

Indian Community School of Milwaukee as a Model for Teaching Diverse Audiences

Introduction

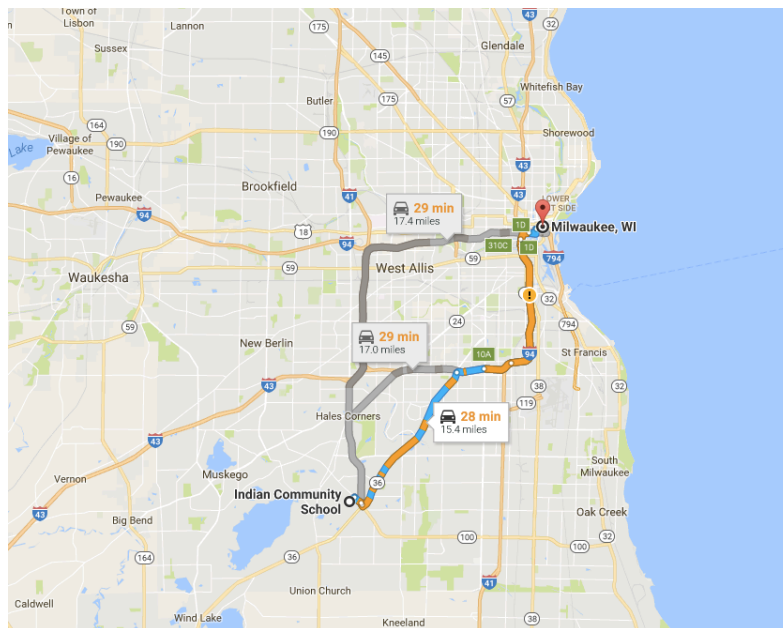
Nelson Mandela once said that “Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world” (Strauss). However, how powerful can our weapon be when it is incomplete? Within the United States there is an issue of knowledge gap. These knowledge gaps arise from a lack of representation of minority history (Giarrizzo). This causes many students within the United States to have a one-dimensional educational experience that only considers the perspective and achievements of white men. It is critical that the education system does everything in its power to increase demonstration of diverse histories and cultures in order for students to be fully equipped to understand global and local perspectives and interactions.

Within the typical American educational journey, Native American Peoples have been repeatedly disregarded in lesson plans. In Wisconsin, there have been efforts to increase visibility of Native American cultures and history in public schools through Act 31. However, it is obvious that Act 31 is not enough. David O’Connor, Native American Education Consultant at the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction and member of the Bad River Band of Lake Superior Chippewa, states that Act 31 is a step in the right direction but, due to lack of enforcement and funding, many teachers and schools do not take the extra effort to ensure that Native American education is being properly integrated throughout all subjects (David O’Connor, Personal Communication, January 30th, 2017). The Indian Community School of

Milwaukee is a potential model for the process of teaching diverse audiences using community engagement and culturally relevant histories and language.

Background

The Indian Community School of Milwaukee is as a “faith based intertribal school for American Indian children” (Tromp 2). Their mission statement asserts that “With the Values at the heart of our mission, the Indian Community School dedicates itself to provide each child in our care with the best educational opportunities to develop spiritually, morally, emotionally, physically, socially, artistically and intellectually in order to achieve the child's greatest personal and community potential” (Tromp 4). The school formed in the fall of 1970 and serves Kindergarten to 8th grade students. In the 2013-2014 school year, there were 314 enrolled students of 12 different Tribes (Krouse 148; Tromp 2). The Tribes, in order from most commonly to least commonly enrolled at the school, were Ojibwe, Oneida, Menominee, Ho-Chunk, Stockbridge Munsee, Potawatomi, Lakota, Cherokee, Muskogee (Creek), Pima, Choctaw, and Chickasaw (Tromp 2).



