

Lesson 9

Sexual Abuse in the Aboriginal Community: The impact of intergenerational trauma

Specific Expectations:

By the end of the course, students will:

- describe the factors that lead to responsible sexual relationships;
- describe specific types of physical and non-physical abuse;
- identify the causes of abuse and violence.

Materials:

- Mind Mapping- What I know about residential schools (9.1 H)
- Residential schools: A backgrounder for teachers (9.2 REF)
- Video *Survivors of the Red Brick School* (Option)
- Where are the children? (9.3 H)
- Intergenerational impact: The legacy of residential schools (9.4 H)
- Comparing Understandings of Residential Schools (9.5 H)
- Comparing Understandings of Residential Schools (9.5 REF)
- Intergenerational Impacts of Residential Schools (9.6 OH)

Teaching/Learning Strategies:

This class discusses the legacy of residential schools in some depth. Teachers who wish to increase their familiarity with this legacy can read the backgrounder provided (9.1 REF) and watch

the video included in this lesson for further information. There are two options for teaching the impact of residential schools – the video

Activity # 1

(20 min)

- Each student should receive a copy of Mind Mapping: What I know about residential schools (9.1 H)
- Individually students should take 5-10 minutes to write down everything they know about the history and legacy of residential schooling for Canada's First Nations people.
- Additional information is provided for teachers in (9.2 REF).
- Once all students have been given the opportunity to jot down their initial ideas they should get together in groups of four to create a group mind-map which should be a synthesis of all of the group members' ideas into one. The result will be that each group will produce a group mind-map. Students should be encouraged to use words, symbols or other pictures to express their understanding

OPTION 1

Activity #2

(30 minutes)

- Show film, *Survivors of the Red Brick School* (30 min). This film is a documentary that follows a number of adult survivors of the residential school system re-visiting the school they attended. Through their reminiscing and reflections students will gain a better appreciation of the hardships and abuses faced by these individuals.

OPTION 2

Activity #2b

(30 minutes)

- Distribute *Where are the children?: Healing the Legacy of the Residential Schools* (9.3 REF) to each student
- Number all students off from one to six
- Each group will play the "role" of one of the residential school survivors.

- Group by group each survivor's story will be told through a choral reading of each individual passage. The teacher should give students a few minutes to practise this choral reading in their groups.
- For the final presentation, groups should arrange themselves clockwise around the circle to represent the Circle of Life and the changing of seasons. Some classes may wish to elaborate on this task to make it a more in-depth dramatic performance for an audience.

Activity #3

(20-25 minutes)

- Have groups return to their mind maps and add additional details they may have gained from watching the video. If time permits, teachers may wish to facilitate a larger group discussion about the students' reactions to the video and what they learned about residential schools.
- Have the groups read and discuss the reading on "Intergenerational Impact: The legacy of residential schools" (9.4 H). They will read the definition of "residential schools" found in current mainstream curriculum documents (in Ontario) and compare how it is the same as/different from their own understanding of residential schools (9.5 H).
- Groups should discuss what may account for the differences between their own understanding of residential schools and that which is currently taught in public schools.
- This discussion can be facilitated as a large group activity using reference 9.5(REF) to assist discussion.
- This is a very important task as it illuminates how current curriculum documents downplay the cultural genocide that took place in these residential schools for decades. Compensation and retribution for residential school atrocities are still being sought in the courts today. Unfortunately, the damage done by this policy is such that no amount of money can erase the painful memories, nor the negative impact that this has had on several generations now of Aboriginal peoples in Canada. Students can be supported in becoming critical readers and beginning to deconstruct some of the larger societal issues that still exist today with regards to Aboriginal issues.

