Where does the divide come from?: Exploring past experiences of discrimination in the classroom.

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History 3510

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What is discrimination? Well, it “is an act (intentional or not) that results in denying or granting individuals or groups opportunities or social rewards on the basis of group characteristics such as skin colour, ethnicity, sex, class, religion, sexual orientation and language. It is usually based on prejudice or pre-judgment, which is often influenced by culturally developed stereotypes and socially constructed images rather than by evidence”[[1]](#footnote-1) It is, unfortunately, a huge ongoing problem in the education system. Now as mentioned above there are many types of it, one may find that to themselves that the more relatable to one the topic is it seems to be seen as a bigger issue. Things like racial and gender discrimination are what stand out in this paper as they seem to be major topics at this time. Discrimination in the classroom has been an ongoing problem since the education system started in Canada. Discrimination towards race and gender have major impacts on those who experience them and something needs to change so this is no longer seen as acceptable. Exploring cases of discrimination towards gender and race from personal experiences and past experiences need to be understood that they are a big impact on those who experience them. Once knowing the problems and seeing the continuous problem it can show where this idea comes from. As this will hopefully educate readers on how this affects the students, and make more people aware of what discrimination in the education system does to those children. With understanding all this it will hopefully make people think about how to change and make discrimination stop in the classroom.

*Once when I was in gym class, we were asked to do certain exercises like push-ups and run laps or other stationary things and then record how many we could do. Gym class was one of my favourite classes so I always tried really hard. When I finished the class I handed in my paper which had everything recorded on it. I remember at the end of the class the teacher asked to talk with me, she asked if I lied on the paper and I replied no. She said what I recorded wasn’t possible for a girl to do. This made me upset that she’d think I couldn’t do what I did just because I was a girl, I didn’t lie why would I lie about how fit I was. She said next time I will be watching, so I said watch me now and I got down and asked her to time me while I did more push-ups that I wrote on the paper in the time allotted. She was impressed and I was pleased that I was able to prove I was better than I wrote and I was better than she expected, I wasn’t going to let the fact that I’m a girl limit what I could do.*

Imagine being told one could not do something because of the gender they are. Girls are supposed to be pretty and not do any hard work because they just cook and clean. Where Boys are supposed to do all the gruff work and be strong and never show any weakness. This is what it has seemed to be for many years although throughout time things have slowly changed that its ok for genders to switch roles. But there are still cases that have shown that in school systems they still feel this need to enforce this gender divide, so where does this idea come from? Well, there was Miss. Holiwell who felt that the education of women should be different from men and that in the end women “will never see herself as equal with” men[[2]](#footnote-2). This was proof that the gender divides in education started as early as 1865 with an all-girls education plan. This divide later continued on in residential schools where the idea that girls and boys are completely different and the two shall never do the same thing was strongly enforced. For instance Bev Sellars mentions how she remembers even when they ate they ate together but had “the boys on [one] side and the girls on the other”[[3]](#footnote-3), even in church when brothers and sisters would try to sit together the boys would be “yanked back onto the boys’ side of the church”[[4]](#footnote-4). She also mentioned the gender specified chores they had to do like girls “[washing] … floors, polishing [the] … dishes and silver, and [making] sure [the] fancy drinking glasses were spot free”[[5]](#footnote-5). Another residential school survivor mentions the boy’s side of the story and tells how the boys “worked [by] fulling the woodbins for the boilers … [also] taking the wood in for the kitchen”[[6]](#footnote-6). These jobs were seen as had and needed strength so that is why they assigned to boys to them. Whereas the other jobs like cleaning were meant for the girls to do. Even with just having gender-specific jobs proves that there was a clear divide and that those stereotypical thoughts that girls can’t be as strong as boys and boys can’t do delicate things have always been a part of the education system. So was completely separating the genders the right thing to do? Even in school pictures, they divided the two, this was wrong as the thoughts have continued on to today making it so girls and boys who don’t want to be seen as typical have to work that much harder to prove who they are and can be.

[[7]](#footnote-7)

*From early on I can remember being put into different classes ones that were for those who weren’t as academically strong. I always had to go with my parents to the office to fight to not be in those classes. Sometimes I was scheduled for a class that I already completed because they assumed I didn’t pass that class, but in fact, I had the highest grade in that class. I can also remember being asked if I cheated on test and assignments because they didn’t believe I was capable of being able to achieve the grades I did. With all this consistently happening it made me realize that teachers and administrators felt that I wasn’t capable of being an A student just because of my race. But this didn’t stop me from succeeding, it actually challenged me to always push myself to prove I could be the top student.*

Not only is the continuous discrimination against gender an issue but there is also the issue of discrimination against race. This one seems to be more visible than the gender issue.

