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## The Positive Impact of Culturally Responsive Pedagogy: Montana's Indian Education for All

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Montana's Indian Education for All Act is an unprecedented state constitutional mandate requiring educators to integrate American Indian content into all instruction. Not all educators in this western state in the United States embrace this requirement, but those who do become change agents as they lead students to challenge the status quo. Tensions between Indians and non-Indians influence Montana's historical and contemporary social fabric. From reservation border towns to urban school districts, and even in the state government, a pervasive lack of cultural awareness contributes to misunderstandings and persistent inequities. Yet, in this climate, students are stepping up and speaking out.

**The Montana Context**  
**Indian Education for All: Old Promise, New Movement**  
**Moving in a Positive Direction**  
**Educators' Personal Reflections on Professional Development**  
**Preparing to Make a Difference**  
**Deconstructing Stereotypes and Confronting Biases**  
**Increasing Awareness and Knowledge**  
**Building and Fostering Relationships**  
**Modeling Best Practices to Connect Classrooms and Cultures**  
**Conclusion**

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When *Fools Crow*, a historical fiction novel chronicling the life of a Blackfeet Indian living in Montana during the post-Civil War era, was introduced into high school curricula in Montana back in 1999, it was challenged. In fact, this American Book Award winner by Montana-born James Welch (Blackfeet) has consistently attracted controversy. Several school districts decided to keep *Fools Crow* in their curricula, but at Laurel High School the novel was banned. As a testament to the impact the book had on their learning, high school juniors from Missoula wrote letters to Superintendent Middleton, which were shared with his school board members in Laurel, a school district 300 miles away from them, to protest the removal of *Fools Crow* from the 11<sup>th</sup> grade language arts curriculum, saying "This book has tremendously helped me learn about American Indians and also Montana history. I think banning this book was a mistake." Another student shared, "*Fools Crow* should not be banned in any high school, especially

not in Montana ... reading *Fools Crow* opened my eyes to American Indians in a new way, and I have gained much respect for them and their way of life.”

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Discussion surrounding Red Lodge High School's mascot has not always been culturally sensitive and at times it has been downright explosive. In this rural community, 60 miles southwest of Billings, the cheer team was uncomfortable using the mascot “Redskins” and some football players balked at shouting “Go Skins” when in a team huddle. Then students at the middle school in Red Lodge, home to a 60-year tradition of the Redskins’ mascot, participated in a community discussion. Superintendent Brajcich warned those attending the meeting that, once a vote was taken, the decision could have a divisive effect; students pointed out that, even if one student was offended by the mascot, it was important to change. The vote resulted in the removal of the Redskins’ mascot. The school board appointed a committee that provided several names for the students to vote on and they chose the Rams as the new Red Lodge mascot.

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A shy Missoula third-grade boy, who had remained quiet all year in class, pleasantly surprised everyone when he brought a hand drum to school and stood alone before his classmates to sing a Blackfeet honor song in gratitude to his teacher for providing him and his classmates with instruction about his own and other Montana tribes.

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These examples illustrate how students appreciate the opportunity to learn about American Indian cultures and histories and how they can use that learning to address injustice. In this paper we highlight one state’s approach to mandating such multicultural education for teachers and students.

The Indian Education for All (IEFA) Act in Montana is a state constitutional mandate requiring educators to integrate American Indian content in all instruction. Not all educators embrace this requirement, but those who do become change agents as they lead students to challenge the status quo. Just as ever-expanding ripples are created across water when a pebble is tossed into a pond, the same ripple effect results when educators are provided with IEFA professional development opportunities that transform their pedagogy. Educators’ heightened cultural awareness impacts students’ actions. With the implementation of IEFA, Indian and non-Indian students alike have become empowered; they have increased their knowledge about Montana’s first inhabitants and honed their change-agent skills. In addition to enriching the curriculum by infusing the cultures and histories of Montana American Indians

across the curriculum, IEFA has heightened educators' cultural sensitivity and allowed them to relate better to their students and create welcoming classroom environments where all students can thrive. This ongoing, trickle-down transformation has been essential to increasing cultural sensitivity and honoring multiple perspectives in Montana schools.