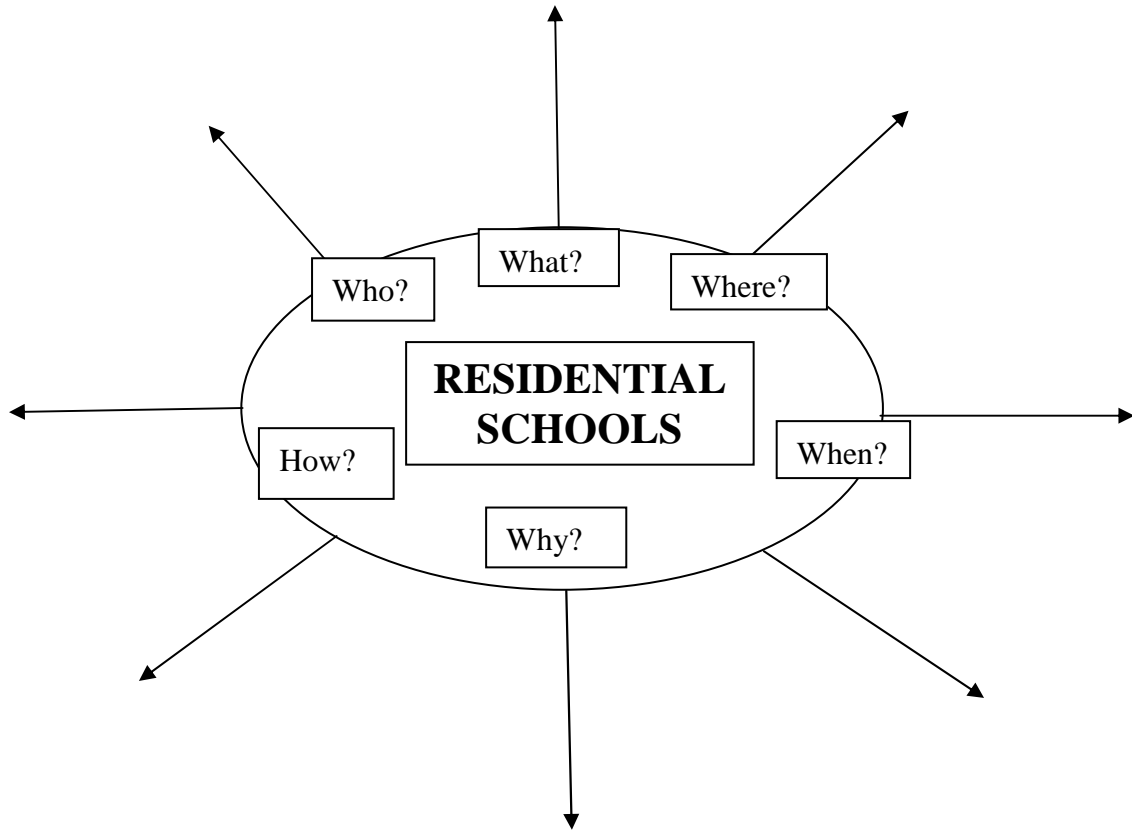
Activity #4

(5-10 minutes)

- Have students as a large group brainstorm other potential intergenerational impacts of residential schools
- Use overhead 9.5 (OH) as a reference for this brainstorming activity, keeping the answers covered until students have identified most of them. The twenty-four (24) different 'intergenerational impacts' of residential schools provided on this reference were obtained from the Aboriginal Healing Foundation (<http://www.wherearethechildren.ca/en/impacts.html>). Remember that this may be a very emotional activity for students depending on their own personal experiences -- some students will have directly been affected by these impacts, while others will just know of people who have been affected.

9.1 H

Mind Mapping: What I know about residential schools



Residential schools: A backgrounder for teachers

RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS: A backgrounder for teachers

Source: <http://www.schoolnet.ca/aboriginal/issues/schools-e.html>

Long before Europeans came to North America, aboriginal people had a highly developed system of education. If you think of how difficult it must have been for aboriginal people to survive by earning a living from the land, you may realize that there was a great deal for aboriginal children to learn before they could survive on their own. Aboriginal elders and parents passed on not only survival skills to their children, but their history, artistic ability, music, language, moral and religious values.

When European missionaries began to live amongst aboriginal people, they concluded that the sooner they could separate children from their parents, the sooner they could prepare aboriginal people to live a civilized (i.e. European) lifestyle. Residential schools were established for two reasons: separation of the children from the family and the belief that aboriginal culture was not worth preserving. Most people concluded that aboriginal culture was useless and dying and all human beings would eventually develop and change to be like the 'advanced' European civilization.

