

Sydney Pellington

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Comparing Education Of Indigenous Peoples In Brazil, Australia, and New Zealand

Introduction

In America, education is one of the fundamental beliefs of our nation, along with the idea that everyone no matter their race, gender, or family should have the chance to receive an

education. Education opens the doors to many of society's privileges such as higher paying jobs, an educated opinion, and often a higher say in political matters. Without equal access to education, the majority of people would lack the ability to make decisions for themselves regarding everything from access to good jobs and pay, all the way to a vote in politics and government affairs.

America has policies to make sure everyone gets a chance at an education, but that is not the case everywhere. Countries often have different policies regarding different things such as education. A good example of different policies and treatment of different people can be shown when taking a close look at sources like World Bank Data, as well as the countries of Brazil, Australia, and New Zealand (Santiago & Akkari, 2020) (Bagnall & Moore, 2020) where each country has a different outlook in regards to education and the right to education. While equal access to education is vastly important, equal treatment of individuals regardless of where or what they come from is tremendously important.

Background Study

If an individual receives an education, but is treated as if inferior to their peers, then the education is meaningless. In the country of Brazil, in order to get into a good university, there is an entrance exam that must be taken and passed. In summary, public schools do not prepare students for the entrance exam whilst private schools have the resources to get the exam prep needed for their students to pass. Since the only families sending their kids to private school are the ones that can afford it, and the only ones that can afford it are parents who are university graduates, there is no chance for people born in poverty to have a shot at getting into college (Gentili (2009). Therefore the rich stay rich, and the poor stay poor. Such treatment should never be tolerated, and while it is still a problem in Brazil, there are other countries who are making changes in regards to the education of indigenous people.

In the country of Australia, two researchers Nigel Bagnall and Sarah Jane Moore met and began to work on an Embedding Diversity research project at the University of Sydney. Their task was to find a way to incorporate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives into their teaching styles in the hopes of making it easier for indigenous students to attend the university. They came up with an idea called Connect to *Country*. In summary some university faculty agreed to spend a day with Oomera in Ourimbah in New South Wales, Australia. The faculty spent the day listening to stories, working as a group, and learning about how to care for one

another. The exposure to the indigenous way of teaching highlighted the importance of learning from the natural environment, and to think of the land as a natural teacher through listening, singing, and dancing (N. Bagnall and S. J. Moore 74-76).

The Embedding Diversity project eventually stretched to reach Aotearoa New Zealand in 2007 where Moore and Bagnall were joined by Sharon Galleguillos, a highly experienced lecturer in Aboriginal Education. During their two week stay, the team traveled around and were invited to speak to a number of educational provision sites. There they spoke to members of the Maori and Pasifika community regarding necessary changes to academics for First Peoples students. “During the research conversations, Education and Social work staff spoke reflectively on how they were transforming their own practices and responding to the need to acknowledge, embed and celebrate Maori histories, voices and funds of knowledge (Moll et al. 1992; Vélez-Ibáñez and Greenberg 1992) in their work.” After the two weeks were up, Moore and Bagnall returned to Sydney and conducted a day-long workshop for the faculty where they showcased what they had learned through discussions, images, and stories.

Regardless of the country, the importance of education, belonging, and cultural democracy can not go unnoticed. As was shown, education plays a vital role in creating a sense of belonging among indigenous people as well as giving them the power to make their own decisions. While there is still a long way to go in the fight to improve cultural democracy between ethnic groups, countries are making an effort to improve indigenous education as shown when Brazil passed the quota policy law 12.711/2012 that gives public school students a better chance at getting into university as well as a job after graduation (Linhares 2010). Small improvements through laws and policies are the first steps to creating an equal educational environment for indigenous students.

Comparative Analysis

Small changes become apparent when looking at comparative data analysis between countries over time, specifically changes made for educational reasons. Data graphs can be used to compare the effectiveness of government actions and policies regarding education and labor force participation. One of the best ways to understand how important a policy is to a country is to track the percentage of government funds spent in recent years. Thus providing insight into the importance and effectiveness of recent educational and labor policies in the countries of Brazil, Australia, and New Zealand.

According to recent data from the World Bank (2024), shifts in government expenditure on education highlight the significance of education across the countries Brazil, Australia and New Zealand. In Brazil, the percent of government expenditure on education increased gradually from 9.3% in 2001 to 12.8% in 2021. However in Australia, the government expenditure has gradually fallen from 14.4% in 2000 to 13.9% in 2022. The rate of decline increases in the country of New Zealand with a steady decline from 16.5% in 2009 to 13.1% in 2022. The data shows a shift in policies between the countries that is most evident in Brazil, the country's increased expenditure towards education emphasizes the newfound importance of the educational system to all citizens of the country. Nevertheless, Australia and New Zealand's expenditure regarding education has been on the decline in recent years, the fall may be due to a change in policies, or in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. While there are many factors that contribute to changes in government expenditure on education, education plays a big role in labor force participation.

