



Early Learning Framework

First Edition

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Government of
Northwest Territories

K'áhshó got'jñe xadə k'é hederı ɔedjhtl'é yerınıwə nı dé dúle.
Dene Kədə

ʔerıhtl'ıs Dēne Sıłıné yatı t'a huts'elkēr xa beyáyatı theɔɔ ɔat'e, nuwe ts'ēn yóftı.
Dēne Sıłıné

Edı gondı dehgáh got'je zhaté k'éé edatf'éh enahddhə nıde naxets'é edahlı.
Dene Zhaté

Jii gwandak izhii ginjik vat'atr'ijəhch'uu zhit yinothan jı', diits'at ginokhii.
Dinjii Zhu' Ginjik

Uvanittuaq ilitchurisukupku Inuvialuktun, ququaqluta.
Inuvialuktun

C'ıdɔ nn'ıbΔ^c ʌɾLJAɾ^c ΔɔıNɔɾ^cıLıNı, ɔɛ^cN^cɔɔ ɔıɔɾ^cıɔN^c.
Inuktitut

Hapkua titiqqat pijumagupkit Inuinnaqtun, uvaptinnut hivajarlutit.
Inuinnaqtun

kıspin ki nitawıhtın ē nıhıyawıhk ōma ācimōwin, tipwāsinān.
nēhiyawēwin

Tłıchq yatı k'èè. Dı wegodı newq dè, gots'o gonede.
Tłıchq

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Acknowledgement

The Northwest Territories (NWT) Early Learning Framework has been inspired and adapted, with permission, from British Columbia's Early Learning Framework (2019), which aligns with our vision of supporting a child-centred, culturally responsive, and inclusive approach to early learning and child care. In addition, early learning frameworks across Canada and other countries were reviewed and guided our work, particularly:

- New Brunswick Curriculum Framework for Early Learning and Child Care (2008)
- Capable, Confident, and Curious: Nova Scotia's Early Learning Curriculum Framework (2018)
- Nunavut Early Learning and Child Care Quality Framework (2023)
- How Does Learning Happen? Ontario's Pedagogy for the Early Years (2014)
- Flight Alberta's Early Learning and Care Framework (2014)
- Belonging, Being & Becoming The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia (2022)
- Te Whāriki: He whāriki mātauranga mō ngā mokopuna o Aotearoa New Zealand's Early Learning Curriculum (2017)

While these documents provide a foundation, the NWT Early Learning Framework (framework) is meant to reflect the unique needs, values and cultures of educators, children, families, and communities of the NWT. The framework is meant to build on the valuable work already established in supporting the care and teaching of young children in the NWT, while intending to leave space for future direction.

Feedback received through the ongoing efforts to transformation of the early learning and child care sector in the NWT was used to help guide the development of the framework. The Department of Education, Culture and Employment acknowledges the contributions from all our community-based early learning and child care partners who have participated in these engagements over the years.

The Department of Education, Culture and Employment also acknowledges Bushkids and Beb(a)ski for their thoughtful review to support the adaptation of the framework to be more appropriate for the unique context of the NWT.

As a living document, the Government of the Northwest Territories is committed to collaborate with our partners as the valuable knowledge and experiences they bring will contribute to the refinement and future adaptations of the framework, ensuring it remains responsive and reflective of the diverse people, knowledge, and cultures that reside here.

Glossary

Note: words in **bold blue** throughout the document can be found in this Glossary.

Abilities: refers to a child's strengths, skills, and potential across all areas of development, not just thinking or test results.

Assumptions: the beliefs or ideas that are accepted as true without proof or evidence. They are often taken for granted and can shape how we think or act, even though they may not always be based on facts.

Bias: attitudes or belief, whether a person is aware of them or not, that favor one group over another. Biased is the adjective, meaning something that is influenced by bias.

Capable person: a person who is motivated to learn and contribute to their community, can recognize and draw upon relevant skills and information to use appropriately. They demonstrate integrity in relationships, honoring self, others, the Land, and the spiritual world. A capable person values and combines both Indigenous and Western worldviews (Indigenous Languages & Education Handbook, Department of Education, Culture and Employment, 2021).

Children with diverse abilities and needs: children who receive additional or specialized supports, services, and instructions to support their learning. They may experience, or be at risk of, developmental delays or disabilities and may require support beyond that required by children in general.

Citizen: recognized member of local community, nation, and country. In this framework, "citizen" includes the rights and protections outlined in The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), such as the right to education, protection from harm, and the right to express their views and participate in decisions affecting their lives.

Co-construct/Co-constructing: the process of learning that happens through relationships, where children, educators, families, and communities collaborate to build knowledge. This approach recognizes children as active participants in their own learning.

Colonialism: the systems and structures in place by an outside group to keep control over the land, resources, and people.

Colonization: the act of an outside group taking control of another land, its resources, and people. Settlers are individuals from the outside group who relocate to the land as part of colonization processes. Settler colonialism is a form of colonization where settlers aim to occupy and control the land, displacing, marginalizing, or erasing local Indigenous populations, while enforcing social, cultural, and economic domination.

Critical reflection: the process of analyzing and questioning one's actions, experiences, and assumptions. It involves evaluating and reconsidering beliefs to improve practice. The act involves

questioning assumptions and values related to children, education, and learning, and requires expanding thinking beyond existing beliefs.

Culturally responsive: an approach that values and respects diverse backgrounds, beliefs, values, knowledge, and lifestyles to experience a sense of belonging. It acknowledges the influence of factors like ethnicity, race, family structure, language, and beliefs on a child's development and worldview. In the Northwest Territories, being culturally responsive includes honouring and grounding early learning and child care settings in local Indigenous knowledge, culture, and language.

Culture: the shared values, traditions, beliefs, and practices that help people understand and communicate with each other. It encompasses the norms, worldviews, and knowledge passed down through generations, shaped by history, geography, religion, and social context. Culture is a key part of learning, as everyone brings their own cultural background to experiences.

Decolonize: the process of dismantling the structures and systems established by colonization that have affected Indigenous people, their rights, knowledge systems, and processes. It involves the ongoing process of critically examining and challenging the lasting legacies of colonialism, supporting the healing of Indigenous communities from the harm inflicted by colonization, and the revitalization of Indigenous identities, knowledge, culture, and practices.

Democracy/Democratic practices: an approach to early learning and child care that values participation, equality, and respect for children's right. It encourages creating an environment where children are actively involved in decision-making, learn to express their thoughts, and engage in practices that promote fairness, inclusion, and social justice in a developmentally appropriate manner.

Dene Kede: a culture-based curriculum that encompasses the language, culture, and worldview of the five Dene regions: Gwich'in, Sahtú, Dehcho, Tłıchǫ, and Akaitcho. Developed by Elders and educators from the Dene communities of the Northwest Territories

Development: the process of growth and change that children experience in different domains. Social development involves learning how to interact, build relationships, and handle social situations. Emotional development focuses on understanding and management of emotions. Physical development refers to the changes in body and development of gross and fine motor skills. Spiritual development is about developing a sense of belonging and connectedness. Cognitive development involves the ability to think, understand, and problem-solve. Language development includes learning how to communicate through spoken words, gestures, and written language. Creative development is the process of expressing oneself using imagination and exploring ideas.

Developmental theories: focus on the cognitive, emotional, social, physical, and behavioral growth of children as they mature. These perspectives help to understand how children learn, predict future behaviors, and guide teaching practices. A developmental perspective sees learning as a natural process where children progress through predictable, age-appropriate stages of growth.

Developmentally appropriate: refers to practices, activities, and expectations that are based on an understanding of how children grow and learn at different stages. It involves considering the individual child's age, abilities, and cultural context to ensure that the learning environment, activities, and teaching methods are suitable for their developmental stage.

Dialogue: a process in which educators engage in open, collaborative conversations to explore and question their assumptions and understandings about their teaching practices. In this framework, dialogue involves reflecting on moments in practice, asking "why" and "what if," and critically examining the meaning behind actions and decisions. These discussions are not aimed at finding predictable answers, but rather at challenging thinking, encouraging ongoing questioning, and deepening understanding.

Diversity: the unique differences and qualities that everyone brings to an early learning setting. These differences can include culture, ethnicity, values, beliefs, language(s), abilities, education, life experiences, socio-economic status, spirituality, gender, age, and sexuality.

Documentation: a process of collecting and recording traces of children's learning and development through notes, photos, videos, and artifacts. It encourages reflection and dialogue, helping educators make meaningful and thoughtful approaches to better meet the children's needs. Documentation is an essential early childhood practice

Early learning and child care settings: places where children receive care, nurturing, and education. These settings can take various forms such as licensed center-based or home-based facilities, family and toddler programs, preschools, and junior kindergarten/kindergarten programs. The focus is on building strong relationships between children, families, and educators to support the child's development. These settings offer routines, activities, environments, and materials that promote growth in all areas of development.

Early years practices: refers to the methods and approaches used to support the learning and development of young children. It involves a range of activities and experiences designed to help children acquire knowledge, skills, values, and behaviors. Early years practice focuses on building strong relationships, making thoughtful decisions about teaching strategies, and creating an environment that promotes holistic development in all domains, including social, emotional, cognitive, and physical growth.

Early years service partners: are individuals or organizations with specialized education, training, and/or experience in supporting children's learning and development in the early years. These may include healthcare professionals, social workers, child psychologists, and community organizations, all working together to provide support for young children and their families.

Educator: An individual working in a variety of early learning and child care settings who supports children's learning and development. Educators provide care, foster positive relationships, and guide children's growth across all developmental domains. They may work in licensed centre-based

facilities, home-based facilities, or school-based programs, and typically hold relevant qualifications or certifications that enable them to create safe, nurturing environments where children can thrive.

Environment: Refers to both the physical and social aspects that support a child's learning and development. The physical environment includes the arrangement of space, materials, and time. The social environment involves the interactions that take place. In early learning and child care, the environment is often referred to as the "third teacher," a concept originating from the Reggio Emilia approach, where the environment is seen as an active participant in the learning process. "It is impossible to separate the learning that occurs within various learning environments - home, communities, indoor environments, and outdoor environments. All parts of the learning environment are equally important, and there should be inhibited flow from one environment to another. Experiences in the home are part of the experiences in the daily lives of children. All activities that occur indoors can also occur outdoors." (Crowther, 2016, p.xiii).

Ethnicity: refers to the cultural traits shared by a group, such as common values, traditions, language, celebrations, clothing, and food. It is often linked to the geographic region or ancestral origins of the group, creating a shared sense of identity and heritage

Families: a group of two or more individuals connected by mutual consent, birth, adoption, or placement, who together share the responsibility for raising and nurturing children. Families come in various forms, including two-parent households, single-parent households, stepfamilies, adoptive families, multi-generational homes, same-sex parent families, multiple families, and foster families.

First Nations: is a term used to identify Indigenous peoples in Canada who are distinct from Métis and Inuit. This term applies to both status and non-status Indigenous peoples and can also refer to bands or nations. The Indigenous peoples in the Northwest Territories consist primarily of Dene and nêhiyawak.

Following the lead of the Land: means being flexible, attentive, and adapting to the natural rhythm and cycles of the Land and letting it guide learning and experiences. It involves being responsive to what is relevant to what is happening at the given time and being open to new opportunities as they occur.

Gender: a social concept that reflects how individuals identify (gender identity) and express themselves (gender expression). While historically seen as a binary (male/female), it is now understood as fluid and diverse, encompassing a range of identities beyond binary. Gender includes roles, behaviors, and identities, and influences how people perceive themselves and interact with others. It can be expressed in many ways, beyond just male or female, and is shaped by culture, social norms, and personal experience

Gifts: children are believed to be born with special talents or abilities. These gifts are seen as important for the community, and elders help children recognize and develop them.

Hazard: a condition or object in the environment that has the potential to cause harm. In risky play, educators need to identify and manage the space to ensure children's safety while providing opportunities to engage in risky play.

Holistic: focuses on the whole child, considering their physical, social, emotional, intellectual, and creative development. It emphasizes the interconnectedness of the domains of a child's growth, fostering respectful relationships with self, others, the environment, and the spiritual world. Holistic learning encourages authentic experiences and integrated competencies rather than separating skills into distinct areas.

Image of the child: the beliefs and perceptions society holds about children, shaped by culture, history, and personal experience. These views influence how we view children's abilities, roles, and development.

Inclusive: the practice of recognizing, valuing, and addressing the diverse social, cultural, linguistic, and individual needs of all people, ensuring equitable access to opportunities, resources, and participation. It promotes a sense of belonging and respect for differences, enabling everyone, regardless of abilities, background, or circumstances, to fully engage and contribute within all aspects of life.

