

Aboriginal Language and Culture-Based Education

Departmental Directive 2004



Minister's Message



Since the publication of the 1982 document, *Learning, Tradition and Change*, in which the people of the Northwest Territories told the Department of Education, Culture and Employment (ECE) what they wanted their children to learn, ECE made a commitment to answer these needs by supporting culture-based education in the school system.

In People: Our Focus for the Future: A Strategy to 2010 was published to provide further direction for addressing educational needs of students.

ECE developed strategies and initiatives from this document. In addition, *Dene Dede K-6*, and *Inuuqatigiit K-12* were published as curricula documents and implemented to support culture-based education in NWT schools. They were designed to help students understand their identity as individuals and as members of a community. Knowing how to implement these curricula, along with strategies and initiatives for culture-based education in the school system continues to present a challenge at all levels.

The department recognizes that there are many cultural and linguistic groups living in the Northwest Territories. Research says that culture is rooted in language. However, Aboriginal languages are in jeopardy of disappearing. The department has a moral, ethical, and cultural responsibility to ensure that Aboriginal languages are being used in the schools. As well, much of the traditional knowledge of this land is not being passed on to the next generation. Proactive support is required at all educational levels in making education truly culture-based.

This directive is intended to identify some of the ways that the school system will support and promote culture-based education through partnership and collaboration. Partnerships will include the Department of Education, Culture and Employment, divisional educational councils and authorities, educators, communities, families, Elders, and Aboriginal organizations.

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Vision

As the Department of Education,
Culture and Employment:

We see communities where people live their culture, language, and traditions and have a deep sense of their cultural identity. These communities are supported by Education, Culture and Employment in their recognition that learning grows from the foundation of their culture and language.



We see communities where families are directly involved in the education of their children. These communities set priorities for cultural and language activities that will be supported in partnership with the department.

We see communities where all students have the opportunity to learn an Aboriginal language, through first language instruction, immersion or second language instruction programs.

DEPARTMENT DIRECTIVE: ABORIGINAL LANGUAGE AND CULTURE-BASED EDUCATION
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Background

The Preamble to the *Education Act* says that the focus of the education system must be the students; that the government believes that education must be a partnership between students, parents, Elders, communities, educators and government; that it recognizes the relationship between language, culture and learning; that it recognizes the need for communities to have greater responsibility for the content and delivery of education; and that it recognizes the important contribution that Elders have made and will continue to make.

In the *Education Act*, Section 70 (1) states, "The language of instruction of the education program must be an Official Language."

- Section 71 (4) states, "A District Education Authority may choose a language [Aboriginal languages, English or French] as the language of instruction if:
 - (a) there is a significant demand for the language in the education district;
 - (b) there are a significant number of teachers who are fluent in the language available to teach in the language in the education district; and
 - (c) there are sufficient and suitable school program materials available in the language."
- Section 75 states, "The Superintendent and the principals of the schools in an education district shall, in accordance with the direction of an education body, plan the delivery of culture-based school programs as part of the education program of the education district". This statement connects school programs to the priorities of the community.
- Section 76 states, "An education body shall, in accordance with the directions of the Minister and to the extent that qualified persons are available, achieve and maintain in the school staff for an education district a representation of cultural backgrounds that reflect the cultural variation of the population of the education district". This gives decision-making choices to the community.
- Section 73 states, "If English is the language of instruction, an Official Language other than English must be taught as part of the education program."

During consultations on the revision of the *Education Act* in 1994, community members emphasized the value of Aboriginal languages and cultures. They said the department

should establish a framework through legislation and policy, provide resources to plan and deliver programs and that the activities that ECE supports should promote the use of cultural traditions in everyday home and community life.

In *People: Our Focus for the Future: A Strategy to 2010* (ECE, 1994) Objective #1 reads: "To improve support to communities to achieve their culture, heritage and language goals". This statement identifies language and culture-based education as the highest ECE priority. Objective #4, "To improve student achievement", connects *Dene Kede* and *Inuuqatigiit* with student achievement.

The communities consulted during the review and updating of the ECE Strategic Plan in 2000 again reinforced the importance of having Aboriginal languages and cultures in early childhood, in schools and in Aurora College Community Learning Centres.

Purpose of Directive

The purpose of this directive is to:

- Give direction and ensure accountability for the use of the funding provided by the GNWT to divisional education councils and district education authorities for language and cultural programming;
- Provide direction for planning and supporting Aboriginal language and culture programming in the NWT schools; Ensure the school system supports and reflects Aboriginal language and culture-based education; and
- The directive sets out a framework for planning, developing, delivering, supporting and evaluating Aboriginal language and culture-based education programming in the NWT schools. It also clarifies the roles and responsibilities related to the establishment of culture-based education programs, as a foundation for education in the NWT.

