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# BLACKFOOT LANGUAGE AND CULTURE PROGRAM

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## A. PROGRAM RATIONALE AND PHILOSOPHY

Canada is home to various Native languages and cultures. Blackfoot, indigenous to Canada, is one of the two main languages spoken by the majority of Native Albertans.

Until the 1960s, when most Native children were still attending school on the reserves, there seemed to be no need for concern about Native children retaining their language. Large-scale student integration into provincial schools, however, has resulted in a drastic decline in the use of Native languages. The situation is particularly critical with the Blackfoot language.

If Native languages and cultures are not encouraged to flourish, they could be lost forever. In a world of technological extremes there is a need for the Native person to maintain his or her native language. It is a language completely of this hemisphere.

Blackfoot children need to see the reality of the Blackfoot people and culture as part of their formal education. They need to learn respect for the Blackfoot language and culture. The students will feel proud to speak the language because it has been elevated to its rightful status by becoming part of their school learning experience. By learning their own language, students will receive the power to view the world from a different perspective.

The language of Native people is the key element identifying them as Natives. Language is the one component of a culture tying every facet of that culture together. Teaching the Blackfoot language will ensure the preservation of a perspective and view of the world that is unique to Blackfoot-speaking people. If the Blackfoot language is not revitalized, the heart of the culture will be eradicated over time. It is not to the benefit of a society that prides itself in its multiculturalism that this be allowed to happen.

In traditional Blackfoot society, the process of transmitting language and culture took place in the home. The young learned life skills from observation, imitation and practice. Learning was a lifelong process in which supervision decreased as experience and proficiency grew. Children received all of their tribal education and socialization from older members of the extended family. Therefore, a functional approach to language learning allows for the involvement of Native community resource people. An effective Blackfoot program recognizes and uses the knowledge and wisdom of Native people, and allows them to be contributors to the educational endeavour.

The Blackfoot Language and Culture Program (Early Childhood Services–Grade 9) provides opportunities for developing and cultivating the unique talents, interests and abilities of students. Not only will the program revitalize the Blackfoot language, but it will also legitimize its study to members of Blackfoot communities.

The program will encourage Native parents to become involved in the education of their children. Grandparents, Elders and other community members will serve as resources for the implementation of the language and cultural content.

## B. GENERAL LEARNER EXPECTATIONS

General learner expectations designate the broad, long-range and significant outcomes desired from a program. It is expected that the Blackfoot Language and Culture Program will help students to become functional and contributing members of their Native community and of the greater society. By the end of Grade 9, students will:

1. Acquire basic communication skills in the Blackfoot language by:
  - 1.1 developing listening and speaking skills while understanding and using appropriate intonation, gestures and visual clues that help to convey the message
  - 1.2 developing reading and writing skills to a level determined by the local community.
2. Develop cultural sensitivity and enhance personal development by:
  - 2.1 becoming more aware of their cultural heritage through learning the Blackfoot language
  - 2.2 becoming aware of and appreciating, through instruction and direct experiences, the valuable contributions of Blackfoot people and Elders to society
  - 2.3 developing a positive attitude toward people who speak another language through exposure to the Blackfoot language and culture
  - 2.4 broadening perspectives to include the national and international scene (becoming aware of Native peoples around the world)
  - 2.5 developing a greater awareness and appreciation of various cultural values and lifestyles.
3. Develop originality and creativity in the Blackfoot language by:
  - 3.1 applying their skills to new and relevant situations
  - 3.2 expressing their own ideas and feelings
  - 3.3 discovering new dimensions of their personalities.
4. Acquire additional concepts and generalizations about language and language learning by:
  - 4.1 acquiring some knowledge of the structure and function of languages
  - 4.2 recognizing the basic structural similarities and differences between the Blackfoot language and English
  - 4.3 developing an awareness of regional, social and functional variations of spoken language
  - 4.4 developing a conscious knowledge of the skills and strategies used in learning a second language.
5. Develop a desire to extend or improve their proficiency in the Blackfoot language through further language study, whether for personal interest, for post-secondary studies or for vocational purposes.

## C. SPECIFIC LEARNER EXPECTATIONS

### PROGRAM CONTENT

The Blackfoot Language and Culture Program (Early Childhood Services–Grade 9), consists of two components: the linguistic component and the cultural component. Much of the content already has meaning for the students because it is part of their life experience. The traditional culture and legend components are also meaningful to the students because they refer to their cultural background.

