Aboriginal Studies Grade 11

Theme II: Schooling and Cultural Change

Lesson Plan 1: Traditional and Post-contact Education Systems

Generalization
Students will develop an understanding of how federal government policies affected the socialization process of traditional Aboriginal education.

Rationale
Prior to contact Aboriginal people educated their children in a variety of ways that stemmed from a holistic framework. Contact and the onset of Catholic and Protestant missionaries combined with federal government initiatives forever altered the process of Aboriginal education. It is very imperative for students seeking to understand Aboriginal cultures to examine this sector the socialization process and how it impacted cultural identity.

Objectives
Knowledge
- Identify aspects of traditional education
- Identify critical aspects of post-contact education system
- Examine the federal governments role in Aboriginal education
- Define assimilation, cultural identity, cultural evolution, Eurocentric, indoctrination
- Recognize how post-contact education affected cultural identity

Skills
- Evaluate the effects of residential schools and assimilation based policies upon Aboriginal children and their communities
- Compare traditional education to post-contact education systems
- Examine and describe some of the residential schools that existed in Alberta
- Prepare a time line that chronicles Aboriginal education initiatives from the onset of missionaries to the present day

Attitude
- Appreciate and respect the differing viewpoints in regards to Aboriginal education policies and initiatives
- Develop sensitivities towards understanding the experiences of Aboriginal people in Alberta and in Canada

Teacher Information
Prior to European contact Aboriginal groups across the country were educating their youth following a variety of different strategies and methodologies. Some Aboriginal groups believed nature was the best classroom, while others followed structured methodologies such as
ceremonies, formal instruction, and vision quests. Other Aboriginal groups believed in teaching and learning through observation, community members were seen as important teachers as they were believed to have something important to share through the passing on of traditional knowledge or unique skills.

Contact brought with it tremendous change to the lifestyle of Aboriginal peoples including the education sphere. Christian missionaries albeit Catholic or Protestant were focused on saving the ‘heathen souls’ of the Aboriginal people. Aboriginal beliefs were viewed as pagan and often they were referred to as ‘devil worshipers’. These beliefs were reflective of what the missionaries conceived Aboriginal cultural as a whole to be like. Therefore they set upon a mission to proselytize and educate the Aboriginal population into European/western ways.

It should be noted that different monastic groups went about this process in a variety of ways and with different intentions.

Probably the most damaging effects of the Christian missionaries quest to indoctrinate Aboriginal peoples was the forced removal of children from their families and communities to isolated Christian schools known as residential schools. Assimilation was the primary goal of these schools.

Generally speaking, residential schools have an overarching negative persona about them. Aboriginal students were stripped of all forms of cultural identity such as the cutting and shaving of boys and girls hair, they were forbidden from speaking their own language and they were often secluded from their own brothers and sisters who attended the same school, and in many instances given Christian names. A stark reality is the amount of emotional and physical abuse that many Aboriginal children had to endure while separated from their culture and families.

Residential schools were not the only form or schooling made available to Aboriginal children. Industrial schools were also developed and funded by the government to teach the Aboriginal children skills that they would need to be successful in the new western world. Day schools were also developed upon some reserves as well as boarding schools. Alberta was not exempt from any policies of assimilation and therefore represents a broad range of different types of schools for Aboriginal children.

When it was recognized that residential and industrial schools were not succeeding in the process of assimilation as hoped the focus shifted to integration in the late 1950’s. However, some residential schools continued to operate until the late 1980’s. Integration focused on placing Aboriginal students in public or separate schools without acknowledging their culture or traditions.

Overall, the education of Aboriginal students post-contact could be argued to be a negative experience. There is no debate as to whether or not residential schools succeeded in diminishing the cultural identity of many of its young students. Aboriginal children did not receive knowledge, traditions, cultural practices including language from their parents and communities as they were often separated from them for long periods of time. They did not learn the ways of western culture either, therefore it is argued that they are marginalized between two cultures. It
is no surprise that the socialization process was interrupted and the state of Aboriginal controlled education is a very hot political and emotional topic today.

