



Teacher's Guide

*With a spirit of openness we share
the impacts of Residential Schools, across
families, cultures and nations.*

**Working with Elders
to teach the history of the
Canadian Indian Residential School Experience**

Project Created By:
Vancouver Aboriginal Community Policing Centre Society
www.CirclesOfUnderstanding.org
www.vacpc.org

Contents

• Introduction	3
• About the Circles of Understanding Project	4
• The Role of Elders in Traditional Indigenous Societies	5
• Inviting Elders into the Classroom	6
• Talking Circles with Elders	7
• Guidelines for Ethical Practice with Diverse Populations	9
• Timeline of Indian Residential Schools	11
• Historical Quotes	13
• A Few Excellent Resources	14
• Acknowledgments	15

Introduction

This Teachers' Guide to working with Elders when teaching the history of Canadian Indian Residential Schools was created with funding provided to the Vancouver Aboriginal Community Policing Centre Society (VACPCS) by Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada.

The Society sought this funding to bring awareness to the roots of the social ills that continue to oppress Aboriginal, Inuit, Métis, Status, non-Status, on-reserve and off-reserve Indigenous people – especially those who seem to have a very challenging time in attaining and maintaining a lifestyle that is conducive to safety and security for themselves, their families and the larger community.

Here is the opening statement of our Panel Project:

Understanding and compassion are important contributions to the healing that is needed between our peoples, our communities and our nations. These statements are offered in the spirit of unity and healing, recognizing that we are all part of the human family. By understanding each other better, our community and country is strengthened. A society based on honour, respect, fairness and compassion is one in which all children, all families, and all generations can grow up in safety and reach their full potential.

We offer this guide in the spirit of unity and cooperation, as well as with the hope that it will assist you in bringing insight and understanding regarding this aspect of Canadian history and its continuing impact upon the original people of Canada.



Circles of Understanding Project

The Circles of Understanding Project was initiated to address the continuing lack of awareness on the part of many Canadians, of the history of the Canadian Indian Residential Schools.

In Phase 1, a core group of Elders and Youth gathered to develop background material for the Project. Through the sharing of their experiences of either being survivors of Residential School, or having been affected from their grandparents or parents experiences of attending Residential Schools, they developed better understanding of the issues they had been dealing with in their families and communities. They also developed caring relationships and co-created a sense of community.

One deliverable of the Circles of Understanding Project is a series of educational panels that provide historical background regarding Residential Schools, along with quotes from the Youth and Elders.

The other deliverable of the Project is a Teachers' Guide to support educators in teaching the history of Canadian Indian Residential Schools. We recognize that there are numerous excellent resources regarding all aspects of Residential Schools, including books, DVDs, and websites, and we have included a short list of these resources at the back of this pamphlet.

Based upon the Project Elders reaction to the idea of the Teachers' Guide, we opted to create a guide for inviting Elders to the classroom, and some pointers for how to invite them to share their knowledge and experience of Residential School.



Eagle Mandala
Natalie Parenteau

The Role of Elders in Traditional Indigenous Societies

Within the traditional indigenous cultures of Canada, Elders were afforded a place of deep respect. They were recognized as keepers of wisdom and knowledge; their role was vitally important to the well-being of the community. They knew the ceremonies, the teachings, the stories – all the things that made their particular culture viable – because they lived it. As one Elder put it, “Culture is how we live.”

In many communities, the Elders were the ones in charge of caring for the children, as the parents were engaged in the day-to-day activities of providing for the family. In this way the Elders were able to impart their wisdom and to role model patience and other virtues to the youngest members of the community.

As communities were decimated by disease and the removal of children, the role that the Elders filled was undermined. They felt a profound sense of loss which arose through the removal of the children, the diminishing or loss of their language and many other aspects of their culture; this sense of loss was accentuated with the loss of their role as grandparents, mentors and keepers of the culture.

As the Elders are able to tell their stories in safe and supportive circles, they find that they are able to reclaim a holistic sense of themselves and their place in the community. They become stronger in their ability to share what they learned from their own Elders, before they were taken away to Residential School, and they are able to role model for the younger generations how to overcome devastating experiences.

The Elders believe that both healing and moving forward as individuals, families and communities is achieved through telling the truth about what they experienced in the Residential Schools. Elders also understand that it takes time for change to occur, however they are keen to be an integral part of the change through taking action now.

Elders want the history of what happened in the Indian Residential Schools to be known; it is an important part of Canadian history, and the effects of the Indian Residential School system are continuing to be felt today.



