

# Culture-Based Education

[http://www.newteachersnwt.ca/culture\\_based\\_education.html](http://www.newteachersnwt.ca/culture_based_education.html)

**Culture-based education** is education, which reflects, validates and promotes the values, world views, and languages of the community's cultures.

Culture may be defined as a people's traditions, history, values and language that make up the culture of a group and which contribute to their identity. Culture-based education is intended to honour all forms of knowledge, ways of knowing and world views equally.

Culture-based education will support Aboriginal children as they define who they are as individuals and community members.

Culture - Based Education is far more than the incorporation of cultural events and traditional skills into the curriculum. The goal of culture-based education is to support all students through affirmation of their culture. When the school recognizes and validates the students' culture, it helps them to be aware of their heritage and to value the accomplishments of their family, their community and their ancestors. It builds a sense of pride and self-esteem, which is the best gift any teacher can give to his/her students.

## Expectations for Culture-Based Education

### Expectations for NWT students:

- A strong foundation of cultural identity
- Knowledgeable about their history, traditions, values and language
- Comfortable in various cultures
- Continuing to grow and understand their own culture
- Developing a balanced approach to life
- Connecting to the world

### Expectations for NWT teachers:

- Incorporate the community culture into their teaching
- Use local materials and local human resources
- Participate in the community, outside the school
- Work in partnership with parents
- Challenge each student to find and develop his/her individual strength
- Find mechanisms to incorporate cultures and languages throughout the school year.

### Expectations for NWT schools:

- Support Culture-based Educational expectations for students and schools
- Accommodate various learning styles through the use of various teaching styles
- Reflect the local culture and environment
- Involve Elders as part of the program
- Provide Aboriginal language programs
- Provide professional development opportunities to orient teachers to the community's culture and languages.

## **Advice for Teachers**

- Develop an appreciation and knowledge of the unique history of Aboriginal people in the NWT and an understanding of the current political, cultural and socio-economic environment.
- Learn the community protocol and customs in order to open the lines of communication.
- Learn about and respecting political and social structures without judgment will help to build support for the school.
- Meet the community with mutual respect and suspended judgment in order to reach a point of understanding and mutually shared goals. Be prepared to deal with issues you do not fully understand and may not agree with. Imposing conflicting cultural values and perspectives very often creates confusion and resistance.
- Learn about historical and contemporary local heroes.
- Take part in community events and celebrations. Being interested and visible will build trust.
- Help your students feel good about who they are. If they do not respect themselves it will be difficult for them to respect others.
- Be aware of diverse communication styles that exist in cross-cultural classrooms.
- Different communication styles can have a significant effect on a classroom and may lead to misunderstandings.
- When using teaching resources:
  - Avoid biased materials
  - Ensure that Aboriginal people are represented accurately
  - Choose strategies and resources which focus on positive images of the Aboriginal cultures, both past and present
  - Use a variety of teaching styles to accommodate the varied learning styles of Aboriginal students
  - Use content familiar to the students to teach skills and concepts

## **Advice for Schools**

- The school must enhance and strengthen the community and not work toward or appear to work toward a position of alienation. It should provide an education, which reflects the values and traditions of the community and should respect, without judgment, the social, political and economic realities which affect life in the community.
- The school needs to be an integrated part of the community that promotes a positive, respectful view of parents, families and the community as a whole.
- The school has a responsibility to help Aboriginal children define who they are as valuable individuals and community members.

(Saskatchewan Education, 1995)

### **Culture-Based Education: Checklist for Teachers in Cross-Cultural Schools**

1. Does the culture of my classroom reflect the language and culture of the community?
2. Do instructional materials:
  - Portray Aboriginal people as diverse peoples with a rich heritage?
  - Portray Aboriginal people in an authentic way?
  - Recognize and value contributions of Aboriginal peoples to present Canadian society?
  - Present positive images of Aboriginal people in contemporary settings?
  - Receive evaluation for stereotyping, bias, racism and other inaccuracies?
3. Do I use a variety of teaching methods to accommodate the diverse learning styles of my students?
4. Do I encourage students to take pride in their culture?
5. In my classroom, do I observe community celebrations and important cultural events?
6. Do I use community resources (people, materials) when appropriate and possible?
7. Are my evaluation tools sensitive to cultural bias?
8. Do I take time to learn more about community culture?
9. Do the parents of my students feel welcome in my classroom?
10. Do I contact my students parents with positive messages about their children?
11. Am I aware of the way culture affects styles of communication and ways of interacting with others?

