

WALKING TOGETHER

First Nations, Métis and Inuit Perspectives in Curriculum

Indigenous Pedagogy Recent Developments in K-12 Aboriginal Education

Excerpt from *Education Is Our Buffalo*

Government of Alberta ■



RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN K–12 ABORIGINAL EDUCATION

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The First Nations, Métis and Inuit Education Policy Framework

Alberta Education's (2002) *First Nations, Métis and Inuit (FNMI) Education Policy Framework* was developed through a committee of representatives from the First Nations and Métis organizations and education stakeholders including the Alberta Teachers' Association. The foundation for the policy framework was based on information gathered by the largest public consultation process on Aboriginal education ever undertaken in Canada.

The policy framework contains a vision statement, goals, principles, strategies and performance measures intended to help the education system and education partners improve Aboriginal learner success in Alberta. The vision articulated in the framework is that "the life-long learning aspirations and potential of First Nations, Métis and Inuit individuals and communities are realized through a responsive and accountable public education system that is recognized as a provincial leader in Aboriginal Education." Alberta Education has made a commitment to proactive collaboration and communication to implement strategies to achieve the vision, which includes

- increasing the knowledge among all Albertans of the governance, history, treaty and Aboriginal rights, lands, culture and languages;
- providing First Nations, Métis and Inuit learners with access to culturally relevant learning opportunities and quality support services;
- developing ministry capacity to address First Nations, Métis and Inuit learner needs effectively; and
- reporting progress on achievement of the long-term goals of the framework.

This excerpt on Aboriginal education ©Alberta Teachers' Association; *Education Is Our Buffalo: A Teacher's Resource for First Nation, Métis and Inuit Education in Alberta*. Edmonton, AB, 2006, revised 2007 and 2008, [http://www.teachers.ab.ca/SiteCollectionDocuments/ATA/Publications/Human-Rights-Issues/Education%20is%20Our%20Buffalo%20\(PD-80-7\).pdf](http://www.teachers.ab.ca/SiteCollectionDocuments/ATA/Publications/Human-Rights-Issues/Education%20is%20Our%20Buffalo%20(PD-80-7).pdf) (accessed September 2011), pp. 48–55.

Aboriginal Teacher Education

The University of Alberta Aboriginal Teacher Education Program (ATEP) was established in 2002 after the Faculty of Education successfully obtained ACCESS funding to begin the program. ATEP is an off-campus elementary teacher education program designed to improve the



In assessing the educational landscape and practices that presently underlie the delivery of education for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal learners in Canada, a clear conclusion emerges: the old paradigm that neglected to make the culture, history, and languages of Aboriginal peoples an integral part of students' learning must undergo a fundamental change.

—Canadian Teachers' Federation (2000)

educational success of Aboriginal children by increasing the number of Aboriginal teachers in northern Alberta communities. ATEP is a four-year teacher education program offered in conjunction with an existing First Nations college. These include a three- and four-year BED completion program at Blue Quills First Nations College; a three- and four-year BED completion program at Northern Lakes College; and a full four-year community-based program in collaboration with Northern Lakes College in Grouard, Slave Lake, Wabasca, Peace River and Fort Vermilion. A three- and four-year completion program at Maskwachees Cultural College in Hobbema began in September 2005.

Students who successfully complete the programs are graduates of the U of A and meet the educational requirements for interim teacher certification in Alberta. Faculty from the U of A and from the colleges are instructors in the programs. Each program has a coordinator, and ATEP has a director at the U of A. Elders within the communities play an important role in the programs. The richness of culture, language and history is extremely important to the program

and to those involved, and the elders provide the vital link between the Aboriginal communities and the education students.

The University of Lethbridge Niitsitapi program was established in 2003. The U of L partners with Red Crow Community College, located on the Kainai First Nation, to offer a teacher education program within the Faculty of Education. The program for local First Nations students incorporates additional cultural supports, including consultants from the Aboriginal community, in a specialized, culturally sensitive Blackfoot teacher education program. Students graduate with a five-year combined degree qualification—the same credentials as their counterparts in the regular program.

The University of Calgary's Bachelor of Education, Master of Teaching program includes course material on indigenous peoples' ways of knowing, pedagogy for diverse classrooms and issues in Aboriginal education.

Aboriginal Teacher Education Instructional Modules

In partnership with the Universities of Lethbridge, Calgary and Alberta, the ministry funded the development of curriculum for teacher preparation programs that addresses the needs of Aboriginal learners in K–12. Beginning in 2007, all graduating teachers will have had coursework based on this curriculum.

First Nations, Métis and Inuit Curriculum Initiatives

Implementation of the *FNMI Education Policy Framework* has been under way since 2002, and Alberta Education has developed new policies, enhanced funding for Aboriginal students and developed new curriculum.

Information about the programs and guides listed below can be found on the Alberta Education website at www.education.gov.ab.ca.





Aboriginal Languages Program

Currently two Aboriginal language programs are offered in Alberta schools. The Blackfoot Language and Culture program was implemented for K–9 in 1990, and the senior high program was implemented in 1993. The Cree Language and Culture program was implemented for K–12 in 2004.