The growing success of this unique legislation has depended on adequate funding, collaboration with tribal partners, active state leadership, and a long-term commitment to professional development. More important, though, is the willingness of educators to engage in the demanding, but often profound, endeavor of becoming culturally responsive. In this article we describe what learning to become culturally responsive looked like for Montana teachers as a result of IEFA and the influences of culturally responsive instruction on Montana students. We begin, however, by providing the contextual backdrop of IEFA.

### **The Montana Context**

Twelve American Indian nations are considered Montana tribes. The 2010 Census reported the percentage of American Indians in Montana at 6.4% (U. S. Census Bureau, 2011). This is much larger than the national average of only 1.2%. In comparison to other states, then, Montana's American Indian population is sizable and, in fact, growing. The Office of Public Instruction (OPI) reported the American Indian k-12 student population in Montana to have increased to 11.8% (OPI, 2010), more than 10 times the national average for American Indian k-12 students.

As is true for between 85 to 90 percent of American Indian and Alaska Native students across the United States, Montana's American Indian youth attend regular public schools. In Montana, our American Indian students often attend schools on or near reservations with high concentrations of other American Indian students. In fact, in 38 school districts in the state, the American Indian student population is between 50-100%; of the non-reservation school districts with a 50-100% American Indian student population, 27 of 62 did not meet Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) goals while 66% of the school districts on the seven reservations across the state did not meet AYP (OPI, 2008).

In addition to low academic achievement associated with these American Indian schooling contexts, what is noteworthy here is that, wherever American Indian students attend public school and whether their classmates are Indian or non-Indian, they are unlikely to have an American Indian teacher. According to data from OPI, 98% of Montana's k-12 teachers are non-Indian (2009, ¶ 1). In these low-achieving and low-affirming environments, a staggering 50% of Indian students in Montana, as is the case nationally, do not graduate high school.

## Indian Education for All: Old Promise, New Movement

An unprecedented reform effort 40 years in the making, IEFA is changing education in Montana; public schools are more welcoming to Indian students and their families, and instructional content is more likely to include American Indian worldviews. Yet, IEFA is for *all* students, as Montana's Superintendent of Public Instruction, Denise Juneau (Mandan/Hidatsa) asserts: "This constitutional, ethical, and moral obligation, known as Indian Education for All, is not only for Indian students; in fact, its principal intent is that non-Indian students gain a richer understanding of our State's history and contemporary life" (Juneau, 2006, p. 3).

In 1972, the delegates of the Constitutional Convention included language in the constitution specific to preserving the cultural integrity of Montana's 12 tribal nations. Article X, Section 1 (2) pledged, "The state recognizes the distinct and unique cultural heritage of American Indians and is committed in its educational goals to the preservation of their cultural integrity" (Mont. Const. art. X, §1).

The constitutional language was finally codified in 1999 when the Legislature passed MCA 20-1-501, now known as Indian Education for All (IEFA). It requires that "every Montanan ... whether Indian or non-Indian, be encouraged to learn about the distinct and unique heritage of American Indians in a culturally responsive manner. ... all school personnel should have an understanding and awareness of Indian tribes to help them relate effectively with Indian students and parents. ... Every educational agency and all educational personnel will work cooperatively with Montana tribes ... when providing instruction and implementing an educational goal" (Mont. code. Ann. titl. 20, ch.1, pt. 5 § 1, 1999).

Once it was clear that all educators were responsible for integrating IEFA, they needed guidance regarding what to teach. The state's education department, OPI, brought together a group of representatives from each of the tribes to create the Essential Understandings Regarding Montana Indians. These Essential Understandings represented the "core knowledge that holds true for each of the distinct cultures which would counteract stereotypes and generalizations" (Carjuzaa, Jetty, Munson, & Veltkamp, 2010).

