

Aboriginal Elders: A Grade 12 Unit Lesson Plan

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March 31, 2003

**EDST 565D
University of British Columbia**

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Aboriginal Elders: A Grade 12 Unit Lesson Plan

Introduction:

This unit plan is designed to be used by teachers engaged in Aboriginal education.¹ By Aboriginal education, we mean education about Aboriginal people for all students. This unit plan is intended to give educators the tools to teach a comprehensive unit on the importance of elders in Aboriginal communities. We selected grade 12 as the intended audience for this unit plan after reviewing the IRP for the grade 12 First Nations Studies curriculum. The study of elders complements the themes of the grade 12 curriculum, which are: Skills and Processes, Land and Relationships, Contact, Colonialism, and Resistance Cultural Expressions, and Leadership and Self-Determination. The curriculum does not explicitly include the study of elders, however, we feel that this omission is an oversight and that given the important role of elders in Aboriginal communities, incorporating this unit into the grade 12 curriculum will enhance the program. Furthermore, the reading incorporated in this unit plan require a certain level of reading comprehension and the activities of self-reflection and interviewing an elder demand maturity, thoughtfulness, and confidence. While other grades may benefit from lessons similar to those found in this unit, we feel that this unit will be most useful and beneficial for grade 12 students.

In addition to learning about the roles of elders in Aboriginal communities, students will learn that elders are sources of knowledge from whom we can learn first hand. After reading about and discussing the role and importance of elders in Aboriginal communities, students will have the opportunity to converse with an elder and reflect on the experience.

Several themes are underlined in the design of this unit plan. Firstly, we have emphasized the importance of respect for elders. That is, we hope that this unit plan helps foster in students a respect for and understanding of the important roles that elders have in Aboriginal communities. Secondly, we have focused on the specific roles that elders have in Aboriginal communities. Students will learn that elders are sources of knowledge, community leaders, and carriers of culture. Thirdly, we stress the importance of orality and learning through stories and conversation. Our hope is that students come to recognize stories

¹ For the purposes of this unit plan the term “Aboriginal” is used to refer to all Indigenous, First Nations, and Native peoples.

from and conversations with elders as valid and rewarding methods of learning. Lastly, we have been guided by holistic Aboriginal pedagogy. Students will engage in group activities that foster relationships through collaborative efforts and have the opportunity to reflect on their learning.

A Discussion of Elders

What follows is a brief discussion of the role and importance of elders in Aboriginal communities including why and how they should be seen as sources of knowledge and culture. This discussion is intended to provide educators with background information to serve as the starting point for and introduction to this unit plan. To supplement the information provided here, we have included a bibliography of related texts that we encourage you to explore. What follows is presented as a series of questions and answers, which we hope you will refer back to, particularly if such questions arise from your students during the teaching of this unit.

□ What is an elder? How are elders identified and different from other elderly people?

Shawn Wilson, who has conducted extensive research on the role of Aboriginal elders in their communities, offers an identification of elders in Aboriginal communities that succinctly clarifies who they are and their importance within the community. According to Wilson, Aboriginal elders differ from other elderly people in the following ways:

“It is...important that an elder have a good knowledge of the culture and traditions of his [her] people...an elder is one who is willing to share this knowledge by passing it on to the younger generations through the teaching and modeling of correct behavior...Elders must convey a spiritual continuity of the past, present, and future. It is the special ability to apply this knowledge, wisdom, and spirituality to the well-being of the community that makes the elder such an important and unique individual. It is the elders’ responsibility to interpret the events of today into the cultural framework of the traditions of the people. Elders are concerned with the well-being of the entire community as well as with the well-being of individuals within the community.” (1996, p. 47-48).

Wilson goes on to discuss the need to respect elders given the important roles they play in their communities and the many responsibilities they have. That is, as communities rely on elders

for spiritual and cultural guidance and leadership, they must ensure that elders are given the respect that they deserve.

Becky Loucks, a community member with a high level of respect and admiration for elders, describes her personal definition of elders in a booklet produced by the Curve Lake Reserve in Ontario. She states:

“My Elders are the ones who look after me in all my needs. They are my lifelong friends; I can confide in them. My Elders are understanding; they have been through some of the same situations and can guide me through when the times are tough, no matter what the cost is to them.” (Elston, 1991, p.22)

Loucks acknowledges that different people define the term elder in many, often personal, ways.

□ **How does the study of elders contribute to our learning about and understanding of Aboriginal people?**

A comprehensive study of Aboriginal people will involve many themes including (but not limited to) culture, community organization, traditions, languages, (de)colonization, spirituality, contemporary socio-economic circumstances, and residential schooling. We believe, however, that given the significant role that elders play in Aboriginal communities, no study of Aboriginal people should exclude an analysis of elders, their roles, and their importance. In fact, the themes listed above are often best studied through discussions with community elders who are willing to share their knowledge about such themes. Furthermore, to overlook the importance of elders in Aboriginal communities is to miss a significant aspect of Aboriginal culture. Elders, therefore, should be considered for their significance within their communities and recognized as sources of invaluable knowledge.

