assimilation, and cultural termination” (Rogers-Stanton, 2014, p. 652). Without a posture of cultural preservation and humility, and instead a posture of forceful assimilation, the United States has disregarded American Indians’

history and culture for decades, hence it's history of excluding American Indian perspectives in textbooks in schools. The second contributing factor to the historical social injustice of limited American Indian perspective in education is the lack of influence American Indian tribes have had on material being taught in public schools. The U.S. education system has placed an emphasis on curriculum relevant for educating the dominating majority: white English speakers. This immediately bars tribal influence from entering the U.S. educational system, as they are not the dominant, Anglo English-speaking Americans. Furthermore, the information about American Indians throughout history, and the U.S.'s poor treatment of American Indians, is told from the white, Anglo American perspective, and seldom includes other perspectives; this leaves a single-story that is inherently biased (Moore & Clark, 2004, p. 17). This single story is taught as truth and furthers the problem of stereotypes and single-perspectives which exist in society today. Rogers-Stanton (2014) writes that "Native peoples have had limited input into the process of curriculum development and implementation;" and exclusion of the American Indian influence on education furthers the historical injustice of limited American Indian perspective in education (Rogers-Stanton, 2014 p. 652). A third factor contributing to the historical injustice of limited American Indian perspective in education is the lack of American Indian representation as educators and lack of American Indian education methodologies. As aforementioned, the United States has a history of excluding American Indians from influencing academics and creating curriculum. Furthermore, most educators are non-Native individuals, resulting in a lack of representation of American Indian views in the education system. Gary W. Cheeseman and Susan C. Gapp argue that "most teachers of American Indians are non-Native and many... know little about diverse cultures;" Anglo-created curriculum and "Anglo educators [are] deficient in addressing the educational needs of American Indian children" (Cheeseman and Gapp, 2012 pg.

24). Cheeseman and Gapp further argue that the only way for American Indian students to truly succeed in the United States public school education system is for educators and teachers to “provide a culturally responsible educational environment that includes diverse pedagogical perspectives” (Cheeseman and Gapp, 2012 pg. 24). Instead of disregarding the perspectives of the American Indians, the U.S. education system must regard educational pedagogies contributed from the American Indians and integrate them into public school education of American Indian children. These recent incidences of lack of American Indian representation in the U.S. education system further substantiates the need for an education program that secures the unrestricted inclusion of American Indian perspectives. In Wyoming, to keep from learning the needs of American Indian persons in education, and to keep from implementing an education program that includes native voices, will cause a continuation of the single, Anglo story.

Wyoming-specific Impact of the Injustice

According to the Wyoming Department of Education, there are currently 92,976 kindergarten through 12th grade individuals enrolled in public schools in the state of Wyoming (Wyoming Department of Education, 2019). Without American Indian perspectives in Wyoming education, thousands of students in Wyoming will miss a vast amount of information pertinent to understanding their own past, affecting who they are today as young American peoples. Tribal advocates on the Wind River Indian Reservation in Wyoming have for years shared their concerns that a lack of public school access to “authentic education about the state’s Native American heritage” has led to Native students experiencing “racist” and “insensitive” interactions with non-Native students throughout the state of Wyoming, specifically as students from the Wind River Indian Reservation travel across the state to different school districts for sporting events (Edwards, 2018, para. 1). There are over 15,000 American Indians currently

residing in the state of Wyoming, not including individuals who identify as American Indian in conjunction with some other ethnicity (United States Census Bureau, 2016). Without American Indian perspectives in education, American Indians currently residing in Wyoming will not receive the deserved attention and accurate perception from other, non-native Wyoming citizens that should have been afforded through education; all American Indians are incidentally impacted by this lack of education in schools. The social injustice of limited American Indian perspective in education is currently a form of marginalization for American Indian peoples, including those in Wyoming.

American Indian Tribes in Wyoming. The state of Wyoming is historically comprised of multiple American Indian tribes. These tribes are believed to have been an expansive mix of plains Indians, including the Arapahoe, Bannock, Cheyenne, Shoshone, Crow, Blackfeet, Kiowa, and more (Wyoming History, 2019). There are currently only two present-day federally-recognized tribes in the state of Wyoming. These tribes are the Northern Arapaho and Eastern Shoshone. The Northern Arapaho and Eastern Shoshone tribes officially reside on the Wind River Indian Reservation, located near Riverton, Wyoming, though not all American Indians in Wyoming belong to these two tribes or live on the Wind River Indian Reservation.

