



# The Classroom:

## A community of learners

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This chapter will help teachers to:

- understand the impact of the classroom’s physical environment on learning and take steps to create a safe, welcoming, engaging and respectful atmosphere
- understand the connections between the emotional environment and self-concept and learning success, and take steps to create a strong sense of community among students
- infuse Aboriginal content into the curriculum.

Many of the sample strategies and considerations have potential to benefit all students, not only Aboriginal students.

The classroom is more than simply a place. It is an environment that teachers and students create. When the atmosphere is warm, inclusive and inviting, students are more likely to feel safe and comfortable.

When they enter the classroom and sense a foundation of recognition and respect—cultural continuity—Aboriginal students feel better able to participate in classroom learning activities, take more ownership for their own learning, and face and overcome challenges that may lie ahead.

### wisdom

Shared

#### **Living as a community**

“The first stage of creating a learning community is to develop a sense of acceptance within the classroom. Learning to survive through tough winters has taught us [Aboriginal peoples] wonderful ways of living as a community. We have stories, laughter, quiet times of caring and all of the cooperative hard work that helps a community to survive ... Living as a community in this way is absolutely essential to our youth.”

– Aboriginal teacher

Recent research into brain-based learning identifies the significance of the learner’s affective or emotional state during the learning process. When students feel safe and comfortable, they are better able to learn.

Many Aboriginal students experience incidents of racism in school. They often say they do not feel safe in their schools or their classrooms.

Other Aboriginal students report that while students and teachers make an effort to welcome them into the school, they still often feel uncomfortable and like they do not belong.

A community of learners, where each student is recognized by his or her classmates and teachers as a valued and contributing member, can enhance a positive social-emotional environment that fosters success.

### Living Systems

Aboriginal tradition views the community, and thus the education system, as a living process. Cree language, for example, distinguishes between animate and inanimate things differently than English. Many objects, such as tables and chairs, that would typically be considered nonliving in English, are often referred to as living objects in Cree.

Like any living thing, a living educational system needs to:

- breathe, to nourish itself
- be interdependent
- be sensitive to its environment and constantly receive feedback
- value the gifts that each different aspect brings to the whole.

The classroom must become a dynamic, living space that re-creates itself continually. This re-creation should be built on relationship, undertaken in dialogue with students and parents, and based on students' evolving learning needs.

### Physical Environment

Traditionally, Aboriginal learning was often a multisensory small-group activity, beginning with observation and evolving into tactile, hands-on experiences. The classroom was the home and the village and, most significantly, the natural environment.

#### wisdom

Shared

##### **Traditional Aboriginal education**

“Tribal teaching and learning were intertwined with the daily lives of both teacher and learner. Tribal education was a natural outcome of living in close communion with each other and the natural environment.”

– Cajete 1994, p. 33

Consider how the physical arrangement of the classroom can affect the comfort level of students. The physical set-up of the classroom should offer the flexibility to incorporate many modes of learning. Adapting physical space by moving furniture and changing visual supports can be of benefit to all students. Ask students for their design ideas for the classroom environment. Brainstorm together for creative ideas and solutions.

### Forming the Circle

The circle is a familiar and sacred shape in many Aboriginal cultures. From round dance to sharing circle, it symbolizes many things, including wholeness, inclusiveness and the cycles of life.

As a way to organize classroom seating, the circle is a form that encourages relationship, discussion and cooperation. Whether tables and desks are arranged in one large circle or several smaller circles, the arrangement helps to create a sense of community and cooperation within each circle—every student in the circle is equal. Some students prefer to work at round tables, or in desks clustered to make a working group.

Circular groupings encourage teachers to circulate throughout the room, making contact with individual learners.

### story

Teacher

#### One big circle

“I’ve tried a lot of different desk and table arrangements over the years but the one that seems to work the best is one big circle. My own desk is part of the circle, too. When we all sit in a circle, we see each other’s faces, we interact. The students seem more likely to take part, to become engaged with what we’re doing. The centre of the circle becomes a space for all of us to use—for presentations, movement, games, drama—and for me to teach from. It makes it easy to move around and interact with each child.”

