



Providing Context for Teaching Practise - A Short History of Indigenous Education in Canada **focused on First Nations education, as the project this is developed for is related to the Anishinabeg**

Traditional Teaching Methods

Traditionally, the act of teaching in First Nations was an integrated process. Children were taught survival skills, emotional resiliency, spiritual traditions, cultural practices, good relations and knowledge of the land by adults and elders as well as older siblings. Teaching was done in circles such as lodges, sweat lodges, medicine lodges, gatherings, and ceremonies. Learning was relevant to life and to responsibilities one held and was integrated into everyday life.

Children and youth learned through oral storytelling which was often done in the long winters. They also learned through music and traditionally; each song is taught with the teaching behind it being shared before children learn the song itself. Stories were passed on and transformed by the voices of the storytellers and those who listened. Children were encouraged to come to their own understandings of stories and the lessons contained in them.

Many traditional stories and collective memories were passed on using arts and crafts that had specific shared meaning. For examples, pictographs and petroglyphs on stone walls, cliffs, and shorelines contained communal knowledge that medicine people knew the meaning for. Some of that cultural knowledge is still valued in many nations and some has been lost through the 500 years of cultural genocide that our nations have experienced.

Other visual imagery was and is present from objects such as beadwork, baskets, sculptures, bowls, staffs, regalia, drums, clothing, and other art forms. The symbols on these objects have meaning and these images were used to teach children and youth about the world views, spiritual practices, clan teachings and other essential life understandings.

As the nations are diverse, we cannot as educators, generalize about what is to be learned from oral history and visual traditions, yet we can learn to integrate these approaches into our teaching methods.

Children and youth also learned by observing adults, their role models and by being shown how to do things. They learned by hands on learning and by responsibilities. They learned by following adults and by ceremony.

This type of learning differs greatly from the Eurocentric knowledge based education system that focuses on rote learning; text based learning and intellectual activities. Some First Nations had written language systems prior to European contact, these writing systems served two purposes: a) pictographs and petroglyphs that were used in medicine societies to transmit and enhance oral teaching and b) birch bark scrolls that were used by messengers to send key information from one group to another group. There were no books, as such; for learning from. All was taught through oral language and experiential learning integrated into the way we lived. Many First Nations children and youth still learn this way outside the formal school setting.

Residential Schooling and Intergenerational Trauma

After Confederation, the Canadian Government decided to implement a practice of heightened colonialization through several means. This was as an expression of the desire to establish a “Canadian” identity and nationality that omitted the voices of Indigenous nations occupying their traditional territory. First Day Schools were built on reserves and later (1876) Residential Schools. Eventually all First Nations students were sent to these at the



age of five. The purpose of these schools was to assimilate the children into European values and Christianity. The schools served to eliminate First Nations' languages, cultural traditions, and traditional knowledge and replace the world views through indoctrination into Eurocentric values. Inuit and Métis children were also sent to some residential schools.

The Canadian government paid several churches (including the Catholic Church, the Anglican Church, the United Church, and later the Moravian Church) to run the schools. Children were forced to speak English or French, denied access to their family including their siblings of the other gender, and to learn skills for trades chosen for them by the clergy who ran the schools. Half of their day was spent in school and half working. Widespread emotional, physical and sexual abuse, as well as; murder caused intergenerational trauma still impacting on us today. The five generations of First Nations children sent to the schools were traumatized, lost their knowledge of traditional values and practices, lost their ability to speak their languages and did not learn how to be good parents. The ripple effects can still be felt to this day on many levels.

The intergenerational impact of Residential schooling cannot be underestimated and impacts not only on the learners we teach now, but also on the knowledge of the ways we humans were to interact with others, community and the natural world. This is relevant to consider as many parents and grandparents have not healed from the systematic cultural genocide experienced at residential schools and many children have not learned how to be caring, trusting and respectful young people.