The Shoshone people have lived in what is now Western Wyoming for between 3,500 years and 8,000 years, while the Arapaho people migrated to Wyoming in the 1600's (Stamm, n.d.). The Shoshone people are historically buffalo hunters, speaking the native language of Numic, which is part of the Uto-Aztecan group (Stamm, n.d.). The Shoshone people were historically lead by one of the most well-known chiefs, Chief Washakie (Stamm, n.d.). After initially being denied in an Indian reservation in Wyoming, Chief Washakie's signing of the

1868 “Treaty of Fort Bridger” provided the Shoshone people with the Wind River Indian Reservation near Riverton, Wyoming (Stamm, n.d.).

The Arapaho people have historically been pushed out of their land in Wyoming from white settler’s devious treaties and tricks, to white settlers seeking gold in the gold rush. The Arapaho were forced to the Power River Basin area in Wyoming. Though the Arapaho were historically known for their peaceful relations with white settlers, the Shoshone and the Arapaho were originally enemies, competing for the same resources along the Wind River (Stamm, n.d.). Later when the Arapahoe people were denied their claims to the Powder River Basin, and only given the option by U.S. officials for land outside of Wyoming, Arapaho and Shoshone sought to make peace. With Shoshone approval reaching an agreement, the Arapaho people moved onto the Wind River Indian Reservation in the early winter of 1878 (Stamm, n.d.).

Presently, the Arapaho and Shoshone are working to keep their cultural traditions alive on the Wind River Indian Reservation. Cultural traditions and ceremonies that were at one point banned from practice by the United States government are now celebrated and reinvigorated on the reservation (Stamm, n.d.). Additionally, the preservation of native languages is a priority for native peoples, as American Indians live out their culture today. Employment on the Wind River Indian Reservation looks a lot like employment off reservations, such as jobs in education, construction work, human services, ranching and farm work, and many other professional careers. Living both in the present and in the past is evidenced by life on the Wind River Indian Reservation, as current culture and history inform the lives of many American Indians in Wyoming. Understanding this history and present-day culture alive and active in Wyoming is imperative for Wyoming’s education system.

Another aspect of the Wind River Indian Reservation is the confounding levels of crime experienced within its borders. Though Native persons are aware of the substantial crime rates on the Wind River Indian Reservations, many Native persons report not wishing for non-Natives to discuss crimes that occur on the reservations (Feemster, 2013, para. 1). The crimes which take place within Native communities have been conveyed in media for decades, but such crimes regarding the Wind River Indian Reservation's increasing rate of crime are growing in attention. In a New York Times article, *Brutal Crimes Grip an Indian Reservation*, the crime levels on the Wind River Indian Reservation are denoted as five to seven times the national average (Williams, 2012, para. 5). The article included Wind River Indian Reservation tribal advocate Kim Lambert describing the pervasiveness of homicide on the reservation as something that has always lingered (Williams, 2012, para. 7). Additionally, the crimes on the Wind River Indian Reservation include a significant number of crimes against native women, and many crimes against women that have gone uninvestigated or reported (Edwards, 2018, para. 1-25). Along with high rates of crime is the 50 percent graduation rate of Native students living on the Wind River Indian Reservation, staggering compared to the 80 percent graduation rate of non-Native students in Wyoming (Schrank, 2015, para. 1). This lack of graduation rates denotes a crisis for Native persons in Wyoming, as the Coalition for Juvenile Justice finds "dropouts are three and a half times more likely than high school graduates to be arrested" (Coalition for Juvenile Justice, 2001, p. 2). A 2005 study regarding the relationship between crime rates and education found that simply increasing the education of high school dropouts by one year would decrease murder and assault by almost thirty percent, and that high school dropouts have a life expectancy that is 9.2 years shorter than high school graduates (Levin, 2005, p. 2). Persons with lower levels of education are more likely than their more educated peers to commit crimes and serve time in jail;

education can serve as a deterrent to crime and ultimately lower rates of crime (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2013, p. 3). Education deeply impacts the lives of all people, including Native persons residing in Wyoming. Working to secure the education of American Indian persons in Wyoming public school education can work toward increasing the graduation rate of native persons and ultimately reduce the rate of crime amongst Native communities.

