

Transcending Barriers: Black River's Journey with Act 31 and Curriculum Evolution

August 2017 Update

Paul ST Rykken

Black River Falls High School

Contact Information

E-Mail: paul.rykken@brf.org

Web: pstrykken.com

INTRODUCTION

"We have powerful potential in our youth, and we must have the courage to change old ideas and practices so that we may direct their power toward good ends."

--- Mary McLeod Bethune

What should we teach? How should we teach it? These questions shape our work as educators. Particularly in the area of History and the Social Studies, our gatekeeper role is never worked out in a political vacuum. Indeed, colliding political and worldviews often create substantial debates about *pedagogy*, an interesting word of Greek origin, meaning "to lead the child." After all, what could be more important and potentially controversial than what our children learn about their history and contemporary society? Such knowledge has the potential to shape their view of themselves, the world around them, and their future in profound ways. Coming of age during a time when Civil Rights dramatically caught the nation's attention, my college years witnessed clashing debates over history and how it should be framed within our secondary schools and colleges. Studying with history professors who reflected multiple views, including scholars of the "New Left," I entered my first high school classrooms navigating significant changes from traditional approaches to history. Those 1960s and 70s debates have rumbled throughout my entire career which now spans more than a generation.¹

Act 31, in many respects, has always existed within broader debates concerning multiculturalism and the perceived threat it poses to a more celebratory version of American history. Since 1990 Wisconsin public school educators have been challenged to be more inclusive regarding the history of the people indigenous to North America – the First Nations – especially focusing on the Wisconsin connection of that history. We have now reached the second generation of that initiative. What follows is a description, albeit incomplete, of the journey we have taken in the

¹ The arguments related to the revisions of the AP US History Curriculum provide the most recent example of such debates. Deemed by critics as leftist revisionism, the College Board has been challenged to justify the changes. This article from the National Review from September of 2015 provides an excellent overview: <http://www.nationalreview.com/article/424414/ap-us-history-bias>

Black River district during the past 27 years regarding this landmark law. Our story is unique but perhaps instructive.

CONTEXT

Black River Falls is a complex place. Like any number of frontier towns across the upper mid-west, its founding in 1838 roughly corresponded with the forced removal and displacement of native inhabitants, in this case the Hochungra (Ho-Chunk) people. Lying on the northern edge of lands ceded in a controversial 1837 treaty, the community has grappled for seven generations with the somewhat tenuous coexistence of descendants of those original second-wave New England founders, Germans, Scandinavians, Scotch-Irish, and Bohemian settlers and the Ho-chunk people who courageously fought a series of removals for nearly 40 years. The story and succeeding memory, though lost on many of the modern-day residents, remains central to the region's identity.

The education strand of our community's story reflects the complicated history of the community. Schools were established in the community as early as 1847 and by the 1870s were increasingly important, but only for the Euro-American children. After the final removal attempts in 1873-74, and with the help of some local residents, the Ho-Chunk people were granted homesteads on property east of the Black River and Christian missionaries arrived bringing the prospect of education for some of the native children.² Regional boarding schools, some under federal control and others affiliated with various Churches, increasingly played a role as well. The Tomah Industrial School, the Neillsville Indian School, and Bethany Mission in Wittenberg became part of the experience of many of the Ho-Chunk children during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The well-documented boarding school experience was predicated on aggressively promoting assimilation and posed dramatic challenges to both native cultures and languages and its effects are still being felt today.³ By the middle 1930s in conjunction with changes in Federal

² Jacob Spaulding, founder of the small city on the river, arrived in 1838 and spent the next 38 years putting his mark on the community. Spaulding ultimately became an advocate for the Ho-Chunk people and was instrumental in helping the fight the removals of 1873-74. I have researched the Spaulding story for several years and the following historical essay explores his relationship with the Ho-Chunk people:
<http://www.brf.org/files/hs/Rykken/Spaulding%20Funeral%201876.pdf>

³ My grandfather, T.M. Rykken, worked as a missionary and teacher from 1920-1930 at Bethany Mission in Wittenberg, Wisconsin. The Mission was under the auspices of the Norwegian Lutheran Church and included children with Ho-Chunk, Oneida, Stockbridge, and mixed backgrounds from the region and other parts of the state. Historian Betty Ann Bergland has done significant research on Bethany, particularly regarding the "settler-colonists," the term she uses to identify the Christian Missionaries. Her work is documented in [Competing Kingdoms: Women, Mission, Nation, and](#)

Indian policy under Franklin Roosevelt, the Black River district established the Hochungra School at the Mission east of town, similar in many respects to the other county schools of the era. This enabled Ho-Chunk children to gain education in their home community and, in fact, the school remained an integral part of that community for nearly 30 years until its closing in 1963.