### Sounds, Sights and Movements

Aboriginal approaches to education see the classroom as a living system. A living system experiences changing levels of sound, light and sight, as well as movement.

Aboriginal students have preferences and needs relating to the level of intensity and input in each of these areas—and these may change from hour to hour and day to day. Consider the elements of sound, vision and movement, and experiment with them when creating the classroom atmosphere.

### Sounds

Productive classroom work can range in volume from virtual silence to the noisy buzz of small-group project work. Consider the following sample strategies for ensuring the sounds of the classroom enhance student success.

- Vary activities so that the level and type of sound in the classroom varies.
- Provide alternate workspaces in quiet areas for students who are sensitive to aural distractions. Consider whether using a CD player and headset to listen to music as they work will be helpful.
- Use background music to create atmosphere.
- Encourage students to experiment with earplugs or headphones to see if this helps screen out distracting sounds.
- Consider using sound systems that amplify and clarify verbal interactions.
- Provide a quiet, distraction-free area for testing.

### Sights

One significant way to create cultural continuity in the classroom is to routinely reflect Aboriginal experiences as part of visual displays and art projects. Ask contacts in the Aboriginal community (e.g., parents, Friendship Centres, Native liaison workers) to help collect posters, pictures, books and art for display in the classroom.

Consider using visual references for schedules and for steps in a sequence. These could be in the form of a planning board, list of activities or series of labelled pictures.

Fluorescent lights may have a negative impact on the concentration and learning of some students. By the end of the day, their eyes may be tired or they may get a headache. Whenever possible, use natural light or turn off some fluorescents during certain activities.

## Movements

Students who learn well in a tactile, kinesthetic way benefit from active approaches to learning, such as building, modelling and demonstrating understanding through movement and drama. Providing these types of concrete experiences helps with both retention and comprehension of new skills and concepts.

Being able to move around freely may be especially important for some students. Creating opportunities for them to move around during learning activities can be a supportive step.

- Offer students the choice of standing, rather than sitting, for some activities.
- Plan times and activities that incorporate movement.
- Build in opportunities for movement during testing.

## Emotional Environment: Culture and Self-concept

Aboriginal students are more likely to develop a positive self-concept in a classroom where their cultures are valued and their individual gifts are recognized. A strong self-concept is where learning and community both begin. It allows students to say “yes” to learning and to take their place in the classroom—“Yes, I can try this. Yes, I can do this. Yes, I will take part. Yes, I belong here. Yes, I am worth it.”

A strong self-concept allows students to leave one classroom and go on to the next classroom or school with the ability to advocate for themselves and their learning needs.

As in all else, culture is at the core of a positive self-concept. Aboriginal students need to see positive reflections of their culture in the classroom on a regular basis, connected in meaningful ways to learning in all subject areas, at all grade levels, from science and math to literature and music.

## wisdom

Shared

### Structure of doubt

“As the process of educational reform continues, it is imperative that researchers understand the structure of doubt the Canadian educational system has generated among Aboriginal people ... The self-doubt it has generated within Aboriginal students has made them discount their inherent capacities and gifts.”

– Battiste 2002, p. 27

### Nurturing self-concept

Students enter the classroom on the first day of school with a self-concept that has already been influenced by past experiences beyond a teacher's control. But self-concepts can and do change—for better and for worse.

Traditionally, the community shared in the teaching of a young person. Students would be encouraged to discover their gifts and everyone involved understood that learning takes time. Many Aboriginal people are concerned that too few young people today understand the gift of being who they are. Without this understanding, students often feel lost and discouraged.

It is important for students to have a solid sense of who they are and of how their abilities allow them to contribute to the world around them. This sense of sustainability must come from deep within the student.