Inclusive early learning and child care: an approach that ensures all children, can fully participate in early learning and child care opportunities. Inclusive early learning and child care programs recognize and support each child's individual strengths, needs, and interests, regardless of ability, background, or family circumstance. This allows children to engage, learn, and contribute meaningfully to the community and culture of the program and they are supported in play and learning alongside their peers.

Inquiry: educators explore questions and ideas, often emerging from children's theories or their own reflections. Inquiry encourages deep thinking and collaboration without fixed outcomes. Children actively solve problems through play, while educators support and extend their learning with open-ended questions and responsive teaching.

Interconnected: the idea that everything is linked or connected in some way, meaning that people, communities, and elements of life influence and shape one another. In early childhood education, this refers to how individuals, cultures, and systems are linked, each affecting and being affected by others.

Interdependence: Mutual reliance and support that exists between people, cultures, or systems. Interdependence highlights how individuals or communities depend on each other for resources, knowledge, and growth, emphasizing shared responsibility and collaboration.

Interpretations: process of explaining, clarifying, or providing meaning to something. Understanding and conveying the significance, context, or intended message of a text, situation, event, or piece of information. Interpretations can vary based on individual perspectives, cultural backgrounds,

knowledge, and experiences. In early learning and child care, it refers to the ways in which educators, caregivers, and parents understand and make sense of children's behaviors, actions, and experiences. These interpretations help to better understand each child's needs, strengths, and development, supporting a responsive and inclusive approach

Inuit: are an Indigenous circumpolar people spanning the north. In Canada, Inuit primarily live in the Inuit Nunangat — the Canadian Inuit homeland. In the Northwest Territories, Inuvialuit are the Indigenous people of the western Canadian Arctic.

Inuuqatigiit: A curriculum document developed by Inuit and Inuvialuit educators and Elders from the eastern and western Canadian Arctic, grounded in the belief of the Elders that education must be community-based.

Knowledge system: the methods, practices, and structures through which knowledge is created, shared, and applied. These systems guide how individuals, communities, and societies gather, process, and use information to understand the world and navigate the world. Knowledge systems can encompass various forms of knowledge, including scientific, cultural, experiential, and practical knowledge, shaping how people interact with and interpret their environment.

Land: In this framework, 'Land' is capitalized to acknowledge its inclusion of Indigenous peoples, cultures, languages, knowledge systems, and communities. These components have evolved together since the beginning of time, each affecting the other in a web of relationship that is impossible to untangle.

Learning stories: a method of documenting children's learning that emphasizes their strengths and potential. They view children as curious, knowledgeable, and playful learners, with educators as advocates of play and critical thinkers. Learning Stories recognize everyday efforts as milestones in a child's growth. Through detailed observations, photographs, and reflections, they make children's learning visible. While this process requires time and intention, it offers a richer, evolving picture of a child's development, beyond static traits.

Make meaning: a process where children make sense and interpret situations, events, objects, and conversations by using what they already know and have experienced to a learning situation.

Marginalized: to be placed as insignificant, unimportant, or powerless, often by pushing them to the edges of society or a group. It involves denying them equal participation, opportunities, or recognition, which can lead to social exclusion or limited influence.

Métis: a person who self-identifies as Métis, is distinct from other Indigenous peoples, is of historic Métis Nation ancestry, and who is accepted by the Métis Nation.

Observation: the act of noticing or watching something attentively to gain more information without immediately forming conclusions or judgements. Observation is the foundation for making thoughtful decision-making. In early learning and child care, observation is an essential tool for educators to understand how children develop, interact, and make sense of the world.

Pedagogy: is the art and science of teaching. It includes methods, practices, and strategies to create effective learning environments. It's about what is taught, as well as how and why.

Place: refers to more than physical landscapes, landmarks, building, communities. It includes the experience, stories, and feelings that are associated with it. Place is the physical, emotional, cultural, social, and historical aspects that make it meaningful for someone. A sense of place develops by connecting with the people, local community, Land, and environment.

Play: is essential for healthy development and well-being. It is often hard to define, but most can agree it includes activities that are freely chosen, self-directed, enjoyable, and meaningful. Play is an activity where children use their imagination and explore, with a focus more on the process than the outcome. There are different types of play like symbolic (using objects to represent something else), sociodramatic (role-playing), functional (repetitive actions), and games with rules. In northern cultures, play includes learning essential on-the-Land skills needed to thrive in the local context. In early learning and child care, playful learning is an approach that combines play with teaching that nurtures children's natural curiosity and creativity. This approach helps children learn through hands-on experiences, imagination, and exploration. Playful learning encourages children to choose activities they enjoy, interact with others, and make connections to real-world experiences, fostering their overall development.

Privilege: the unearned advantages that come from being part of a socially favored or dominant identity group. People with privilege often remain unaware of it without thinking about it. Privilege is the opposite of marginalization or oppression, which happens because of racism and other forms of biases.

Reciprocal: the act of mutual exchange where those involved all benefit from each other. A reciprocal relationship means a balanced exchange through shared give-and-take.

Reconciliation: In the context of Canada, reconciliation refers to the individual and collective process of building a respectful relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. It involves a deep awareness of the historical harm that has been done to Indigenous peoples and taking actions to change behaviors addressing the ongoing impacts of colonialism. "Reconciliation is about establishing and maintaining a mutually respectful relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in this country. In order for that to happen, there has to be awareness of the past, an acknowledgement of the harm that has been inflicted, atonement for the causes, and action to change behaviour." (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015, p. 6).

Residential schools: in Canada were institutions that forcibly removed First Nations, Inuit, and Métis children from their families and communities for over 150 years. The primary purpose of these schools was to assimilate Indigenous children into Euro-Canadian culture by erasing their languages, traditions, and ways of life. The schools were a deliberate attempt to destroy Indigenous communities and ways of life. They were part of a broader process of colonization and genocide aimed at undermining Indigenous communities, characterising this intent as a cultural genocide (National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation, n.d.).

Revitalization: the process of renewing or restoring something to make it thrive and strong for future generations. It can include revitalization of culture, language, traditions, practices, community, environmental, or economic revitalization.

Risk: the probability and severity of harm that may occur from an activity.

Risky play: involves activities that create a sense of excitement and thrill, with the potential for physical or emotional injury. It can include play at great heights, high speeds, using tools, rough-and-tumble activities, and interacting with potentially harmful elements, or with the risk of getting lost. Risky play is often associated with activities in the outdoors or nature as the dynamic and changing conditions provide more opportunities for risky play to occur.

Self-determination: the power or freedom to act independently; the capacity for free will. The right to freely determine political status and freely pursue economic, social and cultural development.

Sexuality: involves our bodies, genders, feelings, relationships, and intimacy. It also includes our sexual orientation, describing whom we feel attracted to. For children, it refers to the way children understand their bodies, emotions, and relationships with others. It involves learning about boundaries, respect, and how to express themselves in healthy ways.

Theory/Theories: a set of ideas that explain concepts based on facts and observations. It helps us understand how things work or predict what might happen.

Traces: such as photos, notes, text, audio, journals, digital data, and materials created by children, like drawings, paintings, and constructions. These traces are collected to narrate and document children's learning processes, offering valuable insights into their development and thinking.

Well-being: a state of physical, social, and emotional comfort that results from the satisfaction of basic needs, including affection, security, social recognition, competence, and meaning in life. It encompasses happiness, satisfaction, effective social functioning, and qualities such as optimism, openness, and resilience.

Worldview: a way of understanding and interpreting the world, shaped by a culture's history, values, beliefs, and traditions. It influences how people perceive and interact with their surroundings, including relationships with the land, animals, and others. Each culture's worldview is unique and guides their behaviors, social structures, and the meaning they attach to life.

Introduction

Across the Northwest Territories (NWT), children participate in a variety of **early learning and child care settings**. These programs work in partnership with **families**, a child's most significant and influential **relationship**, to complement the learning that occurs at the home and promote children's social, emotional, physical, spiritual, cognitive, language, and creative **development**.

In the early years, the brain develops very quickly, making children especially sensitive to their experiences with the **environment**. These early experiences influence children's future learning, behaviour, and health. Recognizing the importance of **early childhood**, the *NWT Early Learning Framework* is designed to support **educators** working with young children and families in early learning and child care settings.

This framework builds on the [*2030 Early Learning and Child Care Strategy*](#), which outlines that high-quality early learning and child care in the NWT should be community-driven to best meet the needs of the families in their communities. The *2030 Early Learning and Child Care Strategy* also identifies the following aspects of quality:

- connection to the **culture** and languages of the children, families and local communities
- **inclusive** environments that respond to children's uniqueness and support active participation
- well-supported educators who are knowledgeable in early childhood development
- **developmentally appropriate** environments that meet health and safety practices
- partnership with community-based partners and **early years service partners** to enrich children's experiences

The NWT is the traditional homeland of the Dene, Métis, Inuvialuit, and nêhiyawak. Indigenous people make up approximately 50 percent of the total population. Early learning and child care system must be grounded in the Indigenous **worldviews**, cultures, languages, and **knowledge systems** to support **self-determination**, **reconciliation**, and **revitalization**. In this framework, the term '**Land**' is used to recognize that it includes Indigenous peoples, **worldview**, cultures, languages, and knowledge systems. These elements have evolved together since the beginning of time, each shaping and influencing the other in strong, inseparable connections. Land is essential to teaching and learning in the north.

Terminology describing the identity of Indigenous peoples in Canada has varied over time. For the most part, the collective terms Indigenous and Indigenous peoples are used throughout this framework to refer collectively to **First Nations, Métis and Inuit**.

This framework does not suggest a one-size-fits-all model for early learning and child care. Instead, it presents flexible areas and pathways based on the belief children are capable, competent, curious individuals who are full of potential. This framework is designed to guide educators to reflect and

strengthen their **early years practices**. Educators are encouraged to respond to children's interest, needs, and strengths, and facilitate children's engagement in exploration, discovery, and **inquiry**.

This framework also recognizes the importance of families and communities in strengthening children's development and learning as families provide children with their foundation for early learning. Educators have a role in building relationships with families and communities and welcoming their participation and contributions in meaningful ways. Communities further enrich the learning environment by offering diverse perspectives, resources, and experiences.

Every child brings their unique experience, backgrounds, and perspectives as they engage in the world. This framework values and honours each child for who they are now and for who they will grow to become. Children's unique ways of being and learning at the centre of this framework and informs the following **interdependent** sections:

- **Section 1:** Sets the foundation of the framework by describing the overall vision, and the context and identifying key influences that inform the framework.
- **Section 2:** Introduces the broad principles guiding the framework, focusing on ensuring all children of abilities and backgrounds are supported.
- **Section 3:** Identifies the practices for educators to support their work, such as listening, reflecting, exploring different ways of thinking, and creating **learning stories**.
- **Section 4:** Outlines the five broad areas for early learning and child care in the NWT: Well-being, Exploration, Communication, Togetherness, Land

Every reader will use this framework in a way that best aligns with them. It is intended to be used over time, discussed with others, and to encourage educators to think about why they do what they do in a particular way. It can be used independently or shared with others as a starting point for conversation. It offers a common language to highlight the significance of early learning for young children. It is intended to inspire meaningful communication between children, families, broader community, educators, and other early years services. Aligning efforts across the early learning and child care sector can help create responsive, inclusive, and empowering environments where children in the NWT can develop the skills they need to confidently and successfully navigate the world.

The symbol of this Framework

The cranberry plant is found all over our Northern landscapes. While its fruit may not always be present, the leaves, stems and roots stay through every season and weather pattern. They are strong; carry the weight of animal footprints, lasting through drought and surviving heavy rain. Even after tough times, they remain and are ready to flourish again when the right conditions are met.

Throughout this framework, the cranberry plant is used as a comparison for understanding the connections and feedback that



happen within teaching and learning. Looking to the Land provides clear guidance to understand one's role in the **interconnected** system.

The cranberry teaches us that nurturing strong roots, stems and leaves allows the fruit to thrive when the conditions are right. The tart and sweet red berries enjoyed by many— bears, birds, squirrels and people represent the heart of teaching and learning: the meaningful moments that occur when relationships and processes are trusted to guide the experience. The guidance provided in this framework aims to create conditions to help the growth of these berries.

Section 1: Vision for Early Learning

Young children in the NWT live, learn and grow in unique environments in relationship with the history, culture and language of Indigenous peoples and people from all over the world. As Land across the NWT varies, early learning and child care settings need to be responsive to the identities of the people and places.

Every child in the NWT deserves safe and nurturing environments that honour their gifts, empower them to participate fully, and deepen connection with place, Land, and community. Everyone involved in the care and education of children come together to support their potential, creating spaces where all can respectfully live, learn, and grow together. These young children will grow to be a NWT capable person who will share their gifts and talents and continue to care for the Land, lead and strengthen their communities.