Aboriginal Studies 10-20-30

The first provincial program in Aboriginal studies was developed in partnership with elders, educators and ministry staff. The course content for Aboriginal Studies 10-20-30 deals with First Nations and Métis history and contemporary issues and with Aboriginal perspectives. The course was available for schools to offer in 2003 with an authorized resource list and a set of three award winning textbooks.

Social Studies K–12 Curriculum

The first curriculum to be developed since adoption of the FNMI framework is social studies K–12. Aboriginal historical, cultural and spiritual content has been integrated into the new program.

Infusion of Aboriginal Content into K–12 Curriculum

Alberta Education is working to include Aboriginal perspectives in all subject areas, including fine arts, physical education, literacy and science. Additional teaching and learning resources will be identified to support these curriculum outcomes.

Handbook for Aboriginal Parents of Children with Special Needs

This handbook provides Aboriginal parents with information about their rights and responsibilities regarding the education of their children with special needs, as well as available education supports and services.

Instructional Funding for Aboriginal Learners

The basic instructional grants to schools in 2004/05 were increased by \$1,020 per eligible student to help schools provide programs and services to meet the needs of Aboriginal learners. (This amount will increase in the future at the same rate as the basic instructional grant.) The number of eligible students will be determined by the number of students in the school who have self-identified as Status Indian/First Nations, Non Status Indian/First Nations, Métis, or Inuit. The self-identification process can only work if students and their parents feel comfortable with disclosing their Aboriginal background. Teachers need to respect the wishes of students and parents and follow the privacy policies of the school district.

Aboriginal Liaison Workers

A number of school districts now employ Aboriginal liaison workers to provide teachers with advice and curriculum suggestions regarding Aboriginal education and to support Aboriginal students and their parents. Job descriptions for liaison workers vary across the province but often include the following responsibilities (Alberta Education 2005):

- Establishing and maintaining trust with Aboriginal students and their families



- Acting as a communication link between home and school to assist with school-related issues
- Meeting with individual students on a regular basis to find out what these students need
- Connecting with Aboriginal organizations and community services so they can refer students and families to the community resources they need
- Providing assistance to teachers for presentations related to Aboriginal culture, issues and languages
- Organizing cultural events and activities for the school community.

Incorporating Aboriginal Teaching into Today's Classrooms

I believe we all have a purpose for being on Earth. I believe that life is our classroom. It allows us to learn what we need to learn to fulfill that purpose with understanding, compassion and love. The twenty-first century is destined to bring us back to why we are here and who we really are.

—Adele Arcand, Former Director of Education, Treaty 6

Guidelines for Teachers

The following suggestions will guide teachers in being more culturally sensitive to Aboriginal students, their parents and their community.

- Create an open and welcoming atmosphere in the school and classroom by establishing partnerships with the community, cosponsoring community events and helping parents work with their children. Be respectful of the concerns of parents and involve them by asking them to share their expertise and provide assistance regarding their child's learning needs.
- Be a positive role model. Nurture behaviours that value relationships, are based on respect and promote equality. Recognize that all students are distinct and everyone's culture is valued. Deal with derogatory, demeaning and bullying behaviours.
- Learn about local ways of knowing and teaching to address curriculum outcomes and link the school to the community. Involve Aboriginal liaison personnel in bridging the school and community. Explore ways to work with cultural differences and work with the class to set criteria for behaviour. For example, discuss when it is appropriate to be punctual (for appointments) and when it is acceptable to be late (transitioning from one event to another).
- Develop the observation and listening skills necessary to understand the knowledge and perspectives of the local community, and apply that understanding in teaching practice.
- Carefully review all curriculum resource materials to ensure cultural accuracy and appropriateness. Do not undertake craft activities, ceremonies or physical activities that trivialize Aboriginal dress, dance or beliefs. Research authentic methods for constructing artifacts and, where possible, use the proper materials. Realize that many Aboriginal songs, dances, legends and ceremonies are considered sacred and should not be invented or portrayed in an activity.
- Avoid using materials that offend Aboriginal students, such as alphabet displays that show *I* is for *Indian* and *E* is for *Eskimo*. Reciting rhymes or songs that stereotype or diminish a culture (such as "One little, two little, three little Indians...") is inappropriate. When using commercial displays, select those that respectfully include all races.

