

Residential Schools

Contents

Tips for Teaching Controversial Issues

Lesson Overview

Purpose

Resources

Teacher Notes

Activity

Background

“I Lost My Talk” by Rita Joe

Quiz

Culminating Task

Resources

Essay Rubric

CBC Video Clips

Books

Websites

Tips for Teaching Controversial Issues

The teaching of value-laden issues has generated much controversy. There is some basic consensus on the fundamental moral and ethical values in our society and that these values can be taught in a meaningful way.

It is assumed in Canadian Studies that there are fundamental values on which there is agreement. It is also assumed that there are many disagreements and that students need to learn to deal with controversy. The social studies and history curricula provide students with learning experiences that will help them identify some of the fundamental value positions of society and how these arose. This curriculum deals with controversy, even invites it. However, it does not suggest that any belief is as good as any other belief. Therefore, this curriculum makes no attempt to be objective in the sense of being value free.

Canadian Studies gives students opportunities to examine controversial issues. Debating these issues will provide students with the opportunity to apply concepts and higher order thinking skills in organizing, interpreting and communicating information meaningfully. In this process, students can begin to understand the role of values as the basis for making inferences, that values provide us with evaluative criteria, and that we depend upon the traditions of Canadian society to provide us with guidelines. These criteria include: human dignity, basic rights and responsibilities as defined in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, and respect of, and tolerance for, individual differences.

There are many methods to teach controversial issues in the classroom. As these issues touch personal beliefs and trigger emotional reactions, these methods are sometimes difficult to conduct in an orderly fashion.

The following ideas may assist teachers:

- Recognize the general legitimacy of controversy as a part of society, and that students must learn to discuss the issues and problems presented.
- Establish ordered ways of proceeding: discussions, debates, take a stand, continuum, mediation, etc. Create and agree on effective rules.
- Concentrate on evidence and valid information.
- Represent the opposing positions accurately and fairly.
- Make sure to clarify the issue, so that everyone understands where there is a disagreement and where there is agreement (to avoid simultaneous monologues).
- Identify core issues.
- Avoid the use of slogans.
- Talk about concrete issues before raising the discussion to a level of abstraction.
- Allow the students to question your position.
- Admit doubts, difficulties, and weaknesses in your position.
- Teach understanding by re-stating the perspective of others. Have participants paraphrase what they hear to gain this skill.
- Demonstrate respect for all opinions.
- Establish means of closure: examine consequences and consider alternatives.

Overview

This lesson will introduce students to the residential school system developed by the federal government for Native youth during the late 19th and much of the 20th centuries in Canada. Students will be introduced to the concept of **assimilation** and will explore the reasons for the introduction of these educational facilities, the roles of both government and Churches in the running of these institutions, the lasting effects these schools had on those individuals who attended them and Native culture as a whole, and the attempts made to compensate the victims of abuses at these facilities throughout their existence.

Teacher Notes:

1. Introduce the lesson by having the students peruse the items provided on the Residential Schools Scrapbook Pages (attached). Read aloud some of the testimonials provided by the students of the schools and reflect on the pictures in either a group or class setting.
2. Distribute and read the poem “I Lost My Talk”, by Rita Joe, and have the students answer the accompanying questions (both attached). Discuss answers with the students and stress the fact that Ms. Joe attended a residential school while growing up in Nova Scotia and the feelings and emotions she associates with that experience.
3. Begin researching residential schools by employing the question/answer format as it is laid out in the information sheet provided (attached). This could be done by the teacher reviewing the information on overheads, the students reading the information themselves via handouts, or by having the students participate in a jigsaw-type group activity, with individual students responsible for reporting information back to their home group.
4. When reviewing the information with the students, teachers can access a number of short (3-7 minute) video clips from the CBC website that could be used to illustrate better the concepts explored in the question/answer format. These video clips (along with the corresponding questions) are listed on the document provided (attached). More information for teachers and students is available at the CBC website.
5. Once the information gathering has been completed, teachers may then administer the “Residential Schools Quiz” (attached) as a method by which to reinforce some of the key terms and ideas outlined in the information provided.
6. As a final task for this lesson, the teacher would distribute the Culminating Assignment (attached) outlining the Grass analogy described in the assignment. Students would, over a period of time, observe and record notes on the “imprisoned” grass which would culminate in the writing task outlined. The teacher could evaluate the task using the rubric provided (attached) or could adapt their assessment methods accordingly.
7. Bring in a local guest speaker who has experience with residential schools.