□ **What can we learn from elders?**

If we recognize elders as sources of knowledge, there is no limit to what we can learn from them. Elders can teach us about their own experiences, the history and culture of Aboriginal people, Aboriginal spirituality, languages, traditions, and the list goes on. As Leilani Holmes, a professor of Sociology and Cross-Cultural Studies and a student of *hula kahiko* (ancient hula) points out (2000), the stories of elders can lead to reinterpretations of current environmental and socio-economic concerns and encourage social justice. For young Aboriginal students, stories from and conversations with elders can lead to greater

levels of cultural awareness and pride. Elders can also help to alleviate for young Aboriginal students the tensions resulting from interactions between Western and Aboriginal knowledges, traditions, and cultures. The preservation of Aboriginal cultures and the assertion of Aboriginal rights are historical and ongoing struggles. While elders serve as leaders and sources of knowledge, they can also inspire Aboriginal youngsters to continue these struggles.

□ **How can we learn from elders?**

As stated by Wilson, one role of elders is to model correct behavior in line with Aboriginal values. Thus, through simply observing elders we can learn. There are now several texts that document the knowledge of elders and allow us to access their teachings. Through conversations with and stories from elders, students can learn from elders while engaging with them and forming relationships. Such interactions foster understanding and respect for elders. Furthermore, as Shirley Sterling, an Aboriginal academic and educator in British Columbia, points out, stories are mnemonic devices through which unwritten knowledge can be passed and remembered.

□ **In what ways does this unit plan differ from and complement mainstream pedagogy and other lessons?**

In most mainstream classrooms, learning takes place through the reading and discussion of texts, the taking of exams, and the writing of papers. Teachers tend to have sole control over the assignments and events in the classroom, and there is little room for individual or subjective interpretation of information. Aboriginal education may be limited to the memorization of dates, names, places, and traditions and not allow students to reflect on what they are learning. This unit differs from such approaches by allowing students to gain autonomy in the learning process. Students are expected to reflect on their experience of interacting with an elder and interpret for themselves what they have learned. In addition, students will learn first hand from an elder, which, we believe, will make learning more personal and meaningful for the students.

□ **Who can I turn to for more information or help in further developing this unit?**

As pointed out under the BC First Nations Studies Grade 12 Curriculum: *Building a Support Network*, there are a number of resources available to help enhance your unit on Aboriginal elders or other matters related to First Nations content. Some of these sources may help in providing contacts with various First Nations communities. Such organizations are

available to provide First Nations curriculum resources, to answer various questions, and to provide additional contacts.

The First Nations 12 IRP (Integrated Resource Package) list the following as possible sources:

- School District First Nations Education Coordinators
- Local Band Educator Coordinators
- Local Tribal Councils
- Local Band Councils
- Friendship Centers
- School Counselors and Colleagues
- Ministry of Education: Aboriginal Branch
- BC Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs
- BC Treaty Commission
- Umbrella provincial First Nations political organizations

How to use the unit plan

This unit plan can be used alone or as a supplement to other lessons, and should be altered when necessary to best serve the students. That said, see this unit plan as a guide that can and should be modified according to your own time frames, creativity, and needs. However, as learning *about* and *from* elders are equally important, we see the opportunity to interview an elder as an essential element of the unit plan.

Why Interviews?

The interview approach was selected as the main teaching tool to promote the passing of Indigenous knowledge through methods rooted in Indigenous knowledge such as orality, storytelling, and personal interactions. Indigenous Knowledge “is orientated toward holistic and contextual processes that involves a kind of logic that is symbolic, relational, qualitative, and interactionist and that reflects the notion of many possible directions in the relationships between cause and effect” (Battiste and Henderson, 2000, p.39). We also chose the interview process to give students some authority and autonomy in their learning process. Through presentations and discussions, students learn from each other and recognize that learning does not happen unilaterally. Likewise, through the interviews – conducting, writing about, discussing, and reflecting on them – students learn that there are multiple lessons to be learned.

Why the four R's: Respect, Relationships, Responsibility, and Reverence

The four R's were used as a way to structure and frame the interviews. Although students may have been exposed to some aspects of the four R's, this unit lesson plan gives them the opportunity to apply all of them consciously during the interview process. It is also hoped that students will begin to apply the four R's in other aspects of their lives. The four R's approach is an Indigenous way of life. The four R's guide Indigenous people in their actions and words in many situations. Thus we used the four R's as a conceptual framework for the interviews.