Teachers of Aboriginal students have an important role to play in nurturing the self-concepts of their students by:

- showing respect for and interest in Aboriginal cultures
- building cultural continuity into classroom activity
- creating a classroom environment that supports feelings of acceptance and respect
- expecting and finding ways to help every student succeed
- focusing on gifts and strengths, and encouraging students to use these to overcome their challenges
- helping students to recognize and own their successes—even the small ones
- communicating with parents and families about students' successes
- letting students make real decisions about things that will affect them, and expecting them to share responsibility for these decisions
- reminding students that they have the ability to make meaningful changes in the classroom, school and community, and providing them with opportunities to do so
- planning opportunities for students to contribute and feel connected by helping each other and the teacher
- helping students become effective self-advocates.

## wisdom

### Shared

#### **Self-confidence**

Developing a strong self-concept is not always easy—for sometimes life is hard. However, it is during some of our most difficult times that we can learn about some of the greatest gifts inside us. It is important for you to let your students know that gifts and wisdom are often earned by facing challenges wisely. Help them face the little things so they can grow strong in their gifts. As Hap Gilliland says, “... self-confidence is the memory of success” (1999, p. 79).

#### **A sense of belonging**

In Aboriginal traditions, cooperation and sharing are the foundations upon which families and communities base their survival. Competition and the accumulation of personal wealth often have significantly less status within Aboriginal communities than they do in mainstream society.

Aboriginal students are more likely to do their best work in classroom communities where they experience a sense of safety and belonging, and feel respected and valued as individuals within the group.

When teachers quietly and respectfully acknowledge the unique strengths of each individual student, students know they have an important place in the classroom. For many Aboriginal students, bragging and boasting are not considered culturally appropriate so it is important for the teacher to find ways to acknowledge students, without focusing unwelcome attention on them.

When students are able to identify their unique contributions to the classroom community, they also become aware of how to use their strengths and gifts to benefit the class as a whole. This process takes time and hard work, as well as an ongoing emphasis on equality among classroom members.

#### **Uncovering hidden gifts**

Helper, humourist, peacemaker, performer, artist, mathematician, observer—each student has a number of gifts they bring to the classroom.

To begin discovering students' classroom gifts, quietly observe them in group situations and one-on-one interactions with other students.

- How are students demonstrating their gifts? Do they hide or mask a strength? Do they misuse a strength?
- How can students' gifts enhance their learning?

If the students' gifts enhance their learning and growth, teachers can foster that strength by finding ways to acknowledge and use these gifts in classroom activities.

If gifts are misused in inappropriate behaviour, a student's gifts and strengths may be overlooked. For example, language and logic skills may be overlooked or dismissed in a student who likes to argue. Likewise, a student labelled as a troublemaker may have unrecognized leadership skills. The challenge is to help students recognize their own skills and then to encourage them to rechannel the skills in positive directions.

### Modelling and reinforcing

A teacher's response to and respect for Aboriginal students, their cultures and their gifts will set the tone for other students. There are many opportunities to model respect, caring and acceptance.

- Ensure students are addressed by their correct names. Because of the effect of translation, some students' surnames may sound unusual. If they have a surname such as "Calf Robe," do not abbreviate it, for example, to "Calf"—use their full name.
- Remember and refer to students' personal interests so that they feel important and accepted.
- Do not allow put-downs of anyone. Teach students strategies for responding to put-downs, such as being assertive and saying, "That is a put-down and I will not accept it."
- Find ways to recognize students' strengths on a regular basis, in both one-on-one settings and group settings. Many Aboriginal peoples do not promote the praise of individuals. Recognize or celebrate strengths in the context of the contribution students have made to the community—to another student's success, to a team effort or to the class as a whole.
- Widen appreciation and acceptance by planning activities that highlight Aboriginal cultures as well as the strengths, talents and interests of individual students.
- Teach, model and reinforce social skills.

## story

Teacher

### **Classroom rules**

“I tell my students that rules and guidelines exist so we can all use our gifts wisely and contribute to our community.

When we create our classroom rules, I contribute 50 percent of the rules and the students develop the other 50 percent. We read the rules aloud and practise them every day. I try especially hard to live by the rules. Because the students have input into the rules, they really mean a lot to them—they want their classroom to function well.

I also try to acknowledge and reinforce students who use their gifts and make a contribution.”

