2002 CURRICULUM UPDATE

SECTION 3: POCKETS OF RESISTANCE & PUNISHMENTS

(2002)

Source: School Curriculum: The Legacy of Indian Residential Schools = http://research2.csci.educ.ubc.ca

HISTORY, SOCIAL STUDIES

MAIN IDEA

Nishnawbe Aski Nation children found ways to resist the strict rules and regulations that guided their lives at residential school. In some instances for NAN students, as wells as, in the Kamloops residential school, children created an underground subculture as a "means to survive the oppression around them while maintaining a sense of self and family", (Haig-Brown, 1988:115) the subculture was a way for children to come together and support one another. Although children feared reprisals for their acts of defiance, children still resisted in a variety of ways.

The most noticeable form of resistance for children was to run away from school. A young Native boy named Leo, who attended the residential school for 10 years, remembers that children"...always came back. They got them back. I don't remember anybody getting away completely". (Haig-Brown, 1988:99) Children who ran away and were returned to the schools by police officers or Indian Agents received harsh and cruel punishments, (i.e. leather strap). Runaways often had their head shaved as a way for the school to shame and humiliate them.

LEARNING OJECTIVES:

- Student will gain an understanding of why and how NAN students at residential schools would resist the strict rules and regulations that they were supposed to abide by.
- Student will learn about the different punishments that children underwent if they resisted the rules and regulations. True stories told by NAN residential school Survivors.

ACTIVITIES

- 1. Review **Resistance and Protest** and **Pockets of Resistance** with students.
- 2. Have students work with a partner and discuss their thoughts on the **Pockets of Resistance**.
- 3. Using the **Pockets of Resistance comparison sheet**, have students compare the different ways that students resist rules today and how they resisted rules then.
- 4. Have them recreate their comparison on chart paper and present to the class.



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- 5. Read to the class or as a class the **Punishment of NAN Survivor Stories**.
- 6. Divide students into groups of three or four and have them compare: what they learn at school in the present time with what students learned at residential schools in the past. (Once completed have them present their comparisons to the class)
- 7. Then have students individually complete the worksheet to be handed in for marking, about a Typical Day at *their* School.

ASSESSMENT

Formative: Comparison Sheet and Presentation

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INFORMATION

RESISTANCE AND PROTEST

"There is certainly something wrong as children are running away most of the time." (Local Agent, RCAP, p. 368)

From the beginning, First Nations communities, families and students resisted and protested against the system of education set up for Aboriginal children by the government and churches. There are common accounts of families and communities refusing to send children to the schools or of resisting the aggressive recruitment methods of some school officials; of parents lodging complaints; of lawsuits undertaken; and of Aboriginal leaders and former students fighting for change.

"Indian families and their children had a very limited opportunity to influence what was going on, but they did have some opportunity, and they did exercise it. There were a variety of things that they could do. They could lobby and complain to Indian Affairs and the Church groups...They were not slow to make their unhappiness known...The other things they could do was to withhold their kids...Indian people were not passive and mute, they spoke and theY protested." Professor Jim Miller, in Residential Schools Workshop Report, pp. 14 &16, 1991

Perhaps the most persistent and profound form of resistance and protest came from the students themselves: they would run away. Research suggests that they did so in large numbers and throughout the history of the schools. In fact, children fleeing the schools was "commonplace" (RCAP, p. 367) And many of them did so despite their relative powerlessness against the system: despite knowing that they would be severely punished, despite knowing that they would be chased and that many other runaways were caught, and, perhaps even knowing that others had died in their attempts to get home.

"I can understand now why there appears to be such a widespread prejudice on the part of Indians against residential schools. Such memories do not fade out of the human consciousness very rapidly." (R. Hoey, Superintendent of welfare and training, DIAND)

Tragically, some of these children died along the way. Perhaps in a very few cases children did make it home. Sadly, most were caught and returned to the schools to face often extreme and cruel punishment for running away and other transgressions include being beaten, chained to beds or benches, stripped and whipped, strapped, deprived of food, and being shaved bald. The punishment meted out at the schools was not supported or accepted by Aboriginal parents. According to records, "...it continued to outrage Indian parents. So much so that one father, George Miller, sued the principal of the [Mohawk] Institute...for excessive punishment of his two daughters, Ruth (aged 13) and Hazel (aged 11), when they ran away" (E.R. Daniels, 1992)



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INFORMATION continued...

For response of Duncan Campbell Scott, Deputy Superintendent General for Indian Affairs to the is case is telling: "I am entirely adverse to having formal investigations into these charges," he told the Minister of Indian Affairs. "It is not a new thing to receive complaints from Indians making various charges against the management of our schools and necessary investigations are always made by our Inspectors."

In effect he advised the Minister to take action—other than the usual 'investigation' by DIAND's inspectors. However, these 'investigations' routinely exonerated the school staff of blame and rarely led to any disciplinary action being taken against those investigated.