Respect:

Respect is an integral part of an Indigenous way of life. Respect is given to all living and non-living things. It begins with the self and ripples out to others including family, community and nation (Longhouse Teachings). Students will earn and give respect to each other while demonstrating the respect for the classroom teacher and the elders.

Relationships

Indigenous knowledge is the “expression of the vibrant relationships between the people, their ecosystem, and the other living beings and spirits that share their lands. All aspects of this knowledge are interrelated and cannot be separated.” (Battiste and Henderson, 2000, p.42). By demonstrating respect, reverence, and responsibility, students will develop and enhance relationships.

Responsibility

“Aboriginal Traditionalists have long recognized the link between individual responsibility and community well-being. The knowledge that each person is responsible for his or her actions In-Relation to the larger community is a fundamental shared belief.” (Graveline, 1998, p.57). This unit offers students to take responsibility for themselves and their own learning. Students are strongly encouraged to take responsibility for their actions and words during the interview process with the elders.

Reverence

Reverence, which is intimately linked to respect deals with the sacred and spirituality. Oscar Kawagley, a well-known Indigenous scholar and author highlights the importance of reverence in his tetrahedral framework. The three corners of the base “represent the human being, nature, and spirituality respectively as elements in a common circle of life.” (p.16). The framework allows for triangulation whereby human beings can locate themselves in relation to the other domains.

Safety Note:

It is important for both student(s) and elder(s) to feel comfortable with the interview process. This unit is structured to give students background preparation for practicing the four R's during the interview process so elders will have a positive experience.

The teacher must take precautionary measures to ensure that students are comfortable and safe from any physical harm during the interview process. If students do not know elders then identifying elders to agree to participate in the project and organizing the interview in small student groups with adult supervision is advised.

An Introduction to Aboriginal Elders

Objectives

It is expected that students will:

- Work collaboratively to identify what they already know about Aboriginal elders.
- Gives examples of and reflections on their personal interactions and relationships with elders.
- Gain knowledge of the importance of elders in their own lives and for Aboriginal communities.

Purposes

- To introduce students to the unit on Aboriginal elders.
- to help students understand the role of elders in Aboriginal communities.
- To allow students to identify what they already know and want to know about Aboriginal elders.
- To provide students with the opportunity to reflect on the importance of elders in their own lives.

Suggested Time Frame

one class period

Approach

Elders have important roles in Aboriginal communities and serve as sources of knowledge, culture, and inspiration for younger generations (for a discussion of this see the introduction and references).

Introduction

Read several excerpts from Our Elders Speak: A Tribute to Native Elders (Appendix: References/Resources) to begin the unit. This book contains quotes from and pictures of Aboriginal elders as well as autobiographical paragraphs of each elder. This introductory activity will spark the interest of students. You do not need to have a discussion during this activity, rather just let the readings and themes soak in.

Development

Pass out the *KWL Chart* (Appendix: Learning Materials). Have students brainstorm what they know about elders in the first category. Do not guide them towards specific responses; this activity is intended only to get them thinking about elders in general. Record the students' responses using an overhead. When the discussion comes to a natural end, ask the students to brainstorm what they would like to learn about Aboriginal elders. Have students record their responses in the second column. At the end of the lesson, keep the transparency. The lists can be used later by students to reflect on how their understanding has changed and for you to ensure that students learn that which they hope to. At any point in the unit, students can fill in the last column. Tell the students that this chart must be handed in at the end of the unit, but should be used during the unit as a tool for writing the personal reflective essay.

Ask students to write a reflection in a journal or on a piece of paper about interactions and relationships that they have or have had with an elder(s). It is important for students to know that this activity will not be graded and is intended to allow them to reflect on the role that elders play in their own lives. Again, this can be referred to in the writing of the personal reflective essay.