Inviting Elders into the Classroom

In preparing students to learn about the Indian Residential School experience, one very important resource are local Elders. It is useful to develop a resource list of Elders. If there is an Aboriginal Education Enhancement Worker at your school, they would be an excellent resource as they can help identify Elders who would be appropriate for sharing about Residential School.

Give the Elder as much notice as possible, for even though they may be of retirement age, many Elders have full schedules. Be certain to call to confirm the date and time as the day of the presentation approaches.

An Elder's presence can provide a profound learning experience on many levels; from the teacher demonstrating respect toward the Elder, to students being able to experience the knowledge and wisdom an Elder carries, to students having the opportunity to ask their own questions from someone who lived through a particular part of history.

It is best to develop a relationship with Elders over time, so if possible, invite the Elder to visit the school, perhaps for an open house event, before the day of their presentation.

The Elder will need to know the ages of the students, the length of time they have for their presentation and if there are any particular points they should touch upon.

Be certain to ask the Elder you invite if they have any particular requirements for their comfort and well-being, i.e. do they need assistance with navigating through the school, or do they have any special dietary needs, such as non-sugar sweetener for coffee or tea, etc. Providing a comfortable chair is always welcome and if the Elder uses a cane, for instance, a chair with wheels would not be appropriate.

Be certain to provide an acknowledgment and token of appreciation to the Elder. There are numerous traditions and protocols, depending upon which nation the Elder is from, however the most important considerations are respect and gratitude. A card, hand-crafted and signed by the students would be very meaningful, as would handwritten comments by students after the presentation.

If possible, even a small honourarium would also be welcome, something to assist with transportation costs, etc.

Talking Circles with Elders

In most instances when we hold Talking Circles, the Elder will lead things off with a prayer, which usually includes an acknowledgment of the traditional territory where the circle is being held. Everyone gathers in a circle and most often stands together, sometimes holding hands, and the Elder will offer the prayer to start the circle in a good way.

One of the wonderful things “The Circle” teaches is the awareness of equality; that even though each person is unique and has their own special gifts to contribute, ultimately we are all equal in our humanity. This assists us in understanding that each person in the circle has the right to be heard; that no one person’s perspective is more valuable than another’s. Thus, even though Elders are afforded deep respect and acknowledgment due to their greater experience, they are not intrinsically more important than anyone else in the circle.

So while we always encourage young people to show respect and to pay attention to the Elder, we do it in a way that promotes *self-respect*.

In the Lakota language for instance, the word for children is “wakanyeja” which is translated as “stands sacred” – this leads us to the awareness that while children require the guidance of the adults in their lives, they are inherently worthy of being treated respectfully – they are sacred. It is through having respect role modeled for them that they learn how to treat others respectfully, and the Talking Circle is a wonderful tool for demonstrating respectful listening and speaking.

First and foremost, the guidance regarding Talking Circle etiquette is that we all listen when someone else is speaking; there is never any cross-talk or “tuning out”. One excellent means of ensuring that everyone knows whose turn it is to talk is the use of an item that becomes the “Talking Stick”. In reality, the Talking Stick can be a stone, a feather, a specially carved stick in the Northwest Coast style – or even a stick that the students cooperatively decorate. In some instances, even a special stuffed animal can be utilized to great effect. Everyone is directed to actively listen to the person holding the Talking Stick, which includes not rehearsing what to say when their turn to hold the Talking Stick arrives; this is a potent life skill.

One interesting point that must be addressed is that women who are “on their moon” or having menses, are required to ask their neighbor to hold the Talking Stick for them. This can be a little uncomfortable for young women at first; however, we explain that it arises from the fact that “in the old days,” women would be having their 4-day holiday from their regular routine and would be involved in a private ceremony. This is where the stuffed animal can be utilized to good effect; I used a teddy bear for years with all age-groups in order to sidestep this Talking Stick issue.

For an introductory circle it would be appropriate to pass the Talking Stick around and to ask each person to say their name and to share where their ancestors came from, if they know; we have found that this has an equalizing effect on people, as it assists them to connect with their territory of origin – an important aspect of Aboriginal / First Nations cultures.

Once everyone has introduced themselves, the Elder will usually begin their talk. Sometimes the Elder will begin by asking questions and sometimes they will begin by sharing stories about their topic. Very often the time will fly by, so if the teacher has the role of the “timekeeper,” once an

agreed upon amount of time has passed, the Elder will appreciate knowing how much time they have left, in order to provide time for questions from the students.

