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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Identity Formation and Academic Identity in Residential Schools: A Psychological and Sociological Perspective

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Abstract

Residential schools profoundly influence students' identity formation and academic identity through a complex interplay of individual experiences, social interactions, and institutional environments. This review integrates psychological and sociological perspectives to examine these processes. Psychologically, self-concept, social identity, and attachment theories highlight how students' self-perception, group memberships, and emotional bonds shape their motivation and academic engagement. Sociologically, cultural capital, social capital, and institutional theories underscore how access to resources, networks, and institutional structures molds identities. Challenges such as balancing multiple identities and fostering belonging are discussed, alongside opportunities like academic support. Recommendations include fostering supportive relationships, cultural sensitivity, and enhanced academic resources. Future research should focus on longitudinal, comparative, and intervention studies to deepen understanding and inform practice. This review underscores the need for supportive environments to promote positive identity formation and academic success in residential schools.

Keywords: Academic Identity, Residential school, Psychological and Social Perspective, academic support

Introduction

Due to the intensive, communal settings in which students live and learn, residential schools provide a distinctive lens through which to view identity formation and academic identity. Academic, social, and personal identities are fostered in these environments, and they influence academic success, motivation, and self-perception. The institutional culture, peer

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relationships, and regular routines provide a dynamic environment for identity development, especially during adolescence, which is a critical time for the creation of one's self-concept (Marsh, 1990). This review combines sociological and psychological viewpoints to investigate these processes, emphasizing opportunities, problems, and suggestions to promote students' overall growth, paying special emphasis to the historical effects on Indigenous pupils. Self-concept theory in psychology emphasizes how students' self-perceptions affect their motivation and involvement in the classroom. While negative academic input may weaken self-concept, positive feedback can boost achievement in residential schools (Marsh, 1990). According to the Social Identity Theory (SIT), social identity is shaped by group memberships, such as academic or peer affiliations, which have an impact on performance and belonging (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Historical integration efforts caused conflicts that affected Indigenous pupils' self-esteem by upsetting their cultural identities (Charles & DeGagné, 2013). The importance of emotional ties in development is highlighted by attachment theory; for Indigenous children in particular, being separated from their families during residential school disrupted attachment, which in turn affected interactions with teachers and peers and, ultimately, identity formation (Bowlby, 1969; Choate & Tortorelli, 2022). According to sociology's Cultural Capital Theory, residential schools impart information and abilities that improve academic identity; yet, this advantage was curtailed by the historical devaluation of Indigenous traditions (Bourdieu, 1986; By Arcadia, 2022). Although seclusion in historical schools hampered this, social capital theory emphasizes how connections with classmates and mentors make it easier to access resources, promoting resilience and academic identity (Coleman, 1988). According to DiMaggio and Powell (1983), institutional theory looks at how school culture and regulations form identities. While supportive structures foster good development, inflexible or culturally insensitive ones can alienate children. One of the difficulties is juggling several identities, which can lead to conflict, especially for Indigenous students juggling their native and imposed identities (Verhoeven et al., 2019). Positive relationships are essential for creating a sense of belonging, which is frequently disturbed in historical circumstances (Choate & Tortorelli, 2022). Academic support services like tutoring offer opportunities to enhance academic identity (Marsh, 1990). Fostering supportive connections and advocating for cultural traditions and policies that enhance students' full development in residential school environments are some of the recommendations.

Psychological Perspectives

Social Identity Theory: Social Identity Theory (SIT) posits that individuals derive part of their self-concept from group memberships, such as peer groups or academic affiliations, which influence belonging, motivation, and performance (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Students' relationships with their peers and affiliation with academic groupings in residential schools influence their social identities. Academic motivation and engagement can be improved by positive attachments, such as belonging to a study group that supports you. Cliques and competitive academic settings are examples of exclusionary dynamics that can compromise performance and a sense of belonging (Verhoeven et al., 2019). By prohibiting indigenous

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customs and languages, previous residential schools forced assimilation on Indigenous children, upsetting cultural group identities (Charles & DeGagné, 2013). As a result, there was conflict between native and imposed Euro-Canadian identities, which lowered self-esteem and caused academic disengagement. In order to promote healthy identity formation and academic performance, SIT emphasizes the significance of cultivating inclusive group dynamics.

Attachment Theory: Attachment Theory emphasizes the role of emotional bonds, particularly with caregivers, in shaping development (Bowlby, 1969). While insecure attachment types can result in relational difficulties, stable attachment patterns foster resilience and healthy identity building. Attachment systems were upset by family separation in residential schools, especially for Indigenous pupils who were taken from their villages by force (Choate & Tortorelli, 2022). Insecure attachment styles impacted connections with classmates, teachers, and the academic setting since institutional care frequently failed to create caring conditions. For instance, students' academic identities may be weakened by a lack of emotional support, which could lead to disengagement. Identity formation was further complicated by intergenerational trauma brought on by historical disturbances (By Arcadia, 2022). In order to promote resilience and strong intellectual identities, residential schools required supportive connections, according to attachment theory.

