

SYSTEMIC DISCRIMINATION AGAINST ABORIGINAL PEOPLE IN EDUCATION

Education is essential to the livelihood of a person as it could potentially guide their career and provide training in social etiquette. Education in the modern day is heavily influenced by neoliberalism. Neoliberalism is a private market mechanism in schooling choice that treats education as personal investments rather than public property (Yoon & Daniels, 2021). This means that parents and students are to dictate their education pathway to improve their capitalism (Haiven, 2017). Despite the front image of allowing freedom of choices, this mechanism does not provide as much leveled playing field as it is often thought to be. This is due to systemic discrimination in education (Follwell & Sam, 2021). Specifically, despite the abolishment of residential schools, many generations of Aboriginal people are still vulnerable to inadequate and unfair education, which influences Aboriginal parents' decisions on academic pathways for their children. This paper aims to understand the systemic root of the education disadvantages faced by Aboriginal people in Canada.

LEGACY OF RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS

Students of residential schools were not provided with proper education. Rather, residential schools were established based on racism as part of settler colonialism to erase Indigenous cultures while enforcing Eurocentric ideas on Aboriginal people (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2015). Aboriginal people were stereotyped to be incapable of learning. There was a biased selection of teaching staff, who were employed based on their religiousness to Christianity, rather than teaching quality. Moreover, abuse of many types was common in residential schools, be it physical, verbal, or sexual. The outward lack of respect for Indigenous Peoples and cultures by the teachers and authorities has thus instilled a hatred for their own community in Aboriginal students. Subsequently, the students faced a severe absence of practical skillsets for both the industrial workforce and the Indigenous hunting lifestyle (*Truth and Reconciliation*, 2015, pp.61-66).

HIGH RATE OF UNEMPLOYMENT AND LOW INCOME

As a result, the experience of residential schools left many generations of Aboriginal people with limited job prospects, higher chance of unemployment, and eventually, lower income (*Truth and Reconciliation*, 2015, p.68). In schools, undermining Aboriginal languages manifests into illiteracy of Indigeneity, where class materials often fail to include proper knowledge of Indigenous Peoples. This issue persists due to continuous and deep-rooted discrimination by peers and teachers against Aboriginal students (Cahill, 2018). Even now, the discriminatory mindset results in Aboriginal languages and practices being deemed as inferior as compared to English and Eurocentric practices (Haiven, 2017). The combined effects of racism and lower financial and cultural status lead to lower educational attainment among Aboriginal students. The drop-out rate is high among this group. As highlighted by Truth and Reconciliation Commission, The Aboriginal People Survey reported only 42% of Inuit people and 77% of Metis people, between 18 to 44, obtained a high school diploma or an equivalent. These numbers are low when compared to that of the non-Aboriginal population, which was 89% (Truth and Reconciliation, 2015, p.69). Even with comparable educational attainment, Aboriginal people are still underestimated when compared to non-Aboriginal workers. This gives rise to overqualification. Overqualification occurs when there is a mismatch of skillset as a job's academic requirement is lower than that possessed by the worker. Overqualification is a consistent issue among Aboriginal people (Park, 2018). Due to the perceived lower skill levels, Aboriginal workers are underpaid. This concern, combined with the biased and belief of superiority towards the majority group, amounts to a large income gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal parents. By extension, lower incomes limit the schooling choices of Aboriginal families.

SCHOOL CHOICE PRACTICES BY ABORIGINAL PARENTS IN CANADA

There is a wide variety of schools and specialized programs that allow parents to have more diverse selections, such as arts, sports, science, humanities, and technologies. The freedom for parents to choose schools for their children is based on neoliberalism in education, in which schooling is seen as a market space where families can select the schools on their own (Yoon & Daniels, 2021). Even with the replacement of residential schools by such freedom of school choice, the persistent issue of Aboriginal families being disadvantaged financially, culturally, means students may still fall between the cracks (Yoon & Daniels, 2021).

From the article written by Yoon and Daniels (2021), with the curriculum being conventionally Eurocentric, regardless of the school being on-reserve or off-reserve, many parents would relocate to central, bigger areas of Canada in hope of better job prospects, bigger networks, and better education quality for their family. However, due to neoliberalism and the drive of demand and supply, reputable schools have high costs of attending. Hence, there is often a large gap between the expensive school fees and the low income of Aboriginal parents. Additionally, such schools are commonly located in more affluent neighborhoods, as opposed to the housing location of many families. This poses an additional cost of transport, furthering the financial burden on the parents. In spite of successful enrollment, many parents are still concerned about their child's learning experience. Since the trauma of residential schools, Aboriginal people of earlier generations fear that their offspring would experience similar ostracizing in schools. This concern is unfortunately valid, as learning materials in schools are still lacking in their coverage and representation of Indigeneity (Milne & Wotherspoon, 2020). According to The School Context Model by Nina Bascia (2014), parental engagement in children's academic life is greatly beneficial to children's development. Such involvement increases children's and adolescents' chance of success in the future. In this case, on top of a high barrier to entrance, neoliberalism in education also drives up the expectation of parental involvement and its impact on students' academic performance. Aboriginal parents are critically challenged to be as involved as their non-Aboriginal counterparts. The former group has been historically discriminated against, leading to distrust towards the school system (Milne & Wotherspoon, 2020). Furthermore, the practice of speaking English in schools creates a language barrier between many Aboriginal parents and teachers. Worse still, teachers tend to gauge parental engagement and hence, a child's capability based on the parents' involvement in meetings and events. Between longer, less flexible labor working hours and cultural barriers, many Aboriginal parents are unable to be as fully present at meetings or fully involved with their children's schoolwork. Hence, parents are inevitably stereotyped. They are perceived to be unbothered with their children's education while their children are perceived to be less capable than their peers.

DISCUSSION ON INTERSECTIONALITY

As argued throughout this paper, there is a deep-rooted, intergenerational demonstration of systemic discrimination against Aboriginal people. On the surface, the abolishment of legal

restrictions on the schooling of Aboriginal children shows signs of equality. However, the issue of inequity is left unresolved. Even with the same list of school choices as others, Aboriginal parents and children have already been extremely disadvantaged due to the legacy of residential schools. Hence, actions to address the root cause must be taken. *The Truth and Reconciliation Commission* aims to erase the illiteracy of Indigeneity. Engaging Aboriginal families in school events, such as class sharing, can help bridge the gap between racial groups. Inviting Aboriginal families to share their cultures in class has proven to be effective in reducing the anxiety felt by parents about their children's learning experience (Milne & Wotherspoon, 2020). Services could be provided to aid low-income Aboriginal parents in recognizing the available school choices and financial support for their children.

FURTHER ANALYSIS ON FUTURE IMPACT

Future implications on the life of Aboriginal children due to the decisions of their parents are interesting aspects that can be studied further. While most literacy sources observed the effects of residential schools on the mindsets of Aboriginal parents today, there seems to be a lack of research on how history is still impacting Aboriginal children's learning journey in Canada.

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