



Métis Language and Culture Afterschool Program RLI Indigenous Language Experiences Métis Nation of Alberta Region 4



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Pilot Program Background Information

Rupert's Land Institute launched a pilot after-school program in the late spring of 2021 in which 50 students participated. The program's purpose was to introduce Métis language and culture to children in an educational and entertaining manner. The program was open for all children to join, and 90% of the students identified as Métis. The program was designed for students in grades 1-6. Students would join a 30-minute Zoom call once a week and then work on a project focused on the lesson they learned in class. The students were mailed supplies in advance to ensure every child had the materials needed to make these Métis-focused projects. Students who engaged and demonstrated their understanding of the activity were entered for weekly prizes. The prizes were an initiative to engage students in projects and demonstrating their knowledge. The program was six weeks long and was taught in the hours right after school. There was one instructor for the whole program, and one special guest was invited to teach students a few words in Cree. Although the program ran entirely online, there was significant success educating the children about Métis language and culture. Through images of the children's work and positive emails from guardians it was very reassuring that the program was benefiting children and their understanding of Métis culture. From this program emerged Rupert's Land Institutes' Métis Language and Culture Summer Program, where many parents re-registered their children.

Activity: Rupert's Land Institute Métis Language & Culture After-School Program

When creating the After-School Program, a Métis Education Summer Student, Stephanie Tomuschat, was supported to develop her reflection on Métis identity and how to introduce some of this knowledge to children in a supportive way. Throughout the 6-week program, there was a different lesson and activity every week. The grade level determined the depth of intensity and the objectives that were being met. The lessons were all taught on Zoom, and were expressed verbally, visually, and interactively. Students would listen to Ms. Tomuschat teach while also asking questions and providing their own experiences and information into the class discussion. The After-School Program thrived from students' contribution to the class and feeling comfortable enough to express their own thoughts. One of the activities that all the children took part in was making a Red River Cart. Ms. Tomuschat taught students about Red River Carts, what they were used for, what they were made of and why they were essential to Métis people. From this lesson, students were challenged with making a Red River Cart out of recycled materials. The following class students then discussed their designs and what

materials they had chosen to utilize. The Red River Cart activity promoted creativity, individual thought, and stimulated interest in Métis Red River Carts. There was an abundance of positive feedback from guardians and students, thus hopefully leaving an impression. Each lesson was built around principles that are important to Métis people and encouraged youth to learn and participate in Métis culture. In providing an engaging and immersive activity for the children, it was encouraged of the participants to visit and discuss their learning with family members and peers. Participants were also given games where they could guess different objects such as a trappers' tents, moccasins, beadwork, the fiddle, and other Métis cultural symbols. The games that Ms. Tomuschat created were used to instruct children and prompt discussion about each symbol. The games were played on Zoom, and children could voice their opinions or guess throughout the class. By creating inclusive games, Ms. Tomuschat created a welcoming environment where students felt comfortable asking questions and sharing their thoughts. The program was initiated to bring light to Métis's lifestyle and understand the unique language and culture.

Reflection from the Instructor, Stephanie Tomuschat

Through teaching the After-School Program, I was awakened to young students' interest in learning about Métis culture. Through teaching the students about Métis language and culture, there is hope that these 50 students will have learned at least one thing that they will share with others. Through a Métis focused lens within the After School Program, learners were able to develop a deeper understanding of Métis knowledge, language, and culture. Although online learning is not ideal, it is better to educate children and adapt to these challenges rather than not teach at all. The online environment did create challenges of being apart, but one undeniable thing was that everyone had the same interest in learning, which helped shape our online class. The student's desire to learn was empowering, and by adapting to student's online needs, everyone could learn comfortably. One challenge the program faced was the time of each course. Longer classes would have allowed more time for students' questions and creating in-depth connections to our lessons. This challenge does come with obstacles as keeping a young one's attention on Zoom can be troubling, but if allowed in the future, longer in-person lessons would exceed the online approach. The benefit to online is that students could join from anywhere

and still be a part of learning. While I did not think online teaching was a huge detriment to student learning, in-person classes would build stronger connections to the Métis community. An area of success was through the class size. By keeping it to a maximum of 10 students per grade this allowed me to build connections with each child and listen to their thoughts. A smaller class size also helped the students feel comfortable with one another, helping to break barriers of fear and judgment. With Rupert's Island Institute's monetary support, it aided learners who demonstrated a strong kinesthetic aptitude. By adapting and making the class accessible to every child and their learning needs, this program maintained an inclusive environment with the capacity for every type of learner.

Recommendations

- If time allowed it would be beneficial to have 45-minute lessons rather than 30, just to allow more time for discussion and open thought.
- If permitted, it would be great to have some lessons in person
- Bring in an elder to speak about their own culture and the connection they have with their Métis identity
- If you are working with 30-minute classes, focus on one main goal you want the students to comprehend rather than overflow their minds with detail. That way you are ensuring they will take away one main concept.
- To change the pace of things, adding in physical movement or activities could be helpful (ex. Jigging, Simon Says, practice paddling a canoe) anything that promotes movement - If Zoom platform is utilized, it would be recommended to set up on a TV or larger screen; this was extremely helpful for a few younger students who were struggling to sit still for 30-minutes - A question of the week allowed each child to express their opinion. This would be highly recommended especially for the shy children who feel nervous talking in front of crowds. It was an easy way to get children comfortable talking. To elevate this activity, make the questions Métis focused with questions such as "would you rather travel by canoe or Red River Cart"

Related Video:

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