

# Dene Kede

[http://www.ece.gov.nt.ca/Divisions/kindergarten\\_g12/indexK12.htm](http://www.ece.gov.nt.ca/Divisions/kindergarten_g12/indexK12.htm)

## Overview

### Curriculum Status

The Dene Kede Curriculum is an official curriculum supported by the Department of Education, Culture and Employment, Government of the N.W.T. It was produced by Dene developers with the guidance of many elders from each of the Dene regions.

It is expected that Dene teachers will use this curriculum to guide them in the creation of their own community-based programs. Each teacher will have to interpret the expectations in terms of what is specific to his or her community, and use the language, material resources and people of the community to bring the curriculum to life in the form of a local program.

Since this is a community-based curriculum, each community will have a program unique to its own needs. The extent to which the curriculum is used within a school will depend upon the desires and needs of the community. Where one school may use the curriculum as a Dene-based perspective within which to organize teaching of all other subjects, another school may confine the use of the curriculum to the second language classroom.

### Curriculum Components

The curriculum consists of three components:

1. General Learner Expectations for students, Kindergarten through Grade Six in four areas of student development from the perspective of the Dene: student relationships with the spiritual world, the land, other people and themselves. The expectations are intended to be generic that is, broad and general enough to apply to all five of the Dene tribes of the N.W.T.: the Chipewyan, the Dogrib, the North Slavey, the South Slavey and the Gwich'in.
2. Specific Learner Expectations in the following areas:
  - Student relationship with the land
  - Student relationship with the spiritual world
  - Student relationship with other people
  - Student relationship with themselves
3. Also, specific expectations are provided to guide the teacher in setting goals for students who have Dene as a first language, as well as for students who are learning a Dene language as their second language.

# Thematic Units

## Themes

<p><b>Spirituality :</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Spiritual Power</li> <li>- Living Force</li> <li>- One Who Circled the Earth</li> <li>- Drum</li> <li>- Fire</li> <li>- Prayer</li> </ul>	<p><b>The Land and the Sky :</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Geography and Land Use - Trees</li> <li>- Water and Rivers - Sun</li> <li>- Earth Medicine - Plants</li> <li>- Moon and Stars - Camping</li> <li>- Northern Lights</li> </ul>
<p><b>Animals:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Bear - MuskoX</li> <li>- Beaver - Rabbit</li> <li>- Birds - Raven</li> <li>- Caribou - Shrews and Mice</li> <li>- Dog - Spider</li> <li>- Fish - Wolverine</li> <li>- Fox - Wolf</li> <li>- Moose - Muskrat</li> <li>- Trapping</li> </ul>	<p><b>People :</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Family - Friends</li> <li>- Grandparent - Elders</li> <li>- Parents - Leaders</li> <li>- The Child - Clothing</li> <li>- Tribes - The Arrive of the Dene</li> <li>- Birth and Death - Traditional Games</li> <li>- Men and Women - Playing Learning Aids</li> <li>- Eating and Food</li> </ul>

Approximately fifty thematic units are outlined as a possible basis from which to develop a Dene program within a school. The thematic units are generic in the sense that they apply in greater or lesser measure to all regions, and in the sense that they form the content considered core to the Dene culture.

Each unit consists of learning expectations and examples of key learning experiences appropriate for students at various grade levels. The learning expectations correspond to the specific expectations identified in the curriculum in the areas of Land, Spiritual World, Others, and Self.

The thematic units can be an organizational framework for determining how existing learning resources can be used as well as for the development of new learning resources. Using these units, it will become evident what kinds of resources are most needed to be developed.

We have always understood the wealth that our elders possess, but we have not been so sure of their place in the fast-paced world of technology. By seeing children as the key to our future, we realize that we must impart in them the Dene perspectives identified as crucial to our survival. Our elders must be given a place in our formal education system so that these values and perspectives can be passed on to our children, who will be working with the technological tools and knowledge that the modern world provides. The elders will be an essential resource to the teacher when organizing key cultural experiences for the students. These experiences, along with the presence of our elders, will give students a firm grounding in Dene perspective.