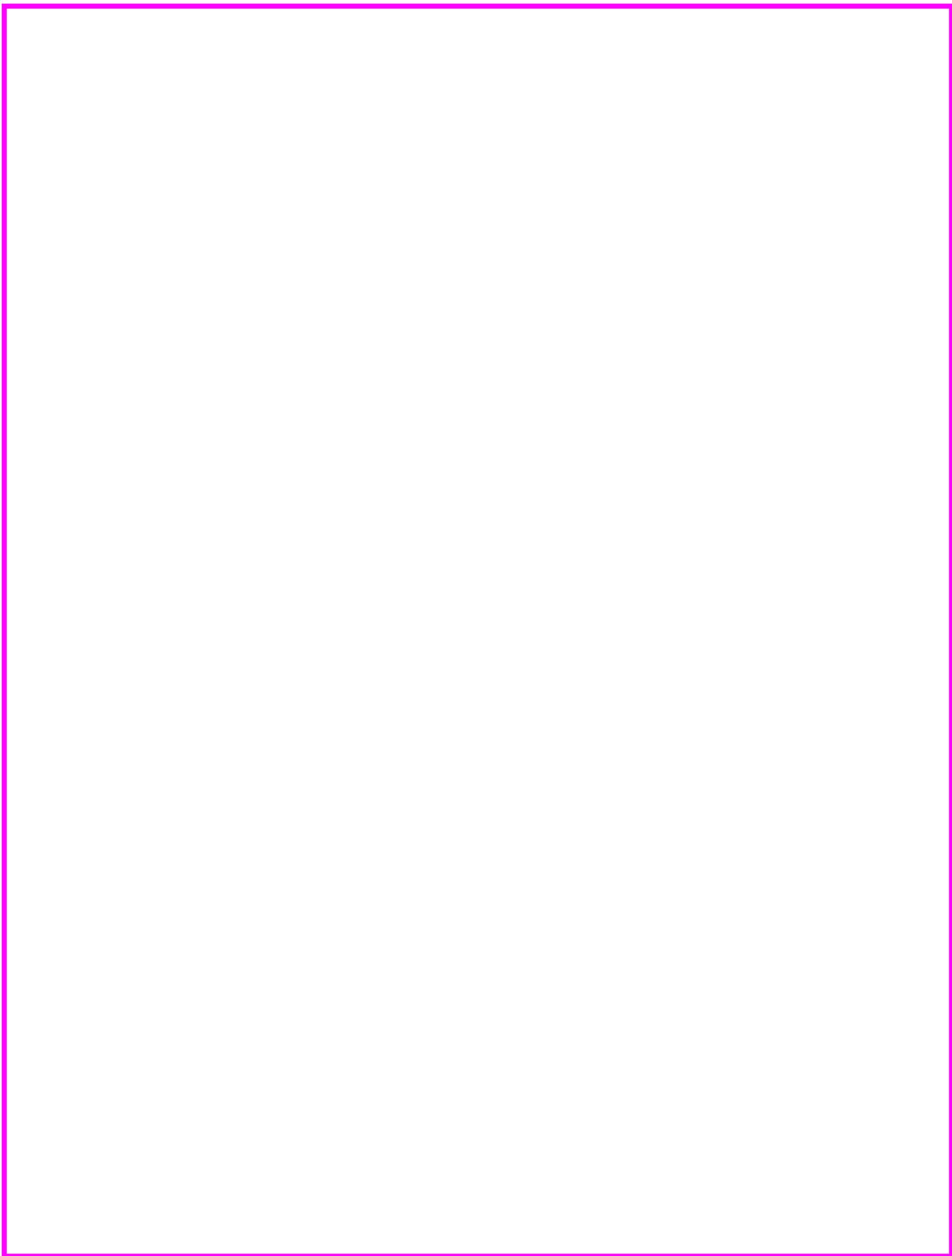
Focus Questions: Who are important elders in your lives? How have they influenced you? What role do they have in your life? What have you learned from them? What would you like to ask them? etc.

Closure

Upon completing these activities, discuss with the students the unit lesson plan. Make sure that you have read and understood the unit plan so that you can answer the students' questions. Discuss with them the assignment of interviewing an elder and the other activities included in the unit plan.

Homework:

Have students brainstorm their own ideas about Aboriginal elders. Students should bring with them to the following class their own definitions of an Aboriginal elder.



Learning From and About Elders

Objectives

It is expected that student will:

- read about, discuss, and demonstrate an understanding of:
 - a. The difference between Aboriginal elders and other elderly people.
 - b. The leadership role of Aboriginal elders in their communities.
 - c. The role of elders in the transmission of knowledge.
 - d. The role of elders in the transmission of Aboriginal cultures.
 - e. The role of elders as community healers.

Purposes

- To introduce students to the various roles and responsibilities of elders in Aboriginal communities
- To foster respect for Aboriginal elders as sources of knowledge, carriers of culture, leaders, and healer

Suggested Time Frame

one class period

Approach

Introduction

Share with students the objectives listed above to introduce them to the themes of the lesson.

Development

Divide students into three groups and provide space for group members to work together. Give each group several copies of one of the four excerpts listed below (see Appendix for location and sources of materials). Each excerpt addresses one or more of the themes listed in the objectives. Students will be asked to present what they found to be the most salient points from each excerpt as they relate to the lesson's themes presented above.

- a. "Elders in the Native Community" Chapter 2 from Shawn Wilson's Gwich'in Native Elders: Not Just Knowledge, But a Way of Looking at the World. (Alaska Native Knowledge Network, 1996).

