

# Aboriginal Education

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Many years ago, classroom resources had few references to Aboriginal people or, if they did, it was often superficial or incorrect. As curriculum processes evolved, resources began to include some information *about* Aboriginal *people* but not how Aboriginal *perspectives and understandings* help us learn about the world and how they have contributed to a stronger society. Now, with the education transformation, the province is attempting to embed Aboriginal perspectives into all parts of the curriculum in a meaningful and authentic manner.

The province has long had the goal of improving school success for all Aboriginal students. To do this requires the inclusion of the voice of Aboriginal people in all aspects of the education system, increasing the presence of Aboriginal languages, cultures, and histories in provincial curricula, and providing leadership and informed practice.

The Ministry will proceed with these directions during the education transformation, looking to include Aboriginal expertise at all levels, ensuring that Aboriginal content is a part of the learning journey for all students, and ensuring that the best information guides the work.

## Implications for Curriculum and Assessment

The inclusion of Aboriginal perspectives and knowledge is based on the understanding that Aboriginal perspectives and knowledge are a part of the historical and contemporary foundation of BC and Canada. An important goal in integrating Aboriginal perspectives into curricula is to ensure that all learners have opportunities to understand and respect their own cultural heritage as well as that of others. Over the past decade, curriculum has integrated Aboriginal content into courses and grade levels. The education transformation work builds on what was learned and extends Aboriginal perspectives into the entire learning journey rather than in specific courses or specific grade levels. This means that from Kindergarten to graduation, students will experience Aboriginal perspectives and understandings as an integrated part of what they are learning. See curriculum guidelines and design principles in [Enabling Innovation: Transforming Curriculum and Assessment](#) and [Exploring Curriculum Design](#).

Aboriginal perspectives will also influence assessment practices. As curriculum content embeds Aboriginal knowledge and worldviews, how students will be assessed will naturally include the same understandings and knowledge. The Ministry has included experts in Aboriginal education in the early conversations on competencies, in the development of curricula, and in the discussion on the graduation program.

## Curricular Examples

The [First Peoples Principles of Learning](#) were considered by the teacher teams when drafting curricula and all curriculum teams included Aboriginal representation. Teams put great effort into embedding Aboriginal knowledge and worldviews in authentic and meaningful ways. Draft curriculum material has had initial reviews by the Ministry Aboriginal Education Branch as well as from Aboriginal teachers and other experts.

References to Aboriginal knowledge and worldviews are both explicit and implicit in the redesigned curricula and are evident in the rationale statements, goals, learning standards and some of the elaborated information (see below). Eventually, once developed, rich examples of teaching and learning

will be included on the website to show examples of relevant teaching units and place-based learning. A common theme running throughout all of the areas of learning is an encouragement to teach with respect to the place in which the students are – to teach from within the school and its outer community.

### **A sample rationale statement from Science**

“Science provides opportunities for us to better understand our natural world. Through science we ask questions and seek answers to grow our collective scientific knowledge. We continually revise and refine our knowledge as we acquire new evidence. Building on a foundation of respect for evidence, we are aware that our scientific knowledge is provisional and culturally-derived. Linking traditional and contemporary Aboriginal understandings and current scientific knowledge enables us to make meaningful connections to our culture, society, and everyday lives.

The curriculum takes a place-based approach. Students will develop place-based knowledge about the area in which they live, learning about and building on Aboriginal knowledge and other traditional knowledge of the area. This provides a basis for an intuitive relationship with and respect for the natural world, connections to their ecosystem and community and a sense of relatedness that would encourage lifelong harmony with nature.”

### **A sample rationale statement from English Language Arts**

“Students’ understanding of their world expands and deepens as they engage with a wide variety of non-fiction and fiction texts. They explore real and imaginary worlds through the analysis and creation of story. They learn to appreciate the importance of story in reflecting and shaping Canadian culture and worldviews, including those of Aboriginal peoples. Aboriginal worldviews are an integral part of the English Language Arts curriculum, as all students learn about themselves and others as British Columbians and Canadians. Students see their own diversity reflected in what they see and do, and they learn to recognize and respect a range of worldviews.”

### **A sample rationale statement and goal statement from Mathematics**

“Mathematics is integral to every aspect of daily life—social, economic, and environmental. It is part of the story of human history. First Peoples in British Columbia, like Indigenous people around the world, used and continue to use mathematical knowledge, skills, and attitudes to make sense of the world around them.”

- Goal: “explore how mathematics complements and includes other ways of knowing, including indigenous knowledge and other world views”

### **A sample goal statement from Social Studies**

- develop an understanding of the connections between the past, present, and future and the people, events, and trends that have shaped the development and evolution of societies, especially our own. A complete understanding of Canada’s past and present includes developing an understanding of the history and culture of Canada’s First Nations

### **Sample learning standards from English Language Arts**

- Appreciate the universal importance of story in Aboriginal and other cultures
- Demonstrate an understanding of how story supports the well-being of the self, the family, and the community in Aboriginal and other cultures

- Read, view, and listen to a variety of text types and genres, including those of Aboriginal origin

### **A sample learning standard from Science**

- Local Aboriginal teachings and stories about the sun and moon

### **A sample elaboration from Science**

- “The interactions between the lithosphere, atmosphere, biosphere and hydrosphere: “ The impact of human activities on the environment (e.g. deforestation, air pollution, coral reef destruction) can be understood through the analysis of interactions between the four Earth systems. Local Aboriginal teachings and stories about the Earth and the environment.”

## **Research and Resources**

There is a large body of research that supports the inclusion of Aboriginal content for all students. There are also Royal Commission recommendations as well as provincial, national, and international agreements that set the foundation for the integration of Aboriginal perspectives in the education transformation. For a place to start, here are some links on support materials, research, and agreements:

Shared Learnings (2006)

<http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/abed/shared.pdf>

Literature Review on Factors Affecting the Transition of Aboriginal Youth from School to Work (2013)

[http://www.cmec.ca/Publications/Lists/Publications/Attachments/298/Literature-Review-on-Factors\\_EN.pdf](http://www.cmec.ca/Publications/Lists/Publications/Attachments/298/Literature-Review-on-Factors_EN.pdf)

Enabling the Autumn Seed: Towards a Decolonized Approach to Aboriginal Knowledge, Language and Education (1998) <http://www.cbu.ca/mrc/autumn-seed>

Weaving Words: Enhancing the Learning of Aboriginal Students (Minerva Lecture Series) <http://www.ccl-cca.ca/ccl/Events/Minerva/PastLectures/PastLecturesWilliams.html>

The Royal Commission on Aboriginal People (1996)

<http://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/eng/1100100014597/1100100014637>

The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2008)

[http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/DRIPS\\_en.pdf](http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/DRIPS_en.pdf)