Savage Education: Epistemic Injustices of Native American Boarding Schools

Abstract
The aim of the Savage Education project is to identify and understand colonial, western pedagogical practices that contribute to the absence of Native American students (and other students of color) in philosophy. By researching and discussing the curriculum and pedagogical practices of Native American boarding schools, we hope to find better practices that encourage under-represented students to engage with philosophy courses. It will also provide early-career Native American philosophers with an opportunity to collaborate and develop research projects pertaining to Native American philosophy of education.

Basic Information
Project Coordinator(s)
Joseph Len Miller

Steering Committee
- Shelbi Nawhilet Meissner, Georgetown University

Funding Amount Requested
$10,000

Expected Project Completion Date
September 2023

Project Description
On May 11, 2022 the United States Interior Department released their report on Native American boarding schools. Led by U.S. Secretary of the Interior Deb Haaland (Laguna Pueblo), this report began in June 2021 with the aim of uncovering the death, suffering, and lasting consequences of boarding schools (i.e., residential schools) in the U.S. Some of the startling (to say the least) findings include:

- 408 Federally operated boarding schools between 1819-196
- Graves, marked and unmarked, discovered at 53 schools
- At least 500 student deaths
- Utilization of “identity-alteration methodologies” (e.g., giving students English names and banning Native languages and cultural practices)
The release of this report provides the perfect opportunity to critically analyze how these western pedagogical practices have helped to shape or influence philosophy as a discipline. While this report highlights the conditions and impacts of these boarding schools on Indigenous peoples in America, much more can be said about the specifically epistemic harms done by the curriculum itself. As such, we’d like to focus on the epistemic harms done to Indigenous people as a result of western pedagogical practices.

Identifying these practices will help us to identify contemporary epistemically harmful pedagogical practices that are rooted in oppressive, colonial curriculum. By identifying such practices, philosophy educators can better avoid pedagogical practices that cause harm to Indigenous students and other students of color. While also adopting more inclusive pedagogical practices, this can promote practices that better encourage Indigenous students and students of color to enroll in philosophy courses and pursue majors, minors, and graduate studies in philosophy.

We would like to visit the Carlisle Indian Industrial School and hold a workshop for Indigenous philosophers. This would provide us with an opportunity to explore the Carlisle Indian Industrial School’s archives at Dickinson College while visiting the land on which these colonial practices occurred. Given the importance of land in Indigenous education, experiencing and interacting with the land on which the atrocities of the Carlisle Indian Industrial School occurred would help to provide a better sense of the estrangement and harms done to Indigenous students by being removed from their land.

A virtual reading group on Native American pedagogy and Native American boarding schools would be held beforehand to prepare for the visit to the land and the archives. After exploring the archives and the land, we would hold a workshop to discuss our observations and experiences, our ideas concerning research and pedagogy, and how to incorporate these into a collection of research concerning the epistemic harms of Native American boarding schools.

**Project Impact**

The professional aims of this project are twofold. First, this will help to diversify philosophy by giving junior faculty or graduate students who are Native American an opportunity to collaborate and publish thereby helping them to advance professionally. Second, by discussing oppressive pedagogical practices (i.e., colonial practices and their legacy and influence on current curriculum), we are aiming to better understand and develop pedagogical practices that are more inclusive and encourage under-represented students to engage with philosophy courses.

Ideally, we’d like participants to write a collection of papers that would be published either as an anthology or as a special issue journal. This would provide early academic or junior faculty who are Native American with an opportunity to engage in collaborative research and publish, thereby helping to diversity the discipline. This collection would also hopefully inspire future Native American/Indigenous students (or, under-represented students in general) to pursue philosophy, as well as encourage philosophical engagement with contemporary issues that affect Native Americans.
It would also help to inform pedagogical practices so as to promote practices that encourage under-represented students to engage with philosophy. By identifying epistemically harmful practices, we can not only better avoid these practices in teaching, but we can develop pedagogical practices that encourage under-represented students to engage with the course material. Understanding the colonial roots of American philosophy - i.e., the effects of settler-colonialism on western pedagogical practices - will help to avoid epistemically harmful pedagogical practices, as well as develop and implementing practices that encourage and invite under-represented students to engage with academic philosophy.

**Project Goals**

- Provide early-career Native American philosophers with an opportunity to publish and professionally develop
- Identify the epistemic harms done by Native American boarding schools
- Understand how pedagogical practices can harm under-represented students and discourage them from engaging with philosophy
- Implement and understand pedagogical practices that are more acceptable to, and encouraging of, under-represented students
- Engage with Native American philosophy of education

**Project Timeline**

January 2023: Virtual reading group about Native American pedagogy and Native American boarding schools (e.g., US Report, Deloria and Wildcat)

March 2023: Post CFP for workshop. Posting the CFP in March would allow participants in the reading group to have some time to develop research projects and agendas before submitting to the CFP.