- b. Selections from “Elders, Research, and a Native World View” Chapter 6 from Shawn Wilson’s Gwich’in Native Elders: Not Just Knowledge, But a Way of Looking at the World. (Alaska Native Knowledge Network, 1996). **AND** “Elders and Archaeologists: The Hesquiat Example” from Ruth Kirk’s Wisdom of the Elders. (The Royal British Columbia Museum, 1986).
- c. Shirley Sterling’s “Yetko and Sophie: Nlakapamux Cultural Professors” from The Canadian Journal of Native Education Volume 26, Number 1. (University of British Columbia, 2002).

Write the following questions on the board and ask students to answer them in pairs or groups of three. Students should work collaboratively and elect one member of the pair/group to serve as the recorder. Answers will be turned in at the end of the lesson. If need be, students should refer back to the readings.

1. What is the difference between Aboriginal elders and other elderly people?
2. In what ways do Aboriginal elders have leadership roles within their communities?
3. Give an example from the readings or the presentations of the role of elders in the transmission of knowledge.
4. How do elders contribute to the transmission of Aboriginal cultures in their communities?
5. How do elders serve as community healers? Consider both physical and spiritual healing.
6. How has your understanding of the role of elders in Aboriginal communities changed as a result of these readings/activities?

Closure

Shared Responses: Have each group share one answer.
Have students write in their journals and/or in the KWL Chart.

The Four R's: A Foundation for the Interviews

Objectives

It is expected that student will:

- Work collaboratively to provide meanings and examples of the four R's.
- Interpret meanings and give examples of the Longhouse Teachings.
- Be able to give specific examples of the four R's using any situation.
- Share personal examples of the four R's.
- Relate the four R's to the interview process.

Purposes

- To introduce students to the four R's: Respect, Relationships, Responsibility, and Reverence.
- To understand the importance and significance of the four R's.
- To develop an understanding that the four R's play a vital role in Aboriginal communities.
- To foster the use of the four R's in the interview process.

Suggested Time Frame

one to three class periods

Approach

-Part I-

Introduction

Inform students that they will soon begin their interview projects but not until a thorough discussion on interviewing protocols has been accomplished. Outline on the board this section of the unit plan: exploring the 4 R's, finding an elder, interviewing an elder, finding a topic, writing a reflective style essay, and making a booklet for the elders.

Pass out *The Four R's: Reverence, Respect, Relationships, and Responsibility* with the Medicine Wheel Diagram (Appendix: Learning Materials: permission to use granted by the First Nations House of Learning). Divide the students into pairs and have them write a definition or example of each R inside the wheel. i.e. respect: listening attentively.

Focus Questions: What does each R mean to you? How do you define them? Can you give an example of each?

Share responses and write them on the board.

Development

Pass out The Longhouse Teachings pamphlet (Appendix: Learning Materials). Explain that these teachings act as a guide for all students, staff, faculty, friends, and visitors who enter the UBC House of Learning. The students can use The Longhouse Teachings as a basis for understanding that the four R's can encompass every aspect of our lives. The four R's should guide us during the interview process. Point out that the four R's are universal guidelines practiced by many Aboriginal people as a way to interact with others and the environment, including plants and animals.

Read the four passages found in the pamphlet. Link the meaning of each R to the examples that are bulleted in the pamphlet. By going through this process, students will begin to understand the importance and significance of each R and to connect to its meaning.

Focus Questions: Could someone paraphrase the meaning of (name one of the R's) or what is the interpretation of the given meaning? How does one illustrate that R in the Longhouse? Continue the process with the remaining R's. You may also want to give more specific examples of the bulleted points. For example: caring for ourselves, others, the Longhouse and the environment, how do we take care of others and ourselves?

Closure

Summarize the four R's and have students give a quick example of one of them before they are dismissed.

Homework: Think about how the 4 R's could apply to the interview process especially in the pre-interview stage.

-PART II-

Introduction:

Review the 4 R's: What are they? Have students share examples of how one of the R's was demonstrated by someone during the last week. On a recipe card or a piece of paper, have students finish this sentence:

My _____ (person) demonstrates _____ (one of the R's) when _____

Example: My mother demonstrates responsibility when she checks my homework and helps me with it.

Development:

Pass out *The Four R's and the Interviewer: Pre-Interview* (Appendix: Learning Materials). Students will now examine the four R's as they relate to conducting an interview.

Have students give examples of each R within the cells.

Focus Questions: What things do we have to consider in the pre-interview stage? (Responses may include: Questions, finding an elder, getting consent). How would you show **respect** at this stage? In what ways would **reverence** apply in the pre-interview? What is your **responsibility** in preparing for a pre-interview? How do we honor **relationships** at this phase?

Write down student responses on the overhead.

Pass out *The Four R's and the Interviewer: Interview Stage* (Appendix: Learning Materials). The students will continue the process again but the table will be completed in light of the interview stage.