Beginning in the fall of 1963, Ho-Chunk students were bussed into the city schools and thus began the period of integration. The closing of the school, part of a larger consolidation process undertaken by the district during those years, proved contentious for the Mission community, as did other such closings for various settlements within the county.⁴ For over 50 years, therefore, Black River's public school leaders and teachers have confronted the challenges inherent in working with students of diverse backgrounds.⁵ In 2017 the district is comprised of roughly 1,900 students, 20% of whom are Ho-Chunk, and has an increasingly diverse student body with a growing number of Hispanic and mixed-race students. In addition, the District struggles with issues of poverty – also historically based – with nearly half of our students qualifying for free or reduced lunch. Jackson County, in fact, consistently ranks in the upper echelon of Wisconsin counties with significant socio-economic and health-related challenges.

THE ARRIVAL OF ACT 31

Act 31 was a natural consequence of a series of events in Wisconsin during the 1980s and became part of the Wisconsin educational landscape in 1989/90. Notably, the Voigt Decision of 1983 affirmed off-reservation fishing and hunting rights of the Ojibwa people of northern Wisconsin, rights imbedded in treaties signed in 1837 and 1842 with the Federal Government. The revival of spear-fishing, in particular, led to confrontations at boat-landings between native and non-native fishermen, confrontations that ultimately became violent. Such actions spurred major debates

the American Protestant Empire, 1812-1960 (Duke University Press, 2010). My father, T.A. Rykken, was born at Bethany in 1924 and I was able to explore the history and culture of the school with him, particularly in the last years of his life. Further, I have had the unique experience of actually teaching students whose ancestors attended Bethany, and actually had the opportunity to meet Jim Funmaker prior to his death. Funmaker was a student of my grandfather's at Bethany in the early 1920s.

⁴ Ethno-historian Nancy Lurie of Milwaukee indicated to me in an interview that the Hochungra School provided a sense of community within the Mission. The integration of Ho-Chunk students in the city schools came during the period following the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision of 1954. Lurie indicated, for example, that Mitchell Whiterabbit, UCC Minister and leader within the Ho-chunk community, argued that such integration would, in fact, be a benefit to the Ho-Chunk children over time.

⁵I was part of that first wave of students and this has given me a unique perspective on the story. My family lived in Black River from 1962-1972 and I attended my first 9 years of school during these years. I was able to witness first-hand some of the dynamics of this process while growing up.

between competing factions of the state's population, and ultimately prompted the call for greater awareness of the history of treaty-rights and American Indian history in general. Act 31, as it came to be known, is embodied in 5 specific statutes that provide direction for History and Social Studies teachers and curriculum leaders.⁶ Here is a shortcut version of the 5 statutes, indicating what should be added in terms of both content and teacher preparation:

CHAPTER 115.28 (17)(d): Treaty-based, off-reservation rights (focus on Chippewa),

CHAPTER 118.01 (c)(7)(8): Human relations, understanding different cultures and value systems (notably, American Indian, African-American, and Hispanic)

CHAPTER 118.19 (8): Pre-service Requirements for Wisconsin teachers (beginning 1 July 1991)

CHAPTER 121.02 (1)(h): Instructional materials, texts, LMC materials that reflect cultural diversity and pluralistic nature of American society

CHAPTER 121.02 (L)(4): Beginning September 1991 (specifically) as part of Social Studies curriculum, instruction in history, culture, and tribal sovereignty of the federally recognized tribes and bands located in Wisconsin – 2 exposures in elementary grades (K-8) and at least once in high school.

It is clear from the provisions of the law that Act 31 sought to address the perceived lack of emphasis on diversity within our History and Social Studies classes in general, and challenged us to dramatically rethink our curriculum, particularly as it related to American Indian studies. To what extent and how schools have chosen to implement Act 31 remain subjects of debate twenty-six years into implementation. A great deal of work has been done throughout the state, though my sense is that the original vision of the law has yet to be fully realized and progress has been slower than intended. The Black River experience with Act 31 is often viewed as a success story, and in many respects it has been. As is the case with any curriculum reform, however, there is much left to be done in 2017. What follows is a brief commentary on the Black River experience with Act 31 and a series of relevant recommendations based on that experience.