ACTIVITY

Background

What were residential schools?

Residential schools were developed for Native children by the Canadian government in 1883 with two contradictory goals in mind: to “protect” Native peoples from White society, but it intended to **assimilate** them into White society at the same time. The government wanted to exclude Native peoples from having a say in their own affairs and it failed to recognize Native self-government, centralizing it within the federal government instead.

Prior treaties obligated the federal government to provide and maintain schools on reserves, but these proved to be expensive. By building residential schools, and by bringing the churches in to run them, costs were cut dramatically. By 1923, there were 72 such schools, and by 1931 there were 80. Legislation made school attendance compulsory for Native children between the ages of 7 and 15.

Children were completely removed from their communities, having little or no contact with their families, for it was feared students would “revert” to Native ways if they returned to the reserve. Most residential schools prohibited children from speaking their native language. Frequently, students who broke the rule were severely punished. Traditional Aboriginal dress was seen as “uncivilized”, which prompted many schools to adopt uniforms.

Until 1930, the curriculum was largely religious instruction and moral education promoting the values of White society. From then on, however, the focus was more on that of a practical nature. Sadly, one educational authority concluded that a residential school student would be lucky to reach the academic equivalent of grade five by the time he or she was 18.

These schools became grossly under-funded; and despite the concerns raised by school officials about diet, sanitation and health care, remained so until they were disbanded in the late 1960's.

(Source: Canada: Our Century, Our Story, pg. 98-100)

What was the government's role in residential schools?

The government had a deliberate policy to disrupt the social structures and economies of First Nations by forcibly removing children from their traditional cultures, spirituality and educational means. First Nations governments were displaced and nations disintegrated as a result. Languages were extinguished; traditional healing, spirituality and ceremonies were driven underground.

Quite simply, from 1894-1969, the Canadian government sought to assimilate Aboriginal people – by giving their children Christian education, teaching English (or French), taking them from their family environments and replacing their values with European values. Part of the plan was to train them to be farmers or housekeepers (but not so skilled as to be a threat to the outside economy). These schools were funded by the federal government. Further, the Indian Act included a clause that attendance was mandatory and failure to comply could result in fines or imprisonment of the parents.

During their schooling, students often experienced a variety of abuses inflicted in part from the racist values of society at the time and from people who administered the school.

The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples recommended a public inquiry to hold public hearings to document and investigate the origins and effects of residential schools policies and practices; and to recommend remedial action such as apologies, compensation of communities and funding for treatment for affected individuals and their families.

(Source: Residential Schools Update, AFN Health Secretariat, March 1998)

What was the aim of the churches involved in residential schooling?

Four churches were involved in the operation of residential schools for Indian children: various orders of the Roman Catholic Church; the Church of England (or Anglican Church); the Methodist (or United) Church; and the Presbyterian Church. An estimated 100 000 to 150 000 Aboriginal children attended residential schools, representing about 20% of the potential First Nation status population.

The Churches wished to spread the gospel, and to help young people to survive in a world where the old ways of life seemed to be vanishing, such as the buffalo hunt. For example, the Oblates (order of the Roman Catholic Church) sought **“the development of a child’s character in accordance with the concept of Christian education”**. All the Churches wished to evangelize – bring Christian gospel to Aboriginal people. Sometimes this was done in conjunction with Native spirituality – usually, it was at the expense of Native traditions.

However, whatever the good intentions of the Churches involved, they now admit that the consequences were tragic for First Nation people. The good intentions could not hide the injustice of the system. During the time they operated residential schools, the Churches explicitly supported the federal government’s assimilation goals in running the schools. Government paid for capital expenditures and staff salaries through operating grants: the Churches had responsibility for the day to day atmosphere and school activities. After 1969, the Churches withdrew from running the schools and control passed from to the federal government and the individual Bands.

(Source: Residential Schools Update, AFN Health Secretariat, March 1998)

What were some of the effects of residential schooling on First Nations people?

The effects of residential schools have been far-reaching and diverse. Some commentators consider the residential schools an instrument of genocide. Every First Nations group has suffered a disintegration of political and social institutions, of culture, language, religion and the economic existence. The destruction of the personal security, liberty, health, dignity and even the lives of First Nations individuals have been felt by successive generations and in various sectors of First Nations societies.

