

Traditional Aboriginal Careers

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Acknowledgment

This resource was developed through generous support from the Janice Thomson Memorial Grant program that commemorates the goals Janice Thomson achieved as an educator. (See www.curriculum.org for more details.)

Introduction

For Aboriginal students, gaining competence in traditional careers is important to the continuation of their culture and lifestyle. In remote locations, such competence provides a means for sustaining a family. Young people who wish to learn and engage in traditional careers frequently leave school at an early age. Others who choose to stay in school are often unable to participate in the traditional land-based activities of their community. By providing cooperative education credits in traditional careers, the school recognizes the value of indigenous land knowledge and skills.

Traditional Careers is a resource designed to guide teachers in promoting career opportunities for Aboriginal students, using experiential and holistic education as frameworks. Students have opportunities to acquire cooperative education credits in traditional Aboriginal workplace settings, e.g., trapping, wood cutting, and hunting.

In embracing the opportunities presented for students in this culturally sensitive mode of learning, teachers and administrators are challenged to work both creatively and flexibly. An element of trust in both the indigenous mentors and the experiential learning process is integral to negotiating the realities of many traditional careers.

This resource highlights acquisition of the knowledge, skills, and attitudes students require to be successful in a variety of traditional Aboriginal careers. The experiential learning may not easily fit in the usual timeline of a half-day cooperative education work placement. Extensive flexibility may be required in school-based programming for a student to participate. For example, some schools close to accommodate student participation in spring and fall goose hunts.

Types of Traditional Careers

Trapping, hunting, fishing, and guiding are easily recognized traditional careers and a good starting point. Other careers are related to traditional women's skills such as skinning, preparing, and making useful articles from hides. Woodworkers make tools and implements such as snowshoes, paddles, tikinagens, bowls, and spoons. Herbalists harvest plant and tree life for medicinal purposes. Specific communities have particular economic activities such as wild rice harvesting. The options will be particular to each location and for each indigenous group.

Identifying a specific and discreet "career" could be problematic in terms of holistic experiential learning. Often, much of the knowledge and skills that young people are expected to gain is broad based and attributable to more than one career, for example:

- apply accurate measurement and estimation strategies that relate to their environment;
- follow indigenous language and cultural practices;
- develop competence and confidence in living off the land;
- develop competence and confidence in living on the land;
- handle and maintain traditional travel and transportation equipment in a safe manner.

Other knowledge and skills are more directly related to a specific traditional career, for example:

- participate in a goose hunting camp;
- display practices of handling and preparing ducks and geese.

(Source: *Omushkego Culture* by Omushkego Education and Ojibway and Cree Cultural Centre, 2006)

Curriculum Connections

Each cooperative education work placement must be linked with an academic course of study. Given the variety of activities available in a holistic land-based work experience, there are multiple possibilities for curriculum linkages. These will depend on the type of traditional career the student chooses for the cooperative education work placement.

Native Languages: Communication throughout the work placement can be in the local community language.

Native Studies: The work placement experience can provide a stronger understanding of the indigenous connection with the land.

Health and Physical Education: The work placement experience could provide a strong foundation for healthy, active living.

The Arts: The work placement could provide opportunities to experience various indigenous visual arts.

Business Studies: Students can explore trapping and guiding as economic ventures, especially in the context of entrepreneurship.

Science: The work placement could provide extensive experience in biology and earth science.

Social Sciences and the Humanities: The student has opportunities to learn about and experience indigenous approaches to individual, family, and community living.

Hospitality and Tourism: The work placement could help the student develop skills for future careers in the indigenous tourist industry.

Considerations for Teachers and Administrators

- Gain familiarity with protocols of learning in a different cultural context, e.g., relationships between mentor/teacher/student.
- Explore various possibilities for traditional careers (e.g., fishing guide, herbalist, wood worker) by talking with parents and networking with personnel at local band offices, Native Friendship Centres, local health centres, and local First Nations schools.
- Liaise with school guidance counsellors to identify potential students and mentors. Students and their families may not view their traditional lifestyle as compatible with secondary school education. Ideas should be presented and explored in partnership.
- Establish connections and develop trusting relationships with individuals who can provide reliable translations between individuals and cultures. School personnel may need to rely on such people for identification of and communication with mentors. Possibilities include personnel at Native Friendship Centres, staff in First Nations elementary schools, First Nations staff, and extended families of individual students. The student may identify a mentor in the extended family unit.
- Determine any scheduling concerns with respect to other academic courses.
- A critical component of a traditional career work experience is the student-mentor learning relationship. Classroom teachers need to value and respect the mentor and the experiential process of traditional indigenous education.
- If possible, the classroom teacher should engage in some traditional learning in person. Be an observer and look for the value in the attitudes, approaches, and ways of teaching and learning that these learning experiences offer.

A Cooperative Education Course

Preparation for the Workplace

There should be a mutual understanding between the teacher, student, and mentor of the knowledge and skills the student should acquire.

- What experience and knowledge does the student already hold?
- What does the student want and need to learn?
- What does the mentor want the student to know or understand prior to the placement?
- What new learning is expected during the placement?