CHANGING THE CONVERSATION

It may seem natural that within a mixed community such as Black River implementing Act 31 would be relatively simple, but as Nancy Lurie once told me, the seven miles between Black River

⁶ Alan Caldwell, member of the Menominee Nation of Wisconsin and DPI American Indian Studies Consultant during the 1980s was responsible for much of the original language of the law. In the fall of 2014, Caldwell spoke at the 25th Anniversary celebration of Act 31, calling on educators to keep up the fight for its provisions. Alan died in the winter of 2016 – a great loss for all of us involved in this work!

Falls and the Ho-Chunk Mission often seemed more like seventy miles. As mentioned earlier, the Black River District had been fully integrated for 27 years by the time of Act 31. Sporadic efforts at “awareness-raising” concerning American Indian history and culture certainly occurred during those years. Individual teachers made conscious attempts to build bridges within the community, though such efforts were not necessarily rooted in the curriculum.⁷ Significant learning gaps, as well as graduation rates, between native and non-native students were ever-present.⁸ While it is clear that some work had been done prior to 1990, Act 31 served as a catalyst for a more formal approach to developing an inclusive curriculum. My arrival in the District in the fall of 1990 coincided with the implementation of the law and it was clear from my hiring interviews with Principal Roger Sands that school leaders were eager to take a hard look at this facet of the curriculum. Further, there were leaders within the high school, notably Charity Thunder and Ron Perry, who were determined to carry out the provisions of Act 31. Perry, in fact, had piloted changes with the 9th Grade World Cultural Studies program that highlighted Ho-Chunk history and culture for a portion of the school year. It was a well-intentioned effort that opened the door to further changes over time.

Beginning in the fall of 1990, then, we began to take a hard look at our History and Social Studies classes with the new law in mind. The timing proved advantageous due to other changes in our class offerings at the time including the addition of Economics, a revised Government course, a changing approach to US and World History, and the addition of Advanced Placement History. It was our good fortune throughout this process to have the wise counsel of Nancy Lurie. Dr. Lurie’s connection to the area and her incredible work regarding American Indian cultures in Wisconsin is well documented, and during the 1990s in particular, she offered sound advice and ideas for our particular situation. Charity Thunder was also instrumental in a number of ways during this

⁷ An example of what I’m talking about in this regard is work that Mildred Evenson (now retired) undertook in the elementary schools. She had a particular affinity for local history and had worked extensively with Francis Perry, resident local historian, in transmitting a greater understanding of the ethnic history of the area with a special emphasis on the Ho-chunk story. Unfortunately, when Millie retired, much of that work was discontinued.

⁸ In fact, a good deal of de facto segregation still exists today and relationships between native and non-native people, as a whole, remain tenuous. Nevertheless, the advent of gaming in the early 1990s changed the landscape of our region. The Ho-chunk Nation is the largest employer in Jackson County in 2017, a fact that is not lost on local residents. The dramatic changes, both economically and politically, within the HCN are certainly part of a much larger story.

period. Her insights into Ho-chunk history and culture along with her ability to work as a bridge between school and tribe proved invaluable.⁹

As mentioned earlier, we never do this type of work in a vacuum. The economic and political developments occurring within the Ho-chunk Nation provided a dynamic atmosphere for the work we were doing. The development of the new Ho-chunk Constitution in 1993-94, for example, provided an opportunity for our students to witness history in “real time.” As we worked out the details of our new government and politics curriculum, we devised a unit in comparative Constitutions. I had discussions with tribal leaders during this period, particularly President JoAnne Jones and Area 1 Representative Tracy Thundercloud, about the prospect of doing that -- discussions that were met with enthusiasm. Why not teach the United States, Wisconsin, and Ho-Chunk Constitutions comparatively? What better way for our students to delve into the nuances of sovereignty and how that applied to tribal nations?¹⁰ From there, it was natural to explore the Supreme Court decisions relevant to tribal gaming – again, something our students were witnessing within their own community. Though I did not fully understand this at the time, it is clear to me now that each time we opened up a new topic within our various classes, we were scaffolding into something bigger. The process was (and remains) organic and “bottom-up,” in a sense.

Open discussions within our department and with various educational leaders from the HCN began in the middle 1990s. Our goal from the outset was to more naturally integrate American Indian history and culture into the range of our classes. We were uncomfortable with the “add-on” approach often afforded minorities and women, particularly in history education.

Corresponding with this evolution on our part was the leadership of JP Leary at the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction. Dr. Leary, now a professor at UW-Green Bay, was doing ground-breaking work during those years regarding Act 31, and our association with him proved

⁹ It's interesting to note that both Dr. Lurie and Ms. Thunder suggested the addition of a Ho-chunk history course to our curriculum during conversations I had with them in the early 1990s. I recall at the time feeling very intimidated at the thought of attempting that in our school. Looking back all these years later, I'm impressed by their vision, particularly in light of the addition of Ho-Chunk and Ethnic Studies to our curriculum in the fall of 2014. Charity's death in 2017 signaled the loss of a great champion for this work.

