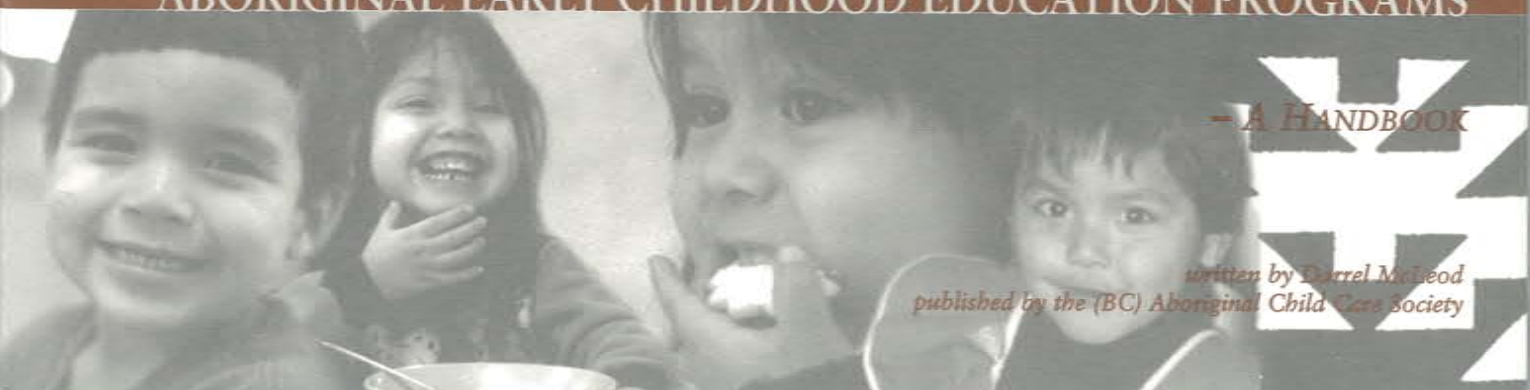


DEVELOPING CULTURALLY FOCUSED
ABORIGINAL EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION PROGRAMS

— A HANDBOOK

*written by Darrel McLeod
published by the (BC) Aboriginal Child Care Society*



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INTRODUCTION

T

his handbook is a guide for integrating First Nations culture into early childhood education programs. The guide attempts to provide both a theoretical framework and practical approach to this area. This guide will be useful for programs based in First Nations communities, for parents and other members of those communities, as well as for general early childhood programs that serve First Nations children.

The Importance of a Cultural Focus in Early Childhood Education

Some educators and child care professionals are not convinced that culture necessarily has a strong influence on children in learning situations. Those who think this way may not realize that if the cultural basis of a program is not deliberately designed and implemented, the culture that will be transmitted can only be the culture of the mainstream society. Learning cannot take place in a vacuum and some form of "culture" will be transmitted, even if it is not intentional. It is therefore critical that educational programs of all types be aware of the cultural aspects of learning and be clear and

deliberate about the culture they wish to transmit to children.

Cultural education fosters the development of a true sense of self. It is important that children be in settings where they feel safe, validated and nurtured in every way. Children must feel good about themselves, their family, community and cultural group.¹

Stacey York, in her book *Roots and Wings*, describes how culture promotes development:

*Early childhood teachers know that these years are an important time for children's growth and development. During this time, children acquire a self-concept, build their self-esteem, learn how to make friends, become aware of family and community, learn to use words to express themselves, have strong feelings and fears, use magical (and often distorted) thinking, and tend to believe everything they see and hear.*²

What is Culture?

Culture is a way of being of a group of people that is passed on that grows and changes from one generation to the next. This way of being is all inclusive:

- The food we eat: how we get, process, prepare and eat that food.
- Life: where we came from – what our source of being is.
- Death: what happens to us when we die – the relationship between this life and those who have gone before us.
- Our senses: the sounds we make and like or dislike, the smells and flavors we like and dislike, the way we touch or don't touch.
- Our "look": the way we like to dress or design our appearance – what we like and dislike in the appearance



of others and the world around us.

- Our movements: our dances or whether we dance or not – the way we communicate non-verbally.

Culture includes a way of seeing the world – a set of values and beliefs about the world around us and how we should relate to it.

Unfortunately, many people, including many educators, have taken the approach that tangible parts of culture represent a complete picture of what culture is. As a result, culturally focused curriculum has been very limited in its content and effectiveness. For a program to be culturally appropriate to a group of people, it must have the culture of the group in question as its basis or foundation. To take a mainstream program and make modifications is helpful to making a program culturally effective, but it only goes part of the way.

The “culture list” provides a summary of different aspects of culture.³



culture list

Things

(cultural objects)

clothing

jewelry

food

furniture

art

music

dance

language

games

houses

Customs

(how people live)

celebrations

holidays

marriage

how people communicate

who lives in families

age of adulthood

recreation

family roles

child care

how people show affection

Values

(beliefs, reason for action)

spirituality, religion

role of people in the world

role of children

role of the environment

attitude toward time

attitude toward money

definition of achievement

understanding of the world

rites of passage



ELEMENTS OF CULTURAL PROGRAMMING

Children learn what is modeled for them and absorb what is around them. If all of the child care professionals around them have a mainstream world view, of course that is what the children will absorb and emulate in spite of the fact that they may be taking part in learning activities that are culturally based.