April 2023: Send invitations to workshop. Of those responding to the CFP, up to five would be selected to attend the workshop. There would be spots for nine people in total: myself, Shelbi, two invited senior Native American philosophers, and five people who were selected after submitting the to CFP. Those invited would be notified in April.

May 2023: Logistics completed. In May we would book the hotel rooms and airfare for everyone attending the workshop. We would also ask that the space for our workshop be blessed by a local Native American healer (hence asking for a honorarium).

July 2023: Visit Carlisle. For a couple of nights in July, we would meet for the workshop and explore the Carlisle archives at Dickinson College in Carlisle, PA. We would discuss our research projects, pedagogical practices, and our thoughts and impressions from visiting the archives.

September 2023: Collect Papers. In September we would ask for drafts of the papers in hopes of finding a publisher to publish the collection.
Project Outreach
While the number of Native Americans in tenure-track positions in philosophy seems to be increasing, there are still challenges concerning retention and improving those numbers. Native American philosophy isn’t an area with a lot of visibility, and, as such, opportunities to engage in research communities are still few. While there are currently Native American philosophers employed at the University of Oklahoma, Georgetown University, Spelman College, and West Chester University in the U.S., there is little formal structure that connects these philosophers or departments other than the APA’s Committee on Native American and Indigenous Philosophy. This workshop would open more channels of communication between these, and other, departments, universities, and philosophers.

Opening more channels of communication will help to encourage and retain those philosophers in tenure-track positions, while also offering junior colleagues an opportunity to engage with and advance in the profession. These opportunities, which are rare given the under-representation of Native American philosophy in American universities, would help to diversify the profession by allowing an opportunity for collaboration and engagement on a scale that is rarely available for Native American philosophers.

Accessibility Plan
To the best of our ability, full accommodations would be made for anyone seeking accommodations. With components of this project being virtual, as well as involving traveling and lodging, difficulties could arise with technological capacities, hearing and speech impairment, mobility, accessibility, etc. Such accommodations (and others) will be dealt with personally and individually. Please contact Joseph Len Miller, West Chester University, for any accommodation requests and concerns. Information regarding accommodations and disabilities can be found at West Chester University’s Office for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (https://www.wcupa.edu/_admin/diversityEquityInclusion/). Also, here are links to two possible hotels in the area and their statements on accessibility: The Smith Steiner (https://www.thesmithsteiner.com/rooms#policies) and the Mooreland Garden Inn (https://www.moorelandgardeninn.com/accessibility-statement). Before lodging and travel decisions are made, discussions will be had with anyone requesting accommodations to find suitable lodgings and to arrange suitable travel accommodations.

Evaluation Plan
Successful completion of this project will involve a well-attended reading group, as well as a large number of submissions once the CFP is released. Selected submissions (5) will be of high quality and work towards advancing Native American philosophy. Part of the criteria for selection will involve the ability of the research paper to incorporate materials and experiences from visiting Carlisle’s archives at Dickinson College. Additionally, final submissions will successfully incorporate recent findings from the U.S. Report on Native American boarding schools, as well as experiences and discussions from the visit the Carlisle’s archives. Ultimately, qualitative success will be measured by whether selected submissions are able to be published as a collection in a journal or edited book volume.
**Online Presence**
We would post a CFP to PhilEvents, as well as emailing any school that has a relatively large Native American student population or Native American faculty. Further information could be provided in the APA’s Newsletter on Native American and Indigenous Philosophy.

**Budget Narrative**
Lodging would be for nine people at $200 per person for three nights. Travel would be for nine people at $400 per person. Since it’s unknown where people would be traveling from and the hotel at which we would stay, these numbers were arrived at by looking at airline ticket prices (though some people may be able to drive) and hotel prices in the area and looking at the average. In keeping with Native American research and lifestyles, we’re also asking for $1,000 as an honorarium to have the space for the workshop be blessed by a local Native American practicing healer (or, a Native American who has strong familial/traditional ties to Carlisle Boarding School). We also, possibly, have a relatively small amount of individual research funds from West Chester University and Georgetown University, though the exact numbers are not yet known.

**Other Funding Sources**
As previously stated, there is a possibility of accessing some relatively small funds from West Chester University and Georgetown University. Since these research funds are from individuals, they wouldn’t be enough to account for much of the financing of the project.