This vision supports the [United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child](#) (1989) (Convention) which acknowledges children as **citizens** with the right to be treated with dignity and respect. The Convention states children have the right to reach their fullest potential, with their **well-being** and voices at the center of decision that affect them. It also recognizes children's right to be protected from harm, to engage in play, cultural life, and the arts, and to have equal opportunities to participate.

Today, there is a growing movement for Indigenous Peoples to reclaim their central role in education. The [Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada](#) (2015) calls for the development of early childhood education programs that are culturally relevant for Indigenous children and families. The [United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples](#) (2008) further supports Indigenous peoples' right to self-determination and their right to manage their own education systems, ensuring teaching and learning are provided in their languages and reflects their cultural traditions and methods. Together, these documents highlight the significant work needed to **decolonize** Canadian society and its institutions.

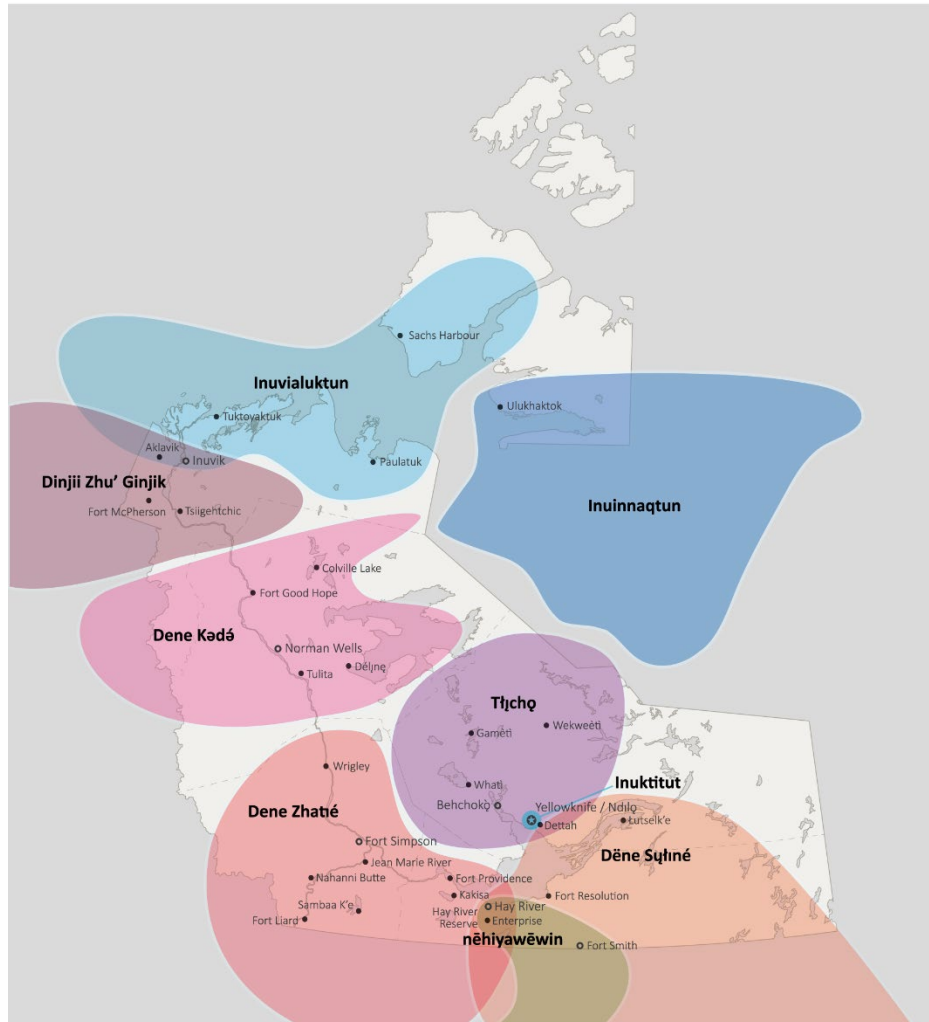
Everyone has a role to play in responding to the *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada Calls to Action* and implementing the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*.

By learning about Indigenous peoples' experiences of systemic marginalization and forced assimilation, educators have the opportunity actively contribute to reconciliation and support Indigenous communities. This includes leaving space for Indigenous self-determination, stepping back when necessary and providing support when needed. Finding balance will require building trust and relationships by consistently supporting and elevating Indigenous knowledge systems.

Understanding the NWT's history and current context is important in developing respectful relations with Indigenous peoples. The harmful legacy of **residential schools** involved the removal of Indigenous identities and the loss of ways of knowing and being. Settler **colonialism** disrupted Indigenous communities when Europeans arrived and enforced laws to assimilate Indigenous children. Many

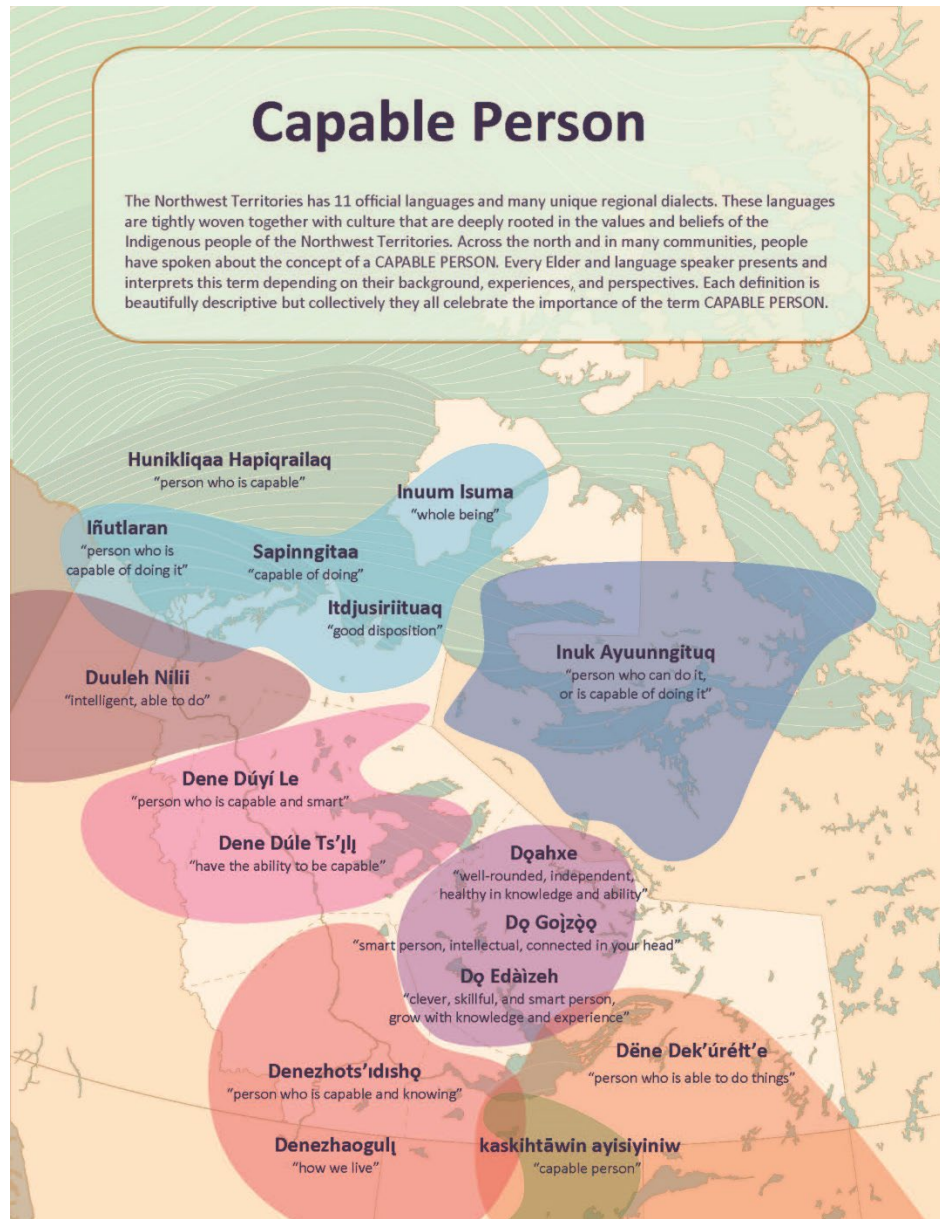
children were forced into residential schools, which separated them from their families. These schools operated from the early 1800s until the late 1990s, aiming to erase Indigenous identities and traditional ways of life, including prohibiting children from speaking their language. Reflecting on these colonial practices, it is important to recognize and honor the languages, traditions and customs vital to Indigenous cultures.

The NWT has 11 official languages, nine of which are Indigenous. However, there are more languages beyond this map, reflecting multiple dialects.



The concept of a '**capable person**' comes from Elders' teachings reflected in the [Dene Kede](#) (1993) and [Inuuqatigiit](#) (1996) curricula. It acknowledges the coexistence of Indigenous and Western worldviews in the NWT. Both worldviews offer unique strengths and when combined, provide an understanding of the world. Integrating both perspectives allows for development of the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values of a capable person in the NWT.

On this map you can see how interpretations of a 'capable person' vary throughout the NWT based on the language, background, experiences and perspectives. Each definition is beautifully descriptive and together they celebrate the importance of the term capable person.



This framework is also informed by the following documents and resources:

- [NWT Early Learning and Child Care Act and Regulations](#)
- [Canadian Council of Ministers of Education Early Learning and Development Framework](#)
- [Multilateral Early Learning and Child Care Framework](#)
- [Indigenous Early Learning and Child Care Framework](#)

Section 2: Principles of Early Learning

Ideas and values about early childhood, how young children learn, and teaching approaches, support the vision of respectfully living, learning and growing together. These principles weave together to offer a well-rounded approach to working with children. They are described broadly to fit all children, families, and communities, regardless of **ethnicity**, **gender**, **sexuality**, **culture**, language, abilities, or socio-economic status.

The principles are:

- Children are capable, unique and full of potential
- Relationships are the foundation for well-being and learning
- Families are essential in children's well-being and learning
- Early years spaces are inclusive
- Educators are collaborators
- Early years spaces build connections with Land
- Early years spaces include community
- Environments are important to well-being and learning
- Play is important for well-being and learning
- Risky play is essential for well-being and learning
- Learning is holistic

The principles may be considered in many ways. As you review the principles, consider how they relate to your work. Reflect on how they connect to the practices you are already using and think about ways to expand or enhance them.

Children are capable, unique and full of potential

This framework holds the **image of the child** as a strong, capable and unique individual who is full of potential. Every child is born with **gifts**. They are naturally curious and begin learning immediately. They are seen as valuable community members who can make meaningful contributions to society.

- Everyone's images of children and childhood are shaped by their own experience, knowledge and hopes. These views reflect what they believe to be important for individuals, society and the world. This influences how we interact with children and the choices we make for them.
- Participating in conversations that go beyond personal viewpoints can open opportunities for every child and family to participate in shared experiences. Recognizing different views of children and childhood enhance education in a socially and **culturally responsive** society.
- Children begin learning from the moment they are born. This learning is not straightforward or the same for everyone. It happens through relationships and experiences with others and is

shaped by individual differences, cultural backgrounds and environments. Each child's learning journey is a unique and complex process.

"Each child is unique in talents and abilities. The task of those around the growing child is to provide experiences which will enable the child to become what it is meant to be. It must be remembered that the gifts come in many forms. For some it may be the gift of special skills on the land and for another it may be the gift of laughter. (Dene Kede, 1993 p.xxv)"

Relationships are the foundation for well-being and learning

People do best in responsive, **reciprocal** and respectful relationships with themselves, each other and the Land. Building strong trusting relationships is essential for promoting growth and success.

- **Relationship with yourself:** involves activities or thoughts that support your mental, emotional, physical and spiritual well-being. This includes exploring practices that reflect one's identity, culture and personal wellness.
- **Relationship with others:** involves building strong relationships with children, their families and communities through respect, time, care and understanding. These relationships help create supportive and safe learning environments.
- **Relationship with the Land:** involves regular, meaningful connection with nature and **following the lead of the Land**. Recognizing and integrating local cultures, languages and knowledge systems offer valuable guidance and important learning that builds relationships with the Land.

"Language is viewed by the Dene as a gift from the Creator to enable us to reach back into our past and our history in order that we can go forward toward survival. The Dene languages help us to establish good relationships with the spiritual world, other people, the land and ourselves." (Dene Kede, 1993, p. xxviii)"

Families have an essential role in children's well-being and learning

Families are the first teachers and primary caregivers of their children. Their involvement is important in supporting children's overall development, well-being and learning.