## Using peer mentors and tutors

Look for opportunities for Aboriginal students, particularly those who struggle with their academic or social skills, to be peer tutors for other students. Have them tutor in an area of strength or about a concept they have already mastered. Not only will this boost their self-concept, it will help clarify and reinforce what they have learned. Teaching is often the best way to learn.

Peer mentors can help students develop social and friendship skills. Peer mentors can serve as role models, sources of information, readers, scribes and study buddies. Because they speak the same “language” and often have similar experiences, peer mentors can help create a more relaxed learning situation. Be aware that the best students are often not the best tutors; they may not be able to relate to the learning challenges and struggles that other students face.

Peer tutoring can benefit Aboriginal students, both when they tutor and when they are the ones being tutored.

## story

Teacher

### **Sharing gifts**

“One boy in my Grade 6 class is just an amazing artist. He struggles with language skills but he communicates beautifully through his art. The Grade 8 teacher was doing an art unit in an area where his gift really shines and she suggested that he come into her class and basically teach this lesson. He got such a lift from that experience! It was so good for him.”

### Encouraging leadership

In Aboriginal traditions, leadership is taught through service—helping others is a critical component of learning. Traditionally, being a good helper is an important value to live by. If people help one another with kindness, things will go well. Silent leadership, or living in “right relationship” with others, can be a very powerful learning force. Aboriginal students need opportunities to create change in their classrooms, their schools and in our complex world.

To encourage student leadership, teachers can use strategies such as the following.

- Develop leadership among students by looking for opportunities to have them help other students as well as teachers.
- Help students understand that they are often in a position to help, for example, they can plan an event or help a classmate with homework.
- Assure students (and their parents) that they have the right and responsibility to ask questions of teachers, and to discuss issues that they may have differing views on. Some students and their families have limited experience questioning others. To be good leaders, they need to learn to do this with confidence, respect and a willingness to consider multiple perspectives.

### story

Teacher

“At our school, all the students from grades 4 through 9 do Group Fit and Group Cree together. We use a family model that’s familiar to the students, where the older kids help with the younger ones. The students like it and it lets the older ones take a leadership role. We also find that for the older students to teach the younger ones, they really need to know their stuff.”

### Building community through talking circles

Talking circles are based on the sacred tradition of sharing circles. People leading a traditional sharing circle have a blessing from an Elder to do this, and use special prayers and sacred objects in the ceremony. Consider inviting an Elder to the classroom to help students learn about this tradition.

The purpose of the less formal talking circle, used as part of classroom instruction, is to create a safe environment where students can share their point of view with others. Create a talking circle in the classroom, where all the students come together to solve problems, explore issues or celebrate successes. Circles are useful when the topic under

consideration has no right or wrong answer, or when classroom members need to share their feelings or thoughts.

Within the circle, each member has equality—no one is above or below anyone else. What each member says will be listened to without interruption and without criticism. Talking circles ensure that everyone has a chance to speak, so even quiet students have the opportunity to participate and be heard. It also creates opportunities for participants to develop an empathetic appreciation for points of view other than their own.

It takes the contributions of each member within the circle to make the classroom community work well. Creating opportunities for students to have real input into real decisions about what happens in the classroom is an effective way of teaching about:

- *consequences*—seeing their ideas put into action; learning about the direct results of choices and decisions
- *respect*—hearing other students’ needs and opinions; having their own needs and opinions heard
- *responsibility*—to themselves, each other and the teacher
- *trust*—trusting themselves and each other to make good decisions; living up to the teacher’s trust in them to make good decisions
- *leadership*—putting ideas into action; working toward the common good; thinking for themselves
- *community*—valuing everyone; balancing the needs of individuals with the needs of the group.

If a topic is a very sensitive one, a teacher may wish to invite an Elder to provide leadership. With sensitive topics there is always the risk of students making themselves vulnerable through sharing or receiving information. Sensitive topics may evoke an array of emotions. This can result in things that should not be getting said, or sensitive and inappropriate personal information being shared. Teachers need to ensure that no individual student is left vulnerable or hurt by what is said in the talking circle. Teachers must also be prepared to provide support for students who share information that reveals a specific need or risk.