Throughout the program, students will acquire basic communicative skills as well as language and culture proficiencies. Blackfoot attitudes and values, and a world view, are taught in context, not as separate units. Through repetitive and developmental processes, these skills will be practised in increasingly sophisticated ways, and with increasing depth and complexity in language usage and cultural behaviour.

### Linguistic Component

The language content lists what should be minimally expected at each level from students who begin the program completely unfamiliar with the Blackfoot language. The language content is defined according to functions (language uses) and notions (language concepts). Functions include such things as asking questions, reporting happenings and making corrections. Notions are linguistic concepts, such as time, location, direction, colour or frequency. The items listed under functions and notions are examples only. They are provided to guide teachers in selecting appropriate vocabulary. Appropriate substitutions may be made.

To facilitate the overlapping of language and cultural themes, there is no required order in which the language items are to be taught. All that is required is that a certain number of language items be covered during a year's work. A set number of language functions and notions should be repeated over and over in different themes/topics throughout the year. All language items are to be taught in the context of some thematic unit taken from the cultural content.

### Functions

#### A. Giving and Getting Facts

1. Identifying
2. Reporting, describing, narrating
3. Affirming, negating
4. Asking

#### B. Stating and Finding Out Attitudes

1. Agreeing and disagreeing
2. Denying
3. Accepting, declining, offering and inviting
4. Offering to do something
5. Stating/asking whether one knows or doesn't know
6. Stating/asking whether one remembers or has forgotten
7. Stating/asking about possibility or impossibility
8. Stating/asking about capability or incapability
9. Stating/asking whether something is logical
10. Stating/asking about certainty or uncertainty
11. Stating/asking about obligation
12. Giving/getting/withholding permission
13. Stating/asking about liking and disliking, pleasure and displeasure
14. Stating/asking about interest and disinterest
15. Stating surprise
16. Stating hope
17. Stating/asking about satisfaction or dissatisfaction
18. Stating disappointment
19. Stating/asking about fear or worry
20. Stating/asking about preference
21. Stating gratitude
22. Stating sympathy
23. Stating/asking about intention
24. Stating/asking about wants and desires
25. Apologizing and forgiving
26. Stating/asking about approval and disapproval
27. Stating regret
28. Stating indifference

### C. Getting Things Done

1. Suggesting action
2. Requesting/inviting others to do things
3. Advising others to do things
4. Warning others to take care
5. Instructing or directing others to do things
6. Offering or requesting assistance

### D. Socializing

1. Greeting
2. Meeting, introducing and identifying
3. Leaving people
4. Saying grace and other prayers
5. Acknowledging

## Notions

### A. Existential

1. Presence
2. Absence
3. Availability, unavailability
4. Possibility, impossibility
5. Occurrence (to happen), non-occurrence
6. Demonstrate (to show)

### B. Spatial

1. Location and relative position
2. Distance
3. Motion
4. Direction
5. Origin
6. Arrangement
7. Dimension
  - size and space
  - pressure and weight
  - volume
  - temperature

### C. Temporal

1. Point of time, period
2. Earliness
3. Lateness
4. Length of time
5. Speed
6. Frequency
7. Continuity

8. Intermittence, temporariness and permanence
9. Repetitiousness and uniqueness
10. Commencement
11. Cessation
12. Stability
13. Change, transition
14. Priority
15. Simultaneousness
16. Present, past, future reference
17. Delay

### D. Quantitative

1. Number
2. Quantity
3. Degree

### E. Qualitative

1. Physical
  - shape
  - moisture, humidity
  - visibility, sight
  - audibility and hearing
  - taste and smell
  - texture
  - colour
  - age
  - physical condition
  - accessibility
  - cleanliness and presentability
  - material and genuineness
  - fullness
2. Evaluative
  - value, price
  - quality
  - desirability, undesirability
  - rightness, wrongness, acceptability, unacceptability
  - correctness, incorrectness
  - successfulness, unsuccessfulness
  - utility, inutility
  - capacity, incapacity
  - facility, difficulty
  - importance, unimportance
  - normality, abnormality

### F. Mental

1. Reflection
2. Expression

## G. Relational

1. Action and event relations
  - agency (who)
  - objective (what)
  - dative (whom)
  - benefactive (receiver)
  - manner, means (how)
  - causative
2. Contrastive Relations
  - equality, inequality, correspondence and contrast
3. Possessive Relations
  - ownership, possession
4. Logical Relation
  - conjunction and disjunction
  - inclusion and exclusion
  - cause and reason
  - effect
  - purpose
  - condition
  - focusing

## Cultural Component

The cultural content presents Blackfoot culture as it is found in four contexts:

- the traditional culture, before the arrival of the Europeans
- legends
- the student's daily routines, including life at home, in the community and at the school
- contemporary Native cultural events and lifestyles.

