

Building Social Inclusion

By Combating Racism

EDUCATION RESOURCES

GRADES 9 – 12

Lakehead Social Planning Council

2007

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Public Health Agency of Canada &
Social Planning Network of Ontario

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Disclaimer

While every effort has been made to use the accurate and current information, we are not responsible for errors, omissions, or outdated information. Please communicate any necessary revisions on the feedback form.

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INTRODUCTION

In recognition of the many cultural differences that exist amongst Aboriginal peoples, it is important to consider the following:

- **Aboriginal peoples' relationship with the natural world**
Aboriginal cultures incorporate a distinctive sense of peoples' relationship with the natural world—a relationship characterized by a sense of connectedness, respect, and stewardship.
- **Aboriginal influence**
The wisdom and knowledge embedded within Aboriginal cultures continue to influence the world.
- **The endurance of Aboriginal traditions**
Aboriginal languages and traditions are living expressions of dynamic cultures.
- **Aboriginal languages and communications**
Aboriginal peoples' spoken/written languages, communication protocols, and other forms of communication reflect distinctive world views.
- **Aboriginal artistic traditions**
Aboriginal artistic traditions are vital expressions of Aboriginal cultures.
- **Aboriginal social, economic, and political systems**
The sophistication of traditional Aboriginal social, economic, and political systems continues to be a source of strength and direction for Aboriginal people.
- **The evolution of human rights and freedoms, with reference to Aboriginal people**
Aboriginal people are continuing to define and affirm their individual and collective rights and freedoms.

Planning Your Program

There are many approaches a teacher may take to make the classroom reflect a more traditional Aboriginal teaching and learning situation. Throughout the resource, teachers will find frequent reference to these teaching and learning techniques:

- **Aboriginal Elders and other knowledgeable community members as guest speakers/presenters**
Contacting local community Aboriginal agencies for assistance in drawing on the local Aboriginal community for knowledge and support is an important instructional strategy in the context of Aboriginal education and is used throughout the resource (refer to ***Aboriginal Presence in Our Schools: A Guide for Staff***).
- **Student-centred, experiential instructional strategies**
Although these can initially prove somewhat time consuming, once students become familiar with a particular approach (e.g., field trips, debate, interviewing, role play), that strategy can be reused with less student orientation.
- **Class presentations**
The oral tradition is a central part of Aboriginal cultures. In this context, class presentations of learnings by individual students or groups are an especially appropriate and relevant instructional and assessment technique.

As well as providing students with opportunities to practice skills that can be applied in many contexts, these instructional approaches demonstrate important aspects of Aboriginal culture.

Adapting instruction to your local situation

There are many Aboriginal language groups. To make this diversity meaningful for students and to ensure that information is accurate, authentic, and grounded in the perspective of Aboriginal peoples, teachers and students should keep in mind the following:

- The local area should be the first focus of study. Then, if appropriate, teachers can expand the content to include other territories, including those from which students and their families originate.
- Where a class includes a significant number of Aboriginal students, it is important not to assume that these students are fully knowledgeable about the traditions and culture of their people.

Building a support network

Building strong community links—engaging in consultation with the local Aboriginal people and seeking their support and assistance for what is being taught—extends the boundary of the classroom and helps the teacher to create active, participatory, experiential learning opportunities for students (many of the activities included in this document, for example, recommend that guest speakers be invited from the local community). To accomplish this, teachers will need to develop a library of learning materials about the local Aboriginal community and build a network of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people and organizations that can provide resources, expertise, and/or important local contacts.

Before initiating contacts with Elders, cultural resource people and cultural centres (in urban areas, Aboriginal organizations such as Friendship Centres), it may be helpful to consult with other teachers in the school and district, and local Aboriginal support workers. They can help secure local community support and serve as valuable sources of information and experience.

Dealing with sensitive and controversial topics

Aboriginal history and present issues include several sensitive areas, such as residential schools, land claims, racism, and treaties that may have had in the past, and continue to have, a profound effect on many local people.

The following outline will help teachers recognize and deal with sensitive issues and controversial topics.

Sensitive Issues

Before showing videos of or initiating instructional activities on sensitive and/or controversial topics, teachers should inform students that people who are most knowledgeable about the issues may have painful memories to share, and that while speakers who share difficult experiences may feel hurt or anger, they also have the strength to share their feelings with others in order to promote healing and understanding.

It is important that the teacher be prepared to help students deal with the difficult emotions they may feel upon encountering certain aspects of Aboriginal history and current events. This may involve consulting with people who are knowledgeable about the issue and/or who are trained to counsel students (e.g., members of the Aboriginal community, school counselling staff).

Controversial Topics

A controversial topic has two important characteristics:

- It contains one or more issues that have no clear resolution on which all parties can agree or for which there are no readily available resolutions.
- The issue(s) have public prominence and have received media attention over a period of time.

Before attempting to teach a controversial topic, teachers should conduct a self-reflection activity in which they identify their own biases, recognizing and listing them so that they are able to address them before and during teaching.

The following ground rules will also help to ensure that the topic is presented fairly and with sensitivity:

- A classroom is not a platform.
- Controversy is best taught through discussion rather than instruction.
- Discussion should protect divergence of view among participants.
- A teacher has responsibility for ensuring exploration of the issue so the discussion promotes understanding and is not merely an exchange of intolerance.

The lesson plan for teaching a controversial topic should also include:

- Ground rules for interaction and discussion (e.g., respect and value each other's offerings, acknowledge discomfort)
- Clear division of tasks and responsibilities
- Time to deal with students' concerns and questions.

Finally, in creating a classroom strategy or strategies such as large and small group discussions, independent research, and/or role plays, encourage students to analyze the issue by asking the following questions:

- What is the issue about?
- What are the arguments?
- What is assumed?
- How are the arguments manipulated?

Adapted from ***Shared Learnings: Integrating BC Aboriginal Content K-10*** —
www.sd79.bc.ca/programs/abed/Shared_Learnings_06.pdf.

As another resource, please refer to ***Aboriginal Presence in Our Schools: A Guide for Staff***.

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Aboriginal Resource

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