

BACKGROUND

“The Commission recommends that provincial and territorial departments of education work in concert with the Commission to develop age-appropriate educational materials about residential schools for use in public schools.”

(Truth and Reconciliation Commission Interim Report)

Rationale

Why curriculum about Indian Residential Schools? This unit was developed in response to the call by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada to develop age-appropriate educational materials about Indian Residential Schools. In its Interim Report (2012) the Commission concluded that “Canadians have been denied a full and proper education as to the nature of Aboriginal societies, and the history of the relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples.”

The colonial foundations of our country resulted in a relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people that was always unbalanced and unjust. This relationship manifested itself in many ways, including the treatment of Indigenous people as wards of the government, the loss of land and language, and the banning of cultural practices that had sustained the diverse First Nations for millennia.

A key component in this relationship was the imposition of the residential school system which the dominant culture hoped would bring about its goals of “civilizing and Christianizing.” Only in recent years has mainstream society acknowledged the extreme unjustness of the residential school system and the harm it caused to multiple generations of First Nations families and communities.

These learning resources are also a response to The Royal Commission on Aboriginal People (1996) which, in calling for a new relationship, outlined four principles of a renewed relationship:

Mutual Recognition
Mutual Respect
Sharing
Mutual Responsibility

The time is overdue for a strengthening of the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, and this can only be accomplished by a full and truthful understanding of the history of the relationship. Stó:ló educator Bill Mussell gives an insightful view of what a positive relationship could be:

Relationship is a key value in Indigenous cultures; one must at all times recognize the value of the other and demonstrate respect and a willingness to discover and honour uniqueness in a relationship, whether it is with people, land, creatures, or the Creator.

One is called upon to be open to learning and to become changed for the better by the other; everyone and everything is a potential teacher in the ongoing journey to wholeness. In [a] relationship, one must be willing to take responsibility for the impact of one's behaviour toward the others, as well as responsibility for managing and learning from one's responses to the other's behaviour. ... This traditional way of understanding relationships can be a model for revising the imbalanced relationship between Indigenous peoples and Canadians generally.¹

The educational materials in this curriculum package are designed to help students participate in this renewed relationship.

What is Reconciliation?

A dictionary definition of “reconciliation” is the reestablishment of a broken relationship, or forging positive accord where there was discord.

In the words of Reconciliation Canada, it is “based on the idea of restoring friendship and harmony – about resolving differences, accepting the past and working together to build a better future.”²

There is an important legal context for the concept of reconciliation in Canadian Indigenous law. Supreme Court judgements for landmark cases such as *Sparrow* (1990), *Van der Peet* (1993), *Gladstone* (1996) and *Haida* (2004) all include discussions of legal and social reconciliation between Canada and First Nations.³

The process of reconciliation is complex, and requires full and active commitment of all parties. As the Truth and Reconciliation Commission acknowledges, it will take time and commitment to reverse the legacy of residential school system. It affected many generations of students and their families; it will take several generations to bring about reconciliation.

Reconciliation involves more than the Indian Residential Schools. It includes reconciling the gamut of colonial injustices, including a fair settlement of land and treaty issues. Although the Truth and Reconciliation Commission was tasked to reveal the truth about the residential school system, it concludes that it was the whole relationship “shaped over time by colonialism and racism” that needs full attention for the reconciliation process to move forward.

What was the Residential School System?

The residential school system was a collaboration between the Government of Canada and the mainstream churches to educate First Nations children in an environment that removed them from the influences of their families and culture. The explicit goal was to “civilize and Christianize” the children and to teach them basic trades for the boys and domestic skills for the girls. The system was based on a colonial, racist world view that Euro-Canadian society was superior and First Nations culture and people were inferior. In its Final Report, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada called the Indian Residential School system “cultural genocide.”⁴ Chief Justice Beverly McLachlin is the highest ranking Canadian

1 William Mussell. *Decolonizing Education: A Building Block for Reconciliation. From Truth to Reconciliation – Transforming the Legacy of Residential Schools*. Aboriginal Healing Foundation, 2008: 336.

2 Reconciliation Canada Background, <http://reconciliationcanada.ca/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/RC-Background-FINAL-29Aug13.pdf>

3 Tony Knox, *Reconciliation In Canadian Law: The Three Faces Of Reconciliation?* 2009. http://mccarthy.ca/pubs/Reconciliation_Paper_July2009.pdf

4 Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future. Summary of the Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015, page 1.

official to date who has used the term “cultural genocide” to describe residential schools.⁵

Under the BNA Act, 1867, the federal government assumed all control of the lives of First Nations people, making them “wards of the government.” This includes responsibility for education. The government funded both day schools located on reserves, and Indian Residential Schools. They paid the churches to operate the schools, since there was a historical precedent of missionaries using education as part of their proselytizing.