Unfortunately, without financial backing, IEFA implementation floundered. Reflecting how lack of uptake was related to funding priorities in schools, in 2002 a group of plaintiffs backed by the Montana Quality Education Coalition filed suit in *Columbia Falls Public Schools v. State*, which alleged that education cuts resulted in a failure to implement Article x, Section 1(2) and IEFA. A special legislative session resulted in funding for IEFA as part of the state's definition of a quality education. Because of the argument made tying IEFA to quality education generally, funding was allocated to school districts in 2005, and IEFA activities began in earnest.

Because of data collected from educators about what they needed in order to implement the culturally responsive instruction at the heart of IEFA, the educators in the Indian Education division of OPI focused on providing professional development. They also created numerous materials and resources. OPI continues today to create model curricula, assemble classroom materials, deliver professional development, connect k–12 schools with tribal educators, and fund IEFA implementation grants. Because of OPI’s work with educators to make possible their compliance with IEFA, Montana teachers can now fulfill the legal obligations they have to integrate IEFA across the curriculum at all grade levels. Further, there is a much deeper understanding of IEFA as an ethical commitment. But implementing IEFA means understanding that each schooling context has its own set of needs. Because of this, OPI Indian Education Specialist Mike Jetty describes IEFA as work-in-progress. “It’s a work in progress—like building an airplane,” he says, “as it moves down the runway!” (Magone & Elser, 2009, p. 4).

IEFA recognizes a continuum of awareness, promotes an environment of respect, empathy, and cultural sensitivity, and “is a hopeful indicator of the changing paradigm of public education; rather than aiming to inculcate nationalism through a culturally homogenized curriculum, IEFA attempts to strengthen democracy by fostering relationships and including multiple perspectives” (Carjuzaa, et al., 2010, p. 197). It is an ongoing, collaborative, time-intensive process that is, slowly but surely, transforming educators, students, and communities. A Fort Belknap Reservation high school junior remembers, “When I was in grade school, we had Native American Week, when we read a few stories, and that was about it... Now we have a context for learning about Indian culture and history. In my school there are many more Natives than non-Natives. But what I’ve found is that learning about these things brings us closer together” (personal communication, 2009).

### **Moving in a Positive Direction**

Although schools with significant American Indian populations face different challenges from schools with few or no American Indian students, a foundational understanding of IEFA is that it is equally important in all settings. No educator is exempt from the requirement, and “whether or not there are large numbers of Native Americans or reservations in every region of the country, Indian Education for All underscores a national challenge to our education system to improve our teaching about Native American history and culture” (Starnes, 2006, p. 186).

As is the case with many minority groups in the United States, American Indians are often inaccurately portrayed, and their contributions are inadequately represented in standard k-12 public school curricula. Until the recent funding of IEFA, most Montana classrooms featured few curricular resources about and by American Indians. Because the valuable knowledge available in American Indian

histories and cultures was withheld, obscured, or misrepresented, the education of all students was diminished: “The exclusion of Indians from America’s story also excludes them from a prominent place in our collective understanding of the American ‘we’” (Starnes, 2006, p. 186). In this way, generations graduated from the educational system with little knowledge regarding American Indians and their contribution to America’s story. This enigma was echoed by multicultural education theorist James Banks at the IEFA Best Practices Conference in Bozeman, Montana: “In order to endorse the national culture, people must see themselves reflected and valued within that culture. We must make all children feel included in our national identity” (personal communication, 2007).