Similarly, as the curriculum and program are being designed, if those designing the program only know or understand mainstream culture, then the program will have a bias towards propagating mainstream culture, in spite of tangible parts of culture that may be incorporated into the program.

For these reasons, if a program is to truly be effective in validating, strengthening, and transmitting the culture of an Aboriginal group, then there must be a multi-layered and multi-faceted approach to the cultural aspect of an educational program.

Culture must be an important consideration in the following:

- 1 Governance,
- 2 Advisory process,
- 3 Policy development,
- 4 Personnel selection,
- 5 Programming and teaching,
- 6 Facility design,
- 7 Learning resources selection and development, and
- 8 Budget planning.

1 Governance

At least one person with a strong Aboriginal cultural background (Elder or person strongly rooted in the culture) should be on the governing body.

The board must explicitly deal with the notion of cultural transmission and effectively deal with the extent to which the program will be culturally based and how a desired approach could be designed and implemented.

The approach to validating, strengthening and propagating culture must be considered in budgeting by:

- Including an honorarium for Elders and other resource people,
- Making the decor and space reflect the culture of the community,
- Ensuring there is enough staff to accommodate the implementation of the desired approach; and
- Ensuring equipment is purchased for the cultural aspects of the program.

The governing body must decide what the language of instruction will be and if it is English, then they must decide how the Aboriginal language will be used.

The governing body should inform itself as to the options open for culturally effective programming such as language immersion and bilingual programs.

2 Parental Advisory Group or Parent's Circle

If there are no parents that have a strong cultural background, then recruit people who do to provide advice to the parent's group about cultural learning for children.

Ensure that the parent group has explicit discussions about language and culture issues and that their input is fed into the governing group and to the program delivery professionals.

3 Policy Development

It is important that the policy of the center deal with cultural issues and address the goals and objectives of the center in relation to cultural validation, promotion and instruction.

*"I have black hair, brown
eyes too,
Soft brown skin,
So do you!
I'm proud to be Haida
Look at me
Growing strong"*

Some of the issues that should be addressed are:

- The language of instruction and interaction with the children, and
- Recruitment and professional development of staff.

4 Personnel Selection

It is important to remember that, as well intentioned or professional as they may be, people who are not part of a cultural group cannot adequately transmit that group's culture. They will teach from the cultural perspective they grew up with – white people will foster the development of values that are important to white society – as will Asian people for Asian society, etc.

It is important for those working in any type of

educational setting to be aware of their own cultural biases and be aware that if they are the product of a mainstream monocultural program, even without intending to, they will reflect mainstream beliefs and values.

Staff must be aware of differing communication styles and accept behaviors of the children as normal and NOT expect *direct eye contact, open discussion of thoughts and emotions, extroverted behavior like assertiveness or aggressivity in social interaction and participation.*

There should be no pressure to either "act white" or "act Indian." Children will naturally model what they experience around them in home and in institutional programs.

It is important to be aware of what some refer to as "dysconscious racism" which is an impaired way of thinking about race: "Whites do not recognize white privilege – an invisible package of unearned assets – that is ever-present, but one to which they are oblivious."⁴ Strong cultural role models are essential to the program.

If the community decides that the Aboriginal language is important for the program, then as many staff as possible should speak the language.

Some basic qualities one should seek in child care professionals are:

- Contact with and good familiarity with Aboriginal people outside of the child care or educational setting,
- A strong understanding and familiarity with the culture of the community,
- Knowledge of many aspects of the history of the community and culture group,
- A willingness to continue to develop professionally and to practice or strengthen cultural knowledge and skills,

- Knowledge of community dynamics: how to communicate effectively with the community and to access community resources,
- Good familiarity with the local Indigenous language as well as with the local English that is spoken by community members,
- Understanding non-verbal communication styles of the culture group (facial expressions, body language, gestures, comfort levels with touching, etc), and
- Understanding culturally appropriate student assessment.

5 Programming and Teaching

Culturally effective teaching professionals and resource people focus on the strengths that exist in communities and families. Cultural identity can be fostered by designing a program that has content and a learning process that is acceptable to the community and cultural group. Those designing the program should spend deliberate time with the governing body and advisory groups developing the learning process that is acceptable to the community and validated by all of its members.

The concept of “culturally responsive teaching” has been around for about 10 years. This method or style of teaching uses the child’s culture to build a bridge to successful academic achievement.

Being ‘culturally responsive’ means to be sensitive, aware, and capable of employing cultural learning patterns, perspectives, family structure, multiple world views, tribal languages and Indian English in the teaching, learning, and mental ecology of the classroom.

*Culturally responsive teaching requires adaptation to local circumstances.*⁵

Adaptation to local circumstances can be achieved by identifying and utilizing the cultur-

al resources that are available in the local community where a program is being delivered, as well as from neighboring and similar communities. To tap into these resources, one only needs to find one or two community members that know the community well and interview them to learn who holds the cultural knowledge in the community.