Wyoming's Current Response to the Social Injustice: American Indian Education Program

The goals of the "American Indian Education Program," otherwise known as House Bill 76 and Enrolled Act 119, are to integrate more stringently and more accurately the experiences of American Indians in United States history, especially those who historically and presently reside in Wyoming. Passed in 2017, the goal of this bill is to establish within Wyoming public schools the knowledge and understanding of American Indian heritage, history, and contributions with the counsel of tribal members and committees of American Indians in Eastern Shoshone and Northern Arapahoe tribes. The resources for students in Wyoming that the American Indian education program seeks to provide are a) an updated review of social studies programs in Wyoming public schools, including imposing requirements on the state board of education that would ensure "cultural heritage, history, and contemporary contributions of American Indians are addressed in the Wyoming social studies content and performance standards;" b) available resources on the department's official website for students and school districts to ensure the meeting of established "benchmarks within Wyoming social studies content and performance standards relating to the study of American Indian tribes"(American Indian Education Program, WY-HB. 0076, 2017).

This American Indian education program in Wyoming affects the lives of multiple individuals and stakeholders; the bandwidth of this bill is broad in Wyoming. The lives of

American Indians in Wyoming, first and foremost, are affected by the enactment of this bill. The representation of American Indians in public education in Wyoming provides a strong base for American Indian children to understand how their culture fits into the grand scheme of Wyoming history, and allows these American Indian children to recognize that their contributions, history, and culture are important and worth representing and studying in school. Furthermore, the lives of tribal members of the Northern Arapaho and Eastern Shoshone tribes are affected by this bill, as they hold a stake in just how American Indian history is being presented in Wyoming classrooms. Through this bill, these tribal leaders have more power to decide what American Indian history education looks like for Wyoming public schools. This will be done through community meetings and hearings with tribal leaders, interest groups, and tribal members from the Wind River reservation, as well as one on one meetings between the Wyoming Department of Education with these tribal leaders that will guide district work and revise and implement new curriculum in social studies programs. This voice empowers tribal leaders to help form the future of Wyoming's historical understanding of American Indians. Next, the lives of educators in Wyoming public schools are affected by this bill. Educators will be expected to learn new information about American Indians, as well as integrate new curriculum into their classrooms provided by resources available to educators through the Wyoming Department of Education website. Educators in Wyoming will benefit from this increase and refining of American Indian education, while being challenged to implement new, revised materials. Finally, the lives of students in Wyoming public schools will be affected by the American Indian education program. The bill enlarges their understanding of American Indian history and would provide them with more information and education than prior social studies programs.

House bill 76 was introduced on the grounds that the state of Wyoming “recognizes” American Indian contributions, culture, and history as vital to the history of Wyoming, and “that the state’s policy is to preserve that heritage and contribution through education” (American Indian Education Program, WY-HB. 0076, 2017). This American Indian education program seeks to assist in securing the unrestricted inclusion of American Indian perspectives in Wyoming education. This program also provides more involvement for American Indian persons in creation of curriculum in public schools. The program relies on committee meetings and hearings being held throughout the process of analyzing and reviewing current social studies programs in Wyoming. House bill 76 covers all public schools in Wyoming under the State Board of Education, through the Department of Education. The bill is to be implemented by the State board through the Department of Education, and the creation of a Social Studies Standards Review Committee by 2021 (American Indian Education Program, WY-HB. 0076, 2017), (Black, 2018, p.1).

Despite Wyoming’s current process of reviewing social studies programs in Wyoming public schools, in consultation with tribal leaders of the Northern Arapahoe and Eastern Shoshone tribes, the Wyoming house bill 76 lacks accountability measures. Simply reviewing the public school social studies programs and providing additional resources regarding American Indian history for educators and students on the Department of education’s website does not provide an adequate level of unrestricted inclusion of American Indian perspective in education. In the next few sections, a social work perspective will be applied to the historical social injustice of limited American Indian perspective in education. The social work perspective will then be utilized to provide a pathway for securing social justice to unrestricted American Indian

perspective in education in Wyoming through the proposal of a social work perspective-informed education program in Wyoming.