### Traditional Culture

Traditional culture is taught primarily through the study of pre-contact culture. First, this is done to avoid confusion between the traditional culture as it existed prior to the arrival of the Europeans and the present Blackfoot culture. Second, it is hoped the students will gain a better understanding for and appreciation of the traditional culture, if it is studied as a whole way of life, such as existed in the pre-contact era.

It is expected that the curriculum developers for each community will go to their Elders to fill in the details of the broadly outlined traditional culture content. It is also expected that the Elders will be called upon to interact with the students when they are learning about contemporary Blackfoot knowledge.

Here it will be as important for the students to learn the proper respect for and behaviour toward Elders as it will be for the students to learn the language and other aspects of the culture.

The depth to which spiritual aspects of traditional culture are studied should be left to the discretion of the community, particularly to the Elders. There is no expectation other than to have certain rituals or ceremonies briefly mentioned in the classroom.

Though students will be learning about camp life and activities as practised hundreds of years ago, much of it may be familiar to them. Many will be familiar with the use of sweet grass, dancing and other aspects of camp life. For those students who have not been exposed to contemporary cultural activities, less time might be spent on the pre-contact culture content and more time spent on contemporary events, so as to give the students first-hand experience with the Blackfoot culture.

Sacred and public knowledge exists in all traditional Native cultures. Spiritual aspects and the private ownership of certain knowledge, such as songs, are sacred knowledge among the Blackfoot people. In the Blackfoot culture, to acquire and possess sacred knowledge is both a privilege and an honour. The right to certain sacred knowledge is to be earned through proper cultural channels. Knowledge may also be passed down to certain (special) individuals, from generation to generation.

Public knowledge is common knowledge and the public generally has open access to it. In some circumstances, only a certain person or group of persons possess the special right or authority to speak of or share their knowledge or area of expertise. It is left to the discretion of the individual whether or not he or she will provide this knowledge.

For example:

1. The mechanics of constructing a tipi are public knowledge, whereas the design on a tipi is “owned” by a certain individual. Therefore, only he or she has the “right” to use it, and to speak about it.
2. The fact that a Horn Society and a Women’s Society exist is public knowledge. As these societies are sacred and closed, one cannot encounter open discussion about them, nor would one ask questions about them.

Sacred knowledge and these “rights” must be respected by all individuals, Native and non-Native, and be treated appropriately by those involved in the Blackfoot program.

The Elders of a community, traditionally, are the keepers and transmitters of knowledge. It is through their own life experience and acquisition of knowledge that Elders are greatly respected. The young need to respect and recognize the important role the Elders play in their education.

### Legends

Legends can be used in the classroom to teach acceptable traditional attitudes and morals. They can also be used to teach about traditional culture. For example, the teacher may point out tools used, family relationships or songs in a particular legend, and have the students learn about them or learn the Blackfoot words for them as a follow-up activity. It is possible to use **only** legends in the classroom and teach all traditional culture through them, if the curriculum developer so wishes.

### Daily Routines

The daily routines are very broadly outlined in this guide to allow a maximum amount of freedom for the teacher, parents and students of each school to decide for themselves what is important and relevant in their daily lives and what to include in the curriculum. What is chosen will vary widely from school to school. It must be kept in mind that terms listed in the program guide under daily routine are suggestions only and meant to guide rather than restrict.

### Contemporary Blackfoot Events and Lifestyles

The items listed under Contemporary Blackfoot Events and Lifestyles are the minimal expectations in terms of items to be covered. It is up to the individual curriculum developers to decide what might be added to the list. If the students have not had these experiences, the teachers and the schools should make every effort to allow and/or encourage such experiences, either by taking the students out into a traditional environment or by bringing the activities into the schools.

## CULTURAL COMPONENT – SCOPE AND SEQUENCE

### ECS and

#### Division One: Focus on People and Their Activities

#### Division Two: Focus on Seasons and Activities

#### Division Three: Focus on Concepts and Activities

### 1. Traditional Culture →

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|--|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Grandfather/Grandmother (Elder)               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– giving advice in general, in particular</li> <li>– storytelling/teaching, name-giving</li> <li>– certain Elders have a special right to do something; e