

Ontario teachers embrace cultural concepts

Walking the Path — PATTY GYSEL, North East Region HQ

Interest in *Walking the Path* has steadily increased since its inception in 1996. Initially created for Nipissing First Nation by OPP Sgt. George Couchie (formerly of Anishinabek Police Service) the youth program was developed to improve youth self-esteem. Students are provided insight into the history, beliefs and traditions of Aboriginal people using Anishnawbe cultural teachings as a foundation.

Walking the Path addresses the belief that young people who have the self-respect and self-confidence to respect others are better prepared to cope with negative influences. A positive self-image is essential for a child's development and this spills into the family and community.

Couchie explains, "Students don't identify themselves as being native – a legacy passed down from ancestors who faced racism in Canada in the 1960s and '70s. Residential schools took away their culture, language and history, leaving no one to pass that on. Now, we are slowly starting to regain what was lost."

The next level

As the success of the program grew, so did the requests for Couchie to deliver it. Somewhat overwhelmed by the need, he wondered if others could help with the program delivery. An infusion was needed. That infusion came in the form of an enthusiastic teacher who embraced the concepts of *Walking the Path*.

Emily de Jourdan of Our Lady of Sorrows School in West Nipissing is inspired by Couchie's work and his commitment to Aboriginal youth. Having experienced *Walking the Path*, she adopted its teachings in her classroom and, on her own initiative, spent an entire summer revising the program to meet Ontario teaching curriculum standards. As a result, the Ontario Principals'

Council accepted *Walking the Path* as a course of study at all catholic schools in Ontario. Now, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities can tap into the *Curriculum Guide* and the *Train the Trainer* workshop program.

Aboriginal Policing Bureau Commander Supt. Brad Blair says, "Our objective is to ensure that the culture of learning and respect embodied in *Walking the Path* reaches young people as widely as possible at the school and community level."



Sgt. George Couchie and teacher Emily de Jourdan demonstrate the application of materials in the creation of a mask.

Blair says bringing the program in line with school curriculum is a major contribution.

"We're very proud of the impact this valuable programming is having on the healthy development of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal youth and of the growing involvement of parents, elders, family and community in its learning initiatives."

With the ongoing support of the OPP, initially through OPP First Nations Program and today through OPP Aboriginal Policing Bureau, *Walking the Path* has grown into an award-winning initiative that can now be integrated into established curriculum K to Grade 12. **OPP**

Seven Grandfather Teachings

Wisdom
Love
Respect
Bravery
Honesty
Humility
Truth

These banners are displayed in the foyer of each school that has participated in the program.