

The Politics of Pedagogy

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INTRODUCTION

- As a student who went to high school in Alberta transitioning to university in BC I noticed gaps in knowledge particularly in relation to social justice issues.
- Educational curriculum in high school varies province to province, but topics and values in the classroom can also vary teacher to teacher.
- This made it difficult to look only at curriculum in seeking to learn more about these knowledge gaps, and so we decided to conduct interviews with university students from both provinces to grasp where these gaps may be and how they may have been filled.
- The interviews focused specifically on what students learned and didn't learn about residential schools and climate change, which are two important and timely social issues. Students will be asked about how they filled in any gaps in knowledge they had on these topics if they didn't learn about them during high school.

RESEARCH GOALS AND IMPORTANCE

- The main objective is to see how students' perspectives on these issues and perceived gaps in their education BC and Alberta might have changed after high school graduation when they started university as well as how and why these might have differed.
- In order to make meaningful progress on reconciliation and climate sustainability, high school students should have clear access to education on these subjects. Understanding how students with educational gaps on these topics filled them after graduation can give us better insight about how to make sure that they have access to this knowledge at an earlier stage and how we can work to fill these gaps.

ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT

Participants were also asked how these gaps could be addressed both in high school curriculum and in universities. Below, I have provided some of the ideas the participants came up with, but now, it's your turn too! If you have any answers or thoughts, please use a sticky note and attach to the poster.

How could high school curriculum be improved in such a way that addresses these knowledge gaps regarding residential schools and climate change?

- Bring in residential school survivors to humanize the lessons and centralize lived experience

How could universities better work to address the varying levels of knowledge students have regarding these issues?

- Make an introductory class on social justice issues a graduation requirement for a variety of programs

MAIN FINDINGS

1

High school **education in British Columbia and Alberta shows a disparity in effectively teaching about residential schools, with BC generally performing better**; both provinces exhibit a **significant lack** in education on **climate change**.

2

These gaps in knowledge were often filled by **proactive educators** or alternative information sources like **social media**, indicating a **reliance on individual efforts** over structured curriculum.

3

Students reported feeling more **empowered to take meaningful action** towards social change once these knowledge gaps were filled.

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1 OVERALL GAPS AND PROVINCIAL DISPARITIES

- Students who went to high school in British Columbia stated they had a more comprehensive formal education regarding residential schools.
- Students in Alberta often found that if it was talked about in their classes, it was done so in passing and without meaningful intent.
- Students from both provinces found that most education regarding residential schools spoke about it as simply a historical event and that it was not until university that they truly realized the ongoing effects and legacies:

"I think the most major thing I discovered after graduation was that residential schools and the need for reconciliation wasn't just in the past, it is still ongoing"

- As for climate change, students from both provinces noted a significant lack in education on the topic throughout their high school experience:

"It's hard to recognize a gap in knowledge when they weren't even anything there"

2 ADDRESSING THE GAP: INDIVIDUAL EFFORTS & UNIVERSITY EDUCATION

- Students who did note a more comprehensive high school education regarding residential schools all pointed out instances in which it was the educator who took the initiative to provide them with this level of education rather than the curriculum itself.

"It was definitely the teachers initiative, like [they] just saw an opportunity to show us something important and [they] took it"

- The number one tool used to fill gaps in knowledge once they were realized was social media apps such as Tik Tok and Instagram.
- Participants noted that many university courses were able to play a key role in bridging these knowledge gaps, However, it is often still up to the individual to ensure they are seeking these courses and education.
- All of this together indicates a heavy reliance on individual efforts (whether from educators or students) rather than structured curriculum in addressing this lack of knowledge.

3 WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

Participants were asked why we should address these gaps in knowledge and how important is it that these gaps be filled earlier on in meaningful ways.

- The most common personal difference noted was that after having these knowledge gaps filled, participants felt they were more prepared and empowered to actually take action on these pertinent social and environmental justice issues.

"I have always wanted to act but was unsure how and where I fit into that . . . Now I feel more mobilized towards change"

- Many participants pointed out that introducing these topics in earlier grades would help to normalize and solidify the importance of these conversations about social justice issues and involvement in movements towards change.