Many communities identify a time in the fall and spring for community members to engage in traditional cultural pursuits. The exact dates are determined by the annual seasonal life cycles in the surrounding environment. Flexibility of scheduling is required to enable the student to participate in the work placement.

For students attending secondary schools in the same location as their mentors, half-day work placements may be possible, with some flexibility in the regularity of the placement. It may be possible to negotiate a work placement that takes place during the summer months.

Students must understand and practise being safe during their work placement, e.g., seasonal and geographic safety, transportation safety, tools/implements safety, and radio use and protocols. For some work placements, the student may need a firearms certificate and can take a gun safety course, if required. The student can take first aid and CPR training.

Teachers need to negotiate workplace safety and insurance coverage depending on local protocols.

Personalized Placement Learning Plan

The Personalized Placement Learning Plan (PPLP) must provide a means for recognizing the organic nature of the holistic learning opportunities of the work placement. As an example, weather changes may make it impossible to provide an anticipated learning opportunity or provide unanticipated learning. The movement and availability of large and small game cannot be accurately predicted. Equipment malfunction will change the nature of the anticipated learning.

Primary input for the specific learning activities of the placement will come from the mentor. The mentor may have prior knowledge of the student's current level of competence in the chosen workplace or may prefer to have an initial short outing with the student prior to identifying learning activities.

Another option for the first placement is to identify the expected learning opportunities in general terms prior to the work placement, then add specificity to the PPLP during the post-work placement review.

The teacher acts as a cross-cultural broker in identifying how the learning activities are connected to the objectives of the linked course.

Integrating Work Experience with the Classroom

The “reporting back” component provides an opportunity for the student to give back to others in appreciation for the knowledge that the mentor shared during the work placement. The student can:

- share with others what he or she learned and experienced (oral presentation);
- teach younger students (e.g., in elementary school) some of the cultural skills he or she mastered (experiential presentation);
- create a multi-media presentation to contribute to cross-cultural knowledge (visual presentation).

Assessment

Classroom Component (suggest 10% to 30%)

- Placement readiness and participation (attitude, commitment, following protocols)
- Development of learning goals related to the placement (done collaboratively between the student and the cooperative education teacher)
- A clear understanding of the role of mentor by all – the student, the teacher, and the mentor
- Health and safety knowledge
- A recognition by the student of placement opportunities and challenges
- Reflection and analysis by the student of the placement experience
- Participation in activities in which the student shares with others knowledge gained at the work placement
- Accessing related career information
- Understanding the changing role of men and women in traditional careers
- Continual updating of the PPLP

Placement Learning (suggest 40% to 60%)

- The mentor’s assessment and the student’s self-assessment are provided verbally at the post-placement meeting.
- In updating the PPLP with the mentor and student, the teacher can record skills development, noting if they have been introduced, improved, or if the student has gained competence. Next steps can be identified.
- The teacher can assess achievement in curriculum expectations based on information provided by the mentor.

Summative Assessment (usually 30%)

- This assessment is based on what the students report back about the cooperative education work placement, demonstrating achievement of the learning goals established for the placement.
- Students can demonstrate in a variety of forms:
 - oral presentations;
 - reflective journals that log the experience weekly;
 - projects;
 - bulletin board displays;
 - verbal or written thank yous to mentors
 - portfolios

Sample Cooperative Education Course in Traditional Careers

The student attends his local secondary school on the reserve. He wants to join his uncle at the annual fall and spring hunting camps. Credit hours will be calculated at 10 hours per day for 4 days at each camp. These 80 hours plus 30 classroom hours (15 hours pre-placement and 15 hours integration) provide the required 110 hours for a credit. The cooperative course is linked to a Native Studies course (Aboriginal Beliefs, Values, and Aspirations in Contemporary Society) that the student is taking concurrently.

During preparation for placement, the student takes a First Aid/CPR course that is offered in the community in September (16 hours). Integration consists of a series of activities during which the student shares what he has learned. After each camp, the student talks with others about his experience and shares the information with the community on a local radio station (2 hours). He prepares a visual presentation for local elementary students (4 hours). He accompanies elementary classes on field trips to demonstrate how to hunt partridge and snare rabbits (4 hours). He assists in food preparation at the community feasts held at the end of each hunting season (4 hours).

The student approaches his uncle with the request for mentoring and discusses potential learning opportunities. The teacher meets with the mentor and student (with a translator, if necessary) to cooperatively develop the PPLP for the fall camp. After the fall camp, the teacher meets with the mentor and student to assess progress, determine next steps, and update the PPLP. The process is repeated for the spring camp.

Assessment is composed of 70% term assessment (60% mentor information and 10% classroom learning assessment) and 30% final summative assessment. The mentor provides an oral report during the post-work placement interview that supports the teacher in assessing student achievement in curriculum expectations as identified on the PPLP. Student strengths and weakness are assessed and next steps are identified as the PPLP is updated during the interview. The mentor and student together provide an assessment of student learning during the placement. Student achievement during the First Aid/CPR course counts for 10% of the term assessment.

The summative assessment is comprised of the reporting back the student does of this work experience. A variety of assessment tools are used by the teacher – self- and peer-assessment, anecdotal reports, rubrics, and checklists.