

## **First Nations Curriculum Development**

Jurisdiction: Yukon

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Level: K – 12

Theme: Curriculum Materials

### Description of Practice:

The First Nations Programs and Partnerships Unit of the Public Schools Branch in partnership with Yukon First Nations is developing curriculum materials that will provide all Yukon students with textbooks focused on Yukon First Nation content and perspectives, which includes history, culture and language. Current development includes an early-readers series on Yukon First Nations culture and language, a Grade 5 unit on Traditional Governance and a Grade 12 course on YFN Law and Lands.

### Background:

Aboriginal students comprise 33.3% of the Yukon student population. Aboriginal people comprise 23% of the Yukon population. It is necessary for all Yukon students to understand the unique history of Aboriginal people and the unique demographics and political climate of the Yukon (11 of 14 Yukon's First Nations are self-governing with constitutionally protected authority and jurisdiction to govern themselves, their citizens, their lands and their resources in accordance with their Self-Government Agreements). It is a Government of Yukon priority to create a school system that is inclusive of and engages First Nation students.

How is the practice integrated with ongoing non-aboriginal programming?

The grade 5 unit on traditional governance will be integrated directly into the grade 5 social studies program. The unit will address learning outcomes from the regular academic curriculum as well as from the YFN cultures, history and languages. The primary reader series is a part of an intensive reading program at the grade one level. All Yukon schools will deliver these new materials to First Nation and non-First Nation students alike. The grade 12 YFN Law and Lands course is a high school course that provides ministry approved credits to be used towards high school graduation. The course is optional at this point in time, however will be available in all Yukon high schools. Both First Nation and non-First Nation students are encouraged to take the course.

### Development:

All developments have a Working Group that helps to provide accurate information on Yukon First Nation peoples, history, culture and languages. The working group also helps to ensure that all 14 YFN communities and 8 language groups are equally represented throughout the course. A technical group comprised of staff from the department's First Nation Programs & Partnerships unit provides for the day to day work that is required. The teachers and students will provide feedback on the appropriateness and interest of written materials submitted for use in the student text. The progress of all developments is reported through community presentations to YFN communities, school councils and schools.

### Evidence:

Yukon First Nation curriculum development has been underway since 2004. The primary reader series is available in all Yukon schools. The grade 5 unit on traditional governance will be piloted by grade 5 teachers in the 2006/07 school year. The grade 12 materials are in the first pilot phase with grade 12 teachers and students.

### Adaptability:

Suggestions for adapting the practice in other jurisdictions: Ensure that First Nations curriculum books are comparable in quality to existing textbooks. First Nations also suggest that First Nation curriculum encompass information about all regional First Nations as opposed to focusing on one and that First Nation focused curriculum be made a graduation requirement as opposed to an elective course.

Key lessons learned: Staff that is committed to the long term development is critical to the success of such projects. Staff turnover has directly impacted the schedule of development on two of the three projects.

Cautions for interested jurisdictions: First Nations curriculum must be linked to existing curriculum so that it blends with other programming and can be seamlessly integrated. This ensures that new curriculum doesn't appear to be 'extra work' for teachers or as for only First Nation students.

### Further information:

For further information please refer to the Government of Yukon Education Curriculum website at: <http://www.education.gov.yk.ca/curriculum.html> and also see <http://www.yesnet.yk.ca/firstnations/index.html>.

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