The essence of genocide is a purposeful intent to destroy a group out of existence. In many ways, this intention was achieved. Scores of First Nations children died from disease while in the care of residential schools; others were emotionally and spiritually destroyed by the harsh discipline and living conditions. Confinement, humiliations, lack of privacy, physical, sexual and psychological abuses resulted in dislocation, loss of pride and self-respect, and loss of identity within family, community and nation.

We speak of multi-generational effects. The grievous levels of suicide, alcoholism, solvent abuse and family violence in some First Nation communities are attributed to the lingering effects of residential schools. This includes the psychological pain which could not be mentioned; the sufferings which could not be named, but which ripple through the lives of survivors and children.

The schools alienated Aboriginal people from their culture by separating children from their families, forbidding them to speak their languages or to honour their traditions. This has taken a toll on succeeding generations. For example, one generation of children were punished for speaking their languages; when they became parents, they did not teach their children their native tongue, to protect them; the third generation was denied an opportunity to learn their languages, cultures, traditions and is now attempting to recover that knowledge.

It is widely believed that those who attended residential schools lost their ability to parent and their identity as Aboriginal people. This psychological trauma would have been passed on to subsequent generations of children. The long-term cumulative effects of the schooling upon those who suffered has been termed “residential school syndrome”.

(Source: Residential Schools Update, AFN Health Secretariat, March 1998)

Why were residential schools harmful?

Not all residential school experiences produced unhappy or tragic experiences and we therefore must be cautious about over generalizing. However, supported by a broad government policy of assimilation, residential schooling had detrimental effects on the overall health and well being of First Nations.

Residential schools **“were the product of a particular era, an era where Indians and Inuit were not highly valued by the non native community”**. The schools were a product of the time when the relationship was not healthy. The attitude among those who put together the schooling program was essentially that the Indian people were to be eliminated.

While outright extermination was considered inhuman by the Churches and Government of the day, they believed the Indians could be **“civilized”**. The goal was to encourage them to give up their traditions. These would be replaced with values to assist them to blend in with the newly-formed Canadian society. These values included formal schooling, Christianity and work experiences.

The way in which these values were transmitted was dramatically different from the way First Nations children were educated traditionally. The book replaced the spoken word; strangers from another culture replaced family, elders and community members as teachers; learning through memorization of text replaced learning through observation and example. Education was no longer a lifelong, organic process or the responsibility of the entire community. In fact, the community was portrayed by the new teachers as backward, ignorant and useless to the children.

Many, many people testified at the Royal Commission of Aboriginal Peoples that, after residential school, they experienced confusion about their identity and that, afterwards they could fit into neither Native or mainstream society. Some parents began to drink after their children were in residential schools.

(Source: Residential Schools Update, AFN Health Secretariat, March 1998)

Was the discipline at residential schools any different than that at schools for non-Natives?

Views about discipline and punishment were a lot different back then. According to historians, the discipline at residential schools was different in severity and purpose from that of the mainstream schools during that period.

Historians suggest that discipline was harsher in residential schools than at their counterparts. For example, Professor J. R. Miller, an authority on the subject of residential schools, told a meeting for the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs in 1991, **“There was a great deal of physical abuse. There was a use of things which would not have been accepted in Euro-Canadian institutions at the time”**. These methods included isolation cells, severe floggings and whippings, and public humiliation.

There was also a great difference in how Aboriginal children and their families regarded what was happening. Physical discipline and punishment was accepted by the mainstream population at the time. The idea that a child could be hit with a ruler on the palm of the hand for not knowing an answer at school was not usually challenged. Mainstream child rearing allowed for spanking and strapping as routine methods used by parents and teachers to punish disobedient, “lazy” and uncooperative children – boys more so than girls.

However, First Nations child-rearing practices did not condone the use of physical violence with children. Many European observers commented on the lack of force used with children and lack of coercion used by parents. To European eyes, Aboriginal children “ran wild”, since they were not expected to be silent and still but to run and play, to explore their environment and use their bodies.

Traditional parenting methods used such tools as teasing, modeling good behaviour, putting older siblings in charge of younger ones, and using storytelling to instruct. Above all was the principle of non-interference.