In a school setting there may only be a short time for a Talking Circle, however the value of the circle goes beyond the length of time; creating a sense of safety in community is one of the *medicines* of the circle, which goes hand in hand with working with Elders.

If it is possible, inviting the Elder to return is a wonderful way to deepen the relationship between the Elder and the students, which can be richly rewarding for all concerned.



Guidelines for Ethical Practice with Diverse Populations

1. Recognize the inherent worth of all human beings regardless of how different they may be from oneself.
2. Be aware of one's own cultural, moral, and social beliefs, and be sensitive to how they may enhance one's interactions with others or may interfere with promoting the welfare of others.
3. Recognize the power differential between oneself and others in order to diminish the differences, and to use power for the advantage of others rather than unwittingly to abuse it.
4. Study group or cultural norms in order to recognize individual differences within the larger context.
5. Be aware that theories or precepts developed to describe people from the dominant culture may apply differently to people from non-dominant cultures.
6. Recognize the reality, variety, and implications of all forms of oppression in society, and facilitate clients' examination of options in dealing with such experiences.
7. Recognize that those who are subjected to physical or sexual assault are victims of crime, and that those who assault are guilty of crimes.
8. Be knowledgeable about community resources available for diverse populations.
9. Respect, listen and learn from clients who are different from oneself in order to understand what is in their best interests.
10. Use inclusive and respectful language.
11. Share all relevant decision making with clients including goals of the interaction and the nature of proposed interventions in order to serve their best interests.
12. Ensure that consent is truly informed, keeping in mind diversity issues and cultural differences.
13. Be especially careful to be open, honest, and straightforward, remembering that persons who are oppressed may be distrustful or overly trustful of those in authority.
14. Assess accurately the source of difficulties, apportioning causality appropriately between individual, situational, and cultural factors.
15. Respect privacy and confidentiality according to the wishes of clients, and explain fully any limitations on confidentiality that may exist.

16. Evaluate the cultural meaning of dual/multiple and overlapping relationships in order to show respect and to avoid exploitation.
17. Constantly reevaluate one's competence, attitudes, and effectiveness in working with diverse populations.
18. Consult with others who may be more familiar with diversity in order to provide competent services.
19. Acknowledge one's own vulnerabilities.
20. Choose ways in which one can contribute to the making of a society that is respectful and caring of all its citizens.

Canadian Psychological Association. (2001). *Canadian Code of Ethics for Psychologist. Third edition*. Ottawa: Author.



A Condensed Timeline of Events Regarding Indian Residential Schools

- 17th Century: First missionary operated school established near Quebec City, 1620–1629
- 1831: Mohawk Indian Residential School opens in Brantford, Ontario; it became the longest-operated residential school, closing in 1969
- 1842: Bagot Commission recommends agriculture-based boarding schools, placed far from parental influence
- 1847: Egerton Ryerson's study of Indian education recommends religious-based, government-funded industrial schools
- 1850s-1860s: Assimilation of Aboriginal people through education becomes official policy
- 1857: *Gradual Civilization Act*
- 1860s–1870s: Macdonald's *National Policy*; *Homestead Act*; RCMP established to facilitate government control of West
- 1860: Management of "Indian Affairs" transferred from Imperial Government to Province of Canada
- 1867: *British North America Act*
- 1869: *Act for the Gradual Civilization of the Indian*
- 1876: First *Indian Act*
- 1879: Nicholas Flood Davin, submitted a report to Sir John A. Macdonald, with 13 recommendations concerning the creation of industrial boarding schools, modeled after schools of the same name in the United States
- 1892: Federal government and churches enter into formal partnership in the operation of Indian schools
- 1907: Indian Affairs' Chief Medical Inspector P.H. Bryce reports numerous deficiencies of the schools
- 1920: Deputy Superintendent General of Indian Affairs Duncan Campbell Scott makes residential school attendance compulsory
- 1940s–1950s: Government begins efforts to integrate Aboriginal and non- Aboriginal education
- 1944: Senior Indian Affairs officials argue for policy shift from residential to day schools
- 1958: Indian Affairs Regional Inspectors recommend abolition of residential schools
- 1969: Partnership between government and churches ends; government takes over residential school system, begins to transfer control to Indian bands
- 1970: Blue Quills first residential school to be transferred to band control
- 1980s–1990s: About one dozen residential schools operated by bands; one school operated by government at band request; gradually only a few remain, the last government-run school closing in 1996, and the last band run in 1998
- 1986–1994: Churches issue apologies for their role in residential schools: United Church (1986), Oblates of Mary Immaculate (1991), Anglican Church (1993), Presbyterian Church (1994)
- 1991: Cariboo Tribal Council publishes *Impact of the Residential School*; Phil Fontaine speaks publicly of abuse he suffered in the residential schools
- 1996: Royal Commission on Aboriginal People Final Report, Volume One, Chapter 10 concerns residential schools
- January 1998: Government's Statement of Reconciliation *Gathering Strength—Canada's Aboriginal Action Plan* includes a \$350 million healing fund