So where does this come from, well it comes from every segregated school that was made. For instance in the mid-1900 black schools were created and those black children that went to a white public school had to face racism from peers and those who had authority in the school like teachers[[8]](#footnote-8). There were also schools created for the Chinese because they were not wanted at public school, this was a major issue through the years of 1922-1923[[9]](#footnote-9). Also, of course, the main focus of someone who comes from Frist Nations descent and also the school system that has been mentioned before, which was residential schools which started in 1870 and the last school closed in 1996. All of these schools mentioned were all a way of giving each different race an education that would hopefully transform them to be other white race. Unfortunately, because the government was the majority of white people who made the decisions they made it so white schools were funded well whereas the other schools of colour were highly underfunded which created unhealthy and bad conditions for those attending. Focusing back on the issue of the where does the idea that racial discrimination in the classroom being acceptable, all starts with these schools. This problem allows authority figures to single out people of a minority race that can make it so they don’t succeed as well as other. For instance, in the story above the student is seen to have not as high of potential as white students because she is First Nations and with having a First Nations last name her teachers assume she can be as smart as she is. This assumption comes from the idea that residential schools were to make children smarter because they didn’t understand European culture, but just because they didn’t understand one culture doesn’t mean they don’t understand the same things in their culture. This may mean that their culture does it slightly differently, because everyone is a little different. Sellars mentions how the teacher singled out two students for not knowing one answer telling the class “look at the two smartest pupils in this class they can’t even answer a simple question”. This probably humiliated the students and made them question if they really are smart, its situations like this that give the idea that its ok to single out first nation students not realizing the negative impact it can have on many of them. Although some First Nations Students may need a little more assistance to get them to the same level as other students does not mean they aren’t capable of meeting that expectation. But really the reason students may be a little bit behind is because of how residential schools educated their students, they didn’t teach them book smarts always because they felt they needed “practical skills such as farming, shoemaking, and housekeeping”[[10]](#footnote-10). Whereas in public schools they were focusing on school work full time, so when comparing the two it made it look like the first nations weren’t as smart as them. Also for some time “Indians could not go past grade 8”[[11]](#footnote-11) as well as they had to be educated by different schools which didn’t always have suitable teachers. All of the residential schools were essentially not good for those who attended because of the racial discrimination and this continues on to more recent times. With Canada being a multicultural country it has made it so a large part of the racial materials has been removed from the curriculum, but with the European education system it creates a problem in things like textbooks because of the “non-recognition and misrecognition of the contribution of groups of people”[[12]](#footnote-12). But changing that isn’t going to stop racism because of “hidden curriculum”, this “refers to the socialization process in schooling – a curriculum that is taught without being formally ascribed. It emanates from social, political and cultural environments of the society and must be understood in relation to the overall societal power structures (of ethnicity, class, and gender for example) that influence the education system”[[13]](#footnote-13). With this is shows that it is going to take a lot to change and stop this racism as not only does the education system have to change, textbooks have to, teachers have to and the people themselves have to change. With racial discrimination being an ongoing problem in the education system it has become an even bigger problem that people even realize.

 Through what has been explored one can come to conclude that discrimination towards race and gender have been an ongoing problem in the education system since pubic-school became important. If this seems to continue, where this problem is coming from needs to be addressed. The sources of the problem seem to be a number of things like the education system and textbooks that are recommended to use as well as teachers and those who are of higher authority that does not realize that not changing their way is a way of discrimination itself. So how can this change, well one would look at what needs to happen in order to eliminate all forms of discrimination? It has been said that this change can happen if the education system “better prepare students for the world of work; we need to focus on their emotional development to nurture cultural wealth and a healthy inner being; and most importantly, we need to motivate them to create a civil society”[[14]](#footnote-14). But also the “[s]chool and the rest of society need to work together towards the human ideal of a more just, violence-free and interdependent world”[[15]](#footnote-15). With this more racial minority teachers can be hired and have “employment equity”[[16]](#footnote-16). With this, it will show equality within the staff and hopefully, it will affect them in a way that they can also fine equality for all students in their classroom.

 In summary, discrimination is a horrible thing and when it is towards something one can’t change it can impact that person deeply. Also when there is discrimination in the school it can affect the way people learn as it can intimate them so they don’t do well or it can challenge them to do better. Unfortunately, it usually affects the students in a negative way which is why it needs to change. With learning the past and present story should make people realize how bad this problem and hopefully it will make people not want that to happen. Also creating equality in the staff structure and in the education curriculum can make it so it creates equality in the classroom as well. Discrimination is bad and it needs to stop with these stories that were told earlier hopefully educate people in this problem and make it so they make others aware of what is happening to people in school. Discrimination may be intentional or non-intentional but either way, people need to be aware that they could be discriminating without even knowing. Hopefully, bring awareness to readers will make a difference in the world and in the education system as well.

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