- Children grow up in a variety of family and household structures, including two-parent households, single-parent households, stepfamilies, adoptive families, multi-generational homes, same-sex parent families, multiple families and foster families. Children's experiences should be connected to, and supportive of, their relationships with their families.
- Learning often involves multiple generations. Elders, aunties, uncles and grandparents bring valuable life experiences, cultural knowledge and languages, making them important educators for children. It is important to approach family dynamics with awareness and support.

- Including family members in a child's experiences in their early learning and child care program helps build healthy relationships and partnerships. This creates a sense of connection between children and the important people in their lives and results in stronger learning experiences.

"Children were educated by the people closest around them. Various family members accepted responsibility for different aspects of a child's education. Children and young people learned the skills necessary for the world in which they lived by observing adults and by sharing directly in adult activities. Elders, parents and others taught the values and traditions of the group - often through stories and myths passed orally from generation to generation" (Inuqatigiit, 1996, p. 15)

Early years spaces are inclusive

Early learning and child care settings are safe and welcoming space where every child and family can participate fully and meaningfully. Each child brings with them their history, background, capabilities and potential that can be nurtured. Regardless of geographic location, family structure, ethnicity, socio-economic status, gender, sexuality, abilities and learning needs, every child and family must feel they belong and that their identities are honoured.

- It is essential to recognize and build on children's individual strengths and capacities. Inclusive education means recognizing and supporting every part of a child's identity, including the **privilege** that may come with it.
- Educators create physical spaces, routines and approaches that encourage each child to participate, think, and discover in their unique ways. As educators create inclusive spaces, they are aware of a range of additional supports and services and the importance of engaging collaboratively with families.
- Educators reflect on their **biases** as these beliefs can affect their interactions with children and the decisions they make in the program. It is important to create an environment where every child and family feel encouraged to participate and contribute.

"Inclusion means that all children are welcomed and supported to engage in every aspect of their early learning and child care experience. Educators create environments where meaningful connections are made, fostering caring relationships with children, their families, and their cultures. Inclusion is grounded in guiding principles and best practices that prioritize children's well-being, sense of belonging, development, and active participation in learning." (Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, Government of New Brunswick, Inclusion Support Program, 2023, p.4)

Educators are collaborators

Educators collaborate with children and their families as partners in learning. This involves ongoing **observations**, listening, and being open to trying new approaches. The role of the educator has changed from being a giver of knowledge towards working together with children to **co-construct** environments that nurture children's curiosity, creativity and exploration. Educators work in relationship with children

to develop their ideas and learn at their own pace, and strive to ensure children feel safe, confident, motivated and heard.

- Children and adults are both engaged in thoughtful reflection, welcoming different viewpoints and new ideas. Educators notice and listen to the many ways children express themselves, recognizing that active listening is the key to building **reciprocal relationships**.
- Educators inspire curiosity that leads them to extend not only children's learning but their own. They do not see themselves as having all the answers or knowing the best way to teach. Instead, they are both learners and teachers who continuously reflect on their approach. This highlights the importance of thoughtful decision-making and encourages educators to find inspiration from the ideas presented in this framework.

"When we move to the heart of inquiry, it is about engagement, about lighting a fire within [children] so they want to investigate and find out more. It is not a single method or a program. It is a 'way of being' as a teacher. It is about how you see yourself and is at the heart of what you do and why you do it."
(Murdoch, K., 2015, p. 16)

Early years spaces build connections with Land

Land shapes people, cultures, languages and knowledge. It was, and continues to be, the basis for learning before **colonization** and continues to teach these lessons to all who listen. Indigenous families have been teaching and learning together for generations, following traditions and values deeply connected to the Land, nature and everything that comes from it.

- When children connect with Land, they gain an appreciation for their **interdependence** with its parts - animals, plants, trees, rocks, water. Consistent visits to the same outdoor location help children form a connection to specific places.
- Educators can help children build strong connections with local environments, cultures, languages and knowledge. This allows children to develop their own relationships with Land. It is important for educators to learn about the distinct cultures of the Indigenous peoples they work with, including the **names of communities** and significant places. Understanding these connections helps children see themselves in programming and strengthens their engagement.
 - For those who are Indigenous to the Land, this could include sharing your cultures, languages, and knowledge, and taking pride in who you are.
 - For those who are not from the area, this means understanding your own background and taking pride in it, while learning about and respecting the Indigenous peoples, cultures, languages and knowledge linked with the Land where you are living, learning and teaching.

"When we adjust our teaching practices to include Indigenous worldviews, concepts, experiences, and values, we provide an opportunity for Northern students to develop a deeper understanding of who they

are, the place where they originated or presently live, and the possibilities of where they can go.”
(Government of the Northwest Territories, *Indigenous Languages & Education Handbook: Our people, Our Land, Our Ways, Our Languages*, p.55)

Early years spaces include community

Children develop a sense of **place** when they connect with their local communities and the people in them. Elders, knowledge holders, family and others bring unique gifts to early years spaces. Creating spaces where everyone’s voices are heard, including children, is essential to building a sense of belonging and reinforcing children’s role as a **citizen** of their community.

- Strong community connections are essential to build positive relationships. Traditionally, a network of caring adults were responsible for raising and teaching children. The separation of education from the community is a result of **colonization** and residential schools. Involving willing community members in sharing languages, cultures and knowledge from the Land can help bring **knowledge systems** back.
- Children are important members of their community, offering their unique gifts and talents. Participating in community life can strengthen a sense of belonging. With their endless imaginations and sense of adventure, they will grow to be the leaders who will shape our societies in the future.

“The parents, elders and skilled and knowledgeable people from the community formed a partnership to educate the youngsters. As the youngsters took their place in later life they would give back to the community what the community had instilled in them. The community involved itself because it would eventually benefit from it.” (Dene Kede, 1993, p.12)

Environments are important to well-being and learning

The importance of the early learning and child care **environment**, usually referred to as the ‘third teacher,’ cannot be underestimated in shaping the experiences of children and adults. Children and adults live and learn in relationships with the people around them but are also affected by their connections to their important spaces and the meaning they gain from interacting with materials.

- Learning and teaching happen both outdoors and indoors. Each environment is valuable and provides an enriching and well-rounded experience.
- Educators pay attention to how children interact with the environment, both individually and in groups. Educators experiment with environments to promote **inclusion**, building relationships and encouraging deeper thinking.
- Educators consider and respond to each child’s way of being, doing and learning and honour their abilities and interests so every child can participate.
- Environments are always in relationship with people, place, ideas and culture, and include:

- **Space and place:** The way furniture, structures and objects are arranged in an indoor or outdoor space, shows how people can move and interact with others. The arrangement of space can encourage small and large group interaction, inspire collaborative learning, celebrate **diversity**, and invite children to explore and express their identities and cultures. When educators notice how space is used, they can creatively respond to open possibilities for children to extend their thinking and experiment with new ways of being.
- **Materials:** Different materials (such as loose parts, toys, objects, art supplies) invite children to participate and engage in different ways. Some materials may be set up to show how the materials can be used, while others may allow for many possibilities to experiment, imagination and lively interaction. Providing materials that reflect children's identities, languages and cultures show them their backgrounds are valued and they do not have to hide themselves to fully participate in the environment.
- **Time, rhythms and flows:** How the day is planned affects interactions and impacts the experiences that take place. Instead of 'spending' time, it is protected for meaningful engagement. Flexible schedules with a predictable routine reduce transitions and create long periods of uninterrupted time, allowing children to develop their ideas and explore their inquiries at their own pace. Fewer transitions also allow educators to be more present and spend time alongside children to **observe** and participate.

"In the early years, children need multiple ways to build a solid identity and connections with those around them—their families, peers, role models, culture and community, and the natural world. Children bring a powerful drive to learn and understand what's around them. They learn best when offered interesting materials, ample time, and opportunity to investigate, transform, and invent—without the interruptions of a teacher's schedule." (Curtis & Carter, 2003, p. 6)

Play is important for well-being and learning

Play is vital to children's learning, growth and **make meaning** of the world. Many terms are used in this framework related to play, such as "engagement," "experimentation," "**inquiry**," "building theories," "participating," "making meaning," and "investigating." By expanding the words used for play, educators may begin to see play in new ways and can lead to meaningful conversations.

- Play is understood and approached differently across cultures and reflects the Land and seasons where children live. In Northern cultures, play can also include learning essential on-the-Land skills needed to thrive in the local climate.
- Play can be individual, group-based, spontaneous, planned, experimental, purposeful, unpredictable and/or dynamic. Children experience the world through seeing, feeling, touching, listening, and by engaging with people, materials, places, species and ideas.

- Play is a way to explore, learn about the world, and discover what children are capable of. By providing diverse materials and experiences, educators create spaces for experimentation and transformation.
- Educators can **document** moments of children’s play to make learning visible, to invite others (colleagues, children, families) to share their perspectives and to consider different ideas about learning.

“Play is a crucial developmental part of the Dene child’s development, and is essential to the acquisition of language. Through play, children find friendship, learn leadership skills and develop mentally, physically, creatively and spiritually. Play is considered an important process for the child in need of healing.” (Dene Kede, 1993, p. 196)

Risky play is essential for well-being and learning

Children need safe and supportive environments that allow them to engage in play that is adventurous, challenging, and where they can take risks to support their development. **Risky play** is thrilling and exciting experiences where the outcome can be uncertain and has the potential for physical or emotional injury. As children are in control of their own play, they get to understand what level of **risk** is right for them, learning to trust their instincts, make decisions, and develop confidence to navigate the world.

- Safety is essential when children engage in risky play. Educators can balance safety and risk through careful supervision to assess the risks and benefits of children’s activities and checking the environment for potential **hazards**.
- Supporting risky play is about creating conditions that are ‘safe as necessary’ rather than ‘safe as possible’, where children can take appropriate, manageable risks that match their abilities, experience and confidence.
- Risky play involves curiosity, exploration, focus, tolerable fear, and excitement. The outdoors is ideal for this kind of play as it is dynamic and active. It provides children with the freedom and space to test their limits, explore boundaries, and learn to manage challenges and risks.

“Opportunities to engage in outdoor free play—and risky play in particular—have declined significantly in recent years, in part because safety measures have sought to prevent all play-related injuries rather than focusing on serious and fatal injuries. Risky play is defined by thrilling and exciting forms of free play that involve uncertainty of outcome and a possibility of physical injury. Proponents of risky play differentiate ‘risk’ from ‘hazard’ and seek to reframe perceived risk as an opportunity for situational evaluation and personal development.” (Beaulieu, Beno, & Canadian Paediatric Society, 2024, para. 1)

Learning is holistic

Children learn with their mind, body, heart and spirit, and in relationship with themselves, others, the environment and Land. They gain knowledge by creating and testing ideas, exploring the world, and expressing their thoughts. Learning isn’t a straight path; it’s more like a spiral. As children interact with

people, places, ideas and materials, they engage their whole selves and discover things in surprising ways.

- It is important to recognize that everyone learns in their own way. Each child has their own strengths and ways of understanding things. Some might learn best through hands-on activities, while others may prefer looking at pictures or listening to stories and songs. By recognizing children's preferences to learning, we can create a learning environment where all children are able to thrive.
- **Children with diverse abilities and needs** may learn, play, explore and express ideas differently, using senses such as sight and touch or by working with others. Activities that engage multiple senses and involve the whole-body can help support various learning styles.
- A **holistic** approach recognizes that all areas of learning: physical, emotional, social, spiritual, language, visual, auditory and intellectual are connected and influence each other as they develop.

“Traditionally, children learned by experiencing life in a spiralling fashion. Children would be repeatedly exposed to similar kinds of experiences over a period of time, but each time they would learn at a more complex or advanced level Children learned by:

- *being observant while experiencing.*
- *making an individual decision as to when to try to do something on their own.*
- *taking responsibility for what to learn and when” (Dene Kede Teacher Resource Manual, 1993, p. 17).*

Section 3: Practices of Early Learning

Many factors contribute to the diverse ways educators approach their practice. Teaching and learning are complex and shaped by many relationships, including families, children, communities, legislation, policies, places, ideas, materials and histories. Different experiences and perspectives can lead to challenging conversations but engaging with complexity means accepting different ways of thinking, seeing, doing and knowing.

When educators take the time to pause and reflect on their work with young children, they can see how theories are present in their practices and can begin to explore different theories and possibilities. This process, known as **critically reflective** practice, and is a key part of this framework.

Theory and practice are often seen as separate—where theory is linked to academics and practice to educators. However, they are connected and influence each other. Daily practices, like rules and routines, are shaped by theories that guide expectations for children and how educators view their roles.

Educators may draw on a range of perspectives in their work, which may include:

- **Development theories:** These describe how children grow and acquire skills in stages, forming the foundation of early childhood education and viewing children as active learners.
- **Socio-cultural theories:** These highlights the vital role families, culture, and historical, economic, and political factors shape their learning experience.
- **Post-foundational theories:** These challenge existing knowledge systems and encourage us to rethink our beliefs about power, equity and social justice.
- **Indigenous theories:** These focus on caring for children in ways that are rooted in unique worldviews, including languages, cultures, traditions and practices expressed through various systems.