Early residential schools were similar to religious missions. Later, the mission-run schools were administered jointly by Canadian churches and the federal government, and for a number of years, residential schools became official Canadian policy for the education of Indian children. Speaking no English, having never ridden in a car or truck, having never eaten anything other than meat, fish, bannock and perhaps the occasional sweet treat, aboriginal children as young as six left the world of their families and were sent into the unfamiliar world of the white man.

Children were usually rounded up in August and transported by train, plane or bus to the residential schools. They were separated from their brothers, sisters and friends and herded together according to age level. They were issued clothes and assigned a bed number. Even though many of the children could not speak any English, the supervisors spoke only English to them. The children were, in fact, punished for speaking their native languages. For as long as a year, and occasionally for several years, children were unable to express to anyone in authority what their basic needs were. Loneliness, sickness, confusion and abuse all had to be borne in lonely silence.

Many things combined to make the experience difficult for young aboriginal children. They included the suffocating heat of the buildings; the painful need for someone to talk to; the pain of separation from their families; the bad tasting, indigestible food; the size and unfamiliarity of the buildings; the frightening crowds of people; the painfully abusive and harsh discipline; mental and physical abuse; and the continual loss of personal freedoms and individual control. All of this must have been a staggering shock to the new "student."

The white man's school contradicted everything these aboriginal children had learned at home. Aboriginal society placed a large measure of responsibility on children's shoulders. They were expected to help with jobs such as tending the nets, feeding the dogs, cutting and hauling wood, cutting up meat and fish for drying. The school demanded very little in comparison. A child had no responsibility for the well-being of others. At residential school, the aboriginal child became no one's keeper, not even his own.

Some children were able to return home for two short summer months. Parents found that they had changed. Children were no longer interested in helping the family with tasks such as carrying water and other chores. They had to be told everything, and they often refused to "listen." Instead they "talked back" and in general tended to spend time with children their own age who also attended residential school. Parents noted that frequent, violent arguments (very foreign to most aboriginal cultures) arose and that children seemed as unconcerned about hurting others as they were unwilling to obey elders.

Even more difficult for parents was the children's loss of ability to speak their own language. After several years away at school, children often found it difficult to speak their mother tongue. Parents felt left out when the children spoke English and wondered if their sons and daughters were talking about things they didn't want their parents to understand. Children used English when they were angry and so English became associated with bad feelings and strong language.

The most damaging part of residential schools, from an aboriginal perspective, was that children were taught that their culture was not worth preserving. Students learned that aboriginal traditional values were wrong and primitive, and that white Canadians came from a more "advanced" form of social organization. Students came to see their homes as "dirty" and "cold," their parents as dressing "funny" and as smelling "bad." Students began to believe that the ceremonies and rituals which harmonized the spiritual and social life of the community and gave its members a sense of personal significance and group identity, were "heathen" and "the work of the Devil." The organization of the schools and the content of the curriculum conveyed to aboriginal children that the human values, the political institutions, the spiritual practices and the economic strategies of other Canadians were infinitely superior to the "primitive" ways of their traditional lifestyles.

It was disorienting for aboriginal children to spend the first (formative) years of life living in a traditional aboriginal way, and then to be thrust into a foreign, painfully abusive and harsh discipline. Residential school disrupted the smooth transmission of beliefs, skills, and knowledge from one generation to the next, and deliberately divorced the aboriginal child from her background by discrediting her culture, punishing her for speaking her language and preaching the superiority of European attitudes. The experience often caused severe, and in many cases, unalterable damage to the child, to the family and to the community to which she would eventually return.

There were some positive aspects to residential schools. Without them, most of the students would never have learned to read and write, or learn about other ways of life than their own. It was not education in itself that was bad. It was that the manner in which the residential schools were organized were simply not sensitive to the needs or lifestyle of the aboriginal students.