The program should be culturally based and organized to follow themes and incorporate regular rhythms and rituals – so the children see and feel a regular predictable pattern. There can be regular cycles for the patterns. A set of daily patterns should be developed, as well as weekly, monthly and seasonal patterns. (See chart on page 8 for examples)

Developing Themes

The development of monthly themes could be done by the whole center at the outset of the first year, and then revisited and revised in subsequent years.

To develop themes, a two day workshop could be organized and include members of the governing body, members of the advisory group, personnel, and cultural resource people.

The two days could be organized as illustrated in the chart on page 9.

Encouraging Self-Esteem

– unconditional love and acceptance

It is important to continually validate the children in every way possible: their appearance, their intelligence, their emerging talents, their behavior. This can be done explicitly by telling the children how beautiful their hair and eyes are, and how nice their skin is. The same applies for the other traits to validate listed above.

Sample Program

Every Day	Every Week	Every Month
<p>Greetings in the local language:</p> <p>"Hello, how are you?"</p> <p>"Good morning."</p> <p>"Good-bye, we'll see you again"</p> <p>"That's it for now."</p> <p>The phrases used would be those that are normally used in the target language and not literal artificial translations of the usual English phrases:</p> <p>Morning prayer or song – giving thanks for the day,</p> <p>Giving thanks before meals,</p> <p>Group journal – songs or stories about the day and the activities for the day – include statements about the weather, the season, special events (birthdays/celebrations/cultural events/times)</p> <p>Outdoor time – a walk or observation.</p>	<p>Regularly scheduled weekly events like:</p> <p>Guest visits from Elders and cultural resource people, parents, storytellers, musicians,</p> <p>Field trips,</p> <p>Animal talk (what are the animals around us doing in this season?),</p> <p>Cultural celebration, and</p> <p>Traditional food day (if traditional foods are used everyday – focus on some special item that is rare, or a special or seasonal treat).</p>	<p>Overview of the season.</p> <p>New theme introduction and conclusion.</p> <p>Overview of birthdays and celebrations for the month.</p> <p>Review of our "child care" family – who is with us this month.</p> <p>Cultural mini-festival reviewing and celebrating the cultural learning of the month.</p>

Dr. Cornell Pewewardy identifies the components of self-esteem to be "significance, competence, power, and virtue." Pewewardy describes these components in the traditional Indigenous world view as follows:

- Significance: nurtured in a world view that celebrates the universal needs for belonging,
- Competence: developed and insured by providing opportunities to master skills and abilities,
- Power: developed and encouraged by the expression of independence and individuality (author's addition); and
- Virtue: demonstrated and realized in the over-arching value of generosity.

It is important to note that there may be varying physical characteristics in children that attend a center. While most of the students will probably have the usual appearance of Aboriginal children, there will be some who have lighter hair and fairer skin. For some people it is hard to recognize people with fairer features as being Aboriginal. It is important that no child feel rejection, but rather complete acceptance and unconditional love. Personnel should vigorously defend any children who are teased or in any way discriminated against because of their appearance. All children should be equally validated.

Negative comments about children or their "Indianness" should never be tolerated under any circumstances.

Developing Themes

DAY ONE

Introduction – Welcome

am

Overview of the goals and philosophy of the center.
Brainstorming of broad theme topics by the whole group

Offer a well prepared lunch of traditional foods for participants

pm

Organization of the team into smaller teams to focus on theme development for particular months

Small group presentations back to the whole group on theme development work

Note:

Time should be built into the work assignment of staff to allow for ongoing theme development work. In addition, if funding is available, a local resource person could be hired to continue theme development work.

There is a type of “subliminal” validation that can be put in place. Surround the children with attractive images that look like them – pictures of local people, Aboriginal celebrities, etcetera.

Purchase dolls that look like the children and within a diverse collection, make sure that the dolls that look like the children are far more numerous than the others.

It is important that children have real life Aboriginal models as well as those in videos, books and pictures to relate to and identify with. Invite Aboriginal guests from the local and neighboring communities often to be around the children.

Choose books that validate the children – books in which aspects of their lives and culture are portrayed, rather than lives and cultures of others.

DAY TWO

Introduction – Review

am

Whole group – revisiting themes – any new or additional ideas

Continuation of theme development for particular months in small groups

Whole group review of theme work development and brainstorm of resources, songs, stories, and materials available for theme implementation in the community

pm

Small group work on cultural resources required for theme implementation

Small group work matching cultural resources available as listed in the morning brainstorm with particular themes

Child care professionals should take time to talk to the students about traits of Aboriginal people that they should be proud of – appearance, talents, knowledge, families, etcetera.

Children should be constantly praised.

Children should be exposed to Aboriginal people and other people of color to encourage a sense of belonging. Positive interaction with “white” people should be modeled and encouraged as well.

Have lots of mirrors in the center and place them at the eye level of the children so they see themselves frequently.