Focus Questions: What things do we have to consider in the interview stage? (Responses may include: Arriving on time, greeting, reviewing the questions, asking for permission to take notes, reviewing the purposes, asking questions, location, body position, eye contact, stopping on request, eating, offering a gift, thanking the elder, inviting him or her to the school for the gathering). Where would we put some of these items on the four R's chart and why? For example: Why should we arrive on time? And by arriving on time, what teachings are we applying? Continue the process.

Pass out *The Four R's and the Interviewer: Post Interview* (Appendix: Learning Materials). The students will continue the process again but the table will be completed in light of the post-interview stage.

Focus Questions: What things do we have to consider in the post-interview stage? (Responses may include: reviewing the student's use of the interview with the elder, changing the meaning or context of elder's words, revising the project if needed, reviewing the revised edition if necessary with the elder, thanking the elder again, maintenance of the relationships.) Where would we place some of the items on the our R chart and why? For example: Why should we check with the elder about

your final project? What teachings are we exercising by doing this?
Continue the process.

Closure:

Focus Questions: Why is it important to follow the Four R's in doing the interviews? Write in their journals and/or KWL chart.

Students will now have the foundation to do respectful interviews with their elders using the four R's. They can begin to seek out elders to interview and formulate questions for the interview. The questions can be centered on a specific topic, provided that it is acceptable by the elder. The questions should be reviewed either by the teacher or the other students before checking with the elder. Once the interviews are completed, the students will write an essay based on the interview. The students will also benefit from a discussion on how the interviews have affected them. The students can submit another medicine wheel diagram of how they showed the four R's during all stages of the interview process.

Setting up the Interviews: Part I

Objectives

It is expected that student will:

- Brainstorm various elders to interview.

Purposes

- To begin the process of the three interview stages.

Suggested Time Frame

one class period

Approach

Introduction

Focus Questions: Which students have an elder in their lives or at least know of an elder that may want to participate in the interview? Who are they? How many do not have elders to interview?

This part is important, as not all students will have an elder to interview. These students will need help in finding an elder for the interview.

Development

Discuss with the students the process of finding an elder to interview. Ask students that may be daunted by the process if they would be willing to interview an elder selected and previously contacted by you. Students that do not feel comfortable interviewing alone may also work with a partner. This unit focuses on Aboriginal elders, but in the event that a student cannot interview an Aboriginal elder, have him/her interview any elder while focusing on the four R's. Discussions with the students may go as follows:

1. Find an elder on your own: "Let's explore your options. Someone at the friendship center or other local Aboriginal organizations may lead you to an elder that would be willing to do the interview. However, there are many elders who do not wish to be approached so informally and can interpret your request as disrespectful because you do not know them. (Remember the four R's!)

Focus Questions: Where could you locate an elder? Do you need to re-think the meaning of an elder? (Refer back to Lesson 2 and our definitions of Aboriginal elders).

2. Interview an elder found by the teacher: “One option is to interview an elder that I have contacted and is willing to be interviewed.”

Focus Questions: “How would you feel about interviewing an elder that I have contacted and is willing to be interviewed? Would you feel comfortable interviewing and learning from a stranger? Think about how you might develop a relationship with this elder before and during the interview.”

3. Groups or Partner Work: “The other option is to “share” your elder. You could do this project in groups or in pairs, although individually is preferred when possible.”

Focus Questions: Would your elder mind if you invited other classmates to the interview? Is it possible to focus your interview around several different topics? Would your elder mind if he/she did two interviews?

4. Interview any elder (last resort): “If need be, you can interview any elder. I still want you to practice the four R’s in the interview process. You could interview one of your grandparents, great aunts, uncles, or other elderly people you know.”

Focus Questions:

Are there other non-Aboriginal elders available? Would they be willing to participate in the interview?

Discuss with students the protocols of asking an elder for the interview. Use the following websites for additional information:

Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs: Elders-General Information

<http://www.manitobachiefs.com/culture/culture.html>

Angel Fire: Wisdom of Elders-Protocols

<http://www.angelfire.com/trek/puknet/elder00.html>

You could assign reading these websites as homework and have a discussion about it during the next class.

Closure

Journal: How do you feel about the four options given to you?

Setting up the Interviews: Part II

Objectives

It is expected that student will:

- Brainstorm various interview topics.
- Choose a topic as a base for the interview.
- Formulate questions for the interview.

Purposes

- To continue the process of the three interview stages.

Suggested Time Frame

one class period

Approach

Introduction

Pass out the *Brainstorm Map* (Appendix: Learning Materials) Have students individually brainstorm on their own various topics that could serve as the basis for the interviews.

* The students are not limited to one choice; this activity is designed to focus students on their questions. Use the grade 12 curriculum to find additional topics. The list includes: traditional settlement and lifestyle patterns, traditional territories, language, cultural ownership, traditional technologies, traditional education, cultural activities, storytelling, etc. It is important that students realize that not all elders will know about each of these topics. In fact elders may steer the interview in unexpected directions. As stated in the last lesson plan, students should share their interview questions with the elder prior to the interview.