Google Maps. "Indian Community School to Milwaukee." 2017. 1: 126720. Retrieved on March 10, 2017. from <https://tinyurl.com/l19jpa6>

The Indian Community School of Milwaukee is located in Franklin, a suburb of Milwaukee, Wisconsin, but serves a mainly urban student body. As the map above shows, The Indian Community School is about 30-minute drive from the Milwaukee City. Employment of the 2013-2014 school year consisted of 94 mostly full-time staff, with 57 instructional staff members (Tromp 2). The Indian Community School of Milwaukee has the sole purpose of developing critical skills within the urban Native American population of Milwaukee that will allow them to "sustain a healthy balance of American Indian culture, academic achievement, and a sense of identity through indigenous teachings and ways of learning" (Tromp 4). This integrated teaching style is one that other schools could look to when implementing Act 31 into their curriculum.

Policies Affecting the Case

In order to truly understand how federal, state, and local policies affect the creation and sustained presence of the Indian School of Milwaukee, it is necessary to first discuss the Indian Control Movement. The Indian Control Movement refers to the collective action of multiple forces to encourage the implementation of Native American controlled schools (Tippeconnic). The groups working towards this educational achievement included, but are not limited to, the Civil Rights Movement of 1960, The National Indian Education Association, The Great Society programs, and the American Indian Movement (Tippeconnic). Alongside these movements, support from President Nixon and The Indian Education Act of 1972 created a federal promise of support for Indian education through tools and services that would allow Native American students to be competitive in modern society without compromising Native American history,

culture, and beliefs (Tippeconnic). Amendments to this Act along with other federal Acts established training and teacher programs, accessibility to funding such as grants, and Native American administrative control over the schools (U.S Department of Education). These national legislative landmarks fostered a national climate where an Indian Community School could be built in Milwaukee.

Within the school there has been youth and faculty advocacy to make local legislative change. Fourth grade teacher, Mrs. Jorlin, and two dozen of her fourth-grade students attended the Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors Personnel Committee Meeting to present a resolution that would recognize the second Monday of October as “Indigenous People’s Day” (Behm). According to the Weekly Indian Community School Report, the students and the teachers from the school were the ones to create this resolution. A video documenting the committee meeting shows four fourth grade students speaking to the Board. In the video, Austin, a fourth-grade Ojibwe Bear Clan member, discussed why recognizing Indigenous People’s Day is necessary for Milwaukee by stating “I think that we should celebrate Native cultures because we have celebrated Europeans for many of years and (we) haven’t ever got celebrated.” The students and teachers of the Indian Community School of Milwaukee succeeded in their efforts when the Resolution was adopted on December 15th of 2016 (Behm).

Lastly, State legislation has impacted the general climate for Native American education with Act 31. While Act 31 does not necessarily directly affect the curriculum and efforts of the Indian Community School of Milwaukee it does affect outside perception and involvement. Act 31 refers to the State requirement that all Wisconsin schools provide students with education about culture, history, and sovereignty of the 12 Native American Nations within Wisconsin (Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction). This state legislature relates to the Indian

Community School of Milwaukee because the school provides structure, curriculum and programs replicable by non-Native schools. Act 31 also may create a more educated Wisconsin community that could positively impact the Indian Community School of Milwaukee through financial support, public acceptance, and legal support.

Analysis

Student advocacy within the Indian Community School of Milwaukee is a common occurrence. As discussed above, the school takes pride in making social change through student and teacher. Another example of positive social movement at the school is the representation of women activism through the creation and development of the school. Without the contribution of women, this school may not exist today. In the fall of 1970 three Oneida women, Marge Funmaker, Darlene Funmaker Neconish, and Marj Stevens, began teaching classes to ten Native American children in the Milwaukee area when they were frustrated with the Milwaukee Public School System (Krouse 148). These three women began to grow the program by increasing enrollment, volunteers, and teachers. Women involved with the school were also members of other committees that allowed them to expand their teaching space to the Abandoned Coast Guard Station that was taken over as an Indian Center in 1971 (Krouse 148). These women utilized rooms in the Station to teach “Indian crafts and storytelling” for no pay and long hours. However, when the relationship between organizations at the Coast Guard Station and the Indian Community School began to deteriorate, the women rallied to keep teaching at the Coast Guard Station and support was granted to them. The school board, which consisted of 5 women, and volunteer support located funding through donations and grants to continue the growth of the school and eventually the student body was large enough for a new location. Throughout the 1970s most of the school’s board members, teachers, staff, and volunteers were women. The