Instill pride of being Aboriginal (Dakelh, Nehiyaw, Ku’as etc.) by talking about the richness of the culture, the beauty and strengths of the people, and the richness of the traditional lands.

Child care professionals must come to terms with their own feelings and beliefs about their racial heritage.

All children should be validated. Differences in children's appearances can be pointed out with admiration and praise. Children should never be compared negatively. If some children are fairer or darker, have curly hair or straight hair, the beauty of their differences should be validated.

Defend and protect children in your care. If any adults or other children make fun or speak negatively of a child's appearance or anything else – vigorously defend the child and counter with positive comments.

Birthdays

Celebrate children's birthdays. Keep the celebrations simple, but make the birthday child a positive focus of attention and love. Choose a theme for the birthday party. Keep the length of the celebration short. Take lots of pictures that can be posted around the room and sent home for the parents to post at home.

Use poems and jingles that you find or that you write to build self-esteem. One example is as follows:

*I have black hair, brown eyes too,
Soft brown skin,
So do you!
I'm proud to be _____ (Dakelh Carrier
Nehiyaw Cree....)
Look at me,
Growing strong.*

Incorporating Art into Programs

Art is an important aspect of Aboriginal culture. All Aboriginal cultures express creativity in some art form. Generally, Aboriginal children love to express themselves through art and consistently find great pleasure in making art. As a result, art is a powerful medium for instruction. There is a good possibility that

many of the aboriginal staff in the center have artistic talent. Tap that talent to make art for decorating the center as well as for use in instruction.



The book **Pre-school Art** by Mary Ann Kohl (published by Gryphon House) has many wonderful ideas for art activities that can be used as they are described, or that can be adapted to be more culturally focused. All of the activities are designed for young children and the book has a chart after the table of contents that gives information about the activities, such as age range, preparation required, level of help necessary, safety tips, and also indicates the author's favorites. All activities have been field tested.

Ensuring that the program has a rich art focus will help to integrate culture into the program and bring out the natural creativity of everyone involved with the center.

Incorporating Music

For the musical aspect of programming, children should be able to hear, experience and experiment with a variety of sounds. Over time, try to build up a good collection of a wide variety of indigenous music, and of world music. Make sure there is a collection of real or simplified cultural instruments available for the children to experiment with or learn to play. Drums are probably the most universal instrument of indigenous cultures and one that children take to very naturally. The drum can be used for enriching sounds for many types of activities.

Informal production of local listening resources could be a fun project for adult volunteers or,

as with informal publishing, older school aged children.

Use Humor

When working with children, there will no doubt be plenty of incidences of spontaneous humor. However, humor can be planned and deliberately inserted into the program. Experiment with humor for the age groups you work with, and plan some regular, specific activities that you find funny and that you believe the children will find funny.

Field Trips and Outings

An excellent resource for planning local field trips is *Open the Door Let's Explore More* by Rhoda Redleaf (Redleaf Press, St. Paul, Minnesota, 1996). This book describes a detailed approach to learning through field trips and has detailed plans for about 30 different types of walks, such as After-a-Rain Walk, Animal Life Walk, Bugs-Around-Us Walk, etc.

Consider adopting some nature site nearby your center as a regular visiting place for your groups. This way they will be able to observe the weekly, monthly and seasonal changes in this location and it will be a place of special memories for the children.

6 Facility Design

The facility should be designed, built and decorated to be reflective of the culture of the community to the greatest extent possible.

When they enter the building, children should see cultural objects they would be likely to see in their own home, their grandparents' home or in the home a person who is strongly involved with local culture; and children should feel validated and comfortable in their surroundings. They should not feel that they are in a "foreign" environment that is intimidating.



Equipment that is necessary for regular and ongoing cultural activities should be budgeted for and purchased or acquired through donations.

The community should be consulted as to what type of equipment the facility should contain for it to be reflective of local culture and to permit the frequent and ongoing carrying out of cultural activities. For example, it may be appropriate for the facility grounds to incorporate a space outside for hide tanning and inside for an "Elder in Residence" such as a rocking chair, or tea pot and cups.

Plan the facility for community involvement. There should be adequate space for peer elementary school students to come and work with the children, and for community volunteers to help with special projects.

7 Learning Resources Selection and Development

Many existing mainstream resources are perfectly suitable for use in an Aboriginal child care setting without adaptation.

Some materials are suitable for use but with adaptation. For example, the children should not be repeatedly singing and memorizing songs about items, objects or topics that are completely foreign to them. A classic example of this would be the song "London Bridge is Falling Down." This song is suitable for use but if another name is substituted for "London": such as "Nechako" or "T'souke."

Some materials are not appropriate for use because they stereotype, either positively or negatively, and program children to think along certain lines. For example, stories such as Goldilocks, Cinderella or Snow White, where the heros and heroine are all strongly described as being "fair" or "blonde." These tales may be suitably used if combined carefully with others that validate people whose skin is not "fair" and whose hair is not "blonde."

A great deal of material exists from diverse Aboriginal communities which would be very suitable for use.