Responsibility of the Social Work Profession

According to the National Association of Social Workers *Code of Ethics*, social workers are expected to lead the charge in the securing of social justice in society (National Association of Social Workers, 2017, p. 5). Because social workers are bound to the *Code of Ethics* at all times in their career, social workers must be the front runners in promoting social justice in society. Additionally, social workers are charged with the task to “challenge social injustice” throughout their careers; this means that social workers should be the first individuals in society to speak out against the historical social injustice of limited American Indian perspective in education (National Association of Social Workers, 2017, p. 5). The *Code of Ethics* describes social worker efforts to secure justice as “focused primarily on issues of... discrimination and other social injustice,...seek[ing] to promote sensitivity to and knowledge about oppression and cultural and ethnic diversity” (National Association of Social Workers, 2017, p. 5). The ethical obligation for social workers to work to secure social justice in society, especially relating to cultural and ethnic diversity, places the social work profession at the heart of securing social justice to the unrestricted inclusion of American Indian perspectives in education. In Wyoming, social workers are obligated to lead the charge on securing the unrestricted inclusion of American Indian perspectives in Wyoming public schools. Because social workers must lead this social justice charge, social workers must also apply theories utilized in social work to provide a pathway for securing such social justice. This research seeks to satisfy the argument that applying a social work perspective to the historical social injustice of limited American Indian

perspective in education can also provide a pathway for securing social justice to the unrestricted American Indian perspectives in contemporary education in Wyoming.

The social work profession is additionally built around nine core competencies that further describe the responsibility of this profession relating to securing social justice to American Indian perspective in education. Core competencies are vital to the existence of social work practice, as the application of such competencies gives a social worker the “ability to integrate and apply social work knowledge, values, and skills to practice situations... to promote human and community well-being” (Council on Social Work Education, 2015, p. 6).

The nine core competencies are as follows:

- A. “Demonstrate Ethical and Professional Behavior;” this competency is what ties social workers to the National Association of Social Worker’s *Code of Ethics*, which enforces the delivery of social justice by social workers (Council on Social Work Education, 2015, p. 7).
- B. “Engage in Diversity and Difference in Practice” (Council on Social Work Education, 2015, p. 7). This competency describes a social worker’s commitment to recognize and uphold diversity in society, which aligns seamlessly with action to help secure unrestricted inclusion of American Indian perspectives in the education system.
- C. “Advance Human Rights and Social, Economic, and Environmental Justice;” this competency further aligns social workers with social justice activism (Council on Social Work Education, 2015, p. 7). The human rights of Native peoples can be understood through looking to the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. This document contains 46 articles denoting the rights of Native peoples in areas such as the right to work, the right to attain health care, and the right

- to freedom (United Nations, 2008, p. 4-15). Included in the human rights of Native peoples is Articles 14, 15, 17, and 21, is the Native person's multitude of rights to education, including self-determined education, and enjoying all the benefits of a free, equitable education (United Nations, 2008, p. 7-9). These human rights are those which social workers are charged with advancing.
- D. "Engage in Practice-Informed Research and Research-Informed Practice," meaning that social workers must interpret research evidence to improve service delivery to populations as well as to inform legislative policy change (Council on Social Work Education, 2015, p. 8) This competency is pivotal to understanding social work's role in addressing American Indian perspective in education. This research project is the embodiment of competency four, as the purpose of translating research regarding the historical injustice of limited American Indian perspective in education is to improve public policy in Wyoming that will secure social justice to the Native voice in education.
- E. "Engage in Policy Practice," which includes knowledge of public policies and how they affect populations, especially vulnerable populations (Council on Social Work Education, 2015, p. 8). This competency is realized in the discussion about including American Indian perspective in education because it is the social work profession's responsibility to propose public policy that better includes Native voices in education.
- F. Competency six, seven, and eight require social workers to "Engage with," "Assess," and "Intervene" with "Families, Groups, Organizations, and Communities" (Council on Social Work Education, 2015, p. 8-9). These competencies provide social workers with a responsibility to become informed about client populations through

engagement, discover the needs of client populations through assessment, and provide for change to address discovered needs of client populations through intervention.

These competencies relate to the discussion about American Indian perspective inclusion in education as they require social workers to identify the social injustice and create interventions to address such injustice in education. It is a social worker's professional responsibility to engage with, assess, and intervene with American Indian populations and the Wyoming education system.