By the 1950s, the Canadian government began to realize the residential school policy was a failure. The last residential school in Canada was closed some 30 years later.

Today, aboriginal people want recognition of what was done to their communities as a result of the residential schools. Aboriginal people have demanded, and received, official apologies from the Anglican, United and Roman Catholic churches which operated residential schools. As more and more former students of residential schools come forth with stories about the sexual and physical abuse they experienced, several religious authorities who administered the schools are being charged criminally.

The residential school experience continues to plague First Nations education. Many people who attended residential schools, now parents and grandparents, have biases against education for their children because of what they experienced. Furthermore, while the closure of residential schools meant that more and more aboriginal children began to attend regular provincial schools, provincial education curriculums did not change to reflect the educational needs of aboriginal children. Today, the cross-Canada average of the percentage of aboriginal children that complete Grade 12 is about 20%, and even lower in northern regions. Aboriginal children continue to have difficulties fitting in to the existing schools, which are still designed around a culture alien to their own.

Many First Nations are taking over the running of their schools from the government. By designing their own curriculums and running their own schools, aboriginal people intend to reclaim the education of their children and put the residential school experience in the past.

Where are the children? Healing the legacy of the residential schools

Stories of survival excerpted from <http://www.wherearethechildren.ca/>

Bernadine Harper

"In the evenings what I remember is, when all the girls were put to bed, we had night watchmen that would take care of the building. I always had the fear of having a night watchman coming in and shining the flashlight around, because I knew that's when things were happening with the little girls. I guess that's where the abuse had started. "

Glenna Tetlich

"A person can't feel until they deal with all the hurt and pain that was inflicted upon them. Once a person starts doing that, their spirit starts to become alive, and that spirit guides you. That's what I rely on a lot of times, is to listen to that and to try to find out where I'm being guided. It's a beautiful thing, and I hope and pray for all people, especially Aboriginal people that they will find their journey and they will find themselves to do that."

Jackie Fletcher

"There are lots of things coming out. It's like flowers starting to bloom as a result of this. I mean, I know it has been a bad thing that's happened, but there's good things coming out of it too, because people are starting to talk about it now. People are doing good things. They don't want their children to be saddled with all that stuff that's being passed down...that anger and hurt, anxiety, and all that stuff. Our kids need to be happy now. "

Jimmy Hunter

“Even if you're holding an important position, whether in your tribal council or in your community, you shouldn't be ashamed. That's what I'm doing right now. I'm not scared to come out and say what happened to me. That's the only way I'm going to get better. Because if you keep it inside, like many of my friends and my relatives, you can die from it or you get into drugs and alcohol. That's not the answer right there. The answer is to talk about it.”

Madeleine Dion-Stout

“I remember my mother and father coming to visit us and watching my mother disembark from the wagon. And I was missing her already, she had just arrived and I missed her already because I knew she was gonna go. Separation to this day is a part of me I can't ever come to terms with. I have a great deal of problems with separation. For a young child, residential school didn't make much sense. It was hard to make sense of self, sense of family, sense of community when it all seemed so contrived, so artificial. You were shut up, you were shut out, you didn't really have a voice, you weren't really heard and you were shut down. Emotionally you were shut down because it was too hard to feel. “

Martha Joseph

“I see a lot of difference. They are starting to speak out. They are starting to fight for their rights, because we are human too and we've been put through too much. For me it feels like I'm just climbing out of hell. I've got my grasp now, and I know I'll make it. “

9.4 H

Intergenerational Impact: The legacy of residential schools

"Intergenerational or multi-generational trauma happens when the effects of trauma are not resolved in one generation. When trauma is ignored and there is no support for dealing with it, the trauma will be passed from one generation to the next. What we learn to see as "normal" when we are children, we pass on to our own children. Children who learn that ... or [sic] sexual abuse is "normal", and who have never dealt with the feelings that come from this, may inflict physical and sexual abuse on their own children. The unhealthy ways of behaving that people use to protect themselves can be passed on to children, without them even knowing they are doing so. This is the legacy of physical and sexual abuse in residential schools."