¹⁰ It has been my contention that the basic starting point for much of this work is to help our students understand the concept of Tribal Sovereignty. My sense is that this fundamental idea is lost on a good share of the public and that clarifying this with our students paves the way for much greater understanding.

extremely important.¹¹ Our integrative approach (we sometimes used the word “infusion” to describe this) became central to what we were doing. This enabled us to rethink all our classes and challenged us to look at our K-12 curriculum with fresh eyes. We did not think of what we were doing as necessarily that unique, but in hindsight, it probably was, at least relatively speaking. It seems clear to me now that, most importantly, we **changed the conversation**, and that was truly important. Our guiding principle, from the start, was to consider what was best for all our students, particularly when it came to understanding their history.

THE EVOLVING NATURE OF THE WORK

As conceived by Alan Caldwell and others in the late 1980s, Act 31 was aimed primarily at the non-native students in Wisconsin schools. Logically and naturally, the initiatives were designed to enhance awareness among the emerging citizens of our state concerning the history and tribal sovereignty of American Indian people. The process being described within these pages concerning the Black River district has been inherently dynamic – one development opened the door for other changes, some predictable and some not. For example, Act 31 and the discussions that ensued in the Black River District, ultimately led us to more fully embrace the principles of Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT). Through years of trial and error, coupled with ongoing discussions between school personnel and tribal educational leaders, we have kept the train moving. In 2010 the District and the HCN signed a Memorandum of Understanding that must be considered as historic. We now offer Ho-Chunk Language classes as part of our World Languages Program. Beginning in 2013, as part of a newly designed leadership structure for the District under Dr. Shelly Severson, a Committee for Culturally Responsive Teaching was established as part of the District Leadership Team. In our most recent School Board election, Nehomah Thundercloud, a graduate of BRFHS and Dartmouth College, was elected by a wide margin and now serves on our Board.¹² In the spring of 2014, the Black River School Board unanimously

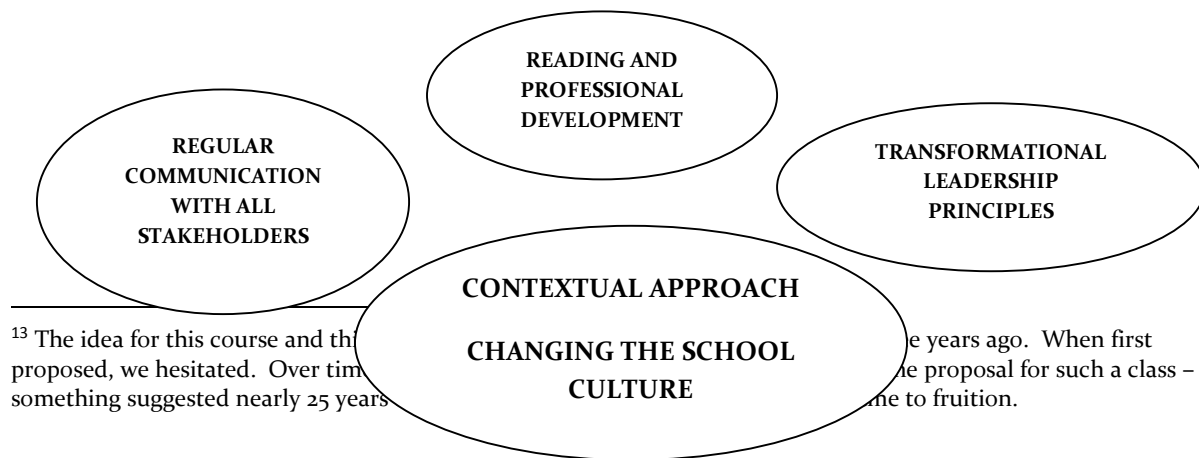
¹¹ I had the opportunity to be a presenter at the first American Indian Studies Institute held at UW-Eau Claire in 1997. Dr. Leary established the Institute to bring together leaders from around the state for a week-long focus on Act 31. It was there that I met Dr. Ronald Satz, notable author and historian, who had written extensively on Chippewa Treaty Rights. Dr. Satz offered terrific insights on the work that we were undertaking and I am forever thankful that I had that opportunity. His death in 2006 was a great loss for our state. It was also there that I met others that became so instrumental in the work of Act 31: Dorothy (Dot) Davids and Ruth Gudinas, for example -- one of my prize possessions is a copy of Ruth's PhD Dissertation on Ho-chunk politics, something I have used extensively over the years! I was also introduced to Barb Munson at that initial conference. Barb has been an incredibly strong leader on the Mascot issue both in Wisconsin and on the national level.

