

## Dene Kede Curriculum

Jurisdiction: Northwest Territories

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Level: K - 12

Theme: Curriculum/materials and Culture and language

### Description of Practice:

The *Dene Kede* Curriculum is an official language and culture 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 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 cultural 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 or cultural classroom. In all cases, *Dene Kede* provides the cultural foundation upon which all programs in the school are based.

### Background:

After years of teaching cultural activities and Aboriginal language in the school, educators and Elders had a sense that some critical component was missing. It had to be more than simply teaching language or what we loosely termed cultural skills. At the same time, the Government of the Northwest Territories recognized that to improve achievement of our predominantly Aboriginal school population, it was necessary to make Dene Education more meaningful for Dene students. Community consultations prior to the publication of *Learning: Tradition and Change* in 1982 indicated that people wanted culture-based education for their children.

Educational research indicates that if children feel their culture, language, heritage and roots are valued they will have the basis for positive self-esteem and the confidence to learn new things. Research also indicates that learning a second language is facilitated through a strong foundation in the first language.

Our goal is to ensure that any curriculum we produce is appropriate to the unique needs, cultures, languages and learning styles of the students of the Northwest Territories.

### Development:

Two years of a series of meetings and workshops with Elders, Linguists, Aboriginal Language Specialists and Aboriginal Language Instructors were the basis of the *Dene Kede 1-6* curriculum in 1993. Nine language groups of the Northwest Territories were represented in each meeting and workshop. The process to develop the curriculum began with two major principles, which was to involve the Elders and communities and consensus.

During the meetings and workshops, hours were spent listening to and recording the Elders as they told stories, legends and gave information of the worldview as they live it. The Elders not only gave the information, but also modeled their teachings as they led the educators. Once information was interpreted it went back to the Elders for verification. The process continued until finalized by the Elders. The process was challenging as some Aboriginal concepts do not translate easily in English.

For two years, Elders and educators worked together as they held meetings and workshops in different language communities as well as worked separately in their own regions and communities compiling data for the curriculum. After verification by elders from each community, the identification of the general and generic expectations was decided on by censuses. Fifty thematic units became the backbone of the curriculum with general learners expectations, specific cultural expectations and specific language expectations for Dene as a First and Second Language. *Dene Kede 7, 8 and 9* were published in 2002, 2003 and 2004 respectively.

### Evidence:

Most importantly, the students not only enjoy the cultural skills activities but also are becoming more aware of their relationship with the land, spiritual world, others and self in the context of Dene worldview.

### Adaptability:

The process could be adapted to other jurisdictions, but it would be very important to ensure the jurisdictional cultural content and basis.

### Further information:

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