*Adapted from an Assessment Checklist in the Indian and Metis Staff Development Program, p.243. Saskatchewan Education, 1995.*

## **Dene Kede: Education from a Dene Perspective, Kindergarten - Grade 6**

Culture-based education means that the culture of the community is the culture of the school. It is reflected in the physical appearance, the communication style, the leadership style and the teaching strategies. The school belongs to the community and the children. Culture-based curricula provide the foundation and guide for the school program. All other areas of study are integrated components which are valued equally. Culture-based education ensures that students will be strong in their own identity first, in order to succeed and become strong in two cultures.

Dene Kede curriculum, K - 6, encompasses culture, language and the Dene perspective on Education. It was developed in consultation with elders representing the five Dene regions Of the NWT and incorporates the four fundamental relationships within Dene culture: The purpose of this curriculum is to provide children with the knowledge, skills and attitudes, which will guide them toward becoming capable citizens.

Dene Kede advocates experiential learning. Within the context of "key cultural experiences" students will learn the perspectives that are distinctly Dene. Related strategies involving discussion, storytelling, analysis, practice, review and reflection, support and enhance the key experiences.

## **Inuuqatigiit: The Curriculum from the Inuit Perspective, K-12**

Inuuqatigiit is a culture-based curriculum from the Inuit perspective. It was developed by Inuit educators and grounded in the belief of the Elders that education must be community based. This curriculum is intended to develop pride of identity and language in the students.

Goals of Inuuqatigiit:

- Maintain, strengthen, recall and enhance Inuit language and culture in the community and the school
- Enhance unity within Inuit groups
- Create a link between the past and present
- Encourage the practice of Inuit values and beliefs
- Encourage pride in Inuit identity to enhance personal identity Inuuqatigiit is based on the belief that learning is a process that takes many different forms.

- **ECE: Kindergarten to Grade 12**

## **Aboriginal Language Programs in the NWT**

"Ninety-one percent of communities in the NWT provide Aboriginal language programs. Instructional time averages 120 minutes a week for second language programs (L2). The emphasis in language instruction is on oral traditions in the primary grades, but reading and writing are often introduced in Grades 4 to 6. Overall, nearly two-thirds of students in Kindergarten to Grade 9 have access to Aboriginal second language programs. Additionally, two high schools in Rae-Edzo and Fort Good Hope, offer credit courses in Grade 10 - 12. In communities, 94 percent of students from Kindergarten through Grade 9 have access to Aboriginal language programs and in regional centres, virtually all K - 9 students have access to Aboriginal language programs. Also, in the regional centres, students have the option of enrolling in either an Aboriginal or French second language program, and a few are given the additional choice of English as a Second Language. Each regional centre has a diverse Aboriginal population, and schools are faced with the difficult task of deciding which language(s) to focus on in an academic year."  
- (ECE, 2000)

Dene Kede and Inuuqatigiit provide a curriculum framework for Aboriginal Language Programs. Regional Teaching and Learning Centres develop language programs for the specific Aboriginal language groups.  
(Education, Culture and Employment, 2000)

## **Teaching and Learning Centres**

The mandate of Teaching and Learning Centres (TLCs) throughout the NWT is: the preservation and enhancement of Aboriginal language and culture through the promotion of literacy and the integration of local language and culture in school programs. Their goal is to support the implementation of culture-based education by producing books and other materials and by supporting teachers. All TLCs share this mandate, with some variation reflecting conditions within individual jurisdictions.

TLCs are generally administered regionally through the Divisional Education Councils except in the Beaufort-Delta where one is administered by the Gwich'in Tribal Council and another by the Inuvialuit Regional Corporation. Most TLCs consist of one to three Aboriginal Language/Program Consultants, except in the Dogrib region where the TLC is responsible for all regional program development.