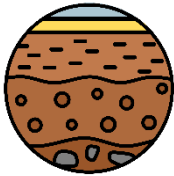
This framework is intended to promote **dialogue** about understandings of childhood, knowledge and learning.

These discussions are important in reflecting on the developmental theories that have historically shaped early childhood practices, where children’s development is seen in a predictable manner. These theories help educators understand and support typical growth pattern. While these theories offer valuable insights, they often overlook the impact of culture, life experiences, and personal differences on a child’s development.

By **critically reflecting** on the ideas behind the underlying theories, educators can explore different perspectives and multiple ways to understand the purpose of early childhood education. Educators have opportunities for ongoing discussion with colleagues, families and the larger community to reflect on how developmental theories have shaped perspectives and approaches to childhood and learning. By coming together, educators can share diverse views and manage complexities in a local and respectful way.

Reflecting on teaching and learning practice is an important part of using this framework. Just like a cranberry plant needs the right environment— sun, soil, and water – to grow berries, the practices in this section aim to support effective early learning and child care programming. The following practices are intended to be included in all other sections, not in direct and strict ways but in an open minded and flexible manner.

What is listening with care?



Soil helps a cranberry plant by giving it the nutrients it needs. Each type of soil has its own qualities, but it does not force anything on the plant. Instead, it stays in place and offers resources based on the plant's need throughout the seasons. If the soil does not listen to the plant, it would not be able to create the right conditions for berries to grow. Similarly, the practice of listening with care is essential for nurturing growth.

Listening with care communicates to others that their ideas and feelings matter, even if they are different from one's own. To be able to listen well, we must make space by gently setting aside our personal thoughts and ideas. It involves more than hearing words; it includes being compassionate, building relationships and accepting others' experiences. This means being fully present, setting aside distractions, understanding others' feelings, and paying attention to both verbal and non-verbal cues to build trust and create a supportive environment.

Listening involves letting go of what we thought we knew to open ourselves up to the experiences of others.

What is reflecting thoughtfully?



The water cycle supplies vital contributions to the cranberry plant throughout the seasons. Reflecting thoughtfully, much like the layers of snowfall in the winter, takes time and care. Asking questions to explore the meaning behind behaviours and learning moments can lead to a deeper understanding of the situation before making a decision.

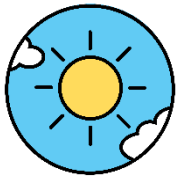
Reflecting thoughtfully means looking at our personal beliefs and understanding how cultural, social, material and historical forces shape who we are and how we see the world. It involves asking questions to deepen understanding, encourage growth when something is unfamiliar and remaining open to diverse cultures, values and beliefs.

Images of children and understandings about learning and education are not universal, they differ based on histories and people's personal experiences, beliefs and desires. With that in mind, educators are encouraged to **critically reflect** on accepted mainstream knowledge and be open to explore different understandings and worldviews.

By reflecting thoughtfully, you can:

- Explore where ideas about “how the world works” have come from, who created these ideas, who benefits from these ideas, and who they have left out.
- Seek many viewpoints on “truths” about teaching and learning and instead, focus on learning together as a community.
- Understand that the world has histories of **marginalizing** and silencing certain peoples.
- Reimagine what educators can do, who they can be, and be open to different ways of thinking.
- Uncover potential **biases** and consider how this may affect teaching and learning practice.
- Celebrate and honour **diversity** in teaching and learning practice.

What is exploring different ways of thinking?



Sunlight provides energy for the cranberry plant to grow. While the light from the sun looks to be white, it is made up of many colours, including those we can't see. In the same way, embracing different viewpoints supports growth and success. Being open to collaboration and other ways of thinking adds value and helps uncover biases.

Welcoming diverse viewpoints means letting go of control in favour of shared growth and success.

Inviting comments, questions and **interpretations** from children, families, colleagues and community members brings in multiple perspectives. This process creates chances for discussion not to find answers but to explore the different ways of thinking about teaching and learning. It helps reflect on **assumptions**, values and understandings that have not been examined. Ongoing discussions can improve and deepen perspectives and can challenge educators to consider new ways of seeing, thinking and practicing. Remember that collaboration and sharing is not always done verbally – notice the actions of children, families and the community.

What is a learning story?



The Land, with its nurturing environment, has grown the fruit. Now it is time to honour the berries with a respectful harvest by carefully picking each berry, handling them with care, and getting them ready to share. Teaching and learning moments should also be thoughtfully gathered, organized and reflected upon. Like berries, these moments hold value and deserve to be handled with care. This ongoing process allows

everyone to enjoy and benefit from the insights collected.

Learning stories are the process of noticing and collecting moments from everyday activities. These stories are then shared with colleagues, children and families to make children's learning processes and educators' teaching and learning choices visible and open to **interpretation** and reflection. The role of the educator is to be actively engaged in **co-**

Creating a learning story may be thought of in this way:

- Listen deeply
- Be curious
- Embrace wonder
- Share the story

constructing with children in a learning collective that includes family and community.

Learning stories put children at the centre, making sure their voices are listened to, and their abilities are celebrated. Educators are invited to be curious, open and respectful of children’s thinking, rather than focusing on specific results. The intent is not to provide answers or set predictable goals, but to connect with children based on their understanding, skills, and interest, exploring ways to keeping the learning process “alive.”

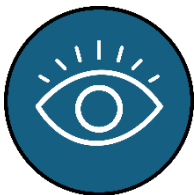
Learning stories highlight the educator’s role as more than just a caretaker, showing them as active thinkers who thoughtfully plan and reflect on their work. By making their decision-making visible, others can see early learning and child care settings are seen as lively and engaging environments.

Educators who use learning stories reflect on the values and understanding they hold about children, learning and teaching. Inviting others in these discussions creates space for connection between multiple perspectives and approaches, not just those of the dominant culture. By engaging others in these conversations, educators challenge the “one-size-fits-all” approach to early learning and develop ways that are responsive to the identities of people and places across the NWT.

The process of learning stories

The following describes the components of learning stories. Remember, there is no single way to do this process – each educator will approach this process differently because it is not linear or predictable. Be patient – there will be moments of clarity and moments of uncertainty, and it takes time and practice to become used to noticing, recording, reflecting, and discussing about moments. Begin where it makes sense and take small steps.

Noticing berries



Be present and prepared in the moment with the right clothing and equipment to be comfortable and enjoy the journey. Instead of rushing or stressing, focus on enjoying your surrounding – fresh air, wildfire, scenery – while keeping a sharp eye for the berries to appear.

These ‘berries’ are moments of discovery that happen everyday. Just as spotting berries on the Land requires care and deep **observation**, so does recognizing these moments with children. Children express a wide range of thoughts, feelings, and ideas through their gestures, silence, movement, gaze and stillness. When educators listen with care, they notice how materials, objects, light, and sound, and how everything is connected and affecting each other in the present moment.

Harvesting berries



When you see the bright red gems hidden amongst the moss and leaves of the taiga floor, follow the trail of berries as they appear. Harvesting involves bending down to pick the berries to save for later processes of cleaning, cooking, and sharing. Enjoy the patch when you find it – take a moment to sit down, taste a few along the way and gather berries thoughtfully.

Part of harvesting ‘berries’ is being in the moment and enjoying the experience along the way. Be attentive and explore alongside children, valuing their discoveries as it unfolds. Educators can **co-construct** with children’s curiosity by responding to their questions, thoughts and ideas in an open-ended manner that helps children deepen their understanding. Notice moments that stand out and use them to guide **inquiry** that focuses on the process instead of an outcome or assessing an individual child.

Harvesting ‘berries’ create **traces** that make moments of practice visible and bring attention to thinking, connections and relationships. Traces of ‘berries’ in learning stories can take the form of:

- Materials created by the children, such as drawings, paintings, constructions
- Written field notes
- Digital audio-recordings
- Photographs
- Video clips
- Quotes
- Transcript

Important: *Photographs, videos, audio recordings, and notes about children should be handled carefully. Make sure families have consented and are informed about how this information is used and stored in the program. Respect their wishes if they do not want their child to be photographed or recorded.*

Reflecting on your harvest



While picking the berries, it’s important to consider their condition and context. This reflection helps you connect past experiences with current insights and prepares for future needs. Providing a clear understanding that grounds one in the present and guides future actions.

Reflect on the ‘berries’ that you have gathered with openness and curiosity. Write observations, thoughts and questions about these moments. By noticing what children are doing and considering why they do it helps connect to their thinking and questioning, offering insight into how they make sense of their world and a deeper understanding of who they are.

Reflections show the processes you are following in your teaching and the connections you are making between the traces you have collected and the **theories** that inform your understanding of children’s learning and development. Consider using the reflective questions in Section 4 of this framework to help engage in reflection.

Sharing berries



This is where the berries are truly honoured by sharing their abundance. Simply picking the berries and leaving them means the process is incomplete, as they have not carried their responsibility of feeding others. When berries are turned into something tangible – like jam, jelly, cake, muffins or even putting them into a jar – and shared with others, the process begins to build connections, spread joy and create meaning. Sending these delightful offerings will spark reciprocity and abundance, enriching the lives others.

Share the ‘berries’ that you have gathered with children, families of the program, colleagues and others in the community makes the moments visible.

Learning stories can take many forms and can be shared in many ways; however, they are never complete. Templates, whether digital or written, provide structure but can limit opportunities for ongoing reflection and **dialogue** about the details of children’s and educators’ learning and thinking. Bulletin boards that simply display images of children do not capture the full story of their learning and thinking.

Learning story only become a **documentation** of practice when it’s brought to life with questions, thoughts, and the **interpretations** of different people. Learning stories are not intended to be a record of what happened; rather, it is a lively invitation to share, discuss, challenge, debate, and rework teaching and learning choices.

Traces of ‘berries’ and the ongoing learning stories can be made visible by:

- Posting on the wall, on a bulletin board, or in the entryway.
- In newsletters to parents, families, educators, the community textually, or visually.
- Sending text, audio recordings or digital video to families through email.
- Sharing digitally through online platforms. Reminder: use of online technologies requires parent or guardian consent and must be password protected for privacy.
- Printing or projecting on a screen or wall at discussion meetings for families, colleagues (for example, a team meeting, a community of practice with a group of colleagues), and children in the program.
- Posting on sandwich boards placed inside or outside the centre or day home.

Consider the diverse abilities in the community and explore multiple ways of sharing learning stories such as by Braille, with pictures and symbols, or using closed captioning, voice-over, or translations.

Holding a feast



Making the most of your berry harvest means bringing people together around the food. The simple red round cranberry fruit spark for joy, love, gratitude, and connection. When people gather to share stories and ideas, the experience grows and evolves. The abundance of the cranberries travels to the bellies of all around the table, and in return, feedback and new ideas can emerge.

Invite comments, questions, and **interpretations** from children, families, colleagues or community members. Encourage ideas that invite multiple perspectives about the children's thinking and learning. Exploring beyond initial thoughts and collaborating helps to understand children better, ask new questions, and see observations from different angles. This can provide valuable insights and ideas for improving our planning and work with children.

- **With children:** Use ideas and thoughts from learning stories to continue conversations with the children. Remembering the event or moment and retelling it and wondering more about it engages children and extends their thinking.

Focus on recognizing and valuing each child's unique efforts and qualities. By seeing each child with fresh eyes and listening carefully, educators avoid imposing their own ideas and instead take the time to getting to know them. Through careful and intentional observation, educators have an opportunity to wonder about what children are seeing and hearing.

- **With colleagues:** With ongoing reflection of learning stories, **dialogue** with colleagues becomes richer and deeper, making both children's and educators' thinking and learning visible. Through **documenting** what educators notice, they may begin to plan differently and think differently about what might be possible. It is also important to consider what is not being documented, and to **critically reflect** on what motivates the choices educator's make. Doing this regularly and collaboratively allows for ongoing exchange of ideas, invites multiple ways of seeing, can uncover biases, facilitates open conversation on biases, and can provide the support needed to shift practices that can lead to meaningful transformations.

These discussions may not always be easy, and tensions or discomfort may arise. Building relationships of trust and creating a culture where dialogue is ongoing takes time and requires a willingness to listen and embrace uncertainty. The goal is not always to come to agreement, but to view disagreement as a means of generating new thinking and perspectives.

Consider asking families:

- What do you think your child is doing/learning in this moment?
- Can you help me deepen my understanding of what is happening in this moment?
- Is there anything you could add to this learning story (background information, personal experiences, insights into personality)?
- How do you see this moment in relation to your image of the child?
- What prior knowledge does your child bring to this moment?