¹² In the fall of 2015, Ms. Thundercloud became Director of the Education Department for the Ho-chunk Nation under President Wilfrid Cleveland. This puts her in a unique position and is certainly a “first” for our District.

approved a new course to be offered in our High School Social Studies Department called Ho-Chunk and Ethnic Studies in conjunction with the First Nations Studies Department of UW-Green Bay.¹³ We recently completed round 3 of the class and thus far 103 students have completed the curriculum, with 85 receiving dual credit from UW-Green Bay. Roughly half of the students have been non-native, so we are getting a good mix in the class, something we hoped for when we initiated it. A highlight from October was a field trip and “history walk” with Bill Quackenbush at the Kickapoo Valley Reserve. Student response was enthusiastic. In addition, we are excited that in the fall of 2016 we amended our Student Senate Constitution recognizing the revived Waksik Wacek organization as an adjunct partner within our student governing structure, mirroring the government to government relationship that exists between tribal nations and the federal government in the “real world.” This initiative stems, in part, from the activism of several of our students last year related to the Effigy Mounds issue in Wisconsin. In nearly every instance since 1990, each step that we have taken toward greater integration has built on previous actions.

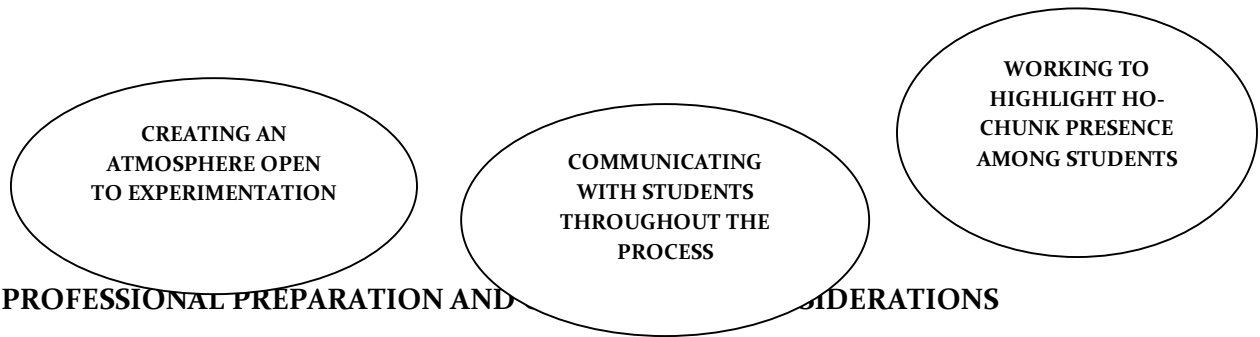
RE-IMAGINING THE CURRICULUM: PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS

Every school district is unique and what works in one area will not be the right fit for another. Nevertheless, my sense is that there are some universals. The suggestions offered here are based on work that we have done within the Black River District since 1990. Before examining specific suggestions related to preparation and teaching strategies, however, I believe it is fundamental to approach this work holistically or contextually – that is, envision curriculum reform broadly and organically – think beyond textbooks, standards, testing, and all the normal “trappings” we associate with our curricula. In light of that, creating an atmosphere of open communication with all stakeholders is paramount. The conversations can be difficult, but they are absolutely necessary. The following diagram illustrates the components that comprise this work:



¹³ The idea for this course and the proposal, we hesitated. Over time something suggested nearly 25 years

... years ago. When first the proposal for such a class – ... to fruition.



Teaching history is undervalued in our schools in my estimation. There seems to be a notion in the public mind that “anyone can teach history,” and nothing could be further from the truth. Specifically, teaching authentically inclusive history is especially challenging and requires great preparation and creative thinking. Our preparation as history teachers needs to be ongoing. Solid preparation builds confidence and enables us to think more creatively about what we are offering in terms of content and methodology. The following suggestions on my part come from the vantage point of the secondary level but certainly can be adapted to the elementary and middle levels. They are in no particular order and continue to evolve.

1. Be determined to increase your own knowledge base concerning American Indian history. There are multiple sources out there to help you with your own background knowledge and there is no substitute for reading. Build your confidence by developing a stronger background and be patient about the process – it takes time. Realize that we are all products of the “settler-colonizing” version of American history – it is woven deeply into our textbooks.¹⁴ Here are two books I have read recently that are really good with the big picture – I highly recommend both.