*It is important to use discretion in dealing with sensitive matters like the residential school experience. Unless the student has a strong personal connection with his/her elder and there is an understanding between them, we would recommend that this subject be omitted. The residential school experience is a very sensitive topic for those who have experienced it either first hand or through family members. It is also a topic that brings on a lot of sadness and grief. Another sensitive topic is spirituality. Some elders will not speak about very private spiritual

ceremonies because of their customs. But, some aspects of spirituality could still be explored provided that they are handled with respect. If an elder tells the student that he/she cannot answer a question, the student should be respectful and not probe any further. (Remember the four R's!)

Development

Form groups of at least three. Students will discuss several topics that they are interested in exploring during the interview.

Focus Questions: Which topic appeals to you? Why? Can you focus your interview around that one topic? If not, what other areas will you explore?

Next, students will begin formulating their questions around their chosen topic(s).

Give students a time frame in which they can conduct their interview. Have them share their questions with others for feedback. Remind them to keep writing in their journals. Given the task of conducting the interview and writing the reflective essay make sure there is sufficient time between the interview and the gathering.

Discuss with the students that they may want to take notes during the interviews, if permission is granted by the elder to do so. Students can also be advised to write in their journal immediately following the interview.

In addition, it is **very important** that the students remember to invite the elders to a gathering in their honour on the pre-determined date.

Closure

Journal: How do I feel about doing the interview?

Learning from the Interviews

Objectives

It is expected that student will:

- Reflect on their interviews.
- Relate how their learning has grown from the interview.
- Begin their personal reflective essays.
- Understand that their reflective essays will be given back to the elder as a gift of thanks for their participation

Purposes

- To begin the final step of the interview phase.

Suggested Time Frame

one class period

Approach

Introduction

Form a circle with chairs and introduce the use of a “speaking rock.” A circle “represents the cosmic order, the unity of all things in the universe. It reflects the shapes and patterns of nature First Nations peoples have constructed including the round planets, their orbs, and their cyclical movement in space.” (Haig-Brown et al., 1997, p.35). As the rock gets passed around the circle, in one direction only, the holder of the rock will have the opportunity to share his/her feelings and reflections about the interview. It is very important that the student with the rock is not interrupted and that the rock makes it all the way around the circle so that everyone can participate in the activity. Students share their responses on the interview process.

Focus Questions: Who did you interview? How did you feel about the process? What did you learn? In what ways did you apply the four R’s?

Development

Show students *In Honour of our Elders: Essays by Children of Curve Lake Reserve and Quotations from Elders* (see Appendix for source and location of materials).

Share the various quotes and contributions of the students in the booklet. Inform the students that, as a class, they will be producing a similar booklet. Their booklet will include the personal reflective essays as well as other contributions. The Four R's charts developed earlier by the students should provide guidance in developing the booklet. As the teacher, you may want to be responsible for formatting the booklet. Some possible ideas:

- Introduction: Purpose of the book.
- Message to the elders: student can write short messages to their elder. This can be a favorite quote from the interview, drawings, poem, etc.
- Reflective Essays: What I learned?
- Drawings or photos
- Have an artistic student work on the front cover.
- Cerlox bind the booklet and present one to each elder at the gathering.

Students will express their learning through a personal reflective essay. As the teacher, you can determine the criteria for the assignment.

Focus Questions: What did I learn from the process? Can I categorize my learning? What was it about this process that will stay with me? Check your journal notes for reminders.

Give students time to begin an outline for their essays.

Closure

In partners, students will share their outlines. Feedback will be given if necessary.

Students should be given a time frame in which to complete their reflective essays. In addition, students should think about their contributions to the booklet.

The rest of the project can unfold as you see fit. Additional class time could be given for writing the essay and/or the essay could be assigned as homework. Once all of the essays and messages are completed, you may want to request several volunteers to help put the booklet together. You may want to include the elders as co-authors; this act would exemplify the importance of their contributions.

A Celebration Of and For Elders

Objectives

It is expected that students will:

- Demonstrate respect for the interviewed elders
- Demonstrate gratitude for the elders' knowledge and the sharing of it
- Help organize and carry out a reception for the interviewed elders
- Introduce the interviewed elders to the class and present them with the booklet compiled in their honor

Purpose

- To show respect for elders in a real-life situation
- To allow student to work collaboratively on the planning and carrying out of the reception
- To give students the opportunity to experience a gathering with elders and thus meet and converse with other elders

Suggested Time Frame

one class period

Approach

Before the elders arrive, prepare the classroom (clean it up, lay out any food, tea, and other drinks, perhaps make a welcome sign – be creative!). Students should participate in these activities. Make sure that there are chairs for the elders to sit in comfortably. If arriving at the classroom is difficult or confusing, send several students to the lobby of the school to help the arriving elders. Lastly, make sure that the booklets prepared for the elders are ready to be handed out.