For a blackline master on guidelines for talking circles, see *Appendix 5: Guidelines for Talking Circles*.

## wisdom

Shared

### **Symbolism of the circle**

“In Native tradition, the Circle is a symbol of power, relation, peace and unity. It serves as a reminder of the sacred relationship we share with all living beings in this world and of our responsibility as a helper and contributor to the flow of the Circle of Life by living in harmony and balance with all our relations.”

– Garrett et al. 2003, p. 227

## Aboriginal Content

While the first responsibility for teachers is to follow the provincial programs of study, the content and context used to teach these outcomes can be a powerful message to students. To Aboriginal students especially, Aboriginal content—whether in a story, a math example or a problem-solving technique—can have a profound impact on how they see themselves. It can also affect their understanding of how others see them and their cultures.

A *lack* of Aboriginal content in the classroom also speaks volumes. Without opportunities to reflect on their histories and cultures—and to engage with their peers in this reflection—Aboriginal students may feel isolated, unheard and invisible.

Unfortunately there are many images—both visual and written—created by individuals with limited understanding of Aboriginal peoples and cultures. Most of these images have been, and continue to be, harmful, damaging the self-concept of Aboriginal people and teaching non-Aboriginal people false concepts. It is important that individual teachers be vigilant to ensure that these inaccurate and hurtful images do not find their way into the classroom.

Fortunately, there is an increasing range of positive Aboriginal content available in many media and across many subject areas, from literature and visual art to film, music, science, mathematics, and so on.

The First Nations, Métis and Inuit (FNMI) Curriculum Infusion Project is part of the Alberta Education First Nations, Métis and Inuit Initiative. The objective is to increase the relevance of provincial programs of study for all students by:

- infusing Aboriginal perspectives into programs of study
- providing strategies for implementation of these programs of study that will support and encourage all students, including Aboriginal students.

Aboriginal content can happen in two ways: as specific programs of study on Aboriginal content and as infusion of Aboriginal content into existing programs of study.

### Specific Aboriginal content

These programs of study are specifically designed to focus on Aboriginal peoples, cultures, worldviews and contemporary issues. This includes selected focus on Aboriginal peoples in the new Kindergarten to Grade 12 Social Studies program, in the senior high Aboriginal Studies 10, 20, 30 program, and in the new nine-year and twelve-year Cree and Blackfoot Language and Culture programs currently under development.

### Infusion of Aboriginal content

Aboriginal content can be infused into the regular Kindergarten to Grade 12 programs of study. Infusion of Aboriginal content is not an add-on or a special event—it is an integral, embedded and ongoing aspect of classroom experience. This inclusive model includes infusion of Aboriginal perspectives across the subject areas at all grade levels.

The infusion of Aboriginal content into the regular curriculum ensures that all students have opportunities to learn about the historical and contemporary contributions and cultures of Aboriginal peoples.

In a classroom that includes Aboriginal students, infusion of Aboriginal content provides a balance of perspectives and helps dispel stereotypes by reflecting these students' cultures in their learning. Students learn most effectively when they experience a connection with what they are learning. Infusion fosters this connection. It also encourages Aboriginal students to become aware of the multiple perspectives within Aboriginal groups.

In a classroom of both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students, infusion of Aboriginal content encourages all students to become more aware of their own perspectives on particular topics or concepts, and to increase their knowledge and understanding of Aboriginal perspectives.

Infusion of Aboriginal content also offers students a way to study the universal human experience within the Aboriginal experience. Just as students learn about human dynamics from Shakespeare or a Margaret Laurence novel, so too can students identify with the life dynamics presented by characters and situations in an Aboriginal film such as *Smoke Signals* or by an Aboriginal novelist such as Thomas King.

Cultural infusion is:

- congruent with the Alberta programs of study
- comfortable with complexity, with “this AND that”
- an attitude, an awareness
- a permeation, rather than an add-on or drop-in piece of information.