Rationale

Most of the Aboriginal languages and cultures of the NWT exist nowhere else. It is vital that they be protected and enhanced at all levels of education. Parents have the primary responsibility for teaching their language and culture to their children. However, it is also vital that Aboriginal languages and cultures are given time and place at the school level. ECE supports the belief that an education system based on the Aboriginal languages and cultures of the people and the land will lead to greater academic success for Aboriginal students. Demographic, historical, political and constitutional developments determine the importance of Aboriginal language and culture-based education initiatives in the NWT.

When the school validates the students' culture, it helps them to be aware that their culture is important and has a place in all aspects of their educational life. This brings to the classroom the accomplishments of their family, their community, and their ancestors.

Teachers need to understand that their culture and language influences their teaching. Teachers come from their own cultural base and perspectives and these might differ from the students they are working with.

Educators need an understanding of the role of language in learning and in forming one's view of the world, of learning preferences and styles, and of how cultural and community experience provide the foundation for learning and self-esteem.

Supporting Language and Culture-Based Education

The Minister of ECE mandates the delivery of *Dene Kede* and *Inuuqatigiit*. ECE can recommend various ways to promote language and culture-based education programs and activities that support *Dene Kede* and *Inuuqatigiit*. These documents are considered the foundational curricula for implementing culture-based education in NWT schools.

All subject areas must take into consideration that the NWT is the traditional homeland of Aboriginal peoples and that curricula and programs will need to reflect the historical and geographical settings of NWT.

Students should be immersed as much as possible in the Aboriginal languages and cultures in every subject. The NWT is not alone in efforts to maintain and strengthen Indigenous languages and cultures. There are valuable lessons learned from other communities in Canada, as well as other countries that are facing similar challenges in preserving culture and languages.

Culturally appropriate settings can include: camps/field trips; learning an Aboriginal language throughout the school; profiling Elders, past and present leaders, student's family history, community histories; making and displaying traditional tools, implements, clothing.

Guiding Principles

The following principles are identified to help the design and implementation of culture-based education:

- Parents, grandparents, family and community members are children's first teachers;
- Aboriginal children are more successful when the school affirms their culture;
- The land is a place of learning and is an important part of the successful learning of Aboriginal languages and cultures; and
- Communities have much to offer the education system.

Definition

Aboriginal language and culture-based education is education that reflects, validates and promotes the cultures and languages of the First Peoples of NWT. It is education that honours all forms of traditional knowledge, ways of knowing and worldviews. In this light, we define culture as people's customs, traditions, history, stories, spirituality, values, beliefs and language that contribute to people's personal and collective identity. Cultures have their roots in ancient perspectives, worldviews, knowledge and skills.

Purpose of GNWT Funding for Aboriginal Language and Culture Programs

Aboriginal language and culture funding is allocated to Divisional Education Councils and Yellowknife District Education Authorities (DEC/DEAs) on the basis of the number of Aboriginal students in each district. Financial support is provided to the DEC/DEAs to support the implementation of Aboriginal languages and culture programming with program access priority given to Aboriginal students.

Aboriginal language and culture funding can only be used for expenditures supporting:

- Aboriginal language instruction programs: first language instruction, immersion or second language instruction;
- Aboriginal language and culture-based programs and activities;
- Salaries for Aboriginal Language and Culture Instructor, Aboriginal Language Specialist, and/or Aboriginal Language and Culture Assistant;
- Coordination and implementation of Aboriginal Language Activities, Programs or Resources at the district/divisional levels, such as Staff of Teaching and Learning Centres (TLC);
- Acquisition, development or production of appropriate learning resources to support Aboriginal language and culture-based activities;
- Involvement of community resource people (i.e., Elders, language speakers, cultural monitors);
- Providing opportunities for educators to take professional development on Aboriginal language and culture-based education, locally, regionally or in other jurisdictions.

Aboriginal Languages Instruction (First Language or Immersion Programs)

Where there is a significant demand in a District for instruction in an Aboriginal language, the DEC/DEA shall determine that there are sufficient teachers fluent in the language and sufficient school program materials available in the language.

If additional resources are required to support a language program, then the DEC/DEA shall direct its TLC to focus on material development, beginning at the lowest grade level requested, and begin the program within a reasonable time frame. Programs may start out with one year of instruction in an Aboriginal language if desired, and progressively expand to the preferred number of years of instruction in an Aboriginal language.