(Aboriginal Healing Foundation, 1999:A5; as cited at <http://www.wherethechildren.ca/en/impacts.html>)

Chances are, if you are of First Nations' ancestry you will have had relatives in your family who survived residential schooling in Canada. "Official" statements may not capture the full reality of residential schools. For example, in one policy document for Grades 9 and 10 Native Studies residential schools are defined as follows:

The Indian Act stipulates that the federal government is responsible for the education of status Indian children from the ages of six to eighteen. The act authorizes the Minister of Indian and Northern Affairs to enter into agreements regarding the education of status Indian children with the government of a province, a public or separate school board, or a religious or charitable organization. Residential schools controlled by the churches comprised the basis of Native education for over a hundred years. Residential schools began to be closed in 1969; the last one closed in 1988.

(Ontario Curriculum- Native Studies, Ontario Ministry of Education, 1999 p.26),

9.5 H

Comparing Understandings of Residential Schools

After reading the provided policy definition of residential schooling, identify how this definition was the same and/or different from the understandings you identified on your Mind Map.

Ways in which our mind map and the “official” definition are similar:

Ways in which our mind map and the “official” definition are different:

For discussion:

How might you account for the differences between YOUR understanding of residential schooling, and that which is used in the curriculum at school?

Comparing Understandings of Residential Schools

After reading the provided policy definition of residential schooling, identify how this definition was the same and/or different from the understandings you identified on your Mind Map.

Ways in which our mind map and the “official” definition are similar:

- Answers will vary
- Most likely, the similarities tend to be the superficial details about the purpose and structure of the schools
- The role of the government and religious organizations in operating the schools may be another point of convergence

Ways in which our mind map and the “official” definition are different:

- Answers will vary
- Overall, the degree of suffering and oppression that was rampant in residential schools is absent from the official definition provided
- The purpose of the schools (i.e., to “civilize” Aboriginal children and erase their language and culture) is not evident in the official definition

For discussion:

How might you account for the differences between YOUR understanding of residential schooling, and that which is used in the curriculum at school?

- Students may find this deconstruction difficult, but it is an important opportunity to discuss issues of power and who gets to set the official record.
- Official definitions may downplay the reality of residential schools for many reasons – lack of accountability (financial and emotional), collective guilt, wish to make history less bleak
- Regardless of the reason(s), official definitions such as these invalidate the experience and residential school survivors and minimize the responsibility of the larger society to redress these impacts

9.6 OH

Intergenerational Impacts of Residential Schools

(Impacts as cited at <http://www.wherearethechildren.ca/en/impacts.html>)

- Alcohol and drug abuse
- Fetal alcohol syndrome (FAS) and fetal alcohol effect (FAE)
- Sexual abuse (past and ongoing)
- Physical abuse (past and ongoing; especially, but not exclusively, of women and children)
- Psychological/emotional abuse
- Low self-esteem
- Dysfunctional families and interpersonal relationships
- Parenting issues such as emotional coldness, rigidity, neglect, poor communications and abandonment
- Suicide (and the threat of suicide)
- Teen pregnancy
- Chronic, widespread depression
- Chronic, widespread rage and anger
- Eating disorders
- Sleeping disorders
- Chronic physical illness related to spiritual and emotional states
- Layer upon layer of unresolved grief and loss

Intergenerational Impacts of Residential Schools

- Fear of personal growth, transformation and healing
- Unconscious internalization of residential school behaviours such as false politeness, not speaking out, passive compliance, excessive neatness, obedience without thought, etc
- Educational blocks - aversions to formal learning programs that seem "too much like school," fear of failure, self-sabotage, psychologically-based learning disabilities
- Becoming oppressors and abusers of others as a result of what was done to one in residential schools
- Cultural identity issues - missionization and the loss of language and cultural foundations has led to denial (by some) of the validity of one's own cultural identity (assimilation), a resulting cultural confusion and dislocation
- Destruction of social support networks (the cultural safety net) that individuals and families in trouble could rely upon
- Voicelessness - entailing a passive acceptance of powerlessness within community life

Internalized sense of inferiority or aversion