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Aboriginal Family and Community Literacy Curriculum

UNIT 2:

Aboriginal Approaches to Learning and Literacy

Part 1: Introduction

Unit 2 introduces learners to important concepts and processes related to aboriginal approaches to learning and literacy. These concepts have been foundational to aboriginal learning for thousands of years. This unit also builds on Unit 1 by introducing concrete processes that foster multiliteracies including the learning of one's own language as well as the mainstream language, learning to read and interact with the natural world, and tapping the visual, oral/auditory, and multisensory learning available through the use of new technologies for learning.

The specific concepts that will be explored in this unit are:

- ❖ the role of the family and community in the development of multiple literacies and learning, including the importance of Elder teachings;
- ❖ a holistic view that focuses on a mind-body-heart-spirit balance in learning;
- ❖ the cultivation of each person's learning spirit and unique gifts;
- ❖ the impact of a long history of oral traditions in learning and literacy development;
- ❖ experiential learning, both from a collaborative and a self-directed view;
- ❖ a critical literacy of the land, meaning Aboriginal people have a deep connection with the natural environment, all living creatures within it, and the universe at large.

Together, these concepts form the heart of what makes aboriginal approaches to learning and literacy unique, and provide a rich foundation for developing holistic learning experiences for aboriginal children and their families. During colonial times, and into the mid 20th century, these concepts were ignored, and even ridiculed and outlawed, as children were forced to attend residential schools, and learning was removed from the family, homes and communities. Since the late 20th century, progress to rekindle these approaches to learning has occurred, that encourages rich, culturally relevant learning experiences for aboriginal learners of all ages. This progress is ongoing, and more programs are needed to meet the needs of growing aboriginal families.

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1. View and Listen to the narrated Power Point, “Cultivating the Learning Spirit in Aboriginal approaches to learning and literacy”

This Power Point introduces the concepts of nurturing the learning spirit and helping people to discover their special gifts, both important components of Aboriginal approaches to learning. Traditionally, family and community members all played a role in these activities, especially Elders. As well, introspective activities were encouraged to foster self-knowledge, multiple literacies and inner motivation.

However, with the introduction of residential schools in colonial times, these ways of teaching were banned, and strict western methods were introduced and enforced. In current times, Aboriginal community leaders are finding ways to reintroduce these traditional strategies into education, beginning with the early years.

Please note: this Power Point includes a link to a backgrounder document created by the First Nations Leadership Council entitled, “**Long term Impacts of Canada’s Residential School Systems**” that has 2 pages of content. Please read this as well.

When you have finished viewing the Power Point, spend some time reflecting on the following questions:

- a) How did the introduction of residential schools interrupt the natural cultivation of the learning spirit, the development of multiple literacies and recognition of special gifts in Aboriginal children? How did they influence the children’s holistic balance in body, mind, heart, and spirit?

- b) Renewed integration of traditional ways of teaching has progressed in Aboriginal schools, but there is still a long way to go. How can you include effective strategies in the early years to encourage children’s (and parent’s) learning spirits, family literacy and awareness of their own special gifts?

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MULTIMEDIA



Tshinanu is an amazing site that features excellent use of Flash and graphics to present a very beautiful and inspiring collection of Aboriginal teachings, stories, and insights at:

http://www.tshinanu.tv/accueil_en.html

The site was funded by a Canadian Culture Online grant from Canadian Heritage department, and created by several partners including APTN television, ECP Nouveau Media, Telefilm Canada and others. A variety of topics are all presented from an Aboriginal perspective. They range from laughing and cooperating to preventing diabetes, creating, dancing and singing. It is quite easy to navigate from the main site map which features photo icons for each section. Each section has further subsections that are clearly marked with large tabs that frame the Flash presentations for each topic. Click on “Overview” when in a particular section to activate the Flash/video presentation.



Dust Echoes is a multimedia site based in Australia that shares twelve dreamtime stories and Aboriginal insights into age-old traditions, available at

<http://www.abc.net.au/dustechoes/dustEchoesFlash.htm>

The stories were audio recorded from community members in Arnhem Land in the Northern Territory, then interpreted into animated movies, first screened on ABC TV, then integrated with Flash into a really stunning web site. To navigate through the stories, click on the small oval shapes that zigzag gently along the top of the page. The site also offers a glossary, desktop wallpaper downloads, and a study guide for teachers and parents.



Native Drums is another rich multimedia site initiated by Carleton University in Eastern Canada that provides a wide assortment of resources, including videos, audio recordings, lessons, stories, interviews, and showcases about the importance of music in Aboriginal life and learning, at

<http://www.native-drums.ca/>

The site has a complex array of content areas, all accessible within an artistic sitemap on the main page. Click on the various sections, for instance, myths, stories, music, drums, videos, and so on. There is also a submenu for various types of visitors, such as teachers, scholars, and kids.



Native Dance, is the ‘sister site’ of the Native Drum site described above, but focuses more on the traditional practice of dance within Aboriginal culture, available at

<http://www.native-dance.ca/>

This site offers over 100 videos of Aboriginal dance, from all parts of Canada and is presented as a valuable learning tool to teach children and adults about the sacredness and time-tested traditions of Aboriginal dance forms. It celebrates dance as healing, transformative, ancient, and renewing for Aboriginal people of all ages.