

# Indigenous Education Framework

Government of  
Newfoundland and Labrador





# Introduction

Newfoundland and Labrador has five distinct Indigenous governments/organizations, specifically, Innu Nation, Miawpukek First Nation, Nunatsiavut Government, NunatuKavut Community Council and Qalipu First Nation.

The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (EECD) and these governments/organizations promote the importance of Kindergarten to Grade 12 curriculum that offers authentic experiences for Indigenous students. It should reflect not only the diverse cultures of Indigenous peoples, but also the values, worldviews and ways of knowing and being that are integral to Indigenous societies. Indigenous students will have the knowledge, skills and confidence to successfully complete secondary education in order to pursue post-secondary studies or to enter the workforce. All students and educators in Newfoundland and Labrador will be exposed to the various Indigenous perspectives, cultures, and historical contributions made by Indigenous peoples.

## Background

The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (EECD) encourages a holistic approach to Indigenous education which prepares children for entering school, uses provincial curricula with appropriate cultural relevance, nurtures the academic, physical, social, and psychological needs of students and provides a supportive learning environment for all students. Using this approach, EECD works with Indigenous governments/organizations to develop culturally relevant programming and resources, support programs that foster healthy lifestyles, and strengthen ties between schools and communities.

In 2015, an Aboriginal Education Advisory Committee (AEAC) was established to formalize and enhance collaboration. This committee advised EECD and made recommendations on Indigenous content within the provincial curriculum. Membership consisted of representatives from the five Indigenous governments/organizations in the province, the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, and Labrador and Aboriginal Affairs.

In 2017, the Premier's Task Force on Improving Educational Outcomes released *Now is the Time: The Next Chapter in Education in Newfoundland and Labrador*. This document contains four recommendations for Indigenous Education, including the development of a framework document on Indigenous education.

In 2018, the AEAC expanded to become the Indigenous Education Advisory Committee with full participation from the Indigenous communities in Newfoundland and Labrador, along with the addition of the Newfoundland and Labrador English School District, the Newfoundland and Labrador Teacher's Association and Memorial University of Newfoundland. Engagement with the Indigenous communities ensures we are able to authentically embody Indigenous values about teaching and learning.

# Context of Indigenous Education in Newfoundland and Labrador

Responsibility for the delivery of K-12 Indigenous education may be federal or provincial depending on factors such as land claim settlements. On Reserves, Indigenous authorities control and administer the school system with financial support from the Government of Canada through federal legislation. Many Indigenous students, however, attend the public school system. Non-Indigenous students depend on the provincially authorized curriculum to inform them about Indigenous history and experiences.

Since 1987, the Miawpukek Mi'kamawey Mawi'omi (Conne River) Band has been operating and staffing its own school. The staff and teachers of its education system are all members of its Indigenous community.

The Innu Nation, since 2009, has exercised jurisdiction and organizational responsibility for the education of its K-12 students in Sheshatshiu and Natuashish. It is the policy of the Innu Nation to increase and promote employment of qualified Innu in the school system.

The Nunatsiavut Government (NG) collaborates with Newfoundland and Labrador English School District (NLESD), which operates and staffs K-12 schools. The NG offers guidance to NLESD in responding appropriately to the educational needs of K-12 Inuit students in northern Labrador.

The NunatuKavut Community Council (NCC) represents the Inuit of south and central Labrador in NunatuKavut. The NCC does not currently operate schools, but it does run an Inuit Education Program, fully funded by the NCC, which integrates Inuit life skills, land based learning, heritage and culture into the curriculum in seven schools along the south east coast of Labrador. NCC is also at the preliminary stages of developing a culturally relevant course in NunatuKavut Inuit history, culture and society.

Qalipu First Nation Band does not operate its own schools. Member students attend NL publicly funded schools. To promote the inclusion of Mi'kmaq traditional knowledge, language and culture within the public school system, representatives of Qalipu First Nation maintain liaison with officials of the Western regional office of the NLESD to coordinate and deliver curriculum-based programs that focus on Indigenous content. These programs offer students opportunities to engage in land-based learning, connect with community Elders and learn more about Mi'kmaq language, history and culture.

## Purpose of the Document

The Indigenous Education Framework for Newfoundland and Labrador supports the learning of Indigenous students and non-Indigenous students through the exploration of the histories, traditions, cultures, worldviews, and contemporary lifestyles of Indigenous peoples in Newfoundland and Labrador and Canada. Students gain knowledge and develop the values, as well as the critical thinking, communication, analytical, and inquiry skills, that will enable them to better understand past and present realities of Indigenous peoples. Additionally, exploration of topics such as self-determination, self-government, and language and cultural reclamation allows students to understand and work towards the post-colonial future envisioned by Indigenous peoples.

# Vision Statement

Indigenous students, as well as non-Indigenous students, in Newfoundland and Labrador will have the knowledge, skills and confidence they need to successfully complete their K-12 education. All students and educators will have an understanding of Newfoundland and Labrador's rich Indigenous history and circumstances and recognize the roles of individuals and institutions in reconciliation.

# Policy Statement

The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development is committed to improving the success of Indigenous students, supporting teachers in their efforts to bring Indigenous knowledge into their teaching practice and supporting all students learning about Indigenous peoples. This Indigenous Education Framework, developed in collaboration with representatives of Indigenous governments/organizations, is intended to guide future planning for Indigenous education. The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development is committed to ensuring:

- Indigenous students see their culture reflected in the provincial curriculum and resources
- Curriculum guides promote teaching methods that reflect Indigenous culture
- Indigenous ways of life are accurately and respectfully represented;
- the works of Indigenous artists, writers, and scholars are present in curricular materials and is reflected in the schools themselves; and
- Revised curriculum is infused with the history, traditions and contemporary culture of Indigenous peoples in order to enhance the educational knowledge and experiences of non-Indigenous students, address racism and build respect.

