

JUST SIX
QUESTIONS

RESEARCH
SUMMARY



Visualizing Pedagogy and Power with Urban Native

Youth: Exposing the Legacy of the Indian

Residential School System

Key Details

KEY WORDS

Residential school, urban Native youth, photovoice, critical consciousness, decolonization, intergenerational

POPULATION GROUP

Aboriginal Youth

STEPPING UP THEMES

Education, Training & Apprenticeships; Health & Wellness; Strong Supportive Friends and Families; Diversity, Social Inclusion and Safety

RESEARCH ORIGIN

Canada

SOURCE

Academic

“The Indian Residential School System (IRSS) legacy is not just a survivor issue but an intergenerational one; it should also be clear that Native youth deserve a meaningful space to heal outside of the institutions of the state.”

1. What is the research about?

Many Canadians know very little about the Indian Residential School System (IRSS) and the lasting legacy it has on Indigenous peoples and communities today. In order to contribute to the work of the TRC, this research explores and interprets the intergenerational effects of the IRSS on Indigenous peoples in Canada from the perspective of three Native urban youth. This study positions itself as participating in processes of reconciliation whereby the research not only facilitates, but is itself, an “act of truth-telling”.

Using photovoice (a method that uses photography to generate critical dialogue and analysis), the research explored the question: “How do urban Native youth interpret and experience the intergenerational effects of the Indian Residential School System in Canada”?

2. Where did the research take place?

This research took place in Vancouver, British Columbia in collaboration with the Urban Native Youth Association.

3. Who is this research about?

The research focuses on the experiences and perspectives of Native urban youth who have left reserves to live in the city.

4. How was the research done?

The research took a community based participatory research approach and used photovoice to collect data. The researcher and three Native urban youth worked together as co-authors and research partners.

Participants received a two-hour training on photovoice methodology and formal institutional research ethics. Participants then received two disposable cameras and were asked to respond in two parts to the guiding research questions:

1. What are negative reminders of the IRSS?
2. What are strengths in the Indigenous community that contribute to the healing process?

Participants’ photos were analyzed using cultural narrative analysis and the session where pictures were revealed to the research team was videotaped and later transcribed.

5. What are the key findings?

- Native urban youth identify painful parallels and similarities between the current situation, where social workers take Indigenous children from their homes and place them in foster care, and the experiences of their family members who were forced into the IRSS.
- Although Canadian society views preserved Indigenous villages as an act of respect for history and culture, for urban Native youth, these historical sites are representative of erasure and a reminder of the difficult circumstances that resulted in Indigenous peoples being removed from their land.
- Native urban youth are subjected to extreme levels of anti-Native racism in educational settings and often expressed that their Indigenous knowledge and cultural perspectives are discredited and viewed as inferior to White colonial norms.
- Native urban youth found that embracing Indigenous identity and culture, such as drumming, beading, and smudging, helped with their self empowerment. Indigenous cultural engagement was found to be assistive for coping with experiences of oppression and discrimination.

6. Why does this research matter for youth work?

The last Indian residential school closed in 1996 and it was only in 1998 that the Canadian government officially apologized to Indigenous peoples for the administration of a 165-year-old Indian residential school system that inflicted individual and community trauma.

While IRSS is officially closed and reconciliation is underway, its effects and underlying causes continue. Urban Native youth are still experiencing anti-Native racism delivered through schools, Children's Aid Societies, and cultural, historical and social institutions.

This research sheds light on the healing benefits of creating spaces for urban Native youth to share and discuss the intergenerational effects of the IRSS. The following practice based recommendations for youth work are based on these research findings:

- Provide opportunities for urban native youth to discuss the inter-generational impact and effects of the IRSS and anti-Native racism on their lives and communities.
- Implement more Indigenous educational programming so that Native youth can have access to culturally safe spaces to participate in pedagogy, traditions and ceremonies that positively affirm their Indigenous culture and identity.
- Engage more Native youth in research and consider utilizing photovoice as an effective research methodology for working more collaboratively with youth.
- Create practiced based professional development opportunities for social workers to learn more about how to decolonize social work practice and work alongside Native children, youth and their families.



Gray, R. R. (2011). Visualizing pedagogy and power with urban native youth: Exposing the legacy of the Indian residential school system. *Canadian Journal of Native Education*, 34(1), 9.