While IEFA provides non-Indian students the opportunity to learn about a fuller, more accurate version of U.S. history and thus enhance their content knowledge, for Indian students IEFA has broader impacts. American Indian-inclusive content stands to reduce the cultural dissonance Indian students feel between home and school environments, easing their alienation and encouraging staying in as opposed to dropping out, and, in this way, affecting what has been a persistent achievement gap. A hopeful comment from a member of the Little Shell Chippewa tribe of Montana expresses this new possibility:

I think Indian Education for All...will help our children understand who they are, take pride in their identity, and see that they have possibilities and opportunities. When I was in school, we didn’t talk about being Indian. If we could, we kept it secret. That was a way to get along. But with IEFA, our children won’t have to do that. They will see themselves in school. They will know that their classmates are learning important things about them. (Hopkins, 2006, p. 207)

Indeed, Ngai and Allen (2007) noted the positive effects of IEFA implementation on student self-esteem in an urban elementary school:

Parents and school staff observed that Indian students at Lewis & Clark School are standing taller since the onset of the IEFA project. In the past, Native students tended to keep their cultures inside. Now many of them have started to express pride in their heritages and confidence in themselves. They have become more comfortable participating in class and they appear to be happier at school. (p. 9)

### **Educators Personal Reflections on Professional Development**

Nearly all of Montana’s teachers are non-Indian, and many have never visited a reservation or even had an American Indian acquaintance. Therefore, their personal experiences and teacher preparation programs have equipped them with limited, if any, understanding of American Indian history and culture. As stated by this elementary principal:

For our teachers, living... where there is not an obvious Indian presence, it is easy to remain in a comfort zone where we don't know what we don't know. Not knowing causes a sense of benign prejudice where we are unaware of how our thoughts and actions might actually have an adverse effect on Indian students and perpetuate the cycle of marginalizing Indian people. (Ngai & Allen, 2007, p 22)

For this study, we wanted to understand how IEFA professional development addressed these personal and professional experiences to enhance student learning. We accessed several data sources in order to explore the impact educators' (teachers, librarians, administrators, and all other school personnel) participation in IEFA professional development opportunities had, in turn, on their respective k-12 students, including a compilation of participant feedback (Personal Reflections) from professional development events facilitated by the Indian Education division of OPI over the 5-year period between 2006 and 2011. Examples of these events were in-service workshops, special training sessions, the annual IEFA Best Practices Conferences, and the annual IEFA Advocacy Institutes.

We used content analysis to carefully sort through large volumes of data to identify certain concepts that surfaced as trends and patterns in the self-assessment/self-reporting documents and make inferences about their meanings (Berelson, 1952; GAO, 1996; Krippendorff, 1980; Weber, 1990). Because k-12 teachers, librarians, and administrators attending the IEFA professional development events completed assessment/self report documents organized around a shared set of six questions, content analysis of the effectiveness of the IEFA professional development was driven by their answers to the following:

1. Why do you think it is important to integrate IEFA in classroom instruction (or school leadership)?
2. In what way has IEFA professional development and availability of materials/resources impacted your institution, your school, your district, and/or your students?
3. How has IEFA influenced or changed your instructional practice and/or your personal views on Indians? On culturally responsive pedagogy?
4. Describe how your personal views about diversity have changed by integrating IEFA in your respective discipline.
5. Describe how IEFA has impacted you personally.
6. What supports have been most helpful in your implementation of IEFA (i.e., school leadership, professional development, tribal events, the OPI website materials, etc.) and what supports will you need?

These data collected from the above-mentioned Personal Reflections documents were further supplemented by data from the 2009-2010 IEFA Book Club contributions and blog comments posted by educators who took advantage of other professional development opportunities. Personal communications with educators and information shared during informal interactions with stakeholders also highlighted the observed impact teachers' implementation of IEFA had on their k-12 students and so were also recorded. Additional documents reviewed

include some of the Five-Year Comprehensive Plans to Implement IEFA that Montana k-12 public schools and districts are required to write and submit, final reports provided by the recipients of Ready-to-Go Grants, and recent dissertation research conducted by graduate students examining the implementation of IEFA.