Legends and tales from other lands and other types of resources that favor diversity are highly desirable for use.

Local First Nations legends and stories should be sought out and used to the greatest extent possible.

Culturally Focused Resources

Attempt to find resources that may have already been developed to incorporate culture into educational programs. You may find such material by contacting local schools and school districts, libraries, community cultural leaders, and Elders. Be careful to assess the material for focus. If it focuses on material culture exclusively, for example, then make sure that you don't make the focus of your program strictly material culture (ie. clothing, visual art, food). Many resources that exist will have been created by non-Aboriginal writers and may or may not accurately portray the culture, so it is important that you assess any such material for authenticity. Also, ensure that the material doesn't represent Aboriginal people in the past tense only, as people who were alive a long time ago and not now.

Build a portfolio of cultural resources for your center. This portfolio could include art projects, cultural objects, sound recordings and videos, lists of community cultural resource people and lesson or activity plans for future

reference. Over time, your center should be able to acquire a rich collection of cultural resources for use with children.

Criteria for the Selection of Books and Materials⁶

Look for the Messages in Children's Books

The Characters

Do the characters in the story have personalities like real people?

Do they seem authentic in the way they act and react?

Do they speak in a style and language that suits their situation?

Are they real people with strengths and weaknesses rather than stereotypes?

Is their lifestyle represented fairly and respectfully?

The Situation

Do the characters have power over their own lives?

Do they resolve their own problems and reap their own rewards?

Illustrations

Do they idolize or idealize the physical traits of one group of people over another?

The Messages

Are there embedded messages that are demeaning in any way or that reinforce stereotypes?

The Author's Credibility

What makes the author or illustrator suited to produce the type of material in question?

Informal Publishing

Informal publishing can be a powerful tool for teaching and validating the local culture and community. To maximize the production of locally produced cultural instructional materials, partner with the elementary or high school to get older students to write and illustrate local stories and legends.

Consider using some of the following themes and others that are appropriate to your community.

- Our stories about the beginning of the world.
- Our stories to explain why things are the way they are in nature.
- Heroes in our community – both living and from the past.
- The roles people play in our community (nurse, chief, child care worker, teacher, principal, maintenance worker, etc.).
- The foods we eat and how we get them.
- Funny stories about our people.
- The clans (houses or other groups) in our community.
- How we share with each other (food - belongings).
- The place we live.
- The water around us.
- The animals that are our neighbors.
- The history of our people.
- The houses we live in and lived in (in the past).
- The tools and equipment we make (and made in the past) and use.
- Trading.
- Our language and how it related to other languages.
- Traditional and current beliefs.
- Masks.
- Dances of our people.
- Songs of our people.
- The local history of our people, including recent phenomenon like the residential schools experience, the Potlatch law, the establishment of the reserve system, etc.

Children love big books where illustrations are 16" x 20" or even larger. Keep the story lines very simple with perhaps a maximum of 10 words in a large font to go with each illustration. Only one copy of each book is necessary, but they could be made in such a way that they could be reproduced. Photos can be an option for some themes (enlarged).

The elementary and high school aged children, through their school, could also help to assemble multi-media kits with items such as pictures, items to touch and manipulate, sounds, smells, slides, etcetera, based around a theme. This is a low budget way of producing quality resources with a high local relevance and interest level for children.

8 Budget Planning

It is essential that there be a budget for the cultural aspects of the program. If the program is very strongly culturally based, then much of the base budget will by default cover some of the cultural aspects of the operation (if core staff are also cultural resource people for example).

Funding amounts will be necessary for:

- An honoraria for Elders and other resource people,
- Materials for a cultural program (ie. hides, sinew, beads, wood, food stuffs, etc.),
- Books, arts and crafts materials,
- Toys and games that are culturally appropriate, and
- Facility enhancement or modification.

LANGUAGE

SPEAKING AND FOSTERING THE DEVELOPMENT OF ABORIGINAL LANGUAGES

Indigenous language is important as a vehicle for transmitting culture and world view. Fostering mastery of one's mother tongue is a sure way of encouraging full mastery of English as well. In some cases, personnel working in the child care center will speak the local Aboriginal language. Certainly an ability to speak the language or at least familiarity with the local language should be a criteria for recruiting and hiring staff.

However, even when staff are fluent or have a good knowledge of the local language, it is a challenge for them to begin to use the language with the children, or to begin teaching it. The following are a few suggestions and tips for fostering the use of the local language in the child care centre:

Tip: Use the language for REAL communication purposes. Use phrases that each context would require. For example – good morning, and other greetings, instructions (ie. take off your coat, take off your shoes, come in, etc.). The use of these types of phrases should increase as the term goes on, so that there are a large number of complete sentences, commands, and expressions that become a part of the regular daily routine of the center and

everyone working there knows what they mean.

Week	Expressions/Commands/Sentences
One	Hello/How are you/Come in/Sit down/Let's eat
Two	Expressions from Week One, plus: your-my name is/nice to see you/you look nice/the food is good
Three	Expressions from the first two weeks continue plus Good-bye/please/thank you/I like you/are you hungry?

