

Learning from Generation to Generation

For First Nations children in the past, school was part of family life. Learning time was any time – and all the time. Living and learning went together.

The teachers were everyone in the community. Parents were teachers; aunties and uncles, and especially grandparents were teachers. Grandparents were the respected Elders.

They must have been good teachers because the knowledge, skills, technology and culture that they taught were passed down from generation to generation for thousands of years!

Each community was different. The children learned specific roles and responsibilities that were unique to the place where they lived, and the resources they harvested from the earth.

Children learned to respect the land that they depended on – the sea, the forest, the rivers and lakes. When people hunted an animal or picked some berries, they showed respect by giving thanks. Some people spoke sacred words, thanking the creature. Some gave offerings of food or a special tobacco.

Children learned important beliefs of their people. They learned how they should behave through stories told to them by the Elders. The Elders also taught children about their family history, their clans and tribal groups. At ceremonies like feasts and potlatches they listened and learned the important songs and dances of their family.

They also learn how to get along with other Nations. The Elders passed on laws and ways to respect other groups. These are still used today.

When children grew up, they passed their learning on to the next generation. They became the Elders. They were taught their traditions well and the community endured.