The Indian Residential Schools were chronically underfunded. Teachers were paid less than in the public schools, and many residential schools operated farms to both feed and subsidize the schools. In these schools students did much of the work around the schools and farms in the guise of “industrial training” and were subjected to the “half-day system” where they attended classes for half the day and worked for the other half.

There were many abuses inherent in the system. The basic premise of removing children from their communities to “kill the Indian in them” was harsh enough. But because of the under-funding and some of the unqualified teachers hired, the schools became a breeding ground for emotional, physical and sexual abuse.

Not only First Nations children attended residential schools. Métis, Non-Status and Inuit children also experienced the system. Métis students were sometimes admitted by church officials, although the governments position was not to fund students without status. In some cases the residential schools were the only option for Métis students to get any kind of education. In the Arctic the schools were run directly by the churches until 1953 when the Department of Northern Affairs and National resources was created and the federal government formally took over the operation of the schools. For more information see chapters 3 and 4 in *They Came for the Children*, and Métis History and Experience and Residential Schools in Canada available on the Aboriginal Healing Foundation website.

It should be noted that some students had positive experiences at residential schools. They learned practical skills and self-discipline that helped them in their future lives. Also, there were many committed teachers who endeavoured to nurture students where they could in the system.

For more information about the history of the residential school system, see *They Came for the Children*, published by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and available online at <http://www.trc.ca/websites/trcinstitution/index.php?p=580>. Further resources pertaining to the residential school system can be found in the Resources listing, page 51

The Way Forward

In the words of Justice Murray Sinclair, the Chair of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, “education brought us here, education will help us get away from this.” On one hand, generations of First Nations children have been damaged by an inferior education system. On the other hand, public schools systems frequently taught that First Nations people and cultures were inferior. “Because that was taught in the public schools,” Sinclair has said, “generation upon generation of non-Aboriginal children in this country have been raised to believe that Aboriginal people have been, were, and are inferior.”⁶

5 Reconciling Unity and Diversity in the Modern Era: Tolerance and Intolerance. Remarks of the Rt. Hon. Beverley McLachlin, P.C. Chief Justice of Canada at the Aga Khan Museum Toronto, Ontario, May 28, 2015. In *Globe and Mail*, May. 29 2015.

6 Report to Senate Committee 2013

There is growing evidence that many members of Canadian society recognize the importance of fully understanding the impact of the Indian Residential School and other injustices experienced by First Nations people. There is a recognition that, as Sinclair suggests, education is the key to understanding and reconciliation.

For example, in December 2012, School District 78 (Fraser-Cascade) passed a motion to authorize the integration of the residential school experience into the social studies curriculum taught in its schools.⁷ The City of Vancouver declared the Year of Reconciliation from June 21 2013 to June 20 2014.⁸ The Truth and Reconciliation Committee's BC National Event held in Vancouver in September, 2013, saw 10,000 people participate in a Walk for Reconciliation through heavy rain. At that event, 5000 students participated in the BC National Event Education Day.

Although the Indian Residential Schools happened before today's students were born, as British Columbians and Canadians they share the history and as future leaders will be actively involved in the reconciliation process. These learning resources will give them a reason for positive action.

PLANNING FOR INSTRUCTION

These learning resources are designed to use an inquiry approach to provide students in a number of Grade 11 and 12 courses with an understanding of the history of the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in Canada. The learning activities are based on the use of primary source materials. They allow for the application of both a First Peoples Pedagogy and the changing BC Curriculum.

First Peoples Pedagogy

This curriculum is guided by a pedagogy that recognizes certain ways of learning inherent in First Nations world views. This curriculum:

- is learner centred
- employs experiential learning and oral texts
- emphasizes an awareness of self and others in equal measure
- recognizes the value of group processes
- supports a variety of learning styles and representation

This pedagogy is based on the desire to bring an inclusive, holistic organization to learning activities. They reflect the following principles of learning, originally developed for the English First Peoples curriculum:

⁷ SD 78 (Fraser-Cascade) Minutes December 11, 2012, p. 5.

⁸ <http://vancouver.ca/people-programs/year-of-reconciliation.aspx>

*First People's Principles of Learning*⁹

- Learning ultimately supports the well-being of the self, the family, the community, the land, the spirits, and the ancestors.
- Learning is holistic, reflexive, reflective, experiential, and relational (focused on connectedness, on reciprocal relationships, and a sense of place).
- Learning involves recognizing the consequences of one's actions.
- Learning involves generational roles and responsibilities.
- Learning recognizes the role of indigenous knowledge.
- Learning is embedded in memory, history, and story.
- Learning involves patience and time.
- Learning requires exploration of one's identity.
- Learning involves recognizing that some knowledge is sacred and only shared with permission and/or in certain situations.

Dealing Sensitively with the Topic of Residential Schools

It is important to deal with the topic of residential schools with sensitivity. A great deal will depend on the age, maturity and family background of students, and teachers will be the best judge of how to approach the material.

