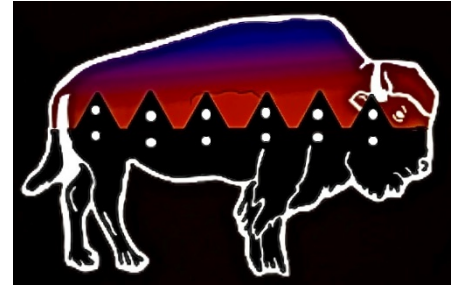


Buffalo Hide Academy

October 2021



Strength-Based Suicide Assessment and Intervention

Dear Esteemed Members of the Browning School Board;

Sienna and I would like to affirm our desire to continue to transform the collective approach to suicide assessment and intervention in our school district. Currently, BPS counseling staff often feel overwhelmed by issues relating to suicidal ideation. Suicide rates have steadily increased in Montana, and Indian Country specifically, year after year since the state began tracking such mortality info. We believe that if we take certain proactive steps that all counselors in this district will one day see themselves as the best tool to address suicidal ideation amongst students (and staff) in our buildings. And that in turn will lead to a school system better equipped to deal with the ongoing and increasing phenomenon of suicidal ideation and behavior in our student population.

We and several other district counselors have been working for many years in various capacities with the Montana Happiness Project - [check it out](#). Part of the mission of this organization is to train clinicians and counselors in the strengths-based model for suicide assessment, developed in partnership with Drs. John and Rita Sommers-Flanagan at the University of Montana.

We formally trained under the supervision of John and Rita with remote course work and in-person clinical practice during the summer of 2021 to become certified instructors and facilitators of this model. This empathic style of suicide assessment and intervention (as opposed to models based on risk-factors, or normative/medical deviance) is especially relevant in Browning, as it is predicated on incorporating and building upon the many strengths and resilience factors of our students and their families. Thus, the rich cultural fabric of the Blackfeet Reservation and our school community will be huge assets as we move forward with this important mental health work.

The main goal Sienna and I share at this point is simple: We would like to teach our local clinicians, counselors, and empathic educators in our community (and neighboring communities) this same strengths-based assessment model. And the ultimate hope is that with training, guidance, and ongoing development and support, BPS can set the standard for

addressing suicide in the short-term ideation phase, as well as with long term care and ongoing intervention.

Sienna and I humbly seek the permission and support to host a 2-day intensive workshop for counselors, clinicians, and area practitioners to teach them this assessment model. The didactic instruction, technique, cultural considerations, supporting evidence, as well as opportunities to practice assessment and intervention skills will be embedded in this workshop. This time will also be used to further adapt this model in culturally appropriate ways, specific to our community.

Ideally, we would offer this workshop in the hallowed halls of Buffalo Hide Academy, and if possible, to even offer a monetary stipend to all participants, as the expectation for ongoing work and personal development when working within this model will be high. The outcome of this training could be transformative for the district by embracing the following 3 fundamental paradigm shifts in suicide assessment;

- 1) A normalizing, evidence-based frame regarding suicidal ideation, intent, and behaviors
- 2) Empathic listening/tracking/assessment and intervention skills
- 3) Robust, collaborative safety planning using cultural assets and community resources

We would be happy to discuss these goals around suicide assessment further at your convenience. Thank you very much for considering our request, we appreciate it.

Respectfully,

Sienna Speicher - BHS Counselor, LCPC

Charlie Speicher - BHA Counselor

BHA Teacher and Researcher Collaboration

[Link to Article](#)

Dr. Robert Petrone continues to build and reciprocate his relationship with Buffalo Hide Academy and recently worked to publish another article including Mr. Rink as a co-author. The article was published last week in a special edition of The Journal of Adolescent Research. It focuses on the origins of the concept of adolescence coming from settler-colonialism, how to responsibly approach research with Native youth coming from that understanding, and reflects on how the concepts of adolescence can have especially harmful implications for Native youth. The Journal of Adolescent Research is the premier journal in the world in the field of adolescent development.

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Toward an Indigenizing, Anti-Colonial Framework for Adolescent Development Research

[Robert Petrone](#), [Adrianna González Ybarra](#), [Nicholas Rink](#)

First Published October 29, 2021 | Research Article | [Check for updates](#)

<https://doi.org/10.1177/07435584211043292>

[Article information](#)

Abstract

As a means to disrupt the historical and present narratives of adolescence and adolescent development, which often build upon and reify settler colonialism and white supremacy, this article calls for theoretical and methodological reconsiderations of colonial-centered developmental science, particularly regarding Native American youth. Thus situated, this article has two purposes. The first is to illuminate the constitutive nature of settler colonialism, white supremacy, and the constructs of adolescence and adolescent development—and the ways these continue to adversely impact Indigenous youth. From this exigency, the second purpose is to articulate a framework designed to inform developmental science's anti-racist aims, especially related to disrupting ongoing settler colonialism, engaging in culturally humble inquiry with Native youth and communities, and supporting Indigenous (youth) futurity. To elucidate this framework, this article brings together Native youth-focused developmental research, Indigenous methodologies scholarship, and experiences gained and lessons learned from a long-term research project with Native youth.

Cultivating a Healthy Mind

One of the new classes being offered to BHA students this year is called “Cultivating a Healthy Mind” which is centered around the following four domains:

- Awareness: attentiveness to one’s environment, as well as what’s happening inside one’s body – sensations, thoughts, and emotions.
- Connection: a sense of care and kinship towards other people, oneself, and the land.
- Insight: self-knowledge concerning the manner in which emotions, thoughts, beliefs, and other factors are shaping one’s subjective experience.
- Purpose: personally meaningful aims and values that one is able to apply in daily life.

This class spans two grading quarters (rather than our typical 9-week class) and allows for students to explore the four pillars through numerous avenues, including daily meditations and reflective writing; reading a wide range of texts – both fiction and non-fiction, including journal articles (see picture below); and creating art projects centered around awareness, connection, insight, and purpose. Additionally, we have had several guests come to the class and participate in meditations as well as share their journey and stories, including TJ LaFramboise, Dr. Robert Petrone, and most BHA staff.

To bring cultural significance to the class, Nicholas Rink hosted a meditation and taught about the role smudging plays in Blackfeet ritual and gifted a smudge box and braid of sweetgrass. BHA counselors Charlie Speicher and Chris Lewis are also frequent meditation participants and provide context and support to align this class to the wellness framework that is a constant at our school.

Both teacher and students are formally inviting any and all BPS school board members to come to the Academy as a guest and participate in a meditation.... Hope to see you here!



BHA Student Spotlight: Dakeline LaPlante



“Rez Dogs”

She's like my close friend that protects me from things that happen when I go places... Some Rez dogs can be your rock, world, everything combined.

By: Dakeline LaPlante

Name: Dakeline LaPlante

Grade: 12th

Years at BHA: 1st year

Interesting Fact: “I like to have deep and meaningful conversations with people and allow them to vent or build them up when they’re having a bad day.”