If additional teachers are needed, who are fluent in the Aboriginal language, then DEC/DEA's should take an active role in identifying suitable individuals and preparing teachers to instruct in an Aboriginal language.

Programs may have two languages of instruction. For example, some classes could be taught in English and others in an Aboriginal language. Some DEC/DEA's may wish to use this approach while working towards full instruction in an Aboriginal language.

Aboriginal Languages (Second Language Instruction)

Where English is the language of instruction and an Aboriginal language is taught as part of the education program, it should be taught a minimum of 90 hours per year, and should be taught from grades 1 to 9. Those Councils/Authorities that do not currently offer 90 hours of instruction in an Aboriginal Language from grades 1 to 9, are required in the 04/05 school year to:

- Identify their current hours of Aboriginal language instruction in grades 1-9;
- Identify any barriers or needed resources to bring the hours of instruction to 90 hours for grades 1-9;
- Develop an implementation plan with timelines to work towards 90 hours of instruction in Aboriginal Language for grades 1- 9 within resources provided by the department.

During 2005/06 and beyond, the DEC/DEAs will implement plans for Aboriginal language instruction.

Aboriginal Language Credits for Senior Secondary Students

- Students enrolled in the NWT secondary schools may seek challenge credit and be awarded credit toward graduation for demonstrated competence in one of the official NWT Aboriginal languages.
- Education Councils and Authorities may offer Aboriginal Language 15, 25, 35 in their secondary programs.
- Locally developed courses in Aboriginal languages can also be approved for 5 year terms.

Definition of Aboriginal Language and Culture-Based Activities

Aboriginal language and culture-based activities explore the languages, cultures, histories, activities, skills, knowledge, traditions and values of Aboriginal peoples of the NWT, and contain a significant Aboriginal language acquisition component. In this directive, they are highlighted as Key Experiences or Cultural Activities.

Examples of Key Experiences

Key Experiences are culturally authentic, realistic, natural and are best done in an Aboriginal language. Some examples are:

- Aboriginal language immersion camps;
- Extended cultural trips on the land;
- Hunting, trapping, fishing, traditional food gathering and preparation;
- Sewing, snowshoe making, drum making, and other traditional skills;
- Attending and participating in traditional activities such as drum dances and feasts;
- Storytelling, legends, drumming, chants, traditional games.

Published examples of authentic Aboriginal language and culture-based activities are identified in *Dene Kede K-6*, *Dene Kede 7-9*. These activities are called Key Experiences. See the *Dene Kede Teacher Resource Manual*, pages 17 – 26.

Examples of Cultural Activities

Cultural Activities respect the focus of Key Experiences, but can take place in current settings. Some examples are:

- NWT Aboriginal art, music, dance, physical education;
- Classroom visits by Elders and knowledgeable community members;

- Exploring appropriate land claim and/or self-governance vocabulary and concepts in Aboriginal languages; Cultural day trips on the land;
- Field trip exploration of significant parts of the territory covered by appropriate land claim/self-governance agreement in Aboriginal language; and
- Designing modern Dene clothing using appropriate materials and vocabulary.

Roles and Responsibilities

Effective delivery of Aboriginal language and culture programming is dependent on several education authorities working together. The roles of key authorities are worked out below.

The Department of Education, Culture and Employment

- Provide funding to Education Councils/Authorities to support Aboriginal language and culture-based education.
- Ensure funding is used for culturally relevant programs/services through an accountability framework.
- Develop, promote, and support culturally appropriate documents, curriculum and strategies.

To better support culturally appropriate ways and culturally relevant content, the Department of Education, Culture and Employment will ensure that:

- Curricula and resource materials concentrate on positive images of Aboriginal peoples;
- Curricula and resource materials reinforce and complement the beliefs and values of Aboriginal peoples;
- Curricula and resources include historical and contemporary issues; and
- Curricula and resources will reflect the legal, cultural, historical, political, social, economic and regional diversity of Aboriginal peoples.

Education Councils/Authorities

- Plan the implementation of jurisdiction wide activities and direct schools through the establishment of suitable policies and directives.
- Ensure funding identified for Aboriginal language and culture-based education is appropriately allocated.
- Ensure that each school accounts for the use of the Aboriginal language and culture-based education funding.
- Provide guidance on how to integrate the community's culture, language and history in school programs.

Aboriginal languages and cultures of the NWT can benefit all students. Education Councils/Authorities and schools should consider using general school program funds to improve, where possible, Aboriginal language and cultural activities to the benefit of all students. A DEC/DEA may wish to establish an Aboriginal Language and Culture Advisory Planning group comprised of Elders, parents, Aboriginal Language Specialists or community members to develop a culturally appropriate plan of action for the schools.