strength determination of the first three Oneida women in the 1970s paved the way for The Indian Community School of Milwaukee to exist.

Currently, the students promote environmental advocacy through education about recycling and compost. On their website, The Indian Community School of Milwaukee states that they have opportunities for students to become Eco-Citizens and reduce environmental impacts on “Mother Earth.” This compost and recycling programs provides students with first-hand experience in resource preservation and allows students to learn the mechanics behind waste disposal processes of recycling and compost.

By integrating academics with community engagement, teachers at The Indian Community School of Milwaukee ensure that students understand the importance of utilizing academic knowledge to make positive impact at a local and global scale. Instead of ignoring difficult topics including environmentalism, gender, and human rights violations such as the Dakota Access Pipeline, the school discusses the local and global implications of these complicated social issues and makes certain that students are prepared to understand and participate in relevant local and global movements (Weekly ICS Report).

Lessons Learned

The Indian Community School of Milwaukee’s Executive Summary and Education Report showcases the School’s areas of achievement and areas of improvement in regards to curriculum, structure, and programming. Overall, the school provides a safe community for community involvement and activism. This is promoted through encouraged collaboration between student and teacher. This strong relationship between student and teacher is fostered through small class sizes, mentorship, after-school study aid, and the availability of certified language and culture teachers. Curriculum for the school focuses on the Wisconsin’s Seven

Core Values of “Language and Literacy, Mathematics, Science, Social Studies, Art, Technology, Health, Physical Education, Movement and Music” (Indian School of Milwaukee, Inc., 10).

However, these core teaching values are integrated with Woodland Culture and Traditional Native American language, music, art, and dance. The Indian Community School of Milwaukee also encourages community involvement through field trips to museums and plays, along with education about current events such as the Dakota Access Pipeline and local Committee Meetings. Future goals for the school highlighted issues with reading comprehension, behavior, and bullying. However, the school has strategic plans to combat the areas that need improvement.

When thinking about making curriculum in a Wisconsin School District on Ho Chunk Sovereignty, History, and Culture it will be important to draw on the achievements of the Indian Community School of Milwaukee. This includes relating materials to relevant current events, community events, and advocacy opportunities. Through the curriculum it is important to empower the students and understand how smart children are and how capable they are to make change. It is also important to create a lesson plan that integrates the Ho Chunk Sovereignty, History, and Culture within Wisconsin’s Seven Core Values, instead of creating a curriculum that is detached from other lessons. This means incorporating music, dance, health, food, language, and social advocacy as part of the curriculum. There are many examples of this integration occurring at The Community Indian School of Milwaukee: in Physical Education students learn: Oneida Longball, Iroquois Longball, Archery, and historically relevant dances; music courses focus on drums, instruments, and songs that are relevant to Native American history; other courses base their curriculum on Indigenous Creation stories, along with other historically relevant stories, diverse language instruction, and Native American history (Tromp).

Lastly, it is important that the curriculum fosters a community between the teachers and students so that the classroom becomes a motivating and safe location for students to learn and make change.

Conclusion

Education is multi-directional and requires involvement of many different groups in order to be successful. These groups include both Native and non-Native teachers, faculty, students, community members, and government officials. There is power in the collaboration of all of these groups and this power can create an educational system that empowers students of different race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, religion, etc. with knowledge of their own personal history and the history of others. Education, is in fact a weapon that can change the world, but only if that education truly represents the past and present world.

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