Responses to the above-listed questions and the content of the supplementary triangulated data were coded, categorized, and analyzed to determine the effectiveness of IEFA on teachers' affirming orientations toward diversity and to explore aspects of the law's impact on k-12 students (Weber, 1990). This paper reports on the transforming effect of the IEFA professional development through the following four themes: deconstructing stereotypes and confronting biases, increasing awareness and knowledge, building and fostering relationships, and modeling best practices to connect classrooms and cultures.

Steps were taken to assure that categories were designed to be both mutually exclusive and exhaustive (GAO, 1996). The researchers used *a priori* coding, i.e., the categories were agreed upon by the researchers before the data were coded to help in describing educators' attitudes, values, and beliefs (Stemler, 2001; Weber, 1990). This powerful data reduction technique allowed the researchers to compress the large quantities of data, develop a specific coding protocol, and make valid inferences. Data were gleaned to highlight the different steps of the transformative process that educators underwent. These steps are identified and described in the sections that follow. Pseudonyms are used throughout this paper to assure anonymity.

### **Preparing to Make a Difference**

Educators need to gain a better understanding of American Indian cultures in order to create a caring, safe, and inclusive learning environment that is respectful of diversity so that all students can meet their academic and social potential: "If future citizens of a state are not taught to understand each other, they are effectively sentenced to ignorance and misapprehension that will complicate their economic, political, and social relationships" (Carjuzaa, et al., 2010, p. 193). Pewewardy (1998) observes that because many teachers grow up with stereotypical and oftentimes racist imagery and messages regarding American Indians, it is sometimes difficult for them to become culturally responsive educators.

A variety of holistic frameworks discuss preparation of non-Indian teachers to work effectively with American Indian students; in reality, these frameworks detail best practices for ALL teachers and students. They emphasize a circular and recursive process (Gay, 2000; Klug & Whitfield 2003). The process demands ongoing commitment; after all, a lifetime of misinformation is not unlearned overnight. Teachers describe the journey toward increased cultural competence as they question preconceived ideas, engage in reflection and critical analysis, examine stereotypes, confront prejudices, gather knowledge,

open themselves to new experiences, and explore cultural identity and its role in the teaching and learning relationship (Diller & Moule, 2005).

Some educators may feel burdened by the IEFA requirement, indicating limited instructional time, resources or administrative support, and unspoken negative feelings that may affect the quality of IEFA implementation. Educators must be familiarized with the legal requirements of IEFA, and administrators' expectations must promote implementation. Given adequate support and resources, however, educators make significant transformations in personal understanding and instructional practice: "IEFA is in motion across Montana schools, moving at varied speeds depending on the school system, but nevertheless growing, as more and more educators gain awareness and increased comfort with the content and how to integrate it in both personal and professional views" (Magone & Elser, 2009, p. 6).

### **Deconstructing Stereotypes and Confronting Biases**

There are many steps on the multicultural education journey towards American Indian awareness and affirmation entailed by IEFA. Educators with limited cultural knowledge must face and deconstruct the stereotypes they have about American Indians as well as confront their personal biases if they are to model critical thinking and diversity appreciation for their students. Allan, a high school math and science teacher, describes the often uncomfortable undertaking of questioning preconceived ideas and their source: "Although I believed I was celebrating history and a unity between the Pilgrims and Indians, I would soon develop questions... the answers never seemed clear, but I was being taught history by the teachers that I so respected. Therefore, I believed it was accurate" (GTCC, 2010). This disequilibrium must be met with adequate resources, professional development and, whenever possible, positive interaction with representatives from the cultures about which they are to learn. Scaffolding must be provided in a safe, non-judgmental environment where educators might ask questions that have been stifled. A Montana high school technology teacher, Cheryl, reported on how learning about American Indians was positively influenced by the opportunity to visit with tribal members: "I have been wary of somehow doing/saying something that would somehow in my ignorance offend Native American people. The (American Indian) ambassadors were so open and eager for us to learn..." (IEFA, 2009-2010). This fear of offending "the other" often paralyzes students, as well. Seeing their non-Indian teachers learning in collaboration with tribal members has boosted students' confidence.