- G. "Evaluate Practice with Individuals, Families, Groups, Organizations, and Communities;" this competency allows social workers to monitor the success of implemented programs or practices, as well as apply evaluative findings to improve practice effectiveness at all levels of intervention (Council on Social Work Education, 2015, p. 9)

Regarding a pathway for securing social justice to American Indian perspective inclusion in education, social workers have the obligation to evaluate the success of any social work-informed programs implemented to address this focus. This means that a final competency responsibility of social workers regarding the topic of American Indian perspective in education is to continually evaluate and improve the success of programs and interventions to secure social justice indefinitely.

Another responsibility of the social work profession is to recognize and address the historical role that social workers have played in the colonization of Native peoples. This history is marked with the removal of large numbers of Native children from their Native homes into white homes through social service agencies (Nicotera et al., 2010, p. 196). Social workers have and service agencies have also applied White-Anglo cultural norms as standards for American

Indian clients, and additionally have applied “pathological labels to American Indian clients who did not conform to these norms” (Pinderhughes, 1997, p. 19-38), (Weaver, 1997, p. 97-11), (Nicotera et al., 2010, p. 196). This enforcement of norms and expectations for Native persons is a form of colonization, whether intentional or not. This colonization has led to “a legacy of death, pain, and devastation that affects the Indigenous peoples today in the form of multi-generational trauma” (Tomburro, 2013, p. 2). It is additionally a form of present-day colonization if social workers do not understand their history in promoting American Indian assimilation (Nicotera et al., 2010, p. 196). Attaining professional self-awareness regarding the history of the profession is what will allow for social workers to both learn from this history and keep from making the same mistakes. Social workers’ acceptance of their previous role in colonization can promote other persons in society to accept their previous role in colonization as well. Social work is far from perfect in its history, but the profession has an obligation to learn from mistakes in the past and press onward toward a future where social justice can be realized.

A pivotal aspect of the social work profession is the practice of cultural competence, which includes cultural humility. The National Association of Social Workers provides social workers with specific guidelines for maintaining and learning cultural competence; these ten standards and subsequent guidelines are found in *Standards and Indicators for Cultural Competence in Social Work Practice*. Cultural competence is essentially transforming the cultural knowledge a social worker has learned about individuals or groups of people into policies, practices, attitudes, and specific standards that guide social work practice with populations (National Association of Social Workers, 2015, p. 15). Cultural humility is the first step to cultural competence, where cultural humility can be understood as “the attitude and practice of working with clients at the micro, mezzo, and macro levels with a presence of

humility while learning, communicating, offering help, and making decisions in professional practice and settings” (National Association of Social Workers, 2015, p. 16). This humility requires that social workers present themselves as learners before clients in order to understand the client’s culture from the client’s own point of view. Because of social work’s professional requirements for cultural competence and humility, it is important to also recognize that promoting unrestricted inclusion of American Indian perspective in education must ultimately be a Native-led action, where social workers can mobilize while Native persons in Wyoming direct this movement. It is additionally important to recognize that social workers who are themselves Native bring a vital perspective to this movement for promotion of social justice; American Indian social workers share this Native story that must inform how social work professionals promote inclusion of American Indian perspective in Wyoming public schools; all social workers across the state have a responsibility to look to American Indian social workers for guidance in promoting social justice for Native persons.

Application of Social Work Perspective to the Social Injustice

Based on the responsibilities of the social work profession through the National Association of Social Worker’s *Code of Ethics*, the nine core competencies, social workers’ professional awareness, and cultural competence, a social work perspective must be applied to this social injustice. This social work perspective being applied to the injustice will include both a social work theory and a social work stance. The historical social injustice of limited American Indian perspective in education is an injustice rooted in cultural elitism and racism. This social injustice creates a problem in social process for students by leading to a lack of agency in American Indian children in schools (Rogers-Stanton, 2014, p. 652). This problem in social process for students can be understood through the application of Karl Weik’s late 20th century

“sensemaking” theory that is utilized in social work perspective (Weick et al., 2005).