These different cultural expectations meant that a non-Native child accepted that his or her parents, teachers and other guardians would use physical force if deemed necessary, and discipline was the unpleasant part of living under adult authority. For Aboriginal children, coercive and violent actions by adults would likely be seen as abusive and terrifying, being outside their normal experiences and expectations.

Routine stories of bad food, cold dormitories, head shavings upon admission to schools and issuing of uniforms are reported by residential school students. Sometimes it seemed that punishment and mistreatment might more accurately be called torture as we now understand it to be; for example, sticking needles in the tongues of children who spoke their native languages must be considered as excessive and cruel. Reports of beatings inflicted on children who attempted to run away were considered excessive even at the time by school inspectors and non-Native neighbours.

(Source: Residential Schools Update, AFN Health Secretariat, March 1998)

What about the students with good experiences?

We need to be aware that not all residential schools were run by sadists and child molesters. Much depended on the school administrator. He or she set the tone in terms of how the students were treated, as souls to be Christianized, as hands to work in the school machine shops, as minds to be educated. Some administrators actually encouraged their staff to learn Native languages, allowed and accommodated parental visits, provided recreation, and fought for more money for better food and shelter. Others, unfortunately, were indifferent and generally unprepared to be put in charge of children.

Some students asked to be sent to residential schools and are grateful for the education they received. However, nearly every community is aware of children who did not have good experiences. These had a ripple effect on families and communities.

Further, beyond the question of individual abuse is the underlying purpose of residential schools, which was to assimilate First Nations people into mainstream society by discouraging their languages, spirituality and cultural practices. This ultimately corroded the structures of First Nations and the self-esteem of First Nation families.

(Source: Residential Schools Update, AFN Health Secretariat, March 1998)

ACTIVITY

Consider the following poem by Rita Joe, a Mi'kmaq poet, about attending the residential school in Shubenacadie, Nova Scotia:

I Lost My Talk

***I lost my talk
The talk you took away.
When I was a little girl
At Shubenacadie school.***

***You snatched it away:
I speak like you
I think like you
I create like you
The scrambled ballad, about my world.***

***Two ways I talk
Both ways I say,
Your way is more powerful.***

***So gently I offer my hand and ask,
Let me find my talk
So I can teach you about me.***

Questions:

1. What you think this poem means?
2. What is the poet's opinion of the residential school?
3. What type of emotions is she expressing when she remembers the school?
4. What does she feel she has lost?
5. How does she hope to change the future?

ACTIVITY

Quiz

Answer the following questions either True or False.

1.	From 1845 to 1969, the Canadian government sought to assimilate Aboriginal people.	True__	False__
2.	During school, students often experienced a variety of abuses.	True__	False__
3.	There were six (6) Churches involved in the operation of residential schools for Aboriginal children.	True__	False__
4.	Churches never admitted that the consequences of the residential schools were tragic for Aboriginal people.	True__	False__
5.	Residential schools alienated Aboriginal people from their culture, language and traditions.	True__	False__
6.	Some people go as far as to believe that residential schools were an instrument of genocide.	True__	False__
7.	All residential schools produced unhappy or tragic experiences.	True__	False__
8.	The goals of the residential schools were to encourage children to give up their traditions and replace their values with formal schooling, Christianity and work experiences.	True__	False__
9.	Traditional Aboriginal child-rearing practices condone the use of physical violence with children.	True__	False__
10.	Some Aboriginal students asked to be sent to residential school and are grateful for the education that they received.	True__	False__

ACTIVITY

Culminating Task

Aboriginal children who attended residential school underwent a devastating process of attempted assimilation. The normal and healthy process of change and growth stopped for aboriginal children when they were forced to live under conditions that were physically, psychologically and spiritually unhealthy. When the growth and development of a living thing is interrupted, that living thing will still try to keep growing, but under circumstances that are harmful to normal development.

As an example of this, find a section of grass (or plants or weeds) you can monitor over the course of a month or so. Place a small box over the grass. Check the progress of the grass every week and keep track of your observations. For example, describe in detail what the grass looked like before you placed the box there - its colour, the shape of the stalks, the feeling it evokes in you. Compare this to the grass once it has been covered, i.e., any growth, new flowers, etc.