In the absence of personal interaction with American Indians, the Book Club discussions were another way for educators not only to learn about tribal histories and cultures, but also to examine the prejudice in their own communities. In the 2009-2010, regarding Book Club online discussion of Larry Colton's *Counting Coup*, a Montana educator named Terry had this to say:

As an educator I am amazed at the racism I have seen in the Bitterroot Valley. I have seen it from community members, students, faculty, and administration over the last five years. This has been alarming to me. I have always believed we are equal no matter where we come from. I did not grow up here or around reservations so it is hard for me to hear people be racist whether they mean to be or not. I do, however, believe that learning about each other is the best way to help someone see another person's perspective.

Another Montana teacher, Clark, added, "I think we have all cringed over things we've heard our students say, particularly in the last presidential election. Racism is alive in our little remote island of a school. It makes the work of IEFA prescient" (OPI, 2009). Both these teachers indicated that, as a result of their IEFA professional development opportunities, they broached the difficult subject of race with their students.

Continuing along these lines, in reference to the following question regarding Larry Colton's novel, "What forms of racism did you encounter in this book and in life living in Montana?" Anna blogged,

The forms of racism I encountered in this book were sadly the typical racist comments and beliefs I have heard many people express about Native Americans. These stereotypes have been present as far back as I can remember. I often think that those persons who make comments that ARE racist don't often realize it because it has been "common understanding" that Native Americans are the way they are. I think, as educators, it's important for us to shine a truthful and positive light on the Native American people and try to steer future generations away from such negative beliefs." (IEFA, 2009-2010)

With IEFA, teachers, even in kindergarten and 1<sup>st</sup> grade classrooms, have engaged students in the exploration of the negative effects of stereotyping.

Encouraging non-Indians to step outside their comfort zones and meet Indians and confront prejudices changes attitudes one encounter at a time. Karen speaks to this and to changes she's observed in her students when she added to the book discussion:

While living in Montana I have heard all of the stereotypes about Native Americans that were shared in this book. They are much more prevalent in Eastern Montana near some of the reservations. My father shares some of the stereotypes but unfortunately he has only seen Indians driving down the dirt road back to the reservation throwing beer cans out the window and often wrecking while drinking and driving; I know these are not the only Native Americans that drive down his road but unfortunately, as Colton pointed out, these are the ones he sees. I took him to a small powwow to help him see the Indians in a different perspective. It did start on "Crow time." We waited a few hours for the Grand Entrance but he did meet some very nice people while we were there and was impressed with the dancers and their regalia. In Victor, we are lucky to have a powwow in

our community, I have seen a change in our students while attending; they seem to have a better understanding and respect for the event every year (IEFA, 2009-2010).

### **Increasing Awareness and Knowledge**

Wendy Zagray Warren, a junior high school language arts teacher in Columbia Falls, Montana, had 14 years of teaching experience when she admitted her own lack of awareness and knowledge about American Indian histories and cultures. Addressing the impact of IEFA professional development on her understanding of herself as a teacher, she wrote:

As I've learned more about IEFA, I've come to feel proud that my state is taking the lead in what I hope will become a national movement in American education. Perhaps most important, I now realize that I have a clear responsibility to my students and to myself. And that means I have a lot of work to do.... A year ago, I knew very little about American Indian history, and what I did know about Montana's tribes could have been gleaned from a tourism brochure. That's because I—like most other Americans—am a product of a system of education that simply does not include Indians. (Warren, 2006, p. 198)

