



Media Representations of Policies Concerning Education

Access and their Roles in Seven First Nations Students'

Deaths in Northern Ontario

Key Details

KEY WORDS

Media, First Nations, education policy, death, northern Ontario, secondary school

POPULATION GROUP

Aboriginal youth

STEPPING UP THEMES

Education, Training & Apprenticeships

RESEARCH ORIGIN

Canada

SOURCE

Academic Article (peer reviewed)

“Aboriginal people are not well represented by or in the media. Many Canadians know Aboriginal people only as noble environmentalists, angry warriors, or pitiful victims. A full picture of their humanity is simply not available in the media.”

1. What is the research about?

Media and media representation has a significant role in shaping how the broader Canadian population understands Indigenous issues. An educated population that has an accurate understanding of First Nations issues is fundamental to garnering support among the Canadian public for policy decisions affecting First Nations peoples.

It is the Federal Government of Canada’s responsibility to provide access to education for First Nation’s youth living on reserve. First Nations education is underfunded per capita in comparison to other jurisdictions. Due to the lack of high schools on their home reserves, every year a large number of First Nations high-school aged youth are forced to move to continue their secondary education.

Between 2000 and 2011 seven First Nations youth who moved off reserve to attend high school in Thunder Bay Ontario died. This study is an analysis of how the media reported on the event. The researchers sought to answer the question: “How do non-First Nations and First Nations media represent the role that education policy played in seven First Nations students’ deaths in Thunder Bay?”

2. Where did the research take place?

This research is a media discourse analysis that focuses on how national and local media represent First Nations Education policy.

3. Who is this research about?

This research is an analysis of media coverage of the deaths of the seven First Nations youth who died in Thunder Bay while attending Franklin Dennis Cromarty High School. These youth were living more than 500 miles away from their home reserves.

4. How was the research done?

The researchers used critical discourse analysis to review nine articles by First Nations news sources, and twenty-one articles by Non-First Nations news sources that covered the seven First Nations students’ deaths. These sources included national and local Thunder Bay newspapers. Notably, the two national newspapers did not cover the deaths of these youth.

The articles were found by searching the University of Ottawa’s library database, including the names of the students in combination with “Thunder Bay”. Each article

was coded to determine if it promoted the statement “First Nations people require federal government policy as a form of intervention in their lives”, or alternately “there needs to be greater cooperation between the Canadian government and First Nations people to resolve the long-standing policy issues that continue to affect First Nations youth and their education in northern Ontario.” (p. 6)

5. What are the key findings?

The researchers found distinct differences in the way news sources reported: First Nations news sources, as well as local Thunder Bay news sources, all included discussion of the role colonization played in shaping inequitable policies.

The local and First Nations run news sources also wrote articles supporting First Nations self-determination, and highlighting the need for a co-operative approach, whereby First Nations governments provide meaningful input into creating policies that will effect them.

National news sources mentioned funding disparities between First Nations and non-First Nations students, but neglected to provide the colonial context that produced policies which lead to funding gaps, essentially omitting the role that colonization played in the deaths of the seven students. The authors argue this is “post colonial amnesia”, whereby the impact of colonization is ignored, thus overlooking the potential improvements that could be made in the lives of Indigenous people if colonial policies were amended.

6. Why does this research matter for youth work?

The media reviewed in this study included references to the historical and structural inequities that First Nations youth continue to experience through their access to education. However, the link between educational policies and colonialism was not always made clear by the media. There is a need to improve the critical media and policy literacy of non-Indigenous Canadians. There is also a need to provide greater access to young Indigenous people to participate in the production of policies and media that effect their lives.



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