**Introductory Activity**

To introduce the topic of traditional and post-contact schooling systems present the following video to the students.


The video is approximately 58 min long but it is possible to only show the beginning of the video as it conveys the most powerful message of residential school experiences. The history of residential schools is explored from the late 1800’s to the 1960’s. The video case studies the impacts of Yukon boarding schools upon Aboriginal culture, identity, and language.

It is suggested that the teacher watch the video in advance to enhance understanding and class discussion.

**Main Lesson**

To reiterate the messages conveyed in the video have a brief discussion about some of the main elements. Place the following overhead up and have students copy the definitions into their notes:
Schooling and Cultural Change Terminology

**Assimilation:** a policy supported by the federal government in which the Aboriginal population was to accept the customs and attitudes of the prevailing European/western culture through a variety of processes.

**Indoctrination:** the process of repeating an idea or belief in order to persuade others to believe a similar point of view.

**Eurocentric:** a tendency to interpret the world in terms of western and European values, beliefs, and experiences.

**Cultural Identity:** a personal way of connecting to the customs, beliefs, values, and traditions of a group or society. A sense of relating to the customs, beliefs, values, and traditions of a group or society.

**Worldview:** Aboriginal peoples have a distinct worldview that differs from other Canadian mainstream cultures. The worldview of Aboriginal people stems from the belief that the universe was developed by the Creator and human beings should live in a harmonious respectful way towards one another, oneself, and with nature. Each Aboriginal culture expresses their worldview in a unique way with different stories, practices, and cultural products.
Once the students have the terminologies copied into their notes shift the discussion to discussing how Aboriginal people educated themselves prior to contact with Europeans. This can be done in a brainstorming session. The teacher or a class volunteer could write down all of the methods on the white/chalk board. It is important to reiterate the notion that Aboriginal people across Canada educated themselves in a variety of ways that were significantly different than to the methodologies practiced in western countries.

Introduce the film *Native Reflections: School in the Bush* (approx 15 min long). The film is available from LRC order no. 525644 at 780-472-5775 or online at www.lrc.learning.gov.ab.ca. The film examines the traditional Cree teaching of values and culture as was taught in the bush.

Make sure to preview the film beforehand and if you wish make up a corresponding work sheet to help keep the students accountable for watching the film.

The next stage in the process of examining the transition from traditional education to post-contact education is for the students to develop a timeline of contact and the beginnings of missionary control of education and federal government involvement and policies up to present day. Students can work in pairs to develop their timelines and they should be as comprehensive as possible.

**Supplementary Lesson**

Students will examine a residential school, industrial school, mission school, or a day boarding school on a reserve that was based in or around a community in Alberta. Students may research and then choose a school that they find interesting or that has bountiful information. The project should be presented on poster form to include pictures, drawings, and information about the particular school. Aspects that students should consider are:

1. Who was responsible for the operation of the school?
2. What type of school was it? What was the school’s mandate?
3. Provide a brief history of the school. I.e: when was it opened? When did it close? Who attended?
4. Research and report on the curriculum of the school. What was the language of instruction? What form of religion was practiced? What was the curriculum content?
5. What were some of the outcomes of the school? Such as success and suicide rates.

**Supplementary Lesson**

If possible, students may want to contact someone they know who has attended a residential school and conduct an interview with them regarding their experience.

**Supplementary Lesson**

Students will create a chart that compares and contrasts traditional Aboriginal methods of educating versus the post-contact education system.
Supplementary Lesson

There are a number of missionairies who had a tremendous impact on the lives of many Aboriginal families and communities in Alberta. Some of the most notable are:

- Reverend Alfred Garrioch
- Bishop Vital-Justin Grandin
- Bishop Emile Grouard
- Father Albert Lacombe
- Reverend George McDougall
- Reverend John McDougall
- Reverend Robert Rundle
- Reverend Henry Bird Steinhauer

Students will be responsible for researching and writing a mini-biography on one of the above mentioned missionaries. Students may use the information provided in the Grade 11 Student Zone biographies section as a springboard.