Are there opportunities to make traces visible in the community? Think about partnerships with galleries, community centres, schools, colleges or universities, or other organizations where the public could engage with learning stories.

Remember: *Photos, video and audio recordings, and notes about children are all sources of information that must be treated carefully. Ensure that families know how this information is used, and how the information is stored. Respect families' wishes if they do not grant permission for their child to be photographed, recorded, or shared.*

Nurturing berries



Preserving natural conditions is essential for nurturing the growth of berries, as it keeps the environment ideal for flourishing. When Land is protected and managed with care, the balance of soil, water, and sunlight needed for berries to thrive is maintained, leading to a bountiful production.

Keeping the condition right is essential to nurturing 'berries' – the delicious and juicy happenings of your practice. 'Berries' can be unpredictable when or where they sprout on the plant. While the 'berries' themselves can't be controlled, educators can encourage their emergence by adjusting their actions and conditions to foster an abundant practice.

Learning stories help educators be intentional in their daily practice to extend children's play, thinking, learning and sense of wellbeing. Educators reflect on the reasons behind their decisions and explore with ideas. These thoughtful choices will likely lead to more documentation, reflection, continued collaborative discussions, and new connections to theories and the framework, encouraging further possibilities. Together, educators and children experiment with new ideas, materials or processes, always remaining open to other possibilities. In this way learning stories can support emergent curriculum.

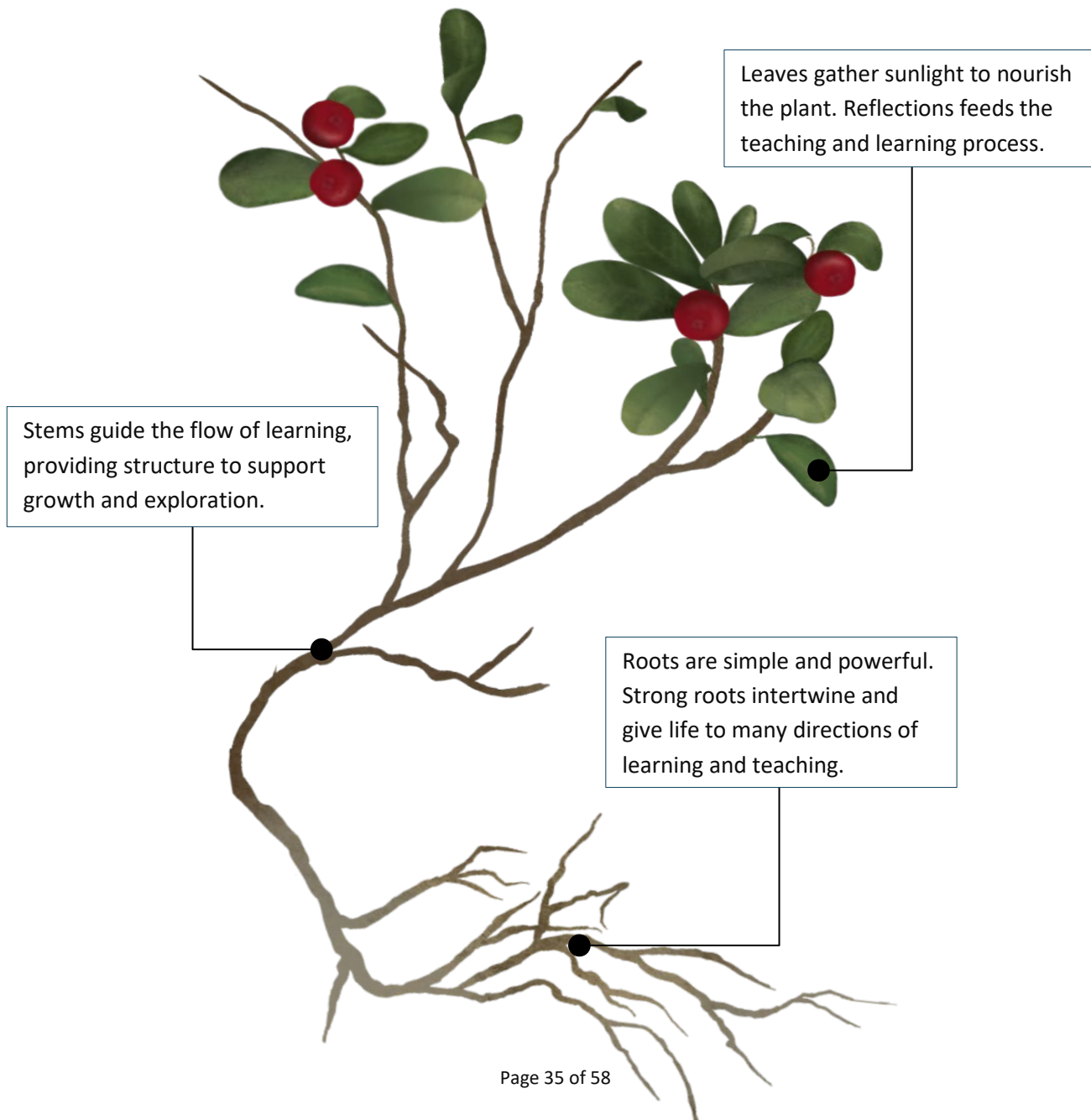
This framework encourages educators to reflect on the reasons behind their choices and to be intentional in the decisions they make when creating the early learning environment. Thoughtful decision-making is at the heart of **pedagogy**. Pedagogy informs everything educators choose to do with children and with the environment, materials, activities, traditions and routines.

In an emergent curriculum, instead of following a pre-determined plan, educators observe and listen to children, allowing their curiosity and questions to guide the direction of activities and learning. The curriculum "emerges" from the children's needs, inquiries, and interactions with the environment. Educators respond to children's interests, ideas, and experiences, using children as the basis for planning and guiding. Educators work alongside children to **co-construct** a learning environment that encourages exploration, creativity, and critical thinking. This approach is a hands-on, child-centered learning, where children's ideas and experiences are valued.

Section 4: Areas of Early Learning

Learning is not an individual act. It happens through relationships with people, materials and place. All aspects of children's learning and development is **interconnected**, just like the how roots grow together beneath the soil to feed a plant throughout all seasons. This framework outlines five **areas** (roots) of early learning: **Well-being, Engagement, Communication, Togetherness, and Land**. Each area includes pathways (stems) and questions (leaves) that prompt opportunities for **reflection** on children, learning and practice.

There is no set way to engage with the areas, pathways, and questions. These elements reflect the evolving nature of early learning and child care, representing a journey that is always growing and changing. Together, they work together to support the **holistic** experience of children.



Early Learning Framework Areas and Pathways					
Areas	Well-being	Exploration	Communication	Togetherness	Land
	Nurturing a sense of well-being and belonging supports children as they learn about and investigate the world around them.	Children make meaning as they engage with materials, other children and adults, space, Land, community and the world.	Children express themselves in multiple ways to communicate ideas, participate in relationships, and make meaning in their homes and communities.	A positive personal and cultural identity is the awareness, understanding, and appreciation of all the facets that contribute to a healthy sense of oneself.	Engaging with and learning from Land, cultures, languages, and knowledge, develops an appreciation and respect for local community and its way of life.
Pathways	Self-determination	Interests and discovery	Multiple modes of expression	Layered Identities	Connection to Land and place
	Joy in relationships with people, place, materials and ideas	Knowledge and theories	Conversational interactions	Collaborative atmosphere	Interconnection
Pathways	Welcoming cultures and worldviews	Spaces	Vocabulary, symbols, and written language	Individual strengths	Culture, traditions, and knowledge systems from Land
	Family structure	Objects and materials	Sound and word play	Social responsibility and justice	Land leads learning
Pathways	Gender expression and identity	Time for engagement	Technology	Advancing decolonization and towards reconciliation	Language comes from Land
	Basic needs	Local community connections			
Pathways	Emotions, thoughts, and views				
	Every child has unique gifts				

Well-being

Nurturing a sense of well-being supports children as they learn about who they are and investigate the world around them. This grows through **reciprocal relationships** with people and places where each child is valued for their unique gifts. Educators create environments in which every child feels confident in themselves and where **diversity** is celebrated. Each child is valued for their contributions and for the knowledge they can share.

By developing responsive relationships with adults and peers, each child feels a sense of well-being and can add to the well-being of their family, community and society. This confidence is essential for children as they explore who they are.

Pathways for engaging with well-being

To inspire a sense of well-being, adults create programming and engage in teaching practices while considering:

- **Self-determination:** Children are listened to, their identities and abilities are respected and they are given independence to make their own choices.
- **Joy in relationships with people, place, materials and ideas:** Children and educators are open to joy and wonder.
- **Welcoming cultures and worldviews:** Each child and family's cultures are welcomed, valued, and woven into the program in ways that are transformative.
- **Family structure:** Educators honour diverse family structures, and all are celebrated and embraced to build a strong sense of community.
- **Gender expression and identity:** Educators respect and support all children's gender identities and expressions.
- **Basic needs:** Children have control of their bodies and contribute to determining routines and schedules that meet their needs.
- **Emotions, thoughts and views:** Children's thoughts, emotions, and views are listened to and respected.
- **Every child has unique gifts:** Every child can contribute their gifts in relationship with others.

Reflective questions for well-being

The table below offers directions and ideas for furthering thinking about practice in relation to the area of well-being and each of its pathways.

Pathways for engaging with well-being	
Pathways	Reflective questions
Self-determination	<p>How do I embody the value of “Nothing for us without us” in my relationships with children and families?</p> <p>How do I support children in having a voice, choosing activities and making decisions about their spaces?</p> <p>How do I give children the choice for who will support them when they need help?</p> <p>How do I ensure children and families feel valued and central in the planning process for the program?</p> <p>How do adults convey to children that the environment is supportive of expressing who they are fully and that all identities in the program are accepted?</p> <p>What ways can I provide children with the chance to take responsibility and make decisions about their spaces?</p> <p>How are diverse abilities respected and valued?</p> <p>How do meanings of respect vary in different cultural or historical contexts? How does a child show respect? How does an adult show respect?</p> <p>What does it mean to be in a reciprocal relationship with an adult? With a child? With other living things? With the Land?</p> <p>Consider adult voices and children’s voices in your program. Who is spending more time speaking? Who is spending more time listening?</p>
Joy in relationships with people, place, materials and ideas	<p>Moss suggests that childhood spaces can give “<i>constant rise to wonder and surprise, magic moments and goose bumps, and a source of hope and renewed belief in the world</i>” (Moss, 2013, p. 82).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What does this mean to me? • Could I use this quote as an invitation for dialogue with colleagues? • What brings me joy in my work? Can I create ways to extend and build on this joy? <p>Children often find joy in their relationships with materials, people, and ideas.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How might I provide opportunities to extend or build on these joyful encounters?

	<p>Do materials, spaces or routines invite joyful engagement? What materials, spaces or routines seem to inhibit joyful engagement?</p> <p>What does it mean to be in reciprocal relationships with children, families, and colleagues?</p>
Welcoming cultures and worldviews	<p>How are children’s cultures welcomed, valued, and woven into my setting in ways that are transformative?</p> <p>How do policies, procedures, and administrative practices honour and strengthen connections to the diverse cultural communities in my region (including deaf culture, diverse ability culture)?</p> <p>In what ways are community members invited and welcomed into my program to enhance cross-generational, cultural, and relational learning?</p> <p>Consider styles and languages of communication including gesture, eye contact, expression of feelings, independence, and assertiveness.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do these vary among different cultural and community groups? • How might I learn more about the cultural practices and histories of the diverse communities in my region? <p>How do I understand and appreciate the differences and similarities between various cultures and groups? In what ways do I seek to learn about their histories and the factors that shape their beliefs and values?</p> <p>How does my own cultural background influence my behaviors and attitudes? What steps do I take to recognize and address my? How might these biases affect interactions with others? If my culture holds a dominant position, what privileges might I have because of this?</p> <p>In what ways do my life experiences influence my interactions with and perceptions of others? How do I engage in self-reflection and evaluation to understand how my experiences shape my views of myself and others?</p> <p>How do I identify and understand my own values, biases, and assumptions, as well as those of others? How can I apply this understanding to improve my interactions and practices?</p>
Family structure	<p>What books, posters, or other materials in my program perpetuate nuclear family stereotypes?</p> <p>How do I view married parents, separated parents, divorced parents, single parents? How do these perceptions affect my view of their children? How might my views differ between traditional nuclear family and other family structure (e.g., same sex parents, polyamorous, common law, extended</p>