## **The Place of Language Learning in Dene Kede**

The Dene languages must be viewed not as ends in themselves but rather as tools that enable us to access the knowledge and wisdom of the elders, and to help us better understand the Dene perspective. 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.

## **The Place of Dene Learning Resources in Dene Kede**

For years now, Dene teachers have been actively creating Dene language and culture learning resources for schools and classrooms in the N.W.T. Each of these resources is valuable for the skills and knowledge it imparts, and for the effort and time it represents on the part of the developers. The Dene Kede Curriculum, with its broad Dene goals and perspectives, gives a place to each of these resources. All resource materials that have been produced to date have an important role to play in the successful implementation of Dene Kede. As the various regions and schools develop teaching units using the Dene Kede curriculum, it is hoped that they will incorporate the many existing resources as well as develop new ones. A preliminary attempt has been made by the developers of Dene Kede to mention relevant resource materials in each of the thematic units contained in this curriculum.

## **The Place of Academic Subjects in Dene Kede**

At one time in the formal school system, the academic subjects were very much tied to purpose. Numbers and math had to be learned to enable students to engage in money transactions or for particular kinds of jobs. Literacy was important for reading the Bible or for reading instructions. Today, some subjects have become so abstract that often our students lose sight of why they must learn them.

Dene Kede attempts to give some perspective as to why these subjects are important. Science and geographic knowledge are important in giving us a greater understanding of the land. Knowledge about our physical bodies and well being (health) is an important part of our being capable on the land and surviving. The study of other tribes and people with respect to their similarities and differences (social studies) is an important aspect of establishing good relationships with other people. Knowledge and skills such as these, taken together, are vital for our survival.

## Scope and Sequence

The scope and sequence of learning expectations in past curricula have been based upon a learning model, which is linear and comparative. Learning was outlined in steps and stages. Students were expected to follow through these stages together, and at the end were compared in terms of how well they mastered the content. For example, reading was divided into mastery of phonics, then reading of a word, then a sentence, then a paragraph.

In keeping with a Dene perspective on education, this curriculum subscribes to a cyclic and individualized learning model, which more closely parallels the traditional model for learning. Children were exposed repeatedly to a holistic and authentic experience from the culture (experiences such as spring camping or making dry meat). A child and an adult would have the same experience but through years of experience, the adult would be more proficient in the experience than the child. Each person would get from any experience that for which he or she was ready. For example, young girls were exposed to sewing or beading and allowed to try a simple project rather than being kept at parts of the project.

The scope of the expectations for the children is provided in four categories: in their relationships with the spiritual world, other people, the land and themselves. The expectations are sequenced with culturally accepted levels of "proficiency" or awareness (e.g. "seeking opportunities to learn from respected individuals in the community" grades 4-6).

## Experiential Learning

The teaching approach advocated by this curriculum is based on the use of Key Cultural Experiences. Key Cultural Experiences here are understood to be:

- **Whole experiences rather than parts of one.**
- **Doing rather than analyzing.**
- **Authentic, realistic or natural activities within the Dene culture.**
- **Experienced at different levels of awareness and ability depending upon the individual.**
- **Experienced over and over throughout a lifetime with a spiraling development of awareness and ability in individuals.**

It is in the context of these cultural experiences that students learn the perspectives that are distinctly Dene. The perspectives can be taught in other ways as well, such as through discussion or hearing stories. However, they are best taught in a "lived" experience. Teachers, schools and communities must enable such experiences as much as possible to make Dene Kede come alive. Analysis, practice, review, and reflection are activities, which occur as offshoots to these key cultural experiences. Also, basic academic skills, including language skills, are taught as offshoots to these key cultural experiences.