### Cultural Infusion and the Non-Aboriginal Teacher

How does a non-Aboriginal teacher ensure that infusion of Aboriginal content is appropriate, follows protocol and maintains cultural integrity? The key is to rely on Aboriginal resources including:

- print, video and film, visual art, and other resources created by Aboriginal people
- contacts in the Aboriginal community made through cultural liaisons, parents and community leaders, keeping in mind that different people hold varying levels and diverse areas of expertise.

### Selecting Aboriginal Content

When choosing a work, such as a piece of literature or art, or an activity to infuse into the regular curriculum, give careful consideration to:

- voice and source
- intent
- complexity.

#### Voice and source

The effectiveness of any work—such as a short story, a historical text or a contemporary film—as an infusion of content depends to a large extent on the voice or tone it embodies and on its source or authorship.

To assess the appropriateness of a work’s voice, ask questions such as the following.

- Is the material respectful and truthful in both tone and information?
- Is there anything in the material that could embarrass or hurt an Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal student?
- Could the material foster stereotypical thinking in either Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal students?
- Does the material present a one-sided view of history, religion or lifestyles? Does it measure success in life by only one standard?
- Does the material present Aboriginal cultures and peoples as distinct from one another, or does it portray pan-Indianism (a generic presentation of “Indian” culture)?

- Does the work reflect respect for the roles of women and Elders in Aboriginal cultures?
- Is the language respectful and free of any racist or insulting words or images?
- Do Aboriginal characters speak dialogue that reflects the language skills of oral traditions, or do they speak Hollywood-style—simplistic language or “noble savage” dialogue?

To assess the appropriateness of a work’s source or authorship, ask questions such as the following.

- What is the author’s (or artist’s or filmmaker’s) background or experience that qualifies him or her to portray Aboriginal peoples and cultures?
- Does the author’s perspective strengthen or enhance the portrayal of Aboriginal peoples, cultures or issues?

### Intent

To assess the intent of a work, ask questions such as the following.

- Does the work interpret ways of life with a deep knowledge of them? Non-Aboriginals are seldom intimately familiar with or deeply knowledgeable about the realities of Aboriginal contemporary and traditional ways of life.
- Does the work present a balanced, factual view? Or does it describe events in terms that state or imply the superiority of one group over another?
- Does the work attribute advances to one group but not another? For example, does it name the European explorer but not the Aboriginal people who guided the explorer to “his” discoveries?

For a blackline master of a sample checklist, see *Appendix 6: Evaluating Resources About Aboriginal Peoples*.

### Complexity

When choosing an activity, make sure that it is presented and undertaken in a way that reflects, as closely as possible, the daily, lived experience of that activity. Separating an activity from its social or spiritual context removes its underlying significance and cultural integrity. Consider the following examples.

- Bannock making connects to teaching about sharing. When students are making bannock, invite another class to share it with them. (Serve it with black tea, butter and jam.)

- Making miniature tipis is in itself simply a craft activity, not a cultural learning experience. When an Elder or traditional teacher guides the students through the teachings associated with each tipi pole and the symbols painted on the tipi, tipi making becomes cultural infusion.

### Process for infusing Aboriginal content

The effective infusion of Aboriginal content goes hand in hand with a learning process that reflects the tenets of Aboriginal education. This is a time-generous, rather than time-limited, approach that is cooperative rather than competitive. It also incorporates a holistic approach, encourages observation, is experiential, is based in community resources and considers multiple perspectives.

#### **Holistic approach**

Successful infusion encourages curriculum crossovers, such as telling Aboriginal legends as part of science, discussing Aboriginal literature in language arts, learning Aboriginal activities and games in physical education or using the geometric ratios of the traditional star quilt to teach mathematics.

#### **Observation**

Students learn from modelling and demonstration. For example, they watch as a tipi is erected, then try it themselves.

#### **Experiential**

Students learn in hands-on ways, by doing. For example, students could create art and text styled on the works of Aboriginal artist George Littlechild to explore and express family and community relationships.

#### **Based in the community's resources**

Elders, parents, liaisons and community leaders bring a variety of traditions—oral, written, visual—into the teachings. For example, an Aboriginal lawyer could talk to a social studies class about his or her work in restorative justice.