Sociological Perspectives

Cultural Capital Theory: Cultural Capital Theory suggests that knowledge, skills, and values acquired through education enhance social mobility and academic identity (Bourdieu, 1986). Cultural capital from residential schools, such as social conventions, language skills, and academic credentials, can support students' academic identities and future prospects. Academic proficiency, for instance, might increase self-assurance and involvement. However, historical residential schools for Indigenous pupils frequently marginalized Indigenous languages and customs, prioritized Eurocentric values, and undervalued native cultural capital (By Arcadia, 2022). Students' possibilities and sense of identity were restricted by this devaluation since their cultural background was not valued. In order to improve academic identity and social mobility for all students, contemporary residential schools can address this by implementing inclusive curricula that appreciate varied backgrounds (Verhoeven et al., 2019).

Social Capital Theory: Social Capital Theory highlights the benefits of social networks in accessing resources, support, and opportunities (Coleman, 1988). In residential schools, relationships with peers, teachers, and mentors form networks that shape identity and academic success. Strong social capital, such as supportive friendships or mentor guidance, fosters a sense of belonging and resilience, enhancing academic identity. Conversely, limited networks, as experienced by Indigenous students in isolating historical schools, hindered identity formation and academic engagement (Charles & DeGagné, 2013). For instance, lack of trusted relationships could exacerbate feelings of alienation, reducing motivation. Building robust social connections through collaborative activities and mentorship programs is critical for supporting students' identity development and academic outcomes in residential settings.

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Institutional Theory: Institutional Theory examines how organizational structures, policies, and cultures shape behavior and identity (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). Residential schools' policies, practices, and cultures set norms and expectations that influence identity formation. Supportive environments with flexible academic standards and inclusive cultures can strengthen academic identities by encouraging engagement. However, rigid or culturally insensitive structures may alienate students. Historical assimilation policies in Indigenous residential schools enforced conformity to Euro-Canadian norms, disrupting cultural identities and creating hostile environments (By Arcadia, 2022). For example, strict disciplinary measures and suppression of native languages undermined students' sense of self. Institutional Theory suggests that creating supportive, culturally responsive institutional environments is essential for fostering positive identity development and academic success.

Challenges and Opportunities

Balancing Multiple Identities:

Residential school students navigate academic, social, and personal identities, often facing tension that shapes their development. Prioritizing academic success can conflict with social affiliations, leading to identity conflicts that affect motivation and self-perception (Verhoeven et al., 2019). For Indigenous students, historical residential schools imposed Eurocentric identities, disrupting native cultural roots and creating significant challenges in balancing these identities. This tension often resulted in diminished self-esteem and academic disengagement, as students struggled to reconcile imposed identities with their cultural heritage (Charles & DeGagné, 2013). Schools must foster environments that support harmonious integration of these identities, promoting inclusive practices that value diverse backgrounds. By encouraging positive peer and teacher relationships and incorporating culturally sensitive curricula, residential schools can help students navigate these conflicts, enhancing their sense of belonging and academic identity.

Sense of Belonging : In residential schools, academic identity and identity formation depend heavily on a feeling of belonging. A supportive environment and a sense of belonging are fostered by positive interactions with teachers and classmates, which boost academic achievement and motivation (Oyserman et al., 2006). Students are more likely to actively participate in their education and forge strong academic identities when they feel connected. However, as demonstrated historically by Indigenous pupils in residential institutions, seclusion can seriously impede this process. Alienation resulted from forced family separation and cultural practice suppression, which interfered with belonging and identity development (Choate & Tortorelli, 2022). Intergenerational trauma and diminished academic identities were exacerbated by this seclusion. The well-being of students depends on the creation of inclusive environments, which calls for culturally aware policies and procedures that respect a range of backgrounds. Residential schools can improve students' sense of belonging by encouraging close interpersonal relationships and a community that values cultural identities, which will promote their academic achievement and overall growth.

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Academic Support: By providing structured academic support systems like tutoring, mentoring, and access to educational materials, residential schools significantly contribute to the development of academic identity. By strengthening a positive academic self-concept that is essential for identity formation, these supports improve students' engagement and academic accomplishment (Marsh, 1990). For example, tutoring programs offer individualized instruction to help students overcome obstacles in their studies and develop self-confidence. By providing role models who encourage academic perseverance and motivation, mentoring cultivates deep connections with instructors. Having access to resources, like technology or libraries, gives students the tools they need to succeed and strengthens their academic identities. Support that is specifically designed to address cultural and historical hurdles is crucial for underrepresented populations, especially Indigenous students. Academic achievement and identity were undermined by historical residential schools' frequent disrespect for Indigenous cultural contexts (By Arcadia, 2022). Incorporating Indigenous knowledge into courses or assigning mentors who are familiar with students' histories are examples of culturally responsive support that can close these gaps and foster a sense of belonging and academic efficacy. By reversing historical disenfranchisement, these programs help students forge strong academic identities that are consistent with their cultural background. Residential schools can help students overcome academic obstacles, improve their perspective of themselves as learners, and succeed in the long run by providing them with all-encompassing, inclusive academic support. This promotes resilience and the formation of a holistic identity.