## Evaluation

The primary form of evaluation proposed for Dene Kede is formative evaluation. The individual is measured against himself or herself rather than against others. It is expected that each student will progress over time, becoming more capable in terms of the indicators identified in the learning expectations. Emphasis on formative evaluation requires the teacher to keep very precise records to pass on with each student from year to year. Student self-evaluation is an important component of Dene Kede. This is a modern-day attempt to bring the child back to the Dene way of being self-aware, self-responsible and self-motivated.

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# Implementation

## *1. Cultural Learning Expectations*

The Dene Kede Curriculum consists of a set of learning expectations, which are intended to help Dene students in the process of becoming capable Dene. The learning expectations are broadly categorized into four areas and relate to the students' relationships with:

- The spiritual world
- The land
- Other people
- Themselves

The expectations outlined in these terms are what make this curriculum uniquely Dene. When these relationships become the focus of education within a classroom, the classroom takes on a Dene perspective or world-view. This is what is meant by Dene culture in this curriculum.

## *2. Dene Language Expectations*

Dene language competence, either in the first language or as a second language, is expected to be taught in the context of teaching or developing these relationships. Language expectations for both first and second language are therefore included as a part of this curriculum.

## *3. Thematic Units*

The curriculum consists of approximately forty thematic unit outlines. These particular topics were chosen by the elders and developers as being most important to the Dene. Each topic is developed in terms of expectations in each of the four relationships. For example, with the topic of "Fish":

- **Spiritual:** these expectations help students in understanding or connecting with the spiritual understandings that the Dene have with respect to fish;
- **Land:** these expectations help students develop the skills and knowledge that the Dene have with respect to the physical aspects of fish and fishing;
- **Other People:** these expectations help students understand how the Dene relate to each other, as determined by activities associated with fish or fishing;
- **Self:** these expectations help students reflect on the significance of the spirituality, knowledge and skills of the Dene with respect to fish and fishing, and become more self-aware as Dene.

## *4. General Expectations*

*In order to survive and to live life to its fullest, Dene students must develop respectful relationships with the Land, the Spiritual World, other people and themselves. These relationships are best developed with the aid of the Dene Elders and their voice, which is the Dene Language.*

### *The Land*

In their relationship with the land, students are expected to, with the aid of the Dene Language:

- Enjoy the Land
- Become capable on the Land
- Understand the Land
- Appreciate and respect the Land
- Be familiar with the Dene history of the Land

### *The People*

In their relationship with other people, students are expected to, with the aid of the Dene Language:

- Learn from and respect their Elders
- Be generous to others
- Work with others, putting group needs before personal needs
- Accept and enjoy others
- Know the traditional relationships and changes in these over time
- Recognize similarities and differences between Dene and others

### *The Spiritual World*

In their relationship with the Spiritual World, students are expected to, with the aid of the Dene Language:

- Recognize powers greater than themselves
- Recognize what is spiritual in the world around them
- Appreciate and respect the spiritual forces
- Recognize and develop their personal spirituality

### *The Self*

In their relationship with themselves, students are expected to, with the aid of the Dene Language:

- Work to maintain integrity in their relationships
- Know and respect themselves
- Maintain humility
- Be aware of how their own behaviour affects others

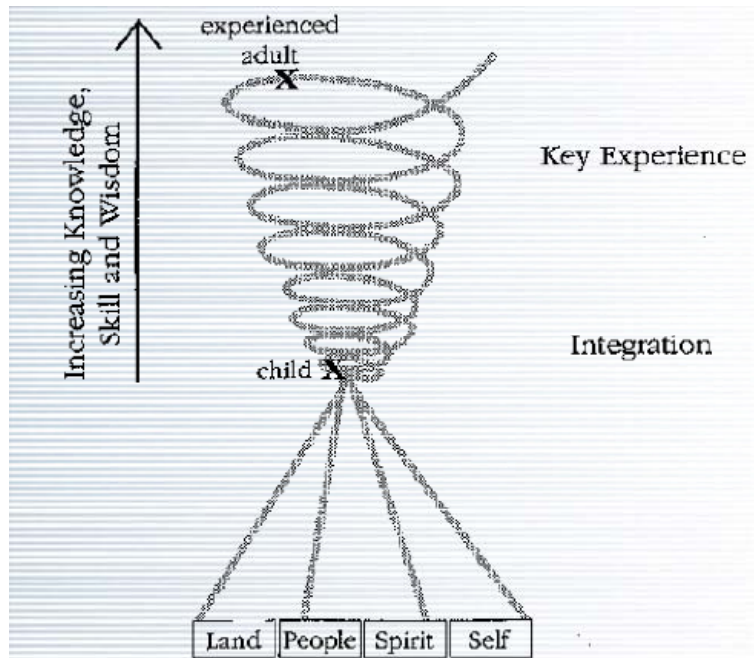
## ***5. Stages of Learning and Evaluation***