	<p>families, step families, grandparent families, auntie/uncle families, adopted families, foster families, etc.)?</p> <p>Do children have opportunities to go beyond the bounds of the nuclear family stereotypes?</p> <p>What is the story of how I came to understand the definition of family and what assumptions might influence my perspective?</p> <p>How is the definition of family different across diverse cultures?</p> <p>How might I pay attention to responses as children play with or go beyond the bounds of Euro Western family norms and share new ideas with colleagues, children and families?</p> <p>How does the literature and stories in my program represent multiple family structures in a non-biased and non-stereotypical way?</p> <p>Do the children feel that the family they love the most in the world is being honoured and valued by my program?</p>
Gender expression and identity	<p>How does my understanding of 2SLGBTQQIPA+ identities shape my practice and advocacy for inclusive policies? How do I deepen my understanding?</p> <p>How do I ensure that my language is inclusive and gender-neutral? Do children have opportunities to go beyond the bounds of gender stereotypes?</p> <p>What is the story of how I came to understand gender identity and sexuality? What assumptions do I hold?</p> <p>How might I pay attention to responses as children play with or go beyond the bounds of gender norms and share new ideas with colleagues, children and families?</p> <p>What are my assumptions of transgender children? Transgender adults? What books, posters, stories, role models or other materials in my center represent 2SLGBTQQIPA+ experiences and people?</p> <p>How can I use relationships and literature to highlight the historical respect and significant leadership roles that two-spirited Indigenous peoples held in many Indigenous cultures?</p>
Basic needs	<p>In what way are infants involved in their routines, such as diapering, feeding, and sleeping?</p>

	<p>Are each child's preferences for sleep and food recognized and responded to? Could more be done?</p> <p>Are children asked to stand, sit, walk, eat, or dress in particular ways during the day?</p> <p>Are children able to have control of their bodies all the time? Some of the time?</p> <p>Do children have choices about when they can be physically active? About how they can be active?</p> <p>How do children contribute to determining the routines and schedules of indoor time? Outdoor time?</p>
Emotions, thoughts, and views	<p>Spend time noticing the multiple (verbal and non-verbal) ways that thoughts, emotions, and views are expressed by children. What do I learn? What surprises me?</p> <p>It is healthy for children to experience all forms of emotions, including happiness, excitement, frustration, sadness, and/or anger. What choices do I make in these moments?</p> <p>What tensions arise when children's behaviour challenges me?</p> <p>Children express emotions in a variety of ways. How can I help children express their emotions in a healthy way?</p> <p>How does my image of the child or the role of the educator influence the way that I respond to children and how they express themselves?</p> <p>How do I respond to the strong, exuberant emotions and excitement that children bring to their play and learning? How do you observe and attune to all emotions that children exhibit?</p> <p>How do I help children in understand and manage new fears that arise as they growing and developing?</p> <p>What is the role of the educator in solving conflicts between children? Is there a "right" way to do this? Think about images of children.</p> <p>Do children have opportunities to discuss, in a developmentally appropriate manner, major life events, such as birth, illness, and death? What are some ways I can help children when they are working through major life events?</p>

	<p>Do children have opportunities to discuss, in a developmentally appropriate manner, difficult life issues, such as violence, guns, fear, compassion, inclusion, or power?</p> <p>Do children have opportunities to discuss positive aspects of their lives such as compassion, love, helping others?</p> <p>In what ways could I engage colleagues in discussions in these difficult areas? Do I need to bring in an outside perspective?</p>
Every child has unique gifts	<p>How can each child contribute their gifts in relationship with adults and other children?</p> <p>Consider routines, schedules, or traditions. How do rhythms and flows of the day invite children to participate in a program that supports and honours their individuality and learning styles?</p> <p>Do these practices and procedures make every child feel that they belong?</p> <p>How might I begin conversations with families about the values, practices, and procedures that are important to them?</p> <p>How might children and adults seek to know one another's gifts?</p> <p>How do I identify and name the distinct qualities that I recognize in each child?</p> <p>How do I create time and space to co-construct knowledge alongside each child?</p> <p>What could I do to contribute to a child's sense of pride in their gifts?</p>

Exploration

Children **make meaning** as they engage with each other, adults, materials, space, Land, community and the world. Objects, space, place, rhythms, rituals, gestures, sound, children and adults – are all **interconnected** and contribute to the interactions and inquiries that come up in early learning and child care spaces.

Adults and children interact in **reciprocal relationships** where knowledge is **co-constructed**, and outcomes cannot be predicted. By listening with care, educators create **environments** in which both adults and children can reflect, investigate, and be motivated to deepen their understandings.

Play is a way to engage in these lively opportunities. As children explore the world, they delve into exploration, create new ideas, solve problems and build thoughts. These engagements can be vibrant, exciting and noisy or they can be quiet, focused and solitary.

Providing time, space and materials that are rich with possibilities for experimenting, imagining and transforming allows children to create and explore in different ways based on their interests. Creating settings for each child's engagement and participation is perhaps the most important way to inspire meaningful learning experiences.

Pathways for engaging with exploration

To inspire exploration, adults create programming and engage in teaching practices while considering:

- **Interests and discovery:** Children can engage with their own ideas, theories, and explore in ways that are important to them.
- **Knowledge and theories:** Educators respect the knowledge and theories children hold.
- **Spaces:** Children live, learn and grow in spaces that are meaningful to them.
- **Objects and materials:** Children investigate and experiment with materials in ways that are meaningful to them.
- **Time for engagement:** Educators and children experiment to reimagine routines, schedules and transitions.
- **Local community connections:** Early learning and child care spaces become places of gathering where children are active participants in the community.

Reflective questions for exploration

The table below offers directions and ideas for furthering thinking about practice in relation to the area of exploration and each of its pathways.

Pathways for engaging with exploration	
Pathways	Reflective questions
Interests and discovery	<p>Do children have opportunities to engage with objects and materials in unusual or surprising ways?</p> <p>Are children's ideas, theories, and inquiries listened to? How do I demonstrate this?</p> <p>How do I ensure I make time to listen to and explore children's ideas and theories?</p>

	<p>Can children explore their interests and passions over extended periods of time? How do I support this?</p> <p>How do adult expectations shape or limit how children engage in their interest?</p>
Knowledge and theories	<p>Think about the concept of knowledge. What does it mean? What knowledge is important? Who decides what knowledge is important?</p> <p>What kinds of questions do I ask about children's engagement? How does my language reflect children as creators of theories? How do my questions reflect children as constructors of knowledge?</p> <p>Consider a culture of research. What does that look like to me?</p> <p>How can I pay attention to the ways children connect different subjects or areas of learning together?</p> <p>How does incorporating knowledge from various fields enrich how I see children's engagements?</p> <p>Consider the knowledge children bring into the program. What opportunities do they have to share and extend this knowledge?</p>
Spaces	<p>Consider the space from a child's perspective? What do they see and interact with from their height?</p> <p>In what ways does the space support or limit different types of play?</p> <p>In what ways might the space influence the flow and accessibility of play for the children?</p> <p>How often do I adjust the setup of the indoor space? How does this impact children's experience, routine, and engagement?</p> <p>What opportunities can I create for children to access and use an outdoor space throughout all seasons? What significance does this outdoor space hold, both historically and spiritually?</p> <p>Is the outdoor space accessible for all children? Does it offer shelter or designated areas of gathering?</p> <p>What opportunities exist for creating continuity between the indoor and outdoor?</p>
Objects and materials	<p>Can children engage with materials in ways that are meaningful to them?</p>

	<p>What limits are placed on how children can engage with materials? Who decides the limits? Why are those limits in place? What opportunities do children have to access materials that can be transformed or investigated?</p> <p>What materials invite experimentation, problem solving, or intrigue?</p> <p>Consider how materials are presented. How does this limit or invite experimentation and investigation? How could I creatively consider materials and/or their presentation?</p> <p>What opportunities do I provide for children to hear stories, poems, rhythms, chants, and songs? How do these connect to the child's culture?</p> <p>How are these representations integrated into other aspects of practice?</p> <p>Do children experience the stories and symbols of their own and other cultures?</p>
Time for engagement	<p>What opportunities do children have to explore ideas and questions over days, weeks, or months?</p> <p>Is it important for children to have space to store projects or inquiries so they can be revisited? How could I talk to children about this?</p> <p>How can I guard long periods of time for play so that children can experience deeper, more sophisticated play?</p> <p>How many transitions are there throughout the day? Could I try different ways of transitioning?</p> <p>Are my routines and schedules flexible enough to support deep involvement in or with ideas?</p> <p>Consider routines and schedules. Do I have the same routine every day? Every year? Could I experiment with routines and schedules?</p> <p>What might emerge if I considered rhythms and flows rather than routines?</p> <p>What role does the clock play through the day? Do routines follow the clock or the people in my program?</p>
Local community connections	<p>How might families, community members, Elders, and intergenerational knowledge holders be welcomed to bring new knowledge and enrich children's theories?</p> <p>How can I personally connect with local Indigenous communities?</p>

	<p>How can children’s theories be made visible to the broader community? What local partnerships might I find that would be helpful?</p> <p>What relationships in the community could be cultivated? (Think about gardens, hospitals, seniors’ organizations, galleries, museums, academic institutions, industry, or cultural organizations.)</p> <p>How might my setting become a place of gathering for intergenerational learning?</p>
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Communication

Children express themselves in multiple ways, **communicate** ideas, participate in relationships and make meaning in their homes and communities. From birth, children communicate through sounds, gestures, movements and eye contact. As children grow, they explore symbolic communication methods to think with and make meaning of the world. They explore expressive languages such as movement, dance, constructing, drama, play, art, mathematics, science, music and storytelling.

Educators **observe** and **reflect** on the many ways children communicate, respecting and supporting the different skills and knowledge that children bring.

Technology has changed the way we interact with each other. Children live in this technology-rich environment as consumers, creators, and producers. In a technology-rich world children have more ways to express themselves. They can experiment with images, print, gesture, sound and video that can contribute to multiple types of literacies and communication. As well, some children rely on technology to support interaction and living; for example, technologies that help in communicating verbally or symbolically.

Technology is an important part of today’s world, requiring reflection and ongoing **dialogue**. There are differing views on the use of technology in childhood. Not all children, programs and families have the same access to technology. It is important that children and adults become critical and ethical users of technology.

Pathways for engaging with communication

To inspire communication, adults create programming and engage in teaching practices while considering:

- **Multiple modes of expression:** Educators listen to and honour the incredible ways of expressive languages children use to communicate and take part in conversations.
- **Conversational Interactions:** Children and educators participate in meaningful, back and forth conversations.

- **Vocabulary, symbols and written language:** Children have opportunities to engage with verbal, symbolic and written languages that are meaningful to them and their community.
- **Sound and word play:** Educators recognize the sounds children make as ways of communication and provide opportunities for children to explore and play with sounds and words.
- **Technology:** Educators reflect on both the creative and the negative possibilities of technology and childhood.

Reflective questions for communication

The table below offers directions and ideas for furthering thinking about practice in relation to the area of communication and each of its pathways.

Pathways for Engaging with Communication	
Pathways	Reflective questions
Multiple modes of expression	<p>How do adults accept and honour all children's (babies, toddlers, children with diverse abilities and extra support needs) expressions of fear, joy, happiness, sadness, disgust, etc.?</p> <p>Think about children as they engage in movement, dance, construction, drama, play, art, mathematics, science, music, and storytelling. How are these ways of communicating? Or expression?</p> <p>In what other ways do children communicate? How could these be extended?</p> <p>How could I create space, time, and materials for children to communicate in all these ways?</p> <p>Consider intentionally listening to all modes of expression. What could I and my colleagues discuss about this?</p>
Conversational Interactions	<p>What opportunities do children have for one-to-one interaction, both with adults and other children?</p> <p>How do I extend and deepen conversations with children?</p> <p>Think about intentionally listening. How might this shift how I converse with children?</p> <p>What opportunities do children have to listen to one another?</p> <p>In what ways do I encourage children to explore different ways of expressing a single idea? (e.g., Can you draw joy? What is a joyful sound? A joyful shape or colour? A joyful movement, a joyful facial expression?)</p>

<p>Vocabulary, symbols, and written language</p>	<p>How can children learn about a diversity of languages? How could I extend these interactions?</p> <p>In what ways do I welcome the use of languages other than English in the child’s environment (e.g., by encouraging bilingual children to use both languages and by singing songs in other languages)?</p> <p>Consider symbolic representation; that is, making marks that have meaning. How could I explore these ideas with children?</p> <p>In what ways can children experiment with numbers, measurement, and form in meaningful contexts?</p> <p>How is written language made part of the rhythm of the program?</p>
<p>Sound and word play</p>	<p>How do I respond to the sounds infants make (e.g., their squeals, growls, grunts, and babbling)? How do I respond to the sounds non-verbal children make? In what ways do I show that I recognize these sounds as forms of oral communication?</p> <p>In what ways are children exposed to a wide range of singing and speaking voices, and in a variety of contexts?</p> <p>Sounds can be a source of delight and enjoyment. How can I enhance this (e.g., rhymes, alliteration, poems, chants, songs, dances)?</p> <p>In what ways do I encourage children to explore their sense of rhythm and melody (e.g., through listening, singing, and dancing in a variety of musical styles)?</p>
<p>Technology</p>	<p>What are my personal views of technology, childhood, learning, and creating in the today’s world?</p> <p>What are the technology policies that outlines how screens are used in my program?</p> <p>Do I model healthy screen habits by making sure my own use of technology doesn’t interfere with quality face to face interactions with children?</p> <p>What are the possibilities for children’s engagement with technology? What are potential negative aspects?</p> <p>What opportunities can technology offer for making and highlighting children’s learning and thinking visible?</p> <p>In what ways does technology present opportunities for children’s creative expression?</p>

	How might I begin to conversations with families and colleagues about the complicated relationship between technology and childhood?
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Togetherness

A positive personal and cultural identity is the awareness, understanding and appreciation of all the parts that contribute to a healthy sense of oneself. It includes awareness and understanding of one's family structure, culture, heritage, language, values, beliefs, and perspectives in a diverse society.