Colin G. Calloway’s First Peoples: A Documentary Survey of American Indian History. Fourth Edition. New York: Bedford/ St. Martin’s, 2012.

Richter, Daniel K. Facing East From Indian Country: A Native History of Early America. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001.

¹⁴ James W. Loewen’s book, *Lies My Teacher Told Me: Everything Your American History Textbook Got Wrong* (2007) provides an excellent analysis of the missing perspectives in our history classes. Chapter 4 (“Red Eyes”), in particular, provides compelling evidence to support the author’s premise.

2. Based on my experiences in the past four years, I firmly believe that every high school in Wisconsin should offer a course within their history curriculum that focuses on one tribal nation. Every community in Wisconsin lies in proximity to one tribe (and perhaps more) that could become the focus of the class. This accomplishes several things at once: first, American Indian history is exceedingly complex and the focus on one tribe will bring the larger narratives to life through an understanding of one tribe's experience; second, offering such a course opens the door to collaborative efforts between tribal nations and schools, something that is key to moving forward with Act 31; third, local history is often overlooked within our schools and we're missing a valuable resource there. In our case, for example, we combined the focus on Ho-Chunk history with ethnic studies, thus enabling every student, native and non-native, to see their heritage within the broader outlines of the community.

3. Historian David Blight has made the following observation: "History must be imagined before it can be understood."¹⁵ Relevant to this discussion, one implication of Blight's statement is that all students must see themselves within the American story to achieve an authentic understanding of who they are. *Get beyond compartmentalizing* our history, particularly when it comes to including the forgotten or underrepresented parts of our past. We do a great disservice to First Nations people or African-Americans or women or any other marginalized groups by "adding" them in token or "sidebar" fashion, as textbooks often do. I have spent my career fighting that approach. In 2013 I had the opportunity to spend one week studying with Colin Calloway at Dartmouth and he was fond of saying, "**American Indian history IS American history in its most fundamental sense,**" and I couldn't agree more. Realize that there are forces out there in the political environment that prefer a celebratory version of the American past, but a much more authentic version of our past is the story of **competing narratives**, and my experience is that students find exploring the tension compelling. History must be taught from multiple perspectives.¹⁶

¹⁵ Blight's comment came during a lecture he gave in a Gilder-Lehrman Institute Seminar I attended in 2001 at Amherst College in Massachusetts. The statement has stayed with me since and helped me to rethink how we approach history.

¹⁶ A further example, and one that is especially relevant in Wisconsin, is the story of the Hmong people of southeast Asia. Nearly 50,000 Hmong are living in Wisconsin and have a significant presence in at least 7 of our communities –

4. Look at your curriculum (in its entirety) and think creatively about “access points” for American Indian history. In educational parlance, the expression “access points” is often used in the context of discussing differentiated instruction – the idea that we find different ways to help all students access the information we are presenting. I’m using the term a bit differently here, but the concept applies. How do we take a topic that is as complex and potentially controversial as American Indian history and weave it into our curriculum? How do we do that in an authentic way that does not appear to be patronizing a particular group of people? When do we begin that process with our students? What strategies and approaches will be most effective with students at various stages in their education? These are important questions for those of us dealing with diverse student populations and we need to think creatively. You cannot “do it all,” but you can provide several opportunities along the way and once that starts happening, you will be amazed at how natural it starts to become for students.

5. Think differently about textual history. A lot of my work in recent years has been centered on developing a document-based approach to my teaching in all classes and that is something we continue to focus on in our department. That said, I have always been somewhat frustrated with the lack of documents related to native voices. Part of the difficulty relates to the heavily oral tradition present in most native cultures (and therefore a relative lack of textual sources), but also my limited view of primary sources. By that I mean that I need to be more open to other types of sources, particularly pictographs, artifacts, and other images that are rich in meaning. I find it interesting that we really do have a bias in our history instruction to “textual” documents and this can actually be a very limiting factor. I’m struck by the notion, for example, that we think of **history** as the point at which we began to have a written record of the past, and the period prior to that as **pre-history**. My sense is that presents us with a diminished view of the past.

6. Realize that scaffolding is incredibly important when dealing with classroom methodologies regarding potentially controversial information. If the ultimate goal is to

Milwaukee, Wausau, LaCrosse, Eau Claire, Appleton, Sheboygan, and Green Bay. Only California and Minnesota have greater numbers. Their unique story needs to be addressed within our history classes more fully than it has been.

encourage high-level discussions about American Indian history and race-related issues, there is much skill development that must happen first. It is easy to make the mistake of jumping too quickly into areas that require measured reflection.