According to recent data from the World Bank (2024), shifts in percentage of labor force participation emphasize changes made in the government policies of Brazil, Australia, and New Zealand. In Brazil, the percentage of labor force participation jumped around for a while before decreasing from 64% in 2000 to 63% in 2023. However in the country of Australia, the change was more consistent with an increase from 63% in 2000 to 66% in 2023. Likewise, in New Zealand the labor force participation steadily increased from 65% in 2000 to 72% in 2023. The data supports the past trends between the countries as shown in the background study. Brazil's data emphasizes the background study showing that as the population grows not all citizens are able to acquire a job with the policies in place. Controversially, Australia and New Zealand's data showcases the success of the effort to include indigenous learning styles in order to increase the size of their indigenous student population as shown in the background study.

The data collected both supports and contradicts the trends shown in the background study. The changes in Brazil's government expenditure exhibits an effort to improve the educational system, but the decline of labor force participation showcases that there are still issues to be solved. Australia and New Zealand contradict Brazil's data with less expenditure on education and an incline in labor force participation. In theory, the changes could be due to the lasting effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on more underdeveloped countries. While more developed countries like Australia were able to bounce back relatively fast, underdeveloped

countries with a large population like Brazil may have taken more of a financial, educational, and social hit. While there is still work to be done to increase the percent of indigenous students in the school system, countries are making an effort to change policies for the better.

Discussion and Future Works

No matter the country, education plays a vital role in the lives of every person no matter where or from what they come from. Through education comes benefits like financial freedom and a political voice that can be used to change policies for the better. Through the comparative analysis a theme of change emerges for the countries Brazil, Australia, and New Zealand. Brazil is working to improve education and work opportunities for all its citizens as seen when they passed the quota policy law 12.711/2012. The policy not only helps lower income and indigenous students makeup 50% of undergraduates in universities, but also makes sure that 50% of corporate positions are filled with students from public high schools (Linhares 2010). Australia and New Zealand are linked together in their fight to increase the percent of indigenous students that attend university through things such as the Connect to *Country*, that are meant to educate teachers on how to reach indigenous students better. While the progress that has been made is great, there are still limitations to what can be achieved and new issues that may arise.

Whenever changes are made to a long existing system of government, there are bound to be a few new problems that emerge. In the case of Brazil, the government used the quota policy law 12.711/2012 to increase the number of kids from public schools in universities. The downside is that the public school kids come in unprepared for the challenge that is university, and therefore have a higher chance of failing out (Linhares 2010). In Australia and New Zealand, universities have been working to ease the transition for indigenous students by incorporating some of the learning styles taught in their villages. While the incorporation of indigenous learning styles is a major step forward, there is always work to be done to improve such as opening up new classes that specialize in indigenous cultures. As always there are limitations to how much of a difference the government can make. The government can open the door for poor kids in Brazil to get into university, but if the kids don't study hard to make up for lost time then nothing is accomplished. Similarly in Australia and New Zealand, the universities can make changes to their programs, but if indigenous kids choose not to come then nothing changes. But just because one idea failed does not mean that the end goal is hopeless.

While the policies and changes that are being made are great and help to solve the problems around indigenous education, there are always underlying factors that need to be addressed for improvement to continue. Since Brazil has abolished the laws requiring people to be educated in order to be citizens, one of the major issues left is with the education of indigenous peoples. While the quota policy law 12.711/2012 helps to increase the number of students in universities and industries, it does nothing to help prepare those students for the challenges ahead (Linhares 2010). The policy itself is a good start, but either needs to be expanded, or a new policy written for the purpose of enhancing the public school systems by giving them the resources to adequately prepare students for university and the labor force. With more prepared students entering university, the graduation rate would increase and more students would have a chance at a good job. Likewise, the countries Australia and New Zealand have done an amazing job opening the doors of higher education to indigenous people through events such as *Connect to Country* (N. Bagnall and S. J. Moore 74-76). To make it even more accessible to potential students, the universities could consider offering scholarships in order to make it financially easier for indigenous students to attend. While Brazil, Australia, and New Zealand have each had, and continue to have setbacks, the countries have made, and continue to make drastic improvements to their educational systems in regards to the education of indigenous peoples.

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