Sensemaking theory, according to Netting et al. (2017), can be summarized as an assumption that “individuals draw clues from their environments, engage in internal conversations designed to make sense of these clues, then form conclusions about what they have seen and heard (Netting et al., 2017, p. 221). Wyoming public schools provide the environment from which students collect “clues;” following this collection of clues, students will internalize these clues and form conclusions based on such clues. This process of “sensemaking” is what leads students to form conclusions about American Indians based on the information, or lack of information, presented to them in academics. If American Indian children are not seeing an American Indian perspective represented in education, sensemaking theory provides that students will take those clues of lack of representation and internalize them to conclude that their American Indian perspective does not have a place in academics. Additionally, these clues of limited American Indian perspective will lead both native and non-native children alike to believe that the American Indian perspective is somehow less important than the white-Anglo perspective that is continually reinforced in the public-school environment. Sensemaking theory is central to this social injustice because sensemaking is “the primary site where meanings materialize that inform and constrain identity and action” (Weick et al., 2005, p. 409). This significance of sensemaking means that while sensemaking is currently causing incorrect and even negative perceptions of American Indians in the minds of students in public schools, sensemaking is also the key to ending current injustices of limited American Indian perspective in education, and rebuilding student’s conclusions about American Indians to represent actuality and inclusion. Altering the clues Wyoming public-school education is providing students regarding American Indians is the key to new internalizations and conclusions about American Indians, which is ultimately the

avenue whereby change is engendered. Sensemaking theory, which is included in social work perspective, provides a pathway for securing social justice to unrestricted American Indian perspective in Wyoming education.

Finally, applying a social work perspective to this historical social injustice can be understood through the “Anti-Oppressive Practice” stance taken within social work perspective. Anti-Oppressive Practice is defined as “a form of social work practice which addresses social divisions and structural inequalities in the work that is done with people” (Dominelli, 1996, p. 170). This form of social work practice is rooted in the experiences of oppressed persons and research about these experiences in order to respond to person’s particular needs, regardless of their social status (Dominelli, 1996, p. 170). This social work stance is holistic, focusing on “inputs, process, methodology, relationships, and outcomes” (Dominelli, 1996, p. 171). Taking this Anti-Oppressive Practice stance in social work, and applying it to the historical social injustice of limited American Indian perspective in education, the social injustice can be understood through a holistic lens. Anti-Oppressive Practice provides social workers with a framework to engage with the American Indian population in education in Wyoming, particularly through researching about their experiences of oppression both in the past and in the present. Understanding these instances of oppression is the way in which Anti-Oppressive Practice moves social workers toward specific interventions to address the needs of oppressed populations. Anti-Oppressive Practice is additionally a way in which American Indian students can become empowered; applying this approach to academics can “reduc[e] the negative effects of social hierarchies on their interaction and the work they do together” (Strier, 2014, p. 2096). Taking an Anti-Oppressive Practice stance is vital to addressing this social injustice because Anti-Oppressive Practice “aims to change the structure and procedures of service delivery

through macro-systemic changes at the legal and political level” (Strier, 2014, p. 2096). The targeting of macro systems by Anti-Oppressive Practice makes the stance a viable pathway to securing social justice for unrestricted inclusion of American Indian perspectives in Wyoming education.

Results: Proposal of American Indian Education Program Informed by Social Work Perspective

The impact on students’ perceptions of American Indians resulting from the historical social injustice of limited American Indian perspective in education, understood through the social work perspective of sensemaking theory, substantiates the need for an American Indian education program in Wyoming that includes unrestricted American Indian perspective. Because Karl Weick describes his sensemaking theory as something which creates significant change through minor mechanisms over time, this sensemaking theory can be applied at every step of the social work-informed proposal for further securing social justice to American Indian perspective in Wyoming education (Weick et al., 2005, p.413).

Though the current American Indian education program provided through Wyoming Enrolled Act 119 is a move in the right direction toward answering the call for solving social problems related to American Indian education, there is another policy approach which exists that may provide greater impact. Washington state adopted in 2015 bill 5433, a bill enumerating a new American Indian education program for Washington, a program similar to Wyoming Enrolled Act 119. Bill 5433 granted not only a revision of social studies programs in Washington, but also the addition of updates on American Indian history and heritage, with the council of tribes (WA-S. 5433, 2015). Bill 5433 grants that all American Indian education in public schools should be determined by the tribes, and continually reviewed every couple of

years to allow for new information and continually revised pertinent information (WA-S. 5433, 2015). This ensures that American Indian education programs in public schools remain up to date, which is working to eliminate the repeating of social problems such as false American Indian history and lack of American Indian influence on public school education. Finally, the Washington bill 5433 also guarantees an American Indian education program that includes and encourages native languages (WA-S. 5433, 2015). Washington's American Indian education program is comparable to Wyoming's American Indian education program, however, Washington's program stands out for greater change towards more inclusion of American Indian perspective and culture in education; Washington's American Indian education program should serve as a model for an education program in Wyoming.