TLCs' roles and responsibilities have become more diverse over time. In the early Days, the major focus was on the development and publication of books and teaching materials for use in classrooms. With the development of Dene Kede and Inuuqatigiit, this role has shifted somewhat to the implementation of curricula, a role which requires staff to work more closely with school staff through workshops and other professional activity.  
(Education, Culture and Employment, 1999)

# Cultural Relevance

TCSA believes in raising the profile of the Tłıchǫ culture in all subject areas. All our programs should encourage students to make connections and to reflect on these connections on a personal and social level. Students are better able to sort and combine information when it is relevant to their experience, transferring this new information to other understandings more readily. Using culturally relevant resources, analogies, hands-on experience reinforces cultural values, beliefs and knowledge. One cannot stress enough the importance of making curriculum relevant.

## Some suggestions to increase cultural relevance in the classroom include:

Using texts with culturally relevant topics.

The following is a list of Tłıchǫ culture books written in English and suitable for integration in Science and Social Studies classes:

Moose	Rosie sets a Snare
Caribou	Hunting on the Land
Flowers	Camp Fires on the Land
Moss	Mother's Day
Fish	My Family
Where Do Animals Live?	Baby's Sleeping
Trees	Rosie Goes Berry Picking
Berries	It is Rosie
Grandmother's Bannock	Living on the Land
Father's Day	On the Land
Baby	Summer Time
My Name is Rosie	Winter Time
	Fall Time
	Spring Time Legends and stories.

Use themes to include

Raven	Water
Eagles	Fish
Feathers	Caribou
Loon – (music by David Gon)	

The following is a list of texts with a Native theme that can be used ELA:

Very First Last Time	Jason's New Dugout Canoe
Many Nations	Eagle Song
Wesakejack and the Bears	How Lone Crow Became Magpie
I am the Eagle Free	Maple Moon
A Salmon for Simon	The Missing Son
Sky Sisters	Red Parka Mary
A Boy Called Slow	The Kids' book of the Far North
Wisahkecahk Flies to the Moon	Nanabosho and the Cranberries
The Hunt for the Giant Bird	Grandpa and the Four Brothers
The Magic Paddle	Jack Pine Fish Camp
	A Man Called Raven

Plan traditional Tłıchǫ activities for physical education classes:

- Dene Games
- Snowshoeing
- On-the-land activities (checking nets, setting snares)
- Dancing (tea dance, jigging, square dances)
- Altering game titles/terminology to use cultural words



Use northern concepts to teach science. Discuss

Snow study	Transportation (canoe, dogsled, skidoo)
Northern animals (caribou, bear, wolf, hare), birds (ravens, eagles, loons) and plants (spruce, birch, heather)	Snare Hydro Dam and the Wha Ti Dam
Traditional structures (teepees, sled, snowshoes)	Tlicho names for local bodies of water and landmarks
Northern weather and seasons	Showing respect to the land and water
Cycles of darkness and light	The importance of water
	Safety: Water and Ice and winter

Encourage students to use English and Tłıchǫ words in their projects, like posters. This shows that the Dogrib language is valued. Have the Dogrib/English dictionary Tłıchǫ Yatıi accessible to students.

Use math manipulates easily found in the north:

- Beads – for patterning, sorting
- Leather strips – as fraction strip
- Wood blocks
- Pine cones, feathers

Incorporate traditional knowledge and beliefs in Social Studies.

Use <a href="http://www.lessonsfromtheland.ca">www.lessonsfromtheland.ca</a> - Idaa trail	Use northern subjects in non-traditional art media study
Build dioramas depicting camp life	Study drumming, dancing, singing in Dogrib
Mapping of the region	Invite local musicians and artists to the classroom.
Traditional roles of men and women, boys and girls	Use David Gon music CD's
View National Film Board's northern topic videos ( <a href="http://www.nfb.ca/e/">http://www.nfb.ca/e/</a> )	Compare Dogrib traditional music practices to those of other Native groups.
View The Dogrib Birchbark Canoe and The Dogrib Caribou Skin Lodge	Make Native crafts (beading, moccasins, drums, rattles, tufting)
Incorporate Native themes in art and music.	Invite elders and community people to tell stories and share experiences.

Use key Tłıchǫ words to greet and praise students.

Think beyond the text and remember your audience – primarily Tłıchǫ children