In presenting these issues, teachers are not expected to be experts on the history and legacies of Indian Residential School. Rather their role is as guides and facilitators.

As teachers go through the unit, they should be aware of the student's reactions to the injustices discussed. It is important to convey to them that the purpose for understanding the past is to be part of a more positive future.

For some students the topics discussed will be sensitive, especially if they have personal connections with residential school survivors. For others, the topics may be controversial, particularly if they feel they have no connection with the issues. Also, in some schools with new Canadians, teachers will need to be aware that some topics may echo feelings that are part of the immigrant experience.

Some considerations for making sure the topic is presented fairly and with sensitivity include the following:¹⁰

- a classroom is not a platform;
- these topics are best taught through discussion rather than instruction;
- a teacher is responsible for ensuring exploration of the issue so the discussion promotes understanding and is not merely an exchange of intolerance;
- allow time to deal with students' concerns and questions;
- be aware of issues that may arise for students both in formal discussions and in and around the classroom; close conversations appropriately; play a role in ensuring potential conflict is dealt with in the context of the classroom;
- try to give students the tools and skills to discuss these topics rationally in the school and community

⁹ These principles were first articulated by a diverse team of Indigenous educators, scholars and knowledge-keepers during the development of English 12 First Peoples.

¹⁰ Adapted from *BC First Nations Studies Teachers Guide*, BC Ministry of Education, 2004.

When discussing sensitive and controversial topics such as the Indian Residential School System Students, it is important to set ground rules to ensure a safe environment for sharing ideas and opinion.

- always respect and value what others bring to the discussion
- discussion should protect diverging views among participants;
- it is okay to feel discomfort

Students can be encouraged to analyze any controversial issue by asking the following questions:

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

Much of the text and video content will elicit an emotional response from students. Teachers should be prepared to help students deal with the difficult emotions that may arise. Find people who are knowledgeable about the issue or who are trained to counsel students, such as school counsellors or Indigenous resource people available in the community. In certain circumstances teachers may wish to refer students to a crisis line for confidential support:

- Indian Residential Schools Crisis Line. Their mandate is to support residential school survivors and their families but their policy is not to turn anyone away. 1-866-925-4419
- Kids Help Phone, an anonymous and confidential phone and on-line professional counselling service for youth. 1-800-668-6868

Resource Overview

The resources in this guide are intended to provide flexibility in integrating the study of Indian Residential Schools and Reconciliation into coursework at the senior secondary level. It is constructed so that it can be used as a complete unit of study, but is built on components that can be adapted into your own curriculum organization.

This guide introduces some of the over-arching issues facing all Canadians today following the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. It puts the particulars of the residential school system and its legacy into the more general.

The activities are provided in three parts. They are intended to provide students with opportunities to engage with the wealth of materials available for the study of the residential school system, its societal legacies and the changing relationship between First Nations and other Canadians.

The first part is structured as an introductory unit of study. It provides a review of the residential school system and its legacies, and a historical overview of where we have come, and where we are going in our relationships as Canadians. The second and thirds provide you flexibility in organizing your course work.

Part One: Setting the Stage for Inquiry

These learning activities examine the changing nature of the relationship between First Nations and other Canadians, from the co-operative stage following contact, through the stage of assimilation which fostered the Indian Residential Schools, to today's atmosphere of negotiation and renewal.

Part Two: A Relationship of 150 Years

These resources examine the relationship between First Nations and Canadian society over time through primary source documents from key time periods. They allow students to investigate Indian Residential Schools in the context of broader Canadian history. Students develop their own methods of inquiry using the research documents provided.

Part Three: Research Project

The final section provides a variety of project ideas that students can undertake to delve more deeply into a specific topic. They can support different learning styles of students and learning objectives of your course organization. Suggestions of research questions and resources are included, although students must find research documents themselves.

BC Curriculum

The learning resources in this guide are adaptable for the Content Learning Standards in a number of courses in the BC Curriculum. As well, the resources emphasize research and critical thinking skills and will support the Curricular Competencies of these courses.

Some relevant Content Learning Standards include the following:

BC First Peoples 12

The themes in this guide are inherent to the learning standards of BC First Peoples 12.

English First Peoples 11 and 12

- Reconciliation in Canada

20th Century World History 12

- Human rights movements, including indigenous peoples movements
- Religious, ethnic, and/or cultural conflicts, including genocide

Contemporary Indigenous Studies

- Resilience and survival of indigenous peoples in the face of colonialism
- Responses to inequities in the relationships of indigenous peoples with governments in Canada and around the world
- Restoring balance through truth, healing, and reconciliation in Canada and around the world

Law Studies 12

- Canadian legislation concerning First Peoples

Social Justice 12

- Social injustices in Canada and the world affecting individuals, groups, and society