It would be worthwhile for each center to select their own list of sentences, expressions and commands that will be used progressively.

Tip: Speak in sentences to the children when using the language – do not use fragments like only nouns or verbs.

Do not oversimplify or speak a non-existent form of the language that is closer to English with the goal of helping children to learn. They will learn incorrect habits this way.

Tip: Use real communication for teaching the language. Don't use phrases like "The cat jumps on the chair," or other abstract sentences that don't arise from the context. Examples using the word "cat" might be – (if a cat appears, or if there is a picture of a cat) "Look at the (big/small/wild/ cat.) It's coming in." Or "Listen to the cat purr – or let's feed the cat."

Examples of real communication are: *Oh hello (name). It's good to see you. Come in. It's raining (snowing, nice, etc.). I like your hat. Say good-bye to Dad now.*

Suggestion: Deliberately introduce the use of the language into the center by setting times where everyone who can speak the language speaks it to the full extent they are able. You could say that Tuesday mornings would be (Carrier, Nuuchah-nulth, etc) language times. Bring in other speakers during this time to help out if necessary. Children will often understand what is being said from the context and from previous exposure to the language. As time goes on you may increase the times devoted to the language.

Follow themes for using and teaching the Aboriginal language. Send a note home to the parents indicating which theme you are covering and also the key terms and phrases that the children will use in each theme.

Dialectical English

Many children may speak with a bit of a local accent or dialect when they speak English. It is very important to accept the child's speech the way it is and not correct it for grammar or pronunciation to a more standard form of spoken English. The child will learn as he or she grows that there are variations within the English language, and that there are formal and informal, polite and colloquial forms of the language. Children will learn as they mature which form of spoken English is appropriate for a particular context.

This is potentially a controversial area in communities, so it is important to review policy in regard to fostering spiritual development in children. However, it is worth working through. Children who get in touch with their spiritual selves have a new resource and additional strength when they might need it. It is important for child care professionals to be clear about their own beliefs and to be very clear about them in the work setting.



The children can be taught prayers that do not belong to any particular belief system and that are not identified with any particular religious group. For example morning prayers, prayers of thanks, and smudging are prayers that children can be taught. If there is no objection in the advisory or governing group – expose the children to an array of religions in a non-intrusive way.

Model spirituality and clear values. Pay attention to being respectful, thankful, kind, generous, forgiving, compassionate, caring, sharing and loving.

Play music of the culture of the children if any is available, so they often hear it in the background.

Use positive affirmations that aren't tied to any particular religion. Choose one per day or one per week, and repeat them with the children several times during the course of the day. Examples are "Dakelh people are strong and smart." "Our land is rich and beautiful."

"Our land is rich

and

beautiful."



INTEGRATING CULTURE INTO ECE

It is important to think long term in setting goals for adding a cultural focus, or for enhancing the cultural focus of your program. When establishing goals, set out a five year time frame. Make goal setting the first step in developing a strategic plan for your center. Once you have set out the goals, then continue planning by identifying:

- Resources required to realize the goal,
- People identified as being responsible for each goal: personnel in the center and/or governing body and community members,
- A specific time by which the goal will be acted on, and
- Ways to evaluate whether the goal has been successfully attained.

While each community center will come up with their own set of goals the following is a list of topics, related to goals, that may be common to many programs:

- Recruiting and hiring personnel from your cultural group, other Aboriginal groups, and other people of color when it isn't possible to hire your own community members.
- Attaining an adequate budget to develop resources and train personnel on cultural teaching.
- Building facilities or adapting existing facilities to enable proper cultural learning to take place.
- Creating awareness of all involved in the center of the importance of incorporating culture into programs.
- Creating an understanding for all involved with the center of how values are transmitted in an educational setting.

- Learning how to identify and use cultural resources from the community in the program.
- Developing an awareness among staff of how to foster positive self-esteem in Aboriginal children and how to screen out any learning materials, personnel or anything else that may undermine children's self-esteem.
- Developing curriculum for a bi-cultural and bilingual program.
- Increasing the awareness of personnel concerning racism and how to teach children to deal with it effectively.
- Preparing children to function well and live in a diverse world.
- Instilling a strong cultural identity in children.

This list is not intended to be exhaustive or prescriptive.

While a goal setting exercise and the subsequent establishment and implementation of a five year plan may seem overwhelming, it is important to just "start where you are" in initiating or enhancing the cultural aspect of your program. The purpose of the five year plan is to allow your center to acquire the resources required and implement a well thought out and adequately resourced permanent culturally based program.

With or without a strategic plan in place, change can begin in the form of adjustments or modifications to your program. Begin by changing whatever is the simplest aspect of your program to change. This may be the decor and the material aspects of your program. This may be hiring new personnel from your community, if you are in a position to do this. Follow what will be a natural progression of events for your situation and allow a good

amount of time to realize each goal.

Elicit support for what you are doing within the community and with those who are in a position to be able to help your center reach your goals within the generous time frame that you set out. Make the administrative staff and political leaders of the community aware of the outcome of your goal setting. If you can get early buy-in by including them in the goal setting, so much the better.

