

Language and Culture

Today, the NWT embraces a broad diversity of cultures – aboriginal and non-aboriginal – evolving to meet the demands of a modern society. The worldview and value of each culture are embedded in its language.

The legislation of the NWT recognizes eleven official languages: Inuktitut, Inuinnaqtun, Inuvialuktun, North Slavey, South Slavey, Dogrib (Tlicho), Chipewyan, Gwich'in, Cree, English and French. The use of each language varies considerably. Some Aboriginal Languages are struggling for survival and renewal; others are striving to be maintained; all have a desire to be strengthened. Each community has its own cultural needs and priorities, and each must determine the programs and services that will respond to these priorities. In the NWT, bilingual education includes 1st language programs, 2nd language programs, and immersion language programs in one or more of the official languages.

All NWT curricula are written from a Northwest Territories' perspective, reflecting the health and vitality of many cultures in a rapidly changing environment. They incorporate traditional knowledge, use northern geographic examples, and are supported by culturally appropriate learning materials. They provide an opportunity for northern students to understand and experience each other's perspectives.

Two Aboriginal foundational documents have been developed: *Dene Kede* and *Inuuqatigiit*. They incorporate languages and cultures into the school, and provide a framework through which all NWT curricula are taught. Through *Dene Kede* and *Inuuqatigiit* we can sensitize ourselves, each other, and the world outside to Aboriginal cultures, knowledge, values and beliefs.

Dene Kede

Dene Kede encompasses the language, culture and the way in which five Dene nations view the world. Themes such as drumming, fire, water, and rivers, caribou, fish, and earth medicine are used to reinforce and teach the four concepts central to Dene perspective: the Spiritual World, the Land, the Self and the People. The purpose of the curriculum is not simply to enhance Dene culture and language, but to help students develop respectful relationships with themselves, other people, the spirit world and the land.

Inuuqatigiit

Inuuqatigiit is a curriculum which focuses on the enhancement and enrichment of Inuit culture, heritage and language. Students will learn about Inuit history, traditions, knowledge, values and beliefs. Inuuqatigiit is based on the philosophy and value system of the Inuit. Inuuqatigiit means Inuit to Inuit, people to people, or family to family. It also implies a unity between people.

While Dene Kede and Inuuqatigiit are not Language Arts Curricula, they do promote meaningful language use. Language is interwoven with culture and heritage.

The development of a curriculum template for Aboriginal Languages is currently in progress. A Department Directive on Language and Culture Based Education will be in place for the 2004-05 school year to provide further guidance in this area.