- March 1998 Aboriginal Healing Foundation established to manage fund
- 2002: Government announces an Alternative Dispute Resolution Framework to provide compensation for residential school abuse
- 2006: Government signs the *Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement* with legal representatives for Survivors, AFN, Inuit representatives, and church entities
- 2008: Premier Stephen Harper, Jack Layton & Gilles Duceppe apologize on behalf of the Canadian government for the Indian Residential School system
- 2008: Government launches the Indian Residential Schools Truth and Reconciliation Commission
- 2010: The government of Canada announces it will endorse the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, a non-binding document that describes the individual and collective rights of indigenous peoples around the world.
- September 19, 2012 – final day to submit claim through the Independent Assessment Process (IAP) to the Indian Residential Schools Adjudication Secretariat.



Historical Quotes

I want to get rid of the Indian problem. I do not think as a matter of fact, that the country ought to continuously protect a class of people who are able to stand alone ... Our objective is to continue until there is not a single Indian in Canada that has not been absorbed into the body politic and there is no Indian question, and no Indian Department, that is the whole object of the Bill.

- Duncan Campbell Scott, Deputy Superintendent, Dept of Indian Affairs 1913 -1932

A careful reading of history shows that Canada was founded on a series of treaties between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal governments which were agreements to share the land. These promises with Aboriginal people were never fully honoured but were replaced by policies intended to remove Aboriginal persons from their homelands; suppress Aboriginal nations and their governments; undermine Aboriginal cultures and identity.

– Royal Commission on Aboriginal People, 1996

The system of forced assimilation has had consequences which are with Aboriginal people today. The need for healing does not stop with the Residential School Survivors - intergenerational effects of trauma are real and pervasive and must also be addressed.

– Legacy of Hope Foundation

When the present doesn't recognize the wrongs of the past, the future takes its revenge. For that reason, we must never, never turn away from the opportunity of confronting history together – the opportunity to right a historical wrong.

– Governor General Michaëlle Jean

Two primary objectives of the Residential School system were to remove and isolate children from the influence of their homes, families, traditions and cultures, and to assimilate them into the dominant culture. These objectives were based on the assumption that Aboriginal cultures and spiritual beliefs were inferior and unequal... Today, we recognize that this policy of assimilation was wrong, has caused great harm, and has no place in our country.

– Prime Minister Stephen Harper, official apology, June 11, 2008

Books:

A National Crime: The Canadian Government and the Indian Residential School System 1879 – 1996, John S. Milloy

Resistance and Renewal, Surviving the Indian Residential School, Celia Haig-Brown

The Broken Circle: The Dark Legacy of Indian Residential Schools: A Memoir, Theodore Fontaine

Stolen From Our Embrace: The Abduction of First Nations Children and the Restoration of Aboriginal Communities, Suzanne Fournier and Ernie Crey

Unsettling the Settler Within: Indian Residential Schools, Truth Telling, and Reconciliation in Canada, Paulette Regan

First Nations 101: Tons of stuff you need to know about First Nations People, Lynda Gray

DVDs:

<http://www.olderthanamerica.com/>

<http://www.fallenfeatherproductions.com>

<http://www.thespirithasnocolour.ca/>

Websites:

www.wherearethechildren.ca

<http://www.ahf.ca/downloads/misconceptions.pdf>

Acknowledgments

We gratefully acknowledge the contributions of the following individuals and agencies:

Our Elder Advisors:

Louis Joseph
Eric MacPherson
Ruth Alfred
Patricia Tuckanow
Gertrude Pierre
Seis^lom (Glen Williams)

Our Youth Advisors:

Paul Alexander
Brittany Stewart
Anissa-Marie Innes
Ambrose Williams
Cory Robinson

Circles Coordinator/ Cultural Facilitator:	Susan Powell
Elder Engagement Coordinator:	Gertrude Pierre
Youth Engagement Coordinator:	Jolene Andrew
Project conceived and Produced by:	John Sakamoto-Kramer

Funded by:



Aboriginal Affairs and
Northern Development Canada

Affaires autochtones et
Développement du Nord Canada

Program Partners:



City of Vancouver



Vancouver Police Department