There are three stages, which are repeated over and over throughout the process of spiraling learning throughout the lifetime of a Dene:

1. the input stage,
2. the reflective stage and
3. the output stage.

Teachers should plan and organize their key experiences with these in mind.

*Fig. 1 Spiraling Learning*



### **6. Support Information for Using Key Experiences**

As a part of the curriculum, approximately fifty thematic units are included, each with suggested key experiences related to the theme.

Most key experiences in the Dene Kede programs will be based on activities involving elders, community resource people, storytelling, researching, and development of cultural self-awareness through the use of journals, conferencing and sharing circles. Each of these topics is developed for the reference of teachers is available online.

### **7. Subject Integration**

In times past, students learned math, science, language arts, etc. as separate subjects. However well the students learned these subjects, they did not often recognize their value or relationship to their real world. In the Dene Kede program, skills and knowledge learned in these subject areas are tied to the Key Experiences. The Key Experiences give a sense of purpose and place to the subjects.

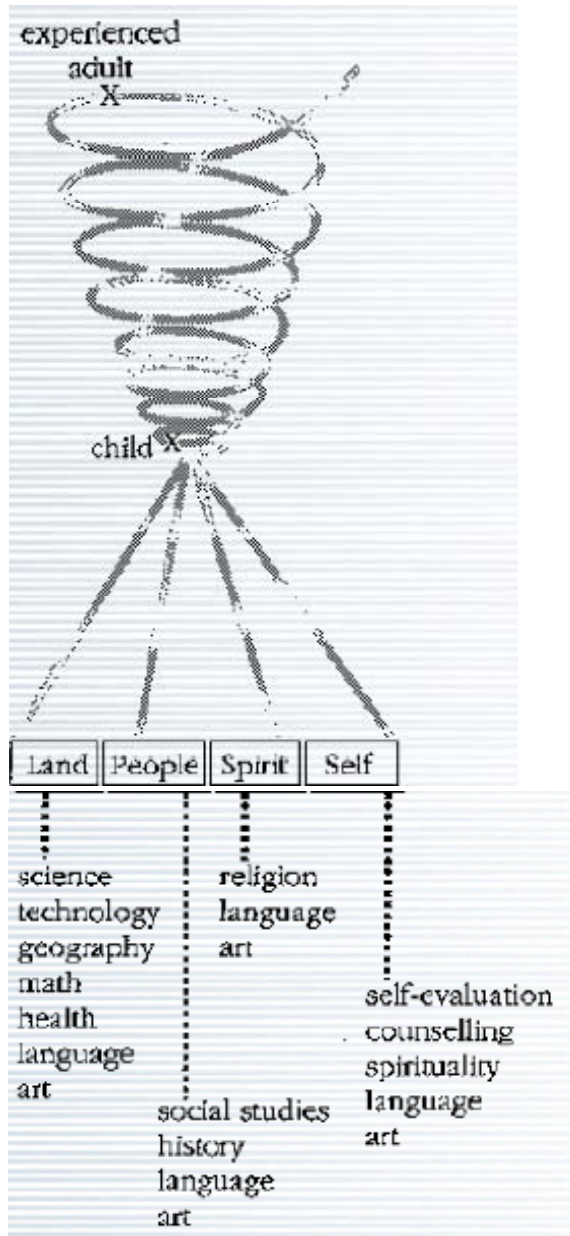
All of the usual academic subjects can be integrated into the Dene Kede program. The diagram shows where each of the subject areas tends to fit into the framework of the Dene Kede curriculum.