Make your goals known to all segments of the community. Talk to all sorts of people about the goals of your program. Make the provincial licensing body aware of your goals. Talk to the other agencies you deal with about your plans and solicit their support and assistance. To the extent it is feasible, try to coordinate the implementation with other agencies that are in a similar business to the one your center is in – the local head start program and elementary school for example. You will be able to save a lot of time and money by coordinating with the school.

Linking With the Community

Remember, you're not operating in isolation – there are other educational and social programs operational in your community. One key resource to liaise with is the elementary school. Has the school done any language or cultural program planning? Specifically, do they have curriculum strands or themes that you could look at? Is there some cooperative programming you could do with the elementary school? Are there cultural and other resources that you could share?

Here are some ways you can form linkages with the elementary school:

- Find out who are the cultural resource people for the school. Do they have any time available to help your program with cultural and language resource development? Would it be possible to cost-share some of their time with the school?
- Find out if the school has developed a the-

matic approach for kindergarten and the early grades. If so, could it serve as a model and is there any opportunity for linkages with this program?

- Find out if the school has a play ground area you can share with them that would be appropriate for children in your program.
- Ask if the school and some of the teachers would consider some joint activities. Could you use students in grades 4,5 and 6 for example for some regularly scheduled activities with the children – particularly culturally related activities?
- Ask if the teachers would consider having their students read or tell stories to children in your programs.
- Invite some of the older students (grades 4-6) to celebrations that your program is having.
- Jointly sponsor a training program for babysitters for older children (legal aged for babysitting) – and have them take the training in your center after hours.
- Use the older children as language role models. Have children who have some level of proficiency in the language come and spend time in the center, participating in activities when your center is focusing on language.
- As suggested in the section on informal publishing, use the students in the school programs to write, illustrate and publish cultural resources for use in your program.



This resource has provided many ideas and processes for making early childhood programs culturally based and focused. You will no doubt find many ways of realizing your goals of integrating culture that are not included here. Share your ideas with other Aboriginal Early Childhood centers and practitioners. Assess the progress your personnel and center are making periodically by reviewing the goals you've established and assessing where you are at against these goals. Do not be discouraged if progress is not as rapid as you had hoped. Keep working at solidly achieving the goals you, your team and community have established.

The following two appendices are two checklists that have been adopted by the Alaska Assembly of Native Educators. One chart is designed to describe cultural standards for educators and the other describes cultural standards for students. Of course, in reviewing the set of standards that apply to students, one would have to recognize that young children should be at the very initial phases of displaying the traits set out. These checklists are an excellent resource for reflecting on where educators are at and what kind of success they are attaining in promoting, strengthening and renewing culture in communities.





FOOTNOTES

1. York, Stacey. *Roots and Wings – Affirming Culture in Early Childhood Programs*. Redleaf Press. 1991.
2. *ibid*, p.23
3. Leslie R. Williams. "Alberta: A Multicultural, Bilingual Approach to Teaching Young Children". York, Stacey. *Roots and Wings – Affirming Culture in Early Childhood Programs*. Redleaf Press. 1991.
4. Sleeter, C.E. *Keepers of the American Dream: A Study of Development and Multicultural Education*. (Falmer Press.) 1992
5. Pewewardy, C.D. (1999). *Culturally Responsive Teaching for American Indian Students*. In Etta R. Hollins and Eileen I. Oliver (Eds.), *Pathways to Success: Culturally Responsive Teaching*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Publishers.) 1999.
6. Chart adapted by Bonnie Neugebauer. York, Stacey. *Roots and Wings – Affirming Culture in Early Childhood Programs*. Redleaf Press. 1991.



APPENDIX 1

ALASKA STANDARDS FOR CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE SCHOOLS

*Adopted February 3, 1998
Assembly of Native Educator Associations
Anchorage, Alaska*

CULTURAL STANDARDS FOR EDUCATORS

A.

Culturally-responsive educators incorporate local ways of knowing and teaching in their work.

Educators who meet this cultural standard:

- Recognize the validity and integrity of the traditional knowledge system;
- Utilize Elders' expertise in multiple ways in their teaching;
- Provide opportunities and time for students to learn in settings where local cultural knowledge and skills are naturally relevant;
- Provide opportunities for students to learn through observation and hands-on demonstration of cultural knowledge and skills;
- Adhere to the cultural and intellectual property rights that pertain to all aspects of the local knowledge they are addressing; and
- Continually involve themselves in learning about the local culture.

B.

Culturally-responsive educators use the local environment and community resources on a regular basis to link what they are teaching to the everyday lives of the students.

Educators who meet this cultural standard:

- Regularly engage students in appropriate projects and experiential learning activities in the surrounding environment;

- Utilize traditional settings such as camps as learning environments for transmitting both cultural and academic knowledge and skills;
- Provide integrated learning activities organized around themes of local significance and across subject areas;
- Are knowledgeable in all the areas of local history and cultural tradition that may have bearing on their work as a teacher, including the appropriate times for certain knowledge to be taught; and
- Seek to ground all teaching as a constructive process built on a local cultural foundation.