The American Indian education program in Wyoming should include amendments about language and the inclusion of such; it should also include plans for continual tribal revision and tribal contribution to the American Indian education programs curriculum and pedagogies. Furthermore, interest groups like the National Congress of American Indians argue that language programs and culture programs are vital to American Indian education; this includes pedagogies and continual influence and contribution by American Indian tribes within education programs in public schools (National Congress of American Indians, 2018, para. 6). The NCAI backs an "Indian Country" bill introduced by the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs at the 112th congress called "Native Culture, Language, and Access for Success in Schools Act," referred to as the CLASS act, which establishes the sovereignty of American Indians influence over American Indian education in public schools. Meaning, American Indians should have full control over all American Indian curriculum taught in public schools (S. 1262, 2012). The bill also proposes large grants for language immersion programs for American Indian students in

public schools, while protecting students who speak native languages from having to take standard national benchmarks in English literature and English language arts (S. 1262, 2012). Finally, the bill is meant to serve as protective factors for American Indian children, granting them education which is culturally literate, and inclusive in aiding the success and eventual graduation of American Indian students (S. 1262, 2012). This act unfortunately was introduced at the 112th congress and has made no progress since 2012; it is currently waiting for movement on the Senate Legislative Calendar under General Orders.

Based on this research relating to the pressing historical social injustices facing American Indians regarding education and education programs, as well as research regarding programs in Washington and public schools in Oklahoma and New Mexico that are rising to address social injustices, there should be an additional alternative American Indian education program in Wyoming, a program that is more extensive than what is included in house bill 76/ Enrolled Act 119. Though this bill is taking a step in the right direction for progress relating to American Indian education in Wyoming, it leaves far more to be desired and required in order to continue fighting for the security of unrestricted American Indian perspective in education. I would propose an American Indian Education program for the state of Wyoming from a social work perspective, utilizing the sensemaking theory and Anti-Oppressive Practice as a pathway for securing social justice to unrestricted American Indian perspective in Wyoming education. This social work-informed American Indian education program would include the following:

- a) A strict review of current social studies programs within Wyoming public schools by the Wyoming Department of Education, followed by a revision of the social studies program regarding American Indian history by local tribes in Wyoming, will be conducted meticulously over the course of several months. This section of the education

program applies the social work perspective of sensemaking theory by ensuring that the “clues” which are provided to students through their educational environment are restoring an accurate and inclusive understanding of American Indian perspective in education. Additionally, the revision of the social studies programs in Wyoming will seek to dismantle and uproot any clues provided in Wyoming education that previously led to negative and fallacious conclusions by students regarding American Indian perspectives and history. Finally, this section of the proposal is informed by the social work competency seven, whereby social workers are charged with the task of assessing organizations and communities; this includes assessment of content within the education system.

b) The program will implement a district-specific American Indian education program through the Department of Education, with a council of American Indian tribal members and leaders, which requires teachers to incorporate American Indian educational pedagogies and curriculum into normal class times, as a way to include culturally-literate learning for American Indian students in public schools. This subsection of the education program requires the additional creation of clues, according to sensemaking theory, that will generate agency in American Indian students. Including pedagogies and curriculum that are generated by American Indians themselves sends clues to students that American Indians do have a place in academics, and that American Indian perspective is just as important as white-Anglo perspective. This section of the proposal provides for the social work perspective through Anti-Oppressive Practice; Anti-Oppressive Practice is incorporated in this section through acknowledging American Indians as the experts of their own stories, and intentionally employing the Native voice to create programs about

Native peoples. Finally, this section of the proposal is informed by the social work competency two, tasking social workers with the responsibility to engage diversity and difference throughout interventions and social work practice.

c) The Wyoming Department of Education will receive a grant from the federal government to fund a native language immersion program designed by local American Indian tribal members and leaders, with the intended purpose of respecting and preserving American Indian cultures. This language program will be enacted by American Indian tribal members and leaders. Relating to social work perspective of sensemaking theory, this language section of the proposed education program provides clues for American Indian students to internalize and conclude the value of their ancestor's native languages. This language program also sends clues to all American Indian individuals that the federal government is willing to spend money on the preservation of native languages. The inclusion of Native language programs into public-school curriculum in Wyoming further employs the social work perspective through including Anti-Oppressive Practice, by changing the "structure and procedure" of the macro education system (Strier, 2014, p. 2096). Social work competency two can also be applied here, as social workers engage diversity and difference in practice with clients.