The proportion of time spent in key experiences, as compared to the integration of subject areas will vary from school to school. Some schools which have the full support of the community, and which have the resources, can have their students spend considerable time learning cultural skills or being on the land. All are key experiences. This is most consistent with the traditional learning and teaching situation.

Other schools may spend little time with key experiences and spend more time with integration of subject activity. These schools will be ones that feel they do not have the resources to spend on the land or that

have parents who do not support as much time spent away from the academic subjects. In the latter case, it is important to tie at least some key experiences to the classroom and to pay attention to all four components of the experience, tying the academic subjects into these components in order to provide at least the Dene perspective to the students.

Fig. 2 *Subject Integration*



## 8. Dene Kede School-Wide

Figure 3 shows how the Dene teacher and Subject Teacher can work together using Key Experiences as their common point of reference.

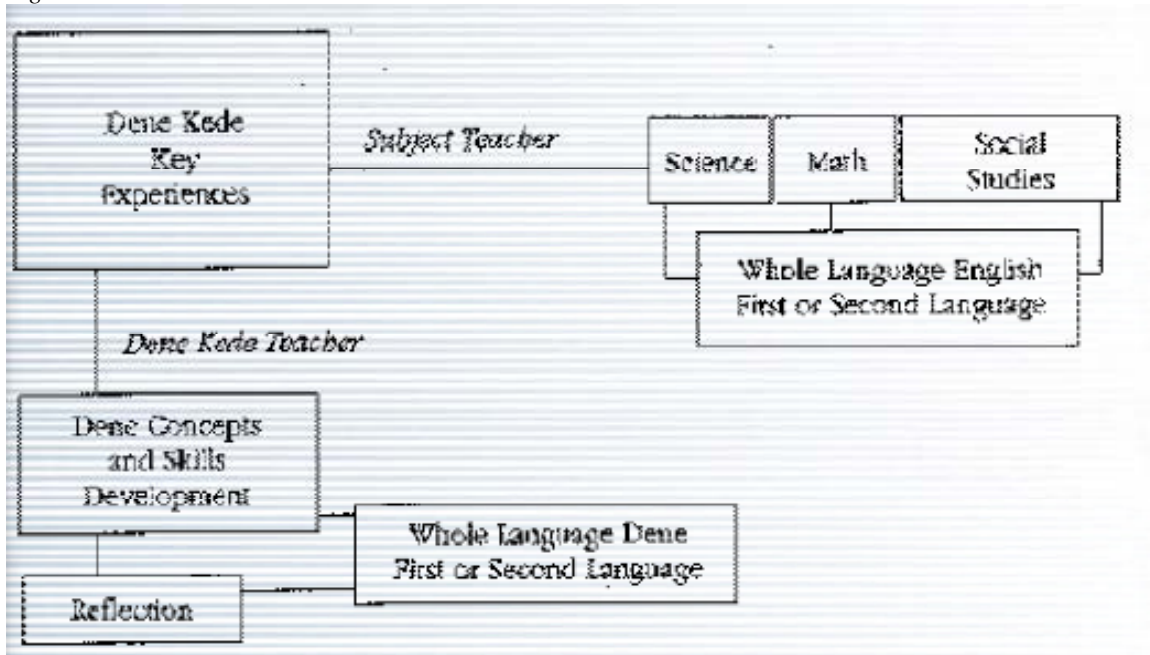
The Dene Kede teacher is responsible for:

- Cultural concept and skill development,
- Development of student cultural and self-awareness and
- Dene language development using a whole language approach (for both Dene as a first language and Dene as a second language)

The subject teacher is responsible for teaching the academic subjects and relating them to the key experiences in a meaningful way, while developing language skills in English through whole language (with English as first or second language).