Even if complaints were supported by these investigations, the process eventually let to Scott—who refused to take action. As the Royal Commission Report points out: "There was more to this irresponsibility than simply a failure of regulation and oversight. There was a pronounced and persistent reluctance on the part of the department to deal forcefully with incidents of abuse, to dismiss, as was its right, or to lay charges against school staff who abused the children." (RCAP, p. 369) In case of George Miller's children, although the civil suit was successful, no criminal charges were brought against the principal involved.

"Where the churches are concerned there is no use sending an adverse report, as the department will listen to excuses from incompetent Principals of the schools more readily than to a report from our Inspectors based on the fasts as they find them." (J. Waddy, September 1, 1924)

The unresponsiveness of leaders in the department and churches was endemic. It led others to do likewise, perhaps not always because they were unconcerned or unwilling to respond but because nothing would be done. Worse, they themselves might become targets of the department's wrath. According to the report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, "Members of [the] public, including parents, Indian leaders and journalists, felt the sting of aggressive departmental attacks when their criticisms came too close to the bone." (RCAP, p. 372)

Despite all of this, the movement to regain control of the education and care of our children and to obtain justice for those harmed in residential school persisted. Though there is much work yet to be done, and though the extent of the abuse is only now coming to light, we can build on the foundation of those before us who courageously and diligently strove for justice and healing.

Source: Residential School Update, AFN Health Secretariat, March 1998



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INFORMATION

POCKETS OF RESISTANCE

Children resisted in a variety of ways:

- Children spoke their Native language in privacy
- · Children ran away from school
- Children passed notes to each other especially the older ones
- Children would sneak letters home to their parents, complaining about the poor treatment
- Girls secretly curled their hair and used make-up
- Children stole food from the kitchen and cellar
- Children maintained dignity through silence (not crying when punished)
- Boys formed counter-culture clique-like gangs

Parents also resisted:

- Parents complained about the way children were being treated
- Parents refused to send their children to school despite legislation
- Parents fought for better education for their children

The most noticeable form of resistance for children was to run away from school. Children who ran away were returned to the schools by police officers or Indian agents and then received harsh and cruel punishments (i.e. leather strap). Some children were never found. Runaways often had their heads shaved as a way for the school to shame and humiliate them.



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ASSIGNMENT

Name:	
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POCKETS OF RESISTANCE

STUDENTS THEN	STUDENTS NOW

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READING

NAN SURVIVOR PUNISHMENTS

DON'T MAKE A MISTAKE

You asked me if I knew why I got spanked and got the strap when I was at the Pelican Lake Residential School. I remember that when I got a spanking it was usually because I had gotten into a fight with one of the other boys or something like that. And when I got the strap it was always because I made a mistake while I was doing something. So I used to tell the other kids, "Don't make a mistake".

SKATING

One fall day at residential school I was skating with three other boys. We skated all morning. The weather was nice and there was no snow on the ice. The ice was perfect and it seemed like we could skate to the end of the earth in any direction. We decided that we would do just that, so we skated as far away from the school as we could, intending to leave forever. We did not want to stay in a place where we could never do anything right and were always being punished. Unfortunately we got caught and taken back to the school. The boys superintendent took us to the principal's office where we got a big lecture and a good strapping.

DON'T COME BACK LATE

I attended the Anglican school in Moose Factory for four years. One Sunday night the girls in our dorm prepared to go to bed. A girl from the Quebec side, who was a year or two younger than me, slept in the bed next to mine. She had been allowed to go out with her parents for the weekend but had not returned by the time the rest of us had gone to bed. When the Quebec girl returned she changed into her pajamas and got into bed. About ten minutes later the lights in the dorm were turned on. The dorm supervisor, accompanied by the administrator and supervisor of the school came into the dormitory and walked directly to the girl's bed. I got scared!

CONFORMITY

When we went for meals the staff divided us into groups and each group had a "leader". When mealtime came we were supposed to line up like a bunch of soldiers outside the lunchroom. The staff insisted that this be done correctly. If it wasn't, then none of us were allowed to eat. Even if just one student was not in the correct place, the whole group would be made to suffer by not being allowed to eat.

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READING
NAN SURVIVOR PUNISHMENTS continued...

POOR MEMORY

One of the things I saw at the Cecilia Jeffrey Residential School confused me. We had to memorize verses and recite them out loud, from memory, in front of the class. If a student could not complete the verse she would be "sent to the corner" where she stood facing the corner until the end of the class. In addition, she would have to write the verse out on paper, or depending on the teacher the student would have to write the verse out on the blackboard numerous times. At other times, the whole class would get punished. The punishment would be to write the verse out on paper ten or twenty times when one of the students was not able to completely recite the verse. When individual students were able to recite a verse without making an error the teacher would give them a "star", and the other students would have to write the verse out a number of times. This confused me because I could never understand why anyone would get punished for not remembering something, or why the rest of us would get punished because one of the students could not recite a verse. Why would a student who had a poor memory always be punished?