

WALKING TOGETHER

First Nations, Métis and Inuit Perspectives in Curriculum

Healing Historical Trauma Residential Schools

Excerpt from *Peoples and Cultural Change*

Teacher Resource

Government of Alberta ■





RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS

Excerpt from *Peoples and Cultural Change Teacher Resource*

RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS

Over seventy years, more than 86 000 First Nations, Métis, and Inuit children aged four to sixteen attended residential schools across Canada, in every province and territory except New Brunswick, Newfoundland, and Prince Edward Island. Of the 130 residential schools that existed, most had ceased to operate by the mid-1970s. The last federally run residential school in Canada, the Gordon Residential School in southeast Saskatchewan, closed in 1996. By 2005, the average age of former students was sixty. Many had already died.

In May 2005, Assembly of First Nations National Chief Phil Fontaine signed an agreement with Canada on the need to resolve the harm caused by residential schools. The federal government appointed the Honourable Frank Iacobucci, a former Supreme Court justice, as its representative in discussions.

In November 2005, the Assembly of First Nations and the federal government successfully negotiated a deal for a \$2-billion compensation package for former students of residential schools. Under the agreement-in-principle, more than 80 000 former students would be eligible to receive an initial payment of \$10 000 plus \$3000 for each year they attended residential school. Claims of sexual assault or serious abuse would be dealt with in a separate process. Persons aged sixty-five and older could apply for a fast-track advance payment of \$8000.

The agreement-in-principle also identified continued funding for a commemoration initiative, consisting of events, projects, and memorials at a national and community level. An existing commemoration project would receive \$10 million, and the Aboriginal Healing Foundation would receive \$125 million.

Truth and Reconciliation

Another area identified was the truth and reconciliation process, an initiative to raise awareness of the impact on human dignity caused by residential schools. With \$60 million in funding, its goal is to create a shared narrative of former students and their families in a culturally appropriate way.

A form of restorative justice, the truth and reconciliation process seeks to heal relations between opposing sides by uncovering facts, distinguishing truth from lies, and allowing for acknowledgement, appropriate public mourning, forgiveness, and healing.



Implementing the Agreement-in-Principle

The draft compensation package is subject to approval of the courts. Days after its signing, the Liberal government toppled after a non-confidence vote. In January 2006, the new prime minister, Stephen Harper, assured the Assembly of First Nations that he would honour the agreement. Although initial expectations were that court approval of the agreement-in-principle would be obtained in the spring of 2006 with fast-track payments being released earlier in the year, four months later the new Conservative government had taken no solid steps towards reaching a final deal. A number of Elders died in the interim.

In April 2006, the Department of Indian Affairs announced a reversal in policy, stating that elderly former students would not be given fast-track advance payments before the draft compensation deal is finalized. A spokesperson for Indian Residential Schools Resolution Canada expected a final agreement to be reached in a few weeks. Compensation payments would likely not be received until 2007.

Where Are the Children?

In March 2005, a partnership project entitled *Where Are the Children? — Healing the Legacy of the Residential Schools* was launched in Ottawa. Co-produced by the Aboriginal Healing Foundation, the Legacy of Hope Foundation, Library and Archives Canada, and the Aboriginal run computing organization Donna Cona, the project includes a travelling exhibition and a virtual exhibition at www.wherethechildren.ca. The website presents video clips, simulated tours, and archival photographs from 1880 to the 1960s.

"The importance of the virtual exhibition was brought into sharp focus in 2001, when Aboriginal youth at the Aboriginal Healing Foundation Youth Advisory meeting in Edmonton expressed a lack of knowledge of the residential school history," said Richard Kistabish, president of the Legacy of Hope Foundation. "They felt that awareness of this chapter in their history should be the central factor in healing and reconciliation."

In 2006, the Inuit Youth Council in Iqaluit told the Aboriginal Healing Foundation that young people would benefit from hearing stories of former residential school students. Youth Council president Jason Tologanak said Inuit youth hoped for a national meeting, indicating information from television or the Internet was not enough to provide a base knowledge of this part of their history.

Aboriginal Healing Foundation

The Aboriginal Healing Foundation (AHF) was created in 1998 under the management of chair Georges Erasmus and a seventeen-member board of directors with a mandate to design, manage, and implement a healing strategy for former residential school students. It was initiated following discussions with former students, members of the healing community, the Assembly of First Nations, the Congress of Aboriginal Peoples, the Inuit Tapirisat of Canada, the Métis National Council, and the Native Women's Association of Canada.

In January 2006, the foundation released a three-volume final report detailing its activities over the previous six years, along with a forty-eight page summary booklet entitled *A Healing Journey*. Without further funding, the foundation will close its doors in March 2007.



The AHF established the Legacy of Hope Foundation in 2001 to work in conjunction with, build on the success of, and eventually take over its work.

Resources for Further Information

Aboriginal Healing Foundation, www.ahf.ca

Assembly of First Nations, Indian Residential Schools Unit, www.afn.ca/residentialschools

Indian Residential Schools Resolution Canada, www.irsr-rqpi.gc.ca

Legacy of Hope Foundation, www.legacyofhope.ca

Where Are the Children? — Healing the Legacy of the Residential Schools,
www.wherearethechildren.ca