C.

Culturally-responsive educators participate in community events and activities in an appropriate and supportive way.

Educators who meet this cultural standard:

- Become active members of the community in which they teach and make positive and culturally-appropriate contributions to the well-being of that community;
- Exercise professional responsibilities in the context of local cultural traditions and expectations; and
- Maintain a close working relationship with and make appropriate use of the cultural and professional expertise of their co-workers from the local community.

D.

Culturally-responsive educators work closely with parents to achieve a high level of complementary educational expectations between home and school.

Educators who meet this cultural standard:

- Promote extensive community and parental interaction and involvement in their children's education;
- Involve Elders, parents and local leaders in all aspects of instructional planning and implementation;
- Seek to continually learn about and build upon the cultural knowledge that students bring with them from their homes and community; and
- Seek to learn the local heritage language and promote its use in their teaching.

E.

Culturally-responsive educators recognize the full educational potential of each student and provide the challenges necessary for them to achieve that potential.

Educators who meet this cultural standard:

- Recognize cultural differences as positive attributes around which to build appropriate educational experiences;
- Provide learning opportunities that help students recognize the integrity of the knowledge they bring with them and use that knowledge as a springboard to new understandings;
- Reinforce the student's sense of cultural identity and place in the world;
- Acquaint students with the world beyond their home community in ways that expand their horizons while strengthening their own identities; and
- Recognize the need for all people to understand the importance of learning about other cultures and appreciating what each has to offer.



APPENDIX 2

ALASKA STANDARDS FOR CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE SCHOOLS

*Adopted February 3, 1998
Assembly of Native Educator Associations
Anchorage, Alaska*

The following standards provide a basis against which schools can determine the extent to which they are attending to the cultural well-being of the students in their care.

CULTURAL STANDARDS FOR STUDENTS

A.

Culturally-knowledgeable students are well grounded in the cultural heritage and traditions of their community.

Students who meet this cultural standard are able to:

- Assume responsibilities for their role in relation to the well-being of the cultural community and their life-long obligations as a community member;
- Recount their own genealogy and family history;
- Acquire and pass on the traditions of their community through oral and written history;
- Practice their traditional responsibilities to the surrounding environment;
- Reflect through their own actions the critical role that the local heritage language plays in fostering a sense of who they are and how they understand the world around them;
- Live a life in accordance with the cultural values and traditions of the local community and integrate them into their everyday behavior; and
- Determine the place of their cultural community in the regional, state, national and international political and economic systems.

B.

Culturally-knowledgeable students are able to build on the knowledge and skills of the local cultural community as a foundation from which to achieve personal and academic success throughout life.

Students who meet this cultural standard are able to:

- Acquire insights from other cultures without diminishing the integrity of their own;
- Make effective use of the knowledge, skills and ways of knowing from their own cultural traditions to learn about the larger world in which they live;
- Make appropriate choices regarding the long-term consequences of their actions; and
- Identify appropriate forms of technology and anticipate the consequences of their use for improving the quality of life in the community.

C.

Culturally-knowledgeable students are able to actively participate in various cultural environments.

Students who meet this cultural standard are able to:

- Perform subsistence activities in ways that are appropriate to local cultural traditions;
- Make constructive contributions to the governance of their community and the well-being of their family;
- Attain a healthy lifestyle through which they are able to maintain their social, emotional, physical, intellectual and spiritual well-being; and
- Enter into and function effectively in a variety of cultural settings.

D.

Culturally-knowledgeable students are able to engage effectively in learning activities that are based on traditional ways of knowing and learning.

Students who meet this cultural standard are able to:

- Acquire in-depth cultural knowledge through active participation and meaningful interaction with Elders;
- Participate in and make constructive contributions to the learning activities associated with a traditional camp environment;
- Interact with Elders in a loving and respectful way that demonstrates an appreciation of their role as culture-bearers and educators in the community;
- Gather oral and written history information from the local community and provide an appropriate interpretation of its cultural meaning and significance;
- Identify and utilize appropriate sources of cultural knowledge to find solutions to everyday problems; and
- Engage in a realistic self-assessment to identify strengths and needs and make appropriate decisions to enhance life skills.

E.

Culturally-knowledgeable students demonstrate an awareness and appreciation of the relationships and processes of interaction of all elements in the world around them.

Students who meet this cultural standard are able to:

- Recognize and build upon the inter-relationships that exist among the spiritual, natural and human realms in the world around them, as reflected in their own cultural traditions and beliefs as well as those of others;

- Understand the ecology and geography of the bioregion they inhabit;
- Demonstrate an understanding of the relationship between world view and the way knowledge is formed and used;
- Determine how ideas and concepts from one knowledge system relate to those derived from other knowledge systems;
- Recognize how and why cultures change over time;
- Anticipate the changes that occur when different cultural systems come in contact with one another;
- Determine how cultural values and beliefs influence the interaction of people from different cultural backgrounds; and
- Identify and appreciate who they are and their place in the world.

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