Where the Dene teacher is a certified teacher responsible for subject teaching as well as Dene Kede, the Dene Kede program can be confined to a classroom and a single teacher but it would be a better use of the resources if the whole school benefited from the key experiences planned and prepared by the Dene Kede teacher.

Fig. 3 Dene Kede School-Wide.



## **9. Planning**

### **A. Yearly Planning**

*How much am I expected to teach in a year? What do I choose for cultural content?*

Each community will differ in the themes it chooses to emphasize and the times of year that it chooses to undertake the various themes.

*Example: The emphasis given to the topic of fishing as it applies to the Dehcho Region will vary between the communities of Fort Simpson and Trout Lake. In Trout Lake it is an important year-round activity, whereas in Fort Simpson, it seems to be a spring and summer event.*

These differences make it difficult to design a program for the whole region from a central location. Each community must design a program that best suits its needs based on its cultural practices, student interest and school year. This will also allow the communities to decide the depth and the amount of time spent on each topic.

In the smaller communities with one-room schools, the native language teachers can get together with interested parent groups, elders or the Community Education Council to discuss which themes to cover and when. In the larger schools, where there is more than one native teacher, the teachers could get together to plan the yearly program as a team.

In doing yearly planning in Rae-Edzo, the teachers take into account the following kinds of activities when making up their cards:

- Seasonal events such as berry picking, gathering wood, and muskrat hunting.
- Community events such as the Dogrib Assembly and Christmas celebrations.
- Year round activities such as hand games and drum dances
- Non-Dene events such as Halloween and Valentines Day.

The thematic topics outlined in Dene Kede can fit into at least the first four kinds of activities.

For the sake of school-wide planning, especially if more than one grade will be taking advantage of the key experiences, teachers from all concerned grades should plan together. The record of this planning should be used to plan from year to year to enable appropriate repetition of experiences as well as introduction of new ones.

### **B. Thematic Planning**

*What are the components of a Thematic Plan?*

#### *A) Key Cultural Experience(s)*

The key cultural experience(s) are activities to reflect or are a real part of the Dene culture of today. The experiences are holistic, activity oriented, and ideal in the sense that they reflect, as much as possible, the ideal relationship that the Dene can have with the land, other people, the spiritual world and themselves. The key experiences bring all the concepts, skills and attitudes that are being learned in a classroom setting, together into an activity that is real and important to the Dene.

#### *b) Learning Expectations*

What is it that the students should know (skills, concepts) or what attitudes should the students have, as a result of the thematic unit as a whole? The students work toward the expectations both in classroom work as well as during key experiences. The expectations should reflect a balance of the four components of the curriculum: the relationships with the spiritual world, the land, other people, and the self. The expectations

should outline the language development expectations as well, in either Dene as a first language or as a second language.

*c) Cultural Concept and Skill Development*

This part of the Dene Kede program consists of learning activities, usually classroom based, which isolate cultural skills or concepts for development and reinforcement. The skills and concepts relate to the key experience(s) at the core of the thematic unit. Language learning activities are also a part of these activities. Language skills (either first or second language) are developed as a part of, or related to, cultural concept and skill development.

*d) Reflection*

Throughout the course of a thematic unit, the teacher encourages the students to personally reflect on what they are learning. Reflection activities are similar to counseling in that student attitudes and feelings are given attention. Through reflection, the students' and community's interests are negotiated. Effective reflection will enable the student to develop a relationship with him or her that is true and comfortable. Reflection activities can be in the form of sharing circles, journal keeping or conferencing with the teacher.

*e) Subject Integration*

The core subjects, math, science, social studies, health and language arts are related to the key experience in some meaningful or practical way.

*f) Sharing Experience*

After a round of key experiences and lessons which explain, reinforce and review aspects of the key experience, students should be given an opportunity to engage in some kind of activity which communicates to people in the community what they have learned. This can be in the form of a display, report or entertainment, or it can be something that is shared with members of the community, such as food that has been prepared.