7. Take the time to analyze the impact that disease had on European-Native relationships – this piece of the history is essential to the story and my experience tells me that most non-native people simply do not know this story. It is nearly incomprehensible to grasp what European diseases did to the indigenous people of this continent. Stories abound, of course, about how some of the affliction was deliberately imposed, but the reality is that the vast majority was simply a tragic collision of cultures. The use of the word “genocide” to describe what happened to native people between 1492 and 1900 prompts an important discussion – one that I have witnessed a number of times in different contexts. That term, of course, is usually applied to the story of Hitler and his attempted extermination of the Jewish people during the 1930s and 40s, but in many respects it is the right word to use when describing what happened as Europeans ventured into the American wilderness. You will want to consider where that discussion fits and how it should be brought into the classroom – it is controversial and it is important to think it through carefully before taking that step. This provides a natural step to introducing the concept of historical trauma.

8. The use of well-informed and properly selected imagery is absolutely central to teaching American Indian history. The adage “a picture says a thousand words” applies here. For example, the use of John Gast’s “American Progress,” a famous painting that presents a glorious vision of America’s manifest destiny, illustrates several important concepts related to the complexity of frontier history. Imagery provides a terrific **access point** for most students and can prompt excellent discussions. For example, for several years we have made it a practice to fly three flags outside each of our district’s schools – the American flag, the Wisconsin flag, and the flag of the Ho-Chunk Nation. This came via a collaborative effort between the District and HCN officials, and provides a terrific opportunity for us to teach the concept of sovereignty. One of the things we are currently working on at BRFHS is the development and placement of imagery that highlights our

community's shared history, something we cannot take for granted.

9. Consider teaching your students about the First Nations of North America in a comparative context. As one who deals with native students on a daily basis, comparative history challenges me to understand the American experience from a global perspective, something I have been attempting to do more within the past 10 years of my career. Though unique, the experiences of American Indian people are part of a wider narrative of greed and the pursuit of power that unfortunately dots the landscape of the human story.¹⁷ There is a lot of work being done right now on trans-national histories and this is another excellent access point for looking at indigenous cultures.

10. Stress the removal episodes as a way of helping students understand the concept of **deracination** in history. Never underestimate the power of that experience. Isolation and alienation are inevitable when individuals or societies are forcibly uprooted from their traditional cultures or homelands. The native students I work with in Wisconsin, for example, are descendants of people who faced a horrific series of removals during the 19th century. It has become increasingly clear to me over many years of doing this work that the removal experience and **subsequent memory** of it is singularly important in Ho-Chunk culture. In addition, that particular chapter of their history, coupled with the boarding school experiences, raises the issue of **generational trauma**, something that we are currently exploring more deliberately in our department. My experience with students is that removal stories resonate with people on a very basic level and raises the level of empathy in the classroom. Again, you may want to talk about other examples from history where this happened. The shift from a rural/agrarian culture to an urban/industrial culture, for example, led to the experience of deracination by millions of people. Slavery provides another example, of course, in which millions of people were uprooted over and over again.

¹⁷ The story of the Sami people (Laplanders) of northern Scandinavia, for example, bears striking similarities with the story of the indigenous people of North, Central, and South America. Introducing students to trans-national examples of colonization broadens the perspective of our students.

11. Spend time with students helping them understand historiography and how that impacts what we do in our classes. In other words, we should talk more openly with them about the evolution of studying history and why more attention is being given today to the **forgotten voices** of the past. Our students need better frameworks for interpreting our history. It's almost cliché to stress that our society is becoming more diverse, but between now and the middle of the century this evolution will continue to garner more and more attention. We need to prepare them for that world as best we can. They need to be guided in their formative years by adults who are willing to be open with them about their own evolution concerning race issues. Again, let me reference a statement from Colin Calloway from my Dartmouth experience: ***“We need to liberate our students from the myths they have been sold. We do that through documents, clear thinking, and healthy skepticism, without leading to jaded cynicism.”*** The final portion of that statement is particularly important. While we need to move beyond a celebratory version of American history, we must help our students develop a reasoned perspective on our triumphs and failures – a complex but necessary task for anyone involved in history education. As an example of that, it is important to present history to students in such a way that they see the power of individual choices and actions impacting eventual outcomes. It is easy to fall into what historians call the “Appomattox Syndrome,” whereby we start with the “end” and work our way back through a lens of inevitability (the reference is to Lee’s surrender to Grant and the Union victory in 1865). Students need to see that “things could have been different” and that the tragedy of the American Indian story was not inevitable.