As educators like Wendy participated in IEFA professional development opportunities and confronted their own lack of education and understanding of American Indians, they appreciated the further collaboration with culturally-knowledgeable tribal members that IEFA provided. As one IEFA participant wrote, "The gift they gave us of information...we are not always privy to... would help us in the classroom show the students how incredible each of the individual tribe's culture is" (OPI, 2009). Inviting American Indian guest speakers to visit schools provided valuable learning for non-Indian educators and their students alike. It led them to acknowledge that there are multiple perspectives on all issues and topics, perspectives that had, for the most part, been ignored in school curriculum. A participant in the Victor Book Club had this to comment after reading *Rethinking Columbus*:

There were many passages in this reading that startled and awakened my thoughts of the Native American perspective on Thanksgiving. I was never exposed to these viewpoints before. Incorporating them into my existing understanding has given me a broader context to share with my students and family. (GTCC, 2010)

### **Building and Fostering Relationships**

IEFA professional development that included teacher visits to American Indian communities generated insights not offered in a one-shot school

assembly. Importantly, these extended beyond cultural awareness and knowledge about the American Indian “other” to, instead, awareness of one’s self as implicated in the power relationships between non-Indians and Indians. Elementary teacher Elizabeth learned from her visit to a reservation what it felt like, at least temporarily, to be a minority among a majority. Talking about her thinking since the visit, she stated, “I have felt uneasy ... from being self-aware of my own ‘whiteness’ or minority status on the rez. I think it is an important feeling and has helped me develop a cultural empathy for others” (OPI, 2009). Clark, a high school English teacher in a predominantly White school, also participated in reservation visits; speaking openly about his journey from, as he puts it, “ignorant to advocate,” he admits that, having grown up in a reservation border town, he “didn’t expect much” (GTCC, 2010).

Providing experiential learning opportunities to educators proved to be invaluable. Participants referred to their reservation visits as transformative and life changing because it afforded the teachers the opportunity to meet and get to know American Indians. Craig said:

The Rocky Boy visit was phenomenal, especially when I, being from Havre, was not expecting much going in, to be honest. I have had many interactions with members of Rocky Boy High School and Stone Child Community College over the years and was not sure what to expect. Having Deb Lamere and Zella Nault is what I believe made the difference. Deb’s organization and all of the information she gave to us was generous and at the same time overwhelming, in a good way. (GTCC, 2010)

### **Modeling Best Practices to Connect Classrooms and Cultures**

At the heart of IEFA is the idea that educators who can give themselves to its moral purpose bring a deeper level of cultural sensitivity to their classrooms. According to Banks (1998), “Our challenge is to create an education that will help foster a just and inclusive pluralistic national society that all students and groups will perceive as legitimate” (p.14). Clark, the teacher quoted above, sums it up this way: “If we as educators can break down the walls created by cultural distance and stereotypes, then, and only then, can we teach our students to embrace cultural diversity and understand the past” (GTCC, 2010).

As a result of participating in IEFA professional development opportunities, many teachers have provided their students with opportunities to interact with other students whom they may perceive as “different.” These interactions have proven to be enlightening. Tami provided this explanation of the cross-cultural exchanges her students engaged in when they invited students from the Piegan Institute, the immersion school in Browning on the Blackfeet Reservation, to come to their school and share their language and culture:

In our school the kids get to decide on 4 "enrichment days." We don't have regular school, instead, we find 'experts' in the chosen field and kids sign up for 5 sessions. We invited kids from the immersion school to not only join us, but to host one of the 50 minute sessions. They took turns teaching kids that signed up for their session how to say things in Blackfoot using the model that they are taught. We all had a blast! One of our boys (who is a great leader type kid) really hit it off with one of theirs. They wanted to pursue a friendship out of school and I don't know what happened there. We will have them back this coming year for sure! The most important end result was the connection between the kids. Sometime in the next few years, those kids will play sports against each other. If and when they see each other again, it will be a positive meeting. Building a foundation while the kids are young and not judgmental will carry them a lot further than trying to change their minds after something negative happens. (GTCC, 2010)

Tami's comments about "building a foundation" speak to what Rainy describes as a new "way of being" in Montana. She sums up the mission of IEFA this way:

