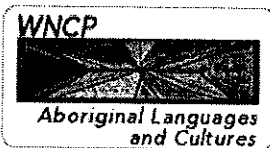


Aboriginal Education  
 Aboriginal Perspectives  
 Learning Resources and  
 Templates  
 Cultural Concepts  
 Curriculum Documents  
 Native Studies  
 Publications



## Aboriginal Education

### Incorporating Aboriginal Perspectives: A Theme-Based Curricular Approach Cultural Concepts

When planning for inclusion of Aboriginal cultural concepts in teaching and learning situations, educators are encouraged to consider the following points

- It is recommended that educators seek the guidance of local community people who are most knowledgeable about the appropriate use of cultural concepts specific and/or unique to their communities.
- The cultural concepts explained in this model are examples drawn from community-based cultural knowledge.
- The examples demonstrate in practical terms how educators can use the cultural knowledge that Aboriginal students bring to the school setting to enhance and personalize the outcomes prescribed in Manitoba curricula.
- Students whose learning experiences are inclusive of Aboriginal cultural concepts will have the opportunity to develop a respectful and balanced view of Aboriginal people and Canadian culture, and a richer understanding of the place of Aboriginal people in the history of Manitoba and Canada.
- The cultural concepts highlighted in this model are reinforced in several documents available to educators, such as Native Studies documents.

The following explanations of the cultural concepts used in this model are not exhaustive. The diversity that exists in Aboriginal communities may result in different interpretations of the concepts below.

#### The Circle/The Medicine Wheel

Aboriginal people enjoy a strong affinity with the circle because it symbolizes and resembles many cycles in the natural world. Some Aboriginal people believe the power of the world works in circles such as the shape of the world, sun and the moon, the wind as it whirls in circles, birds as they make their nests in circles etc. In other Aboriginal communities it is also a symbol of equity where no one person has an elevated position at a certain area of the circle. The cultural concept of the Circle/ Medicine Wheel is also described in *Integrating Aboriginal Perspectives into Curricula: A Resource for Curriculum Developers, Teachers and Administrators*.

#### The Number 4

This cultural concept is based on the Aboriginal belief that natural occurrences happen in fours and four is a sacred number. Often, giving thanks to the Creator mentions the four elements, earth, air, wind and fire, the 4 seasons, 4 directions, 4 human races, 4 chambers of the heart, 4 quadrants of the body, 4 sections of the brain. Four puffs are taken when the ceremonial pipe is smoked, water is poured four times over the hot rocks in the sweat lodge etc.

#### Extended Family

This cultural concept includes not only human family members but also all aspects of life. The planet is referred to as Mother Earth and all animate and inanimate objects such as the rocks that are used in Aboriginal ceremonies are referred to as family members. In Talking Circles, the rocks used are viewed as a supportive family member. As they are passed from one member to another they link all the members of the family and are a source of strength to each participant.

### Collective Decision Making

Aboriginal people use and value this historic tradition which ensures that everyone is given an opportunity to participate and have a voice in the decisions that are made within the group or the community. Nunavut is an example of where this is practiced. The government of Nunavut does not operate on a party system and therefore has no opposition. As a result, all elected members become part of the decision-making process.

### Holistic Approach to Life

For Aboriginal people the concept of *holistic education* is not new. Aboriginal people have always practiced a holistic approach to education and all aspects of life. A definition of holistic education that reflects the Aboriginal approach to the concept is expressed by theorist and teacher Ron Miller who says, "Holistic education nurtures the development of the whole person.... recognizes the interconnectedness of body, mind, emotions, and spirit." The importance of the Aboriginal holistic view is borne out in the Western and Northern Canadian Protocol *Common Curriculum Framework for Aboriginal Language and Culture Programs: Kindergarten to Grade 12* where it is stated that "the Aboriginal perspective ... is characterized by holism and spiralled learning." It is rooted in the belief that one cannot nurture only one aspect such as the mind and ignore the body, emotions and spirit.

### Cooperation

Cooperation in Aboriginal communities is an example of being in harmony with all things including nature, the environment, family, community and oneself. The Aboriginal belief is that if humans do not cooperate and respect the environment and the human race that our relationship with the land, which is the giver of life and law, will be placed in jeopardy. "We work cooperatively together for the good of our people. Cooperation is a value based on need. Cooperating with one another and sharing our ways with each other seems to have been one of the things that makes us strong and able to survive as Anishinabe. We are placed on Aki to help each other. It is not our way for one to leave others behind. We cooperate together, all Anishinabe helping as best we can. Anishinabe grow stronger when we are of one mind, one heart, one body." (Lac du Flambeau Parenting Program)

### Respect

Although many cultures share this value, Aboriginal people extend the concept of respect to inanimate objects. That Aboriginal people show respect to objects that appear to have no life is a concept that may be unfamiliar to non-Aboriginal people. In Aboriginal communities "It is an individual's birthright to receive the respect of others for his or her particular strengths, interests, temperament, physical abilities and mental challenges." (*Native Studies: Early Years (K-4) A Teacher's Resource Book, 1995*)

Aboriginal elders have developed and exhibited the concept of respect to a high degree. Self-respect, respect for others, and respect for all things are values that are congruent with the theme "exploring my world-myself and others" in the Manitoba Social Studies curriculum. (*Native Studies: Early Years (K-4) A Teacher's Resource Book, 1995*)

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