# Goals

The Indigenous Education Framework for Newfoundland and Labrador

- Supports culturally relevant and responsive educational opportunities for Indigenous students in K-12;
- provides direction for the revision of existing curriculum and the development of new curriculum that reflects the history, contributions, traditions and contemporary culture of Indigenous peoples in Newfoundland and Labrador and in Canada.

# Principles

There are seven guiding principles for Indigenous education in Newfoundland and Labrador:

## **Learning is Embedded in History**

Learning from Indigenous cultures requires learning the history of peoples of this land that is now Canada. This rich history is embedded in memory and passed down by oral stories.

- The oral tradition, still highly valued, includes narratives (or stories) that are used for such things as teaching skills, transmitting cultural values, conveying news, recording family and community histories, and explaining the natural world.
- History is represented in ceremonies, art, music, stories and artifacts.
- History is connected to place and transitions through time.

## **Learning is Embedded in Language**

Language is an intricate part of the cultural DNA of Indigenous peoples. Culturally relevant learning relies on or requires a complex engagement of learning language through immersion.

- Core Indigenous values are rooted in and expressed through language.
- Indigenous language can convey a sense of identity and connection to culture, ceremony and traditional values.
- The diversity of languages and language learning is supported.

## **Learning is Embedded in Culture, Traditions and Worldviews**

It is important to recognize the uniqueness of Indigenous cultural traditions and ways of knowing and being. Culturally relevant and responsive education is a way of bringing students, school and community relationships into a learning community of shared values and educational goals for more equitable educational outcomes for all students.

- These teachings are shared by Elders and traditional knowledge holders who are role models for learners.
- Cultural traditions and knowledge are the framework that guide a learner's understanding of the world.
- Understanding and respecting the differences in worldviews will foster relationship building between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people.

## **Learning Requires Exploration of Identity**

The inclusion of Indigenous perspectives and knowledge is based on the understanding that Indigenous perspectives and knowledge are a part of the historical and contemporary foundation of Newfoundland and Labrador.

- Integrating Indigenous knowledge, histories and values in curricula ensures that all learners can understand and respect cultural heritage of others, as well as their own.
- Students are entitled to an education that reflects the importance of learning in different ways, in different environments and about different worldviews.
- Students, seeking to learn more about Newfoundland and Labrador's Indigenous identity, are supported in becoming able learners who develop self-reliance, self-direction and leadership skills; taking responsibility for their own achievement; and using their strengths, skills, and interests to serve their families and communities.
- Students have equal access to an appropriate, culturally relevant, education program in an inclusive, respectful, age-appropriate environment.

## **Learning is Holistic, Responsive, Reflective, Experiential and Relational**

The Indigenous perspective is focused on connectedness, on reciprocal relationships, a sense of place, and that education is not separate from the rest of life.

- A holistic approach supports the physical, mental, social, emotional and spiritual aspects of the learner.
- Learning is adaptable and evolves with past and current trends. Traditions and new technologies are integrated into the pedagogy. Learning is responsive to student needs, interests, and capabilities.
- Reflection is integral to learning and inquiry leads to discovery and new learning.
- Reflection allows the learner to take time to process new information and create new meaning.
- Learning is experiential and hands-on. Learning happens in a variety of learning environments. Opportunities exist for land-based teachings and lived experiences. The use of traditional ecological knowledge along with lived experience allows for an interactive educational experience.
- Learning is relational. It builds connections between the learner and educator. The presence of Elders and Community adds meaning and relevance. Authentic connections nurture meaningful learning.

## **Learning Requires Collaboration**

Collaboration is essential at all levels to ensure student success.

- Respectful dialogue is necessary for successful collaboration.
- Engagement with Indigenous leaders and communities will ensure respectful dialogue and meaningful collaboration. The development of such relationships will increase the capacity to respond to the learning and cultural needs of students.
- Collaboration needs to be authentic, reciprocal, respectful, and long-term.
- Meaningful collaboration between Indigenous governments/organizations, provincial government school districts, parents, students and education partners is essential for student success.

## **Learning Acknowledges and Respects Indigenous Self-Determination**

- Indigenous groups are unique constitutional and government entities, and as such, can provide insight into education and learning.
- Indigenous groups are best positioned to guide Indigenous education. Meaningful dialogue with Indigenous governments/organizations and Elders will ensure an authentic representation of Indigenous values around teaching and learning.
- Education is a means for the Indigenous well-being through the celebration and respect of Indigenous cultures, languages, traditions and traditional knowledge.
- The cultural context builds the consciousness of the child and sets in place cognitive processes for learning and adaptability for Indigenous citizenship.
- Education is viewed as a process of human development reflective of the cultural and linguistic framework of Indigenous peoples.

# Conclusion

High expectations have been generated throughout Newfoundland and Labrador as a result of the Premier's Task Force on Education's examination of Indigenous education. The policy framework is intended to guide the Department's future activities on Indigenous Education.

The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development is committed to working with other Departments across government and Indigenous governments and organizations on ways to improve outcomes for Indigenous students in Newfoundland and Labrador; and leading direction for revision of existing curriculum and development of new curriculum that reflects the history, contributions, traditions, and culture of Indigenous peoples in Newfoundland and Labrador, and increasing all students' and educators' understanding of Newfoundland and Labrador's rich Indigenous history.