I believe that successful Montana Indian Education for All needs to be more than curriculum and instruction—it needs to be a "way of being" that goes beyond our schools and becomes a reflection of Montana communities. I believe open dialogue and honest communication is the first phase needed to create this type of atmosphere....We want to be the ones who help build educational relationships so ALL Montana children can thrive. (IEFA, 2009)

According to Lipkind (2009), educators and students can take this journey in tandem. She states:

Indian Education for All challenges both teachers and students to learn from their experiences, exploring this new content, building a new knowledge base and expanding their perceptions of Indian people, culture, and history. IEFA encourages students and teachers alike to explore how this new knowledge fits into their conceptual schemata, insisting on the high value of the perspectives and ideas of individuals from diverse backgrounds. (p. 56)

## Conclusion

Sleeter and Grant (1998) describe five approaches to multicultural education, one of which is what they call "single-group study." The single-group study is characterized by in-depth and comprehensive study of a particular minoritized population in order to highlight its lack of equity with respect to the dominant population and to support social change efforts. According to De la Mare (2010), "After 30 long years, Indian Education for All (IEFA) may now be

considered the most comprehensive and progressive approach to Single-Group Studies that any US state has ever attempted” (p. 4). However, in contrast to other Single-Group Study programs, IEFA recognizes that Indian education needs to be infused in every aspect of education, and supporters of the initiative have advocated for its integration in all content, in all classrooms, in all assessments, in all teacher preparation programs, and in all professional development (Sleeter & Grant, 1998, 2003). Unlike other single-group study programs, IEFA is also designed to be inclusive and its benefits far-reaching.

Many educators in Montana feel their careers have been revitalized by IEFA’s inclusive and extensive commitment to embrace culturally responsive pedagogy. As Montana teacher Wendy Zagray Warren shared:

Like most teachers, each summer I become filled once again with hope for the coming school year. I feel that hope now, as Montana attempts to blaze this new trail. This is an exciting time to be an educator in this state. Indian Education for All could have a huge impact on our students’ educations and our state’s future. The vision of the democratic ideal of a community that truly includes everyone sparks renewed hope within me. Maybe as we blaze this new trail, rather than living up to our history, we will create a new future—one that lives up to America’s ideals. (Warren, 2006, p. 203)

As teachers like Wendy implement their IEFA learning in their classrooms, they tell us that, in return, students have benefitted from this inclusive, multicultural education approach. Teachers who take on the difficult work of self-examination, critical analysis, and deep reflection transmit this empowerment to their students. American Indian students see themselves reflected in the curriculum, and all students, Indian and non-Indian students alike, have their cultural heritages valued and their life experiences validated on their educational journeys. Students are learning a comprehensive Montana history, appreciating American Indian perspectives and recognizing their contributions to core curricular areas, past and present. It is hoped that more educators embrace what IEFA offers, so that all students learn to see the strength in diversity and are prepared to take stands against social injustice like the examples shared in this paper’s introduction.

Further, IEFA is impacting the national community as well. During a recent visit with representatives from the National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI) in Washington D.C., educators from OPI, Montana State University, and local school districts shared research, materials, resources, and best practices in implementing IEFA. The NMAI representatives evaluated how Montana’s Seven Essential Understandings could inform national standards for integrating American Indian education. Mike Jetty, Indian Education Specialist at OPI, states:

Traditionally the Dakota people think about how current activities and ideas will impact people seven generations into the future. Implementing IEFA from this perspective reminds us all of the power and potential that

educators have in shaping the future of our country, a future which includes American Indian peoples and perspectives. (Personal communication, 2012)

### Acknowledgment

This article is dedicated to my friend and collaborator, Teresa Veltkamp, an amazing advocate for Indian Education for All. Teresa, an Indian Education Curriculum Specialist at the Office of Public Instruction, was a guiding light in Montana's efforts at educational reform; she is sorely missed. I have completed this project we started together in her honor.

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