Schools

- Deliver Aboriginal language and culture-based activities in accordance with overall DEC/DEA plans.
- Ensure funding is used for Aboriginal language and culture-based activities and that reports are provided to the Education Council/Authority.
- Provide a mechanism where the school accesses knowledgeable people in their community.
- Provide opportunities to engage teachers in dialoging about the local language and culture-based education programs.

It is important that culture-based education programs in the schools are delivered in culturally appropriate ways and include culturally relevant content. Education Councils/Authorities that receive funding are accountable by providing evidence that resources are used appropriately.

Accountability for Aboriginal Language and Culture-Based Education

There are a number of key areas in which the education system can demonstrate support and accountability for Aboriginal languages and culture-based education.

These areas are outlined as follows:

1. Curricula and Programs

All curricula and programs used in NWT schools should reflect the Aboriginal perspective, and include content, skills, outcomes and objectives appropriate to the cultural needs of students in the communities served.

2. Resources

Resources purchased or developed for use in NWT schools should reflect the Aboriginal perspective, and include content appropriate to the cultural needs of students in the communities served.

3. Professional Development

All educators and personnel involved in the school system should receive appropriate professional development to provide them with an awareness of their own cultural perspective, as well as an understanding of the values of the culture(s) of the students and community they serve.

Cultural orientation should be provided for staff new to a community. Continued cultural professional development should be provided for returning and long-term staff, as well as for DEC and DEA members. A foundation in Aboriginal cultural perspectives, as well as authentic experiences with the Aboriginal cultures of the NWT, should be provided for participants in the Teacher Education Program (TEP).

4. Community Involvement

The language and culture of the community should be reflected in and incorporated into school life.

- Elders and other key people in the children's lives should be actively involved in school programs.
- The school should be welcoming and inviting to community members.
- Students and staff should participate in community events.
- Learning experiences should occur in community settings as

well as in the school.

5. Accountability for Funding

Dollars targeted for Aboriginal Language and Culture, and for Culture-Based Education are to be spent accordingly. Evidence must be available to support these expenditures.

6. Appropriate Learning Processes

The learning processes used in schools are to be appropriate to the culture and communication styles of the students and community. For many NWT students, this would include a greater emphasis on experiential learning, modeling of tasks and processes, and guided practice. Cultural experiences should be provided as much as possible in the appropriate Aboriginal language in an environment of mutual trust and respect.

Reporting and Accounting

It is important that Aboriginal language and culture-based education programs in the schools are delivered in culturally appropriate ways and include culturally relevant content. Education Councils and Authorities that receive funding are accountable and must demonstrate adherence to this directive by providing reports and accounting of funding for Aboriginal language and culture. This will be demonstrated through:

- An Interim Financial and Activity report;
- A Final Financial and Activity report.

Interim Financial and Activity Report

Each year by November 30, Divisional Education Councils and Yellowknife District Education Authorities will submit to ECE an interim financial and activity report on Aboriginal language and culture programming and spending as of October 31. Included in this report will be year-to-date activities and expenses and projected activities and expenses to the end of June of the following calendar year.

The interim report can include proposed activities and expenditures that exceed the amount allocated in a DEC/DEA's block funding in the area of Aboriginal language and culture-based education. These proposals will be reviewed and may be approved if other DEC/DEAs are unable to fully spend their Aboriginal language and culture programming funds.

Final Financial and Activity Report

A final financial and activity report on Aboriginal language and culture spending will be submitted by June 30 of each year by each DEC/DEA. Only Aboriginal language and culture-based activities meeting the funding criteria will be approved. Proposed activities in a region that do not meet the criteria will not be able to be funded from the Aboriginal language and culture funding. Where a projected expenditure does not meet the guidelines, ECE will offer guidance as to how the proposed activities can be altered to fulfill the requirements of funding. If projected expenditures that meet the guidelines are less than the amount allocated to the Council, excess funds may be reallocated by ECE to another Council or District that has approved projected expenditures exceeding their allocated funding.

Conclusion

Aboriginal language and culture-based education are fundamental to the Northwest Territories education system. As a result, focused attention on ensuring that appropriate programming is provided is critical to the long-term success of students and the education system's operation.

This directive identifies key steps that must be taken to plan, implement, and account for spending of public funds in support of Aboriginal language and culture-based education activities. The Department of Education, Culture and Employment, Divisional Education Councils/District Education Authorities, and schools all have specific responsibilities to ensure that appropriate programming is delivered throughout the Kindergarten to grade 12 years.



Minister of Education, Culture and Employment

Date