

Residential schools in canada

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SociologyDr. C. Barry McClinchey Residential Schools in Canada Before the nineteenth century, the Aboriginal people had their own way of teaching the children in their community, through organic education. In addition to providing knowledge and skills, organic education kept their culture alive (Ravelli & Webber, 2013: pg. 237). This is because the Aboriginal children would also be taught about their culture and its customs. But the Europeans thought, “ Canada’s First Nation peoples were in the way of the relentless onrush of capitalist and industrial expansion (Ravelli & Webber, 2013: pg. 238). This is when the residential education system was established. Since the organic education was what made the Aboriginal culture stronger and last, the Europeans knew they had to break this system in order to weaken the culture. In the film, Education As We See It, some Aboriginal people spoke about their experiences being in a residential school. These experiences they had were not pleasant. The paradigm that best helps us examine the overall topic of the film is conflict theory. Many sociological concepts were applied throughout the film such as language extinction, looking-glass self, and self-fulfilling prophecy.

The Aboriginal went through many of hardships that the Europeans put them through. Conflict theory is the use of inequality towards another social group to maintain the power of those who dominate (Ravelli & Webber, 2013: pg. 47). The Conflict theory is a paradigm that is well presented throughout the film. The Europeans that settled down in Canada believed that the Aboriginal’s practices were overpowering their beliefs (Ravelli & Webber, 2013: pg. 238). Since the organic education was what made the Aboriginal

culture stronger and last, the Europeans knew they had to break this system in order to weaken the culture.

And they were able to do this in the residential schooling program. In these residential schools, the Aboriginal children were not allowed to speak their native language and could not see their families, except for once in a while (Ravelli & Webber, 2013: pg. 238). These children were harshly abused by the nuns in these schools and were terrified of being there. There were many sociological concepts applied in the film, *Education As We See It*. Language is an important part to culture. Language extinction is a concept presented in the film. When a language is lost, then its culture will start losing its organization.

Killing the language of the Aboriginals will lead end their culture, which is what the Europeans wanted. By forcing the Aboriginal children to speak English, the language they spoke with their parents will be lost (Ravelli & Webber, 2013: pg. 131). An Aboriginal that went to a residential school described how they weren't allowed to speak a word of their language at all and they were restricted from seeing their parents on a regular basis (Bob, Geraldine & Marcuse, 1993). The nuns greatly enforced that these children not speak their language, so that they could completely forget about it.

Looking-glass self was a concept that was applied. Looking glass self is how people describe who they are by how others describe them. According to C. H. Cooley, have to envision themselves through social interactions because the mind does not create the " self" (Ravelli & Webber, 2013: pg. 153). An Aboriginal said that when she was younger and first went to the school,

the teacher checked attendance and when she said her name, she answered "here" in her language and the nun gave her this disgusted look as if she was nothing (Bob, Geraldine & Marcuse, 1993).

They make the children feel like speaking their language is horrible. Giving looks also make the child feel like their bad students. The nuns would beat them when they caught them speaking their language or doing anything they felt wasn't "civil." Their 'self' is basically ruined because social interactions with others are not good. They are so traumatized that they probably do not even speak at all. They're unable to go to nuns for help or they'll get negative responses from them. Another concept used was the self-fulfilling prophecy.

It's when a teacher puts a label to a child and leads to the child actually becoming that label (Ravelli & Webber, 2013: pg. 245). This concept coincides with the looking-glass self concept. What the teacher sees the student as, that student is most likely to become that. This happens because the nuns had low expectation for these children (Ravelli & Webber, 2013: pg. 246). They're not there to help them, but instead abuse them. For example, this Aboriginal woman explained how her friend experienced her first menstruation cycle and was frightened by it.

She went to a nun for help, but the nun just yelled at her saying that she was bad then humiliated the girl by throwing bloody underwear at her in front of everyone at school (Bob, Geraldine & Marcuse, 1993). The nuns were basically showing that the girl was weak and evil and that is what the girl displayed in front of everyone. This behavior and the abuse affect children in

the future; making them feel hopeless. And this could lead to them being involved with drug and alcohol abuse. The residential schooling program was such a terrible place to be as told in the film *Education As We See It*.

The European missionaries and the church are supposed to be role models and help people, but instead they just cared about making a valuable culture go extinct. And they did this by taking that culture out of the children. This is a conflict theory perspective because the Europeans wanted to be powerful and in order to do this they had to treat the Aboriginals harshly. The concepts language extinction, looking-glass self, and self-fulfilling prophecy were very well applied in this film due to all the experiences the Aboriginals went through when they were children.

Even though the residential school system does not exist anymore, it caused long-term damage for the Aboriginals and they will always have this terrible memory with them for the rest of their lives. References Bob, Geraldine and Gary Marcuse. (Directors). 1993. " Education As We See It. " in *First Nations: The Circle Unbroken - Disk 4*. [Film]. National Film Board of Canada. Ravelli, B. & Webber, M. (2013). *Exploring Sociology*. Boston: Pearson Learning Solutions.