Teachers need to be aware of this, so they do not assume that children know their customs, their language or their traditional knowledge. Teachers also need to be aware that the re-traumatizing of each generation because of historic remembered trauma is very present in our nations today. The final residential school closed in 1996 so many of our families are still impacted by the legacy of the abuse and trauma experienced there. We need to be sensitive to this reality as educators of First Nations children and avoid judgmental thoughts about how children relate to others.

When you teach in an urban school you need to be aware that ELLs may be both newcomers to Canada and Indigenous persons raised in their own language. The sensitivity to how you tell the stories of Indigenous peoples is imperative either way, as students may have friends they share the classwork with and we are setting a tone of mutual respect and acknowledgement of past traumas as we attempt as nations to work together for reconciliation of right relations.

Other Cultural Genocide and impact on Traditional Knowledge

There are other reasons why children in your classes may not know about traditional knowledge about dogs. In 1885, the Federal Government banned the Potlatch which was a traditional giveaway ceremony of North West Coast First Nations. They later made all ceremonies and gatherings illegal and seized many sacred items. They also arrested some elders. The sacred items were sold to collectors, given to museums or destroyed. The Canadian government has just started dealing with the issue of repatriation of sacred items so that artworks and crafts seized in unethical manner are being returned to the rightful descendants of specific nations.

Native people began to stop their traditional spiritual practices or hide in remote locations in order to do them. It became a risk to hold big ceremonies and teaching lodges, therefore much was lost and only a few people met to carry on their ancestors' traditions. Although legally this ended in 1951, there are still many elders who do not trust that their knowledge can be safely passed on. Consider this as you start to invite elders into your schools.



Also in day schools, children were not allowed to speak their language and many learned to be ashamed of traditional knowledge and activities. This impacted on their pride, sense of self-esteem and what they passed on to the next generation of young people. In some schools, this continues to happen today.

Also many families moved off reserve to rural and urban centers. Their languages were not available (and in many places continue to not be available) in schools. This dislocation, from the land of the ancestors, impacts on youth, as does the associated social issues that urbanization brings to Indigenous peoples worldwide. Children and youth become influenced by other world views and don't always learn to appreciate their own cultural values.

Entire First Nations have been removed and relocated from their traditional territories by the government for various reasons. That dislocation has an impact on those nations' wellbeing and cultural survival.

1972- Indian Education for Indian Children – The National Indian Brotherhood was started by some First Nations chiefs in the 1940s and later replaced by the Assembly of First Nations. In 1972, it released a document on the education of First Nations elementary and secondary students across Canada. This document was a seminal piece in that it advocated for culturally authentic education, revitalization and preservation of original languages, and effective education that not only provided First Nations children with opportunities to feel pride in who they are, but to prepare for life as adults in modern times. Since then, other documents such as the report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples has called for an education system for First Nations' children that supports the revitalization of languages, cultures, and worldviews, while giving young people the skills they need to have meaningful work and lead good lives.

Native Teacher Education movement in Faculties of Education

In the last twenty years there have been many Universities that have developed Native Education programs that train teachers to teach in schools run by their nations. This movement is also now producing research that advocates for not only authenticity in the curriculum that First Nations students learn from, but for measures to improve their success in school. As more First Nations candidates graduate from Faculties of Education and more Aboriginal professors are hired to train them there is an understanding that these adults are significant role models for students in reserve schools and in urban settings with mixed populations.

FNIM Education in Ontario

In 2007, the Ontario government published its Framework for the Education of FNIM students in Ontario. Also they started funding all school boards through their framework for funding, in order to encourage FNIM perspective across the curriculum. This has brought many teachers to have an increased awareness of Indigenous nations, their histories, ITK, languages, and contemporary realities.

In 2016, the release of the report of the Truth and Reconciliation commission recommendations encouraged all MOE's to embed Indigenous content in every subject area for K-12. The MOE in Ontario has started re-writing overall expectations to ensure this happens and is providing both Indigenous and educational organizations with grants to produce authentic resources for teachers. FNMIEO.com has many excellent resources made in partnership with Universities and other subject associations.