d) Periodic and repetitive revision of all programs mentioned in sections a-c are to be completed by the Wyoming Department of Education in tandem with a council of American Indian tribal members and leaders every five years. This revision includes engaging in research and evaluation methods that will inform the Department about updated interventions and needs of the American Indian student population. Relating to social work perspective through sensemaking theory, the repetitive revision of sections a-

c provides clues leading to conclusions by Native and non-Native individuals that the American Indian perspective in education is valuable enough to be continually sought after and improved upon. Additionally, this constant revision will require individuals in the state of Wyoming to continually consider the ways in which American Indian perspective can grow and improve in Wyoming education. This section of the proposal is informed by social work competency four and nine, whereby social workers utilize research to inform their interventions with clients and continually evaluate such interventions and practice with clients. Finally, Anti-Oppressive Practice is represented in this section of the proposal through the requirement of constant evaluation to inform intervention. Research about persons to gain understanding about them, and then create interventions specifically for them, is a key aspect of Anti-Oppressive Practice; this key aspect is represented through this section of the proposal.

The proposed social work-informed American Indian education program would begin implementation through community listening sessions and hearings around the state of Wyoming to include the voices and opinions of all stakeholders. The human rights this education program grants would be protected by the continual revision of subsections a-c, and would be projected to catalyst growth and positive change towards increasing inclusion of American Indian perspective in education in Wyoming in the future, and will continue to combat contemporary challenges which may come to face American Indian students in Wyoming the future.

Discussion

This proposed social work-informed American Indian education program would strive to remarkably affect the American Indian student population in Wyoming. By granting inclusion and influence on American Indian education by tribal members and leaders, American Indian

students are granted the right to an unveiled and accurate portrayal of their ancestor's histories, and therefore an unveiled and accurate understanding of themselves. For an American Indian child to be represented in education means their heritage, culture, history, and contributions are valued and important, therefore showing American Indian students that they themselves are important. Secondly, this proposed program would allow American Indian students to embrace something that connects them intimately with their ancestors: language. American Indian students deserve the right to preserve and embrace the facet of their culture that is deeply entrenched in language. Finally, this proposed program would affect the American Indian student population by teaching them in learning styles or pedagogies that are culturally literate. All students deserve curriculum which has been influenced by their culture, and American Indian students are no exception. Learning styles pertinent to American Indian culture are vital for American Indian student success rates in academics, and ought to be informed by tribal members and leaders.

Given that this proposed program would be led by social workers and informed by social work perspective, this proposed program could additionally change the field of social work relating to American Indian populations. Social workers, especially in schools, could see an increase in American Indian student participation as well as increased contact with American Indian parents following the implementation of this proposed program. The reason American Indian parents could become more involved at school is because of the potential for increased academic success rates of American Indian students. This increased success related to American Indian students feeling their culture is being celebrated, represented, and implemented within classrooms could create a more open space for American Indian parents to feel welcome to participate in the learning that takes place in public schools. This proposed program could also

impact social work practice in Wyoming by the way practitioners would grow in awareness and come to understand and advocate for American Indians. Social workers would begin to follow the lead of this American Indian education program in schools that is intended to move toward securing social justice to American Indians, and could seek to implement similar policies in their specific social work agencies. Social workers may further seek to secure social justice for American Indians through seeking out more education about American Indians, meeting with tribal members concerning interventions to utilize with American Indian individuals, and pursuing cultural humility relating to ways of communicating with and advocating for American Indian clients. Finally, this proposed American Indian education program will fulfill the United Nations "Declaration of Human Rights" section twenty-six, subsection two, enumerating all individuals right to culturally literate education and inclusion in such education (United Nations, 2015, pg. 54). Social justice would be further secured for unrestricted American Indian perspective in Wyoming education through the implementation of this proposed education program. American Indian students could finally have the support and protective factors which may guarantee their graduation and academic success in Wyoming. Finally, Wyoming could be the leader in social justice for American Indian perspective in education through this comprehensive program, and be a forerunner, alongside social workers, for other states to follow in this realization of the need to secure social justice to unrestricted American Indian perspective education.

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