Educators see children as **active citizens** of their communities as well as the world. They encourage engagement and meaningful relationships. Children are encouraged to share their thoughts, promoting reflective **dialogue**, critical thinking and decision making. Children's voices are listened to, their opinions valued and they are supported to listen to and value the voices of others.

Adults and children reflect on how people, environments and living creatures are **interconnected**. Learning environments that encourage active participation in **democratic practices**, such as inclusion, respect and equal opportunity, creates ethical foundations for social and environmental health and well-being, now and in the future.

Educators have an important part in contributing to reconciliation by educating others about the impacts of **colonialism** and clarifying how Indigenous peoples have had so much taken from them – including their children.

For educators to create meaningful learning stories and add to transformative change, they must be open to looking at their practices and expectations of children and be cautious of the continuation of **biased** educational practices. It is important for educators to believe in the ability of all children to achieve at high levels.

Pathways for engaging with togetherness

To inspire togetherness, adults create programming and engage in teaching practices while considering:

- **Layered identities:** Children become confident in their identities including cultural, racial, physical, spiritual, language, gender, social, and economic layers.
- **Collaborative atmosphere:** Educators create an environment in which different opinions and views of both adults and children are accepted, welcomed and valued.
- **Individual strengths:** Children and adults accept and value differences in others and themselves.
- **Social responsibility and justice:** Children and educators discuss social justice topics such as treating everyone fairly, respecting differences, and understanding unfair treatment.

- **Advancing decolonization and towards reconciliation:** Children and educators discuss colonialism in Canada.

Reflective questions for togetherness

The table below offers directions and ideas for furthering thinking about practice in relation to the area of togetherness and each of its pathways.

Pathways for engaging with togetherness	
Pathways	Reflective questions
Layered identities	<p>What opportunities do I provide for children to see their cultural background reflected in our program? How might I include cultural books, stories, or artifacts?</p> <p>What opportunities do I provide for children to see diverse abilities reflected in my program? How might I include books, stories, or artifacts?</p> <p>In what ways do children have opportunities to discuss, learn about and be exposed to worldviews outside of dominant Euro-Canadian perspectives?</p> <p>Are there opportunities made available for children to learn about and explore different parts of their home? Their community? Their region? Country? and the world? How can I introduce children to the larger concept of the world?</p> <p>What opportunities do I provide for children to see and be exposed to a variety of different cultures, beliefs and identities?</p> <p>How are children encouraged to think, speak, and learn about their identities (consider family origins, cultural background, place of origin, allegiance and affiliation, citizenship, and other identities)? What does this look like to me?</p> <p>How can connections to Elders, knowledge holders, families, and community members enhance children's pride in identity?</p> <p>In what ways do I encourage children to become confident in their identities, including cultural, racial, physical, spiritual, linguistic, gender, social, and socio-economic? Could discussions with colleagues and others generate new ideas about this?</p> <p><i>"When we say we are Musqueam, we say we are xw lm xw, which means to belong to the land. Like a child belongs to their mother. So, when the land is removed from our care, from our stewardship, it's like removing a mother from her child" (Pape & Dodds n.d., p. 7).</i></p> <p>How can I make sense of this quote in relation to my practice?</p>

<p>Collaborative atmosphere</p>	<p>What opportunities do children have to express opinions and values?</p> <p>What opportunities do children have to listen to the opinions and values of others?</p> <p>Democracy means making space for many opinions and views, not necessarily agreeing. How can I create a culture in which different opinions and views for both adults and children are accepted, welcomed, and valued?</p> <p>Can children participate in the making of rules, rituals, and procedures in their everyday world? How could this be done in ways that resist being tokenistic?</p> <p>In what ways are democratic practices incorporated into daily living in my program?</p>
<p>Individual strengths</p>	<p>How can children be encouraged to accept and value that everyone is not the same. Everyone is different from one another. How can children be encouraged to accept and value differences in themselves?</p> <p>How might I begin conversations with children about individual uniqueness? How can this be celebrated?</p> <p>How can I initiate conversations with colleagues about values, practices, and procedures (eating, sleeping, self-care, etc.) embedded in the program?</p> <p>Do these practice and procedures make every child feel that they belong?</p> <p>How might I begin conversations with families about the values, practices, and procedures that are important to them?</p> <p>How might I begin conversations with children about individual differences? How can differences be celebrated?</p>
<p>Social responsibility and justice</p>	<p>How might children become involved in community or global projects related to social justice?</p> <p>In what ways do children have opportunities to discuss, in a developmentally appropriate manner, real-life issues such as segregation, diversity, poverty, race, war, gender, discrimination, and inequity?</p> <p>How are relationships fostered among children and adults of diverse abilities, heritages, histories, and cultural backgrounds?</p> <p>How can children begin to recognize and respond to discrimination and inequity?</p>

	Dialogues can bring tensions and disagreement. How do I create a culture where disagreement is a positive force?
Advancing decolonization and towards reconciliation	<p>What do I know about Canada's colonial history and the systemic marginalization and forced assimilation of Indigenous peoples? How can I find out more about what happened in the NWT specifically?</p> <p>Do I have any assumptions or attitudes that are rooted in colonization? What about the privilege or lack of privileges that I may have because of colonization? How might these historical influences shape your perspective and practices?</p> <p>How can my role as an educator contribute to advancing reconciliation with Indigenous communities? How might I begin conversations with colleagues, families, and children about Canada's history of colonialism?</p> <p>What does reconciliation mean to you? How does my practice and program integrate principles of reconciliation with Indigenous communities?</p>

Land

Engaging with and learning from **Land**, cultures, languages, and knowledge, develops an appreciation and respect for local community and its way of life. The Land is a source of guiding wisdom. Learning from the Land involves spending time on the Land and adapting teaching and learning practices to be grounded in **place** – considering Land, families, histories, and cultures of local communities.

Indigenous families have been teaching and learning together for generations, following traditions and values deeply connected to the Land, nature and everything that comes from it. Education is hands-on and immersive, with children surrounded by family and learning from all generations, passing down skills, values, and ethics to contribute meaningfully to their community.

Local community partnerships are essential to doing this properly. Respectfully seeking collaborations with Elders, knowledge holders, and relevant community members to appropriately ground your process in Land and place.

To effectively take part in learning from Land, educators must be willing to learn from and work alongside Indigenous peoples, whose way of life and culture are deeply connected to the Land we all live on. There are no preset answers for educator to engage with Land and requires building meaningful partnerships with local communities.

Pathways for engaging with Land

To inspire relationship with Land, adults create programming and engage in teaching practices while considering:

- **Connection to Land and place:** Children and educators consider what it means to be in relationship with Land.
- **Interconnection:** Educators and children recognize that humans and the natural world are connected and mutually dependent on one another.
- **Culture, traditions and knowledge systems from Land:** Children spend time on the Land and learn from multiple teachers and community members that are Indigenous to the Land they are on.
- **Land leads learning:** Educators and children trust the Land.
- **Language come from Land:** Educators acknowledge Indigenous languages are deeply connected to the Land, intertwined with people and culture, and (where appropriate) sharing Indigenous languages with children.

Reflective questions for Land

The table below offers directions and ideas for furthering thinking about practice in relation to the area of Land and each of its pathways.

Pathways for engaging with Land	
Pathways	Reflective questions
Connection to Land and place	<p>How might I contribute to children's connection with Land and place? What does it mean to be in relationship with Land? To be of a place?</p> <p>How can I offer regular and repeated visits to a nature space throughout all seasons for the children (e.g., the bush, a hike, a stream/creek/lake, a forest)?</p> <p>Whose stories of Land are told and whose have been silenced?</p> <p>What are meaningful ways for children to begin understanding historical and current approaches to colonialism? How can I center Indigenous voices in this discussion? How do I recognize my role and contributions to reconciliation?</p> <p>What are the children's stories of the Land?</p> <p>What local Indigenous stories of the Land, including significant spiritual and cultural places? How might the stories be different from those you know?</p> <p>If I am not from the north, how have Western thoughts about childhood and nature influence my perspective and practice?</p>

	<p>Think about mainstream worldviews and how people are shaped by them. How might I begin to consider worldviews outside of the mainstream?</p> <p>How do I bring the Land inside the classroom on days when we can't be outside? (e.g., loose parts from the Land, discovery tables, clean and cook food from the Land such as a bird or moose)</p>
Interconnection	<p>How can I encourage children to recognize that humans and the natural world are connected and dependent on one another?</p> <p>In what ways can I teach and learn about reciprocity – whenever we take something from the Land, we have to give something back to the plants, air, water, soil and animals?</p> <p>In what ways can I acknowledge children's interactions with ants, birds, or worms as meaningful relationships?</p> <p>What practices do I implement to enrich and deepen children's relationship with place, Land, and the creatures and forms within it?</p> <p>What stories and experiences do children have of Land, place, and the creatures and forms within it?</p> <p>How can I provide opportunities for children to care for their environments (e.g., cleaning, fixing, gardening, helping others)?</p> <p><i>We want young children to sense and register, in more than cognitive ways, that it is never just about us. And we also want to stay open to the possibility that other species and life-forms shape us in ways that exceed our ability to fully comprehend (Taylor & Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2015, p. 7).</i></p>
Culture, traditions, and knowledge systems from Land	<p>How can I welcome local guests (family, community leaders, Elders and knowledge holders) to share culture, local knowledge and their connection to Land and place?</p> <p>What opportunities are there for oral storytelling (e.g., personal narratives, traditional stories)?</p> <p>Do I create an annual plan that makes space for local traditions and ceremonies to be included in the calendar?</p> <p>How are the children's cultural backgrounds represented in the stories and symbols used from day to day? How are these representations integrated into other aspects of practice?</p> <p>Do children experience the stories, songs, poems and symbols of their own and other cultures?</p>

<p>Land leads learning</p>	<p>How can I follow a seasonal curriculum that celebrates authentic learning and natural curiosities?</p> <p>Do I notice what the Land offers for play each day? Do I see opportunities for learning when it snows and when it rains?</p> <p>Do I notice how the relationship of the children with the Land is changing and unfolding? Am I co-constructing knowledge with the children and share how my relationship with the Land is growing and changing too?</p>
<p>Language come from Land</p>	<p>How much do I understand that language comes from Land and is therefore deeply connected to an Indigenous child's sense of identity?</p> <p>What is my role in language revitalization and how do I see this as the foundation of culture?</p> <p>Am I trying to learn Indigenous languages of the Land where I am living and working? Do I model the use of these languages in my program as much as possible (e.g., in greetings, introductions, daily requests and routines)?</p> <p>Do I encourage the inclusion of languages in prayers, feeding the fire, paying the Land, lighting the qulliq or any other ceremonies that are meaningful for the children and families?</p> <p>Am I sharing the language that is being used in my program with families so that it can be used at home?</p> <p>How can I combine authentic experiences on the Land with language learning? How can I support language speakers to stay 100% in the language during these experiences?</p> <p>Who are language speakers in my community who are essential resources and champions with whom we can create a relationship and invite to the program?</p> <p>How can I support children to engage in language use in the community?</p>

Conclusion

The collective efforts of families, communities and educators in creating positive and nurturing early learning and child care settings contribute to children's overall growth and development. The Government of the Northwest Territories is committed to supporting families, Indigenous governments, community organizations, early learning and child care programs, and educators involved in nurturing the development of young children. This edition of the NWT Early Learning Framework is intended to be a starting point and to support ongoing dialogue and shared understandings. As a living document, feedback gathered through user experiences shared with the GNWT will help inform future adaptations.

The GNWT believes collaborative efforts toward enhancing the quality, affordability, accessibility, and inclusivity of early learning and child care will make a significant difference in the lives of young children and their families throughout the territory.

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