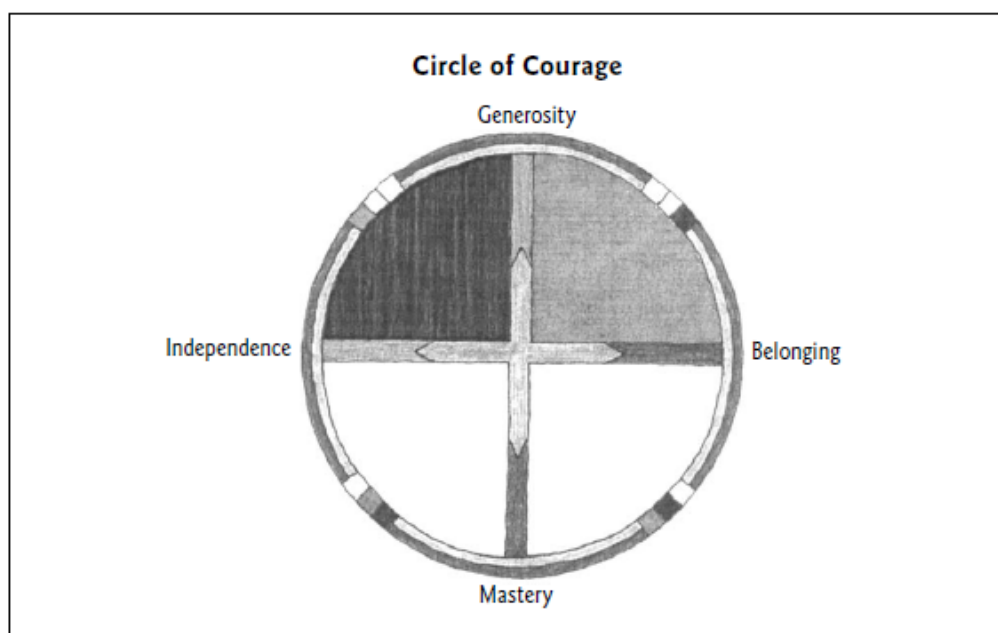


- Avoid singling out Aboriginal students and asking them to describe their families' traditions or their peoples' culture(s). Do not assume that because a student is Aboriginal he or she knows or can speak on behalf of the community. Take steps to recognize and validate all aspects of the knowledge students bring with them and assist them in their ongoing quest for personal and cultural affirmation. Information that is shared should be offered voluntarily.
- Make every effort to utilize locally relevant curriculum materials with which students can readily identify, including materials prepared by aboriginal elders. Make effective use of local expertise, especially elders, when local cultural knowledge is being addressed in the curriculum. Ensure that elders have adequate time to present. Respect local protocols when you invite them to share their wisdom.
- Do not assume that there are no Aboriginal students in your classroom. Surnames do not always identify ancestry, nor does physical appearance. Speak respectfully about Aboriginal culture even or especially when Aboriginal students are not present.
- Support efforts to maintain local cultures, traditional histories and languages. Offer courses in Aboriginal studies and Aboriginal languages. Where possible ensure that Aboriginal teachers deliver the programs. Provide professional development opportunities for non-Aboriginal teachers to be better able to offer courses. Build library and classroom resources so that they reflect students' and communities' interests.
- Properly reference cultural and intellectual property rights in teaching.

Circle of Courage

Educators Larry Brendtro, Martin Brokenleg and Steve Van Bockern have devised a model of youth empowerment that they call the Circle of Courage. This model is based on three areas of research: contemporary knowledge, the wisdom and teaching of workers in human development, and Aboriginal theories about child rearing.

The Circle of Courage is founded on four main values (belonging, mastery, independence and generosity) and promotes a reclaiming environment; that is, the aim of the program is to lead youth to claim something that has been devalued. In doing this, youth are encouraged to live more meaningful, enriched lives, which leads to increased respect for youth in society at large. For more information, go to the Reclaiming Youth Network at www.Reclaiming.com.



Talking Circles

Talking circles are based on the sacred traditions of sharing circles. Talking circles create a safe environment for participants to share their point of view with others. In a talking circle everyone is equal and everyone belongs. Participants in a talking circle learn to listen to and respect the views of others. The intention is to open people's hearts so that they can understand and connect with one another.

Teachers can use talking circles to solve disputes, get input or feedback on an issue or topic, or share stories and personal anecdotes. Following are the steps in a typical talking circle as identified in *Our Words, Our Ways* (Alberta Education 2005):

- Participants sit in a circle, which symbolizes completeness.
- Ground rules are reviewed. For example:
 - Everyone's contributions are equally important.
 - People should say what they feel or believe, beginning with "I-statements" (for example, "I feel that...")
 - All comments should directly address the question or the issue, not comments another person has made. Both negative and positive comments about what others say should be avoided.
- An everyday object such as a rock or pencil is sometimes used as a talking object.
- When the talking object is placed in someone's hands, it is that person's turn to share his or her thoughts, without interruption. The object is then passed to the next person in a clockwise direction.
- Whoever is holding the object has the right to speak, and others have the responsibility to listen.
- Everyone listens in a nonjudgmental way.
- Silence is an acceptable response. There must be no negative reaction to the phrase, "I pass."

- Speakers should feel free to express themselves in any way that is comfortable to them (for example, sharing a story or a personal experience, using examples or metaphors).

An Aboriginal grandfather was talking to his grandson about how he felt about the tragedy that occurred on September 11, 2001.

He said, “I feel as if I have two wolves fighting in my heart. One wolf is vengeful, angry and violent. The other wolf is loving and compassionate.”

The grandson asked him, “Which wolf will win the fight in your heart?”

The grandfather answered, “The one I feed.”

—Tanzen Two Feather



To the Seventh Generation

*Survive
Keep hopes and dreams
Take care of yourself
Remember your spirit
Be there for each other
Respect courage
Share knowledge
Always keep learning
Remember your values*

—Elder, *Strengthening the Sacred Circle: 2000 and Beyond*