

WALKING TOGETHER

First Nations, Métis and Inuit Perspectives in Curriculum

Elders Elders

Excerpt from *Education Is Our Buffalo*

Government of Alberta ■





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ELDERS

An elder is a male or female adult who has earned a reputation for wisdom and spiritual knowledge. Elders perform traditional ceremonies, are respected as teachers and are often sought out as healers. Some achieve this status because they have spent a lifetime studying a particular aspect of their people's culture and traditions; others achieve it because they are members of sacred societies or holders of sacred objects. Still others are respected as elders for their kindness and generosity.

Elders' contribution to education is enormous because they possess specialized knowledge about First Nations, Métis or Inuit history, society and spirituality. Elders seldom announce their status or position but are known to their communities.

Tips for Teachers

It is an honour to be invited to participate in an Aboriginal ceremony. However, teachers must understand that it is inappropriate for anyone to conduct these ceremonies without guidance and supervision from a respected member of the community. If your school wants to host or conduct a ceremony, you must contact community representatives for guidance.

While it is important for students to learn basic information about Aboriginal spirituality and ceremonies, it is not respectful for non-Aboriginals to perform these ceremonies. Seek the advice of the community's elders and invite them to perform ceremonies for special events if it is appropriate and if students and parents consent. Recognize also that many teachings are gender specific and that it is only appropriate for either a male or a female to teach a particular teaching.