Conclusion

Identity formation and academic identity in residential schools are complex, multifaceted processes shaped by an intricate interplay of psychological and sociological factors. This systematic review integrates key theoretical frameworks to elucidate these dynamics, emphasizing their implications for educational practice and policy, particularly for historically marginalized groups such as Indigenous students. Psychologically, Self-Concept Theory underscores the role of students' self-perception in driving academic motivation and achievement. A positive academic self-concept, reinforced through supportive feedback and academic success, fosters strong academic identities (Marsh, 1990). Social Identity Theory (SIT) highlights how group memberships, such as peer or academic affiliations, shape social identity, influencing students' sense of belonging and performance. However, historical assimilation policies in Indigenous residential schools disrupted cultural identities, creating tensions that undermined self-esteem and engagement (Charles & DeGagné, 2013; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Attachment Theory further reveals the impact of emotional bonds, noting that separation from families in residential schools, particularly for Indigenous students, led to insecure attachment styles, affecting relationships and academic identities (Bowlby, 1969; Choate & Tortorelli, 2022).

Sociologically, Cultural Capital Theory emphasizes the role of educational resources, such as knowledge and skills, in enhancing academic identity and social mobility. However, students were disadvantaged and had fewer prospects due to the historical devaluation of

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Indigenous cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986; By Arcadia, 2022). According to social capital theory, social networks are crucial for resilience and academic performance, but isolation in traditional schools hampered these advantages (Coleman, 1988). According to institutional theory, school cultures and policies influence students' identities; pupils are alienated by inflexible or culturally insensitive structures, while supportive environments foster positive outcomes (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). These results highlight important issues that are vital to students' wellbeing, like juggling several identities and creating a sense of belonging. The necessity for culturally sensitive environments is highlighted by the identity difficulties that indigenous students, in particular, experienced as a result of imposed Eurocentric norms (Verhoeven et al., 2019).

Academic support networks that reinforce academic identities, such as tutoring and mentoring, and inclusive curriculum that celebrate a range of origins provide opportunities to improve results (Marsh, 1990; By Arcadia, 2022). Teachers and legislators can address these issues and take advantage of opportunities by combining sociological and psychological viewpoints to build supportive environments. Strong student-teacher relationships, culturally sensitive methods, and a wealth of academic resources are among the recommendations. Longitudinal studies to evaluate long-term effects, comparison studies to find best practices, and intervention studies to create efficient support plans should be the top priorities of future research. In order to ensure fair outcomes for all students, especially those from marginalized communities, this research emphasizes the need for holistic approaches to enhance identity building and academic performance in residential schools.

Recommendations

To support identity formation and academic identity in residential schools—particularly for historically marginalized groups such as Indigenous students—three key recommendations are derived from a systematic review of psychological and sociological literature:

Foster Supportive Relationships

Developing solid, constructive relationships between students, teachers, and classmates is crucial to improving kids' academic identities and sense of belonging. According to Oyserman et al. (2006), supportive relationships within school communities boost resilience, motivation, and engagement. The social isolation that residential students frequently endure can be mitigated by putting mentorship programs and cooperative learning exercises into place, especially for Indigenous students who have historically been excluded and marginalized (Choate & Tortorelli, 2022).

Promote Cultural Sensitivity

Culturally sensitive teaching methods are necessary to promote inclusive identity construction. Integrating culturally appropriate courses that represent and validate Indigenous kids' identities is one way to do this. Students' sense of pride and belonging is increased when ethnic variety is acknowledged and celebrated, which also counteracts the effects of assimilationist practices (By Arcadia, 2022; Charles & DeGagné, 2013). To promote kids'

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self-identity and overall development, schools must place a high priority on cultural representation and respect.

Provide Academic Support Systems

Personalized tutoring, mentorship, and advising are examples of targeted academic help that enhances academic accomplishment and self-concept. For kids from underprivileged backgrounds who could encounter additional educational obstacles, these support systems are especially important (Marsh, 1990; By Arcadia, 2022). Confidence, perseverance, and a good academic identity are fostered by structured academic programs that cater to individual learning demands. These research-based suggestions seek to create fair, welcoming, and supportive learning environments where all students, particularly those from historically underrepresented backgrounds, can succeed academically and personally.

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