Now, write a short essay with the following thesis:

Any society or civilization whose normal development is obstructed will have difficult time maintaining a balanced and healthy way of life.

Be sure to make reference to the field notes of your observations of the grass, and to the residential school experience of aboriginal people.

For a follow-up to this 'experiment,' remove the box from the grass and monitor how it fares once it is back in its natural environment. In your essay, compare these further observations to aboriginal self-government.

Be sure to include all of your field notes as part of your evaluation, which will be based on the accompanying rubric.

RESOURCES

Essay Rubric

	Focus	Support	Organization	Style	Mechanics
Superior Quality 4	Controlling idea is insightful and expressed clearly	Strong examples and explanations support the controlling idea effectively	Organization is evident throughout	Strong control of vocabulary, sentence construction and level of language	Skillful control of spelling, grammar and punctuation
High Quality 3	Remains on topic throughout States main idea and supporting ideas in introduction Relates conclusion directly to main idea	Examples, reasons and explanations are: -relevant -accurate -convincing -specific	Has effective introduction, body and conclusion Has unified paragraphs with topic, supporting, concluding sentences Paragraphs flow from one to the next and sentences are linked within the paragraph	Effective sentence variety Effective vocabulary: varied, accurate Formal level of language	No major errors Few minor errors
Acceptable Quality 2	Says something about the topic Remains on topic States main idea only indirectly Relates three supporting ideas only adequately	Examples, reasons, and explanations are: -partially relevant, -appropriate -developed unsatisfactorily	Has introduction, body and conclusion Has topic sentence and some supporting sentences Some attempt to connect paragraphs and to make connections within the paragraph	Attempts sentence variety Attempt variety and accuracy in vocabulary Formal level of language generally	Some major errors Excessive minor errors
Unacceptable 1	Undeveloped main idea No connection of ideas	Examples, reasons, and explanations are: -vague -repetitious -inaccurate, illogical or absent	Introduction, body or conclusion missing Minimal or no paragraphing skills	Imprecise vocabulary Repetitive sentence structure Colloquialism, slang	Numerous major and minor errors interfere with communication
Mark:	/4	/4	/4	/4	/4
Comments					

RESOURCES

CBC Video Clips

What are residential schools?

1. A New Future (broadcast March 13th 1955)

http://archives.cbc.ca/IDC-1-70-692-4003/disasters_tragedies/residential_schools/clip1

What was the government's role in residential schools?

2. Government takes over Residential Schools (broadcast May 1, 1969)

http://archives.cbc.ca/IDC-1-70-692-4004/disasters_tragedies/residential_schools/clip2

What was the aim of the churches involved in residential schooling?

What were some of the effects of Residential schooling on First Nations people?

3. Losing Native Languages (broadcast February 7, 1970)

http://archives.cbc.ca/IDC-1-70-692-4005/disasters_tragedies/residential_schools/clip3

Why were residential schools harmful?

4. For survivors, the hurt comes back (broadcast March 15, 1991)

http://archives.cbc.ca/IDC-1-70-692-4007/disasters_tragedies/residential_schools/clip5

5. Abuse affects the next generation (broadcast April 2, 1993)

http://archives.cbc.ca/IDC-1-70-692-4008/disasters_tragedies/residential_schools/clip6

Was the discipline at Residential Schools any different than at schools for non-Natives?

What about the students with good experiences?

6. The churches explain (broadcast November 8, 1993)

http://archives.cbc.ca/IDC-1-70-692-4009/disasters_tragedies/residential_schools/clip7

7. 'We are deeply sorry . . .' (broadcast January 7, 1998)

http://archives.cbc.ca/IDC-1-70-692-4011/disasters_tragedies/residential_schools/clip9

Conclusion

8. An agreement for the ages (broadcast November 23, 2005)

http://archives.cbc.ca/IDC-1-70-692-12716/disasters_tragedies/residential_schools/clip13

Books

Sterling, Shirley. *My Name is Seepeetza*. Toronto: Douglas & McIntyre Groundwood. 1992. Chronicles a young girl's life at a residential school, providing a comparison of positive and negative experiences. It covers a variety of universal themes. An excellent way to introduce the topic to today's students. Ideal for English, Social Studies, or Canadian History classes. West Coast Book Prize Society Best Book Award Winner.

Websites

<http://www.schoolnet.ca/aboriginal/issues/index-e.html>