After the elders arrive and there has been time for eating and socializing, call everyone together to begin the presentation of the books. Welcome the elders, thank them for coming to the school, and explain the unit plan that the students have been participating in. The students should already know that they are expected to introduce the elder that they interviewed and present him/her with the compiled booklet. This introduction should at least include who the elder is and a highlight or two from the interview. However, remind students that time is limited!

Once the presentations are completed, thank the elders again for coming to the school. Have students assist any elders that need help leaving the classroom/school.

Once the students are reassembled, congratulate them on their hard work. Ask the students to write a 1-page reflection on the experience that they had today. Encourage the students to think about how their thinking about elders may have changed because of the gathering, how they felt during the reception, what they would do differently/keep the same if they were to have a similar reception in the future, etc. This is an ungraded assignment to allow students to reflect on their thinking/growth/learning.

Websites

The Virtual Circle: The Aboriginal Community Site Aboriginal Elders Teachings

<http://www.vcircle.com/elders/archive/index.shtml>

Information is available on teachings of elders. There are two categories: Current Elder Teachings and Archives of Elder Teachings.

The Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs

<http://www.manitobachiefs.com/culture/culture.html>

Several brief paragraphs are devoted to general information on elders including protocols.

Saskatchewan Indian Cultural Centre with Industry Canada Our Elders: Interviews with Saskatchewan Elders

<http://www.sicc.sk.ca/elders/index.html>

This website includes a searchable database of interviewed elders, images and information such as names, bands, languages, dates, interview text, and syllabics.

Our Nations Elders Speak

Aging and Cultural Diversity: A Cross-Cultural Approach

By Susan Judith Ship with the assistance of Reagan Tarbell

<http://www.niichro.com/Elders/Elders7.html>

Several sections cover the meaning of elders in various ways. The essay also discusses issues that First Nations elders face.

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- Wright, Marion (Roze). (1996). My Elders Tell Me Vancouver Island, BC: Tri-Bands Education Committee.

Locations of Materials Used in Classroom Activities

1. Elston, Geogia, ed. (1991). In Honour of Our Elders: Essays by the Children of Curve Lake Reserve and Quotations from Elders Lakefield, Ontario: Waapoone Publishing & Promotion.

Libraries:

XWI7XWA LIBRARY
Call Number: PE E47 154 1991

Publisher Information:

WAAPOONE PUBLISHING
Box 1358, 67 Hunter Street
Lakefield, Ontario
K0L 2H0
Tel.: (705) 652-7947
Fax: (705) 652-6912

2. Garnier, Karie. (1990). Our Elders Speak: A Tribute to Native Elders. White Rock, British Columbia: Karie Garnier.

Libraries:

XWI7XWA LIBRARY
Call Number: PE G37 O8 1990

VANCOUVER PUBLIC LIBRARY
Call Number: 970.2 G23o

Publisher Information:

The book is personally published by the author as such we could not locate contact information.

3. Kirk, Ruth. (1986). Wisdom of The Elders. Vancouver: Douglas and McIntyre Ltd.

Libraries:

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Call Number: PE K57 W57 1986

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4. Sterling, Shirley. (2002). "Yetko and Sophie: Nlakapamux Cultural Professors." Canadian Journal of Native Education, 26(1), pp. 4-10.

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5. Wilson, Shawn. (1996). Gwich'in Native Elders: Not Just Knowledge, But a Way of Looking at the World. Fairbanks, Alaska: Alaska Native Knowledge Network.

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Rationale for this project

During the initial planning stages, we identified many goals for this project. These goals include the following:

1. Draw on what we have learned (especially about Indigenous elders and knowledge) through readings, discussions, and experiences in EDST 565D
2. Create a resource for educators that advances Indigenous knowledge and promotes respect for such knowledge (i.e. the Four R's: Reverence, Respect, Relationships, and Responsibility)
3. Ensure that this resource is accessible and adaptable for educators with varying needs
4. Link knowledge and practice together both for ourselves and other educators
5. Express the importance of elders in Aboriginal communities as leaders, healers, sources of knowledge, and transmitters of culture
6. Foster a respect for elders
7. Create a resource for educators that moves away from purely textbook based and individual learning towards wholistic lessons that include collaborative and hands-on activities, reflection, creativity, and autonomous learning
8. Give students the opportunity to interact directly with elders and learn from them in a respectful manner
9. Draw on First Nations resources
10. Create a gift of service for the First Nations House of Learning

With these objectives in mind we constructed this unit lesson plan and are pleased that the end product reflects for us an achievement of these goals.