

There have been many important advancements in the education system throughout history but have there been enough changes? This question depends on the various dimensions of how we look at education as a whole. Today the Canadian education system is ranked among the best in the world, with our nation's students coming seventh overall in a new international study of school systems. (International Journal on New Trends in Education and Their - education) This information must mean that the students are excelling academically. Education has come a long way, especially for indigenous people but through my experience, it hasn't been far enough. There are still remaining attitudes of not being deserving of higher education. I see this in my own education from the non-indigenous students voicing opinions that still remain today of indigenous students not being deserving of higher education, and that it hasn't been earned by us indigenous students, despite not actually knowing where our grades are at, and how hard we worked to be in our programs. Looking back in time at traditional education for Elder Margaret R Hyslop it was very different in 1954 how education was offered for her; she said,

“The first school that I participated in was in the community of Kitkatla, on Dolphin Island, in Tsimshian Nation. The family system was my first school, which included extended families, clans/tribes, social activities, food gathering from the ocean, interaction with elders, Chiefs, tribal watchmen, fishermen, hunters, medical attention from my mother to those in need in the community. My mother was the Community Nurse, Teacher, and Organist. My grandparents, aunts & uncles were my teachers of life, learning languages and learning my place in a matrilineal society.” (Hyslop, 2019)

Today the family system is not a school for learning. During 1954 we also experienced a critical shortage of teachers in British Columbia. “To meet the needs for more teachers, the Department of Education initiated a recruiting campaign in Britain to draw in teachers for public schools and

unqualified people were hired to teach indigenous children in residential schools. These hires had little to no training in the profession,”(Croll, 2007) this would not be accepted today. The education system in British Columbia has positively transformed for indigenous students over the past three generations but there still remains so much more to do.

## TEACHING STANDARDS & HUMAN RIGHTS

The purpose of this research is to influence readers that the education system in British Columbia has changed but continues to need more improvements for indigenous students and indigenizing the system. Looking at residential schools in 1950 “Indian Affairs reported that 40 percent of teaching staff at these schools had no training, and that Indigenous children spend most of their day doing manual labour”. (Truth and Reconciliation in Canadian Schools, 2019) In 1974, there were fewer than 50 certificated native Indian teachers in this province. “Workload issues have been a concern for Canadian teachers and teacher unions during recent years, with British Columbia's teachers reporting the highest stress levels (PDF) Diversity and Multicultural Education in Canada) This needs to change, but the question still remains on how can this be done?

“Today the average elementary school room is a pleasant place, attractive and interesting, where children enjoy learning. This change in Canada has been brought about largely through three movements in the past. The first was the child study movement, originating in the US and spread to Canada in the 1880’s it influenced our ideas of school discipline by reducing emphasis upon authoritarianism, restraint and punishment. The progressive education and finally the third factor has been the influence of the mental hygienists on school discipline, which supported the Progressive in the view that a school should be a

place where children can enjoy security and happiness.” (A history of public education in British Columbia, 2019)

## THE CLASSROOM

There have been improvements in curriculum and in the classroom design but there is still a lot of control from the provincial governments around how things are done. They control education, and teachers' unions, including budgets. This has put a bad taste in many teachers' mouths. Flashing once again back to the past Elder Trish Terry started school in grade 1 during 1963, when she was 6 years old during the time of Davin Report. She remembers it being hard because “teachers weren't nice back then, teachers were only there to do the job”. (Terry, 2019) She remembers the classroom design of desks set up in rows, and each class had a chalkboard where the teacher would teach the lessons. In her eyes “teachers were seeking out the answers to questions from students that already knew the answers and understood the material. For the learner that was not getting the information or had no prior knowledge, in Trish's experience they ended up learning curriculum from friends, that would teach what they knew. It appeared to be more of a reciprocal teaching style, because the teachers were perhaps maybe not qualified. Her favourite part of the day was recess, when indigenous students got to play sports and enjoy the outdoors, connecting them with Mother Nature. “Learning from the elders and parents as they traveled through the mountains in search of the earth's medicine through plants.” (Terry, 2019). We have lost this way today. During this time the indigenous children were taken away from their mothers and families into the residential school, Elder Trish Terry was one of the children forced to go. She was there for two long years. The indigenous students had a strict routine of daily chores they had to do. When students were reprimanded, they were sent to a

corner for a timeout, some students were punished by physical and verbal abuse. (Terry, 2019).  
“Life was hard in the school system for indigenous people” (Terry, 2019)

## TODAY’S EDUCATION SYSTEM IN THE PROVINCE OF BC

Looking at today Elder Margeret shares more, this time on what has changed from the family dynamic of learning.

“Daycare, Preschool, and Kindergarten systems now take on family responsibilities, interactions, and social activities have changed the family connections. It has interfered with generational interactions, languages and storytelling, land based knowledge that teaches children responsibilities and interaction with Mother Nature, have been almost destroyed. Government systems & unions often create unnecessary barriers that increase communication gaps between children, parents, aunts, uncles & grandparents rather than I.” (Hyslop, 2019)

Today “The School Act articulates the purpose of the British Columbia school system: to enable all learners to develop their individual potential and to acquire the knowledge, skills and attitudes needed to contribute to a healthy, democratic and pluralistic society and a prosperous and sustainable economy.” (Mitchell) Certainly, there remains a gap. The graduation rates and other measures of success for Aboriginal learners when compared to non-Aboriginal peers is much lower. This is another improvement that we need to see. This is not a fault of the learners, but a systemic failure—including a failure to address what BC’s Auditor General referred to, the last year as racism of low expectations.” (Croll, 2007) Up until now, B.C. students didn't typically learn about residential schools until Grade 11 social studies. “As of fall 2014, new curriculum material is available for Grades 5, 10, 11 and 12. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission's

Report into residential schools made some of the recommendations and have been endorsed by provincial governments.” (Indian Residential Schools and Reconciliation Resources)

## CONCLUSION

“In the school system today the individuals simply mask their intentions with a lot of words, rules, regulations but that underlying energy of doing it our way is still there.”(Hyslop, 2019) There are still educators who don't know about residential schools. “There are still people today that don't know about Indigenous people in Canada, the Indigenous culture, heritage, and history. There were teachers who knew a bit about it but still were unsure how to incorporate it into their classes, and maybe were too uncomfortable, and so didn't.”(Mitchell) "The problem is that when you have people that are uncomfortable and intimidated, the result is that we have educators that may not be doing it at all." (Mitchell) My teaching pedagogy has been shaped by my learning of this history and I will relate it in the real world through a gentle approach of protecting my student's and offering improvements for indigenous students by indigenizing my practice. I will confidently integrate my lessons and the learning environment with Mother Nature and bring back the traditions through teachings of Indigenous culture, heritage, and history so the students have these relationships and knowledge that is missing today. Through my teachings, I will also offer personalized experiences that are inclusive and respectful, and I will ensure my students learn to be inclusive, diverse and respectful to all. I will do my part in improving the education system here in BC by positively transformed what I can for all students including indigenous through my teaching of shaping the minds of our young.

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