#### **Considers multiple perspectives**

The process of infusing Aboriginal content does not seek to polarize views; it reflects a “this AND that” point of view. For example, the history of residential schools reflects many viewpoints.

## Assessment

With infusion of Aboriginal content, effective and appropriate assessment and evaluation should evolve out of the process so that what is being measured is a growth of awareness and a change in attitude. To be truly meaningful, evaluation needs to address more than mastery of specific skills or information.

The objective of cultural infusion is an increased understanding of and appreciation for multiple perspectives. Self-reflection becomes an important component in assessing how infused content affects learning, because it is through self-reflection that hearts and minds are opened.

Assessment processes can be both subjective and objective, and both structured and unstructured. For more structured types of assessment, rubrics can be used to clarify tasks and expectations.

Wherever possible, the assessment should reflect the cultural perspective being presented. For example, in an activity on consensus decision making, the most appropriate type of assessment would be a performance task that demonstrates how students actually participate in decision making.

## Use of Literature

Literature—especially works by Aboriginal authors—encourages Aboriginal students to increase their knowledge and understanding of the world and of themselves. It allows them to identify with the experiences of characters in situations both familiar and new, and in the case of Aboriginal literature, to experience cultural continuity in their classrooms.

The literary genre of storytelling is especially valued by Aboriginal cultures; teaching through literature is a core tenet of Aboriginal approaches to education. Aboriginal students may already be very familiar with the use of storytelling as a teaching tool, both at home and in the classroom.

Use literature to encourage students to:

- examine ways they connect with the story and the characters
- explore their own ideas and beliefs
- develop problem-solving skills
- incorporate hopeful strategies to draw upon in the future.

Literature can also foster cross-curricular connections. Look for authentic ways to link outcomes in science, social studies, health and other subjects with themes in novels, stories, films and poems.

Students can respond to literature at any stage of reading by:

- making predictions prior to reading a story
- stopping at various points in the story to make a comment, respond to what is happening or make further predictions
- responding to what they read through a variety of activities.

There are many ways to respond to a work of literature, including:

- journal writing
- letters to a character
- drawings (for example, drawing pictures of various options a character might have or of personal experiences evoked by the story)
- role-plays based on a story
- revisions to the story, including writing different endings or sequels to the story.

The new authorized list of grades 4–12 novels includes a number of works by contemporary Aboriginal writers. A list of these novels is posted on the Alberta Education Web site at [www.education.gov.ab.ca/k\\_12/curriculum/bySubject/english/novel\\_4\\_12.pdf](http://www.education.gov.ab.ca/k_12/curriculum/bySubject/english/novel_4_12.pdf).

Consider whether or not the school library might contain outdated material that promotes misinformation and stereotyping. If so, do a systematic culling of inappropriate materials so that students are accessing reliable and culturally appropriate information when they use the school library.

## Selecting Aboriginal Images

Consider the following guidelines when selecting pictures, photographs and other Aboriginal images to use in the classroom.

### Keep the images human

Often, images of Aboriginal people can objectify them—they become objects to count, animal caricatures or team mascots.

### Represent the diversity of Aboriginal peoples

There are over 500 First Nations groups in North America, in addition to the Métis and Inuit peoples. Avoid pan-Indianistic viewpoints that portray all Aboriginal peoples as coming from the plains area. Not all First Nations people were buffalo hunters or tipi dwellers.

### Recognize the complexity of Aboriginal societies

Aboriginal communities have always consisted of a variety of specialized, skilled roles for both men and women including hunters, entertainers, healers and teachers. Images should reflect the diversity and complexity of these communities. Avoid images that reflect only a limited perspective of the community—such as men only as warriors, or women only as caregivers.

### Include contemporary as well as historical images

It is important to choose images that show Aboriginal people in contemporary as well as historical times. Contemporary images reflect the evolving and adaptable nature of Aboriginal communities. Examples of these images may include housing in the North (not just igloos), national Aboriginal councils involved in political decision making, or traditional dancers using new materials and colours for their regalia. It is important for images to reflect the reality that Aboriginal people still exist in today's society.