12. Finally, realize that pedagogy deals with both content and methodology and I highly recommend that students be introduced to elder epistemology – that is, the ways of knowing and the ways of learning derived from the traditions of indigenous cultures. Bringing elders into the classroom is one way to accomplish this. Oral history, for example, can be a powerful tool for understanding and also helps students grasp significant differences between Western and Non-Western pedagogy.

FINAL THOUGHTS

The work we are doing in Black River is certainly driven by the community's history and the relationship between the school district and the Ho-chunk Nation. That relationship continues to evolve and each step we take naturally leads to further collaborative possibilities and challenges. The work will always require diligence and focus. The ultimate goal is to establish and maintain structures and systems that work for the benefit of all students and I am continually reminded that much of the work we do today will not come to fruition during my career – we are planting seeds. In the final analysis, we need to **let history do the work**. Inclusive history that accurately portrays the American story creates a space for difficult conversations about race and diversity, conversations that can change our communities for the better.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Curriculum work is a shared effort and our Act 31 journey in Black River exemplifies this truth. Many individuals within the Ho-Chunk Nation have contributed mightily along the way – dozens of people have contributed in one way or another with wisdom and enthusiasm – I will miss some people as I start listing, but here's a start: As mentioned earlier, Charity Thunder was instrumental in the early years, as was her brother Gordon. Barb Blackdeer-Mackenzie, Woodrow White, and Mark Butterfield offered much expertise early on and over the years. Penny Matter, Tina Boisen, and Nehomah Thundercloud contributed during their years as School Liaisons and championed the cause. More recently, former HCN Education Director Adrienne Thunder has been a force for positive change and continual improvement and Bill Quackenbush of Cultural and Historic Preservation offers ongoing support for the curriculum work we are doing. Amanda WhiteEagle, Michelle Greendeer-Rave, and Wilfrid Cleveland also helped out with the new class. Since 2013 we have been developing a Culturally Responsive Teaching initiative within the district and, again, many have been involved with that. Notably, Barb Blackdeer-Mackenzie and Michelle Cloud have given much time and effort to S.E.E.D. training within our various communities (Seeking Educational, Equity, and Diversity) and are helping to “change the conversation” from the grass-roots. In addition, former School Social Worker Mallory Knipe and Adam Kaszubowski of our Math Department and CRT Chair have contributed to the efforts.

David O'Connor, DPI American Indian Studies Specialist, has been a great supporter as well and is continuing the fine work that JP Leary did for so many years at DPI. I have been inspired over the past four years, additionally, by JP, Lisa Poupart, Jeff Ryan, and Aaron Birdbear, all of whom

helped me navigate the new class. Professor Colin Calloway of Dartmouth College offered terrific advice as I was putting the class together – he has forgotten more about American Indian history than I will ever know. Principal Tom Chambers, Superintendent Shelly Severson, Curriculum Director Stephanie Brueggen, and Title VII Coordinator Laura Simonson for the District also deserve mention here due to their unflagging support for our efforts.

Special thanks also to my High School Department colleagues for their continued efforts at improving our approach: Tony Boerger, Kris Wrobel (now retired), Eli Youngthunder, and Mike Shepard all have made significant contributions to this effort. Colleague John Pellowski did genuinely excellent work while he was with us several years ago and brought special skills and expertise to the effort. Finally, it was my great privilege to have had consistent correspondence with Nancy Oestreich Lurie since the early 1990s and her advice was helpful and inspirational. Her willingness to be interviewed and to share materials, both published and unpublished, significantly added to my understanding of the complex story of the Ho-Chunk people. Dr. Lurie's knowledge in the field was unsurpassed and her unique connection with Black River dating back to 1944 was truly been a gift. Her passing in 2017 left a unique void in our state.

Paul Rykken is originally from North Dakota. He spent 10 of his formative years in Black River Falls, Wisconsin (1962-1972) and graduated from West Fargo High School in 1975. He received his B.A. from Concordia College in Moorhead, Minnesota in 1979, and earned a Master's Degree in American History from the University of Minnesota-Moorhead in 1985. Rykken taught in Minnesota and North Dakota for 11 years prior to coming to Black River in 1990. 2017-18 is his 39th year in secondary education and he teaches four classes: AP United States History, Law and Society, US and Global Politics, and Ho-chunk and Ethnic Studies. Rykken also is an Adjunct Instructor with the First Nations Studies Program of UW-Green Bay as part of their CCIHS program. He also coordinates the Falls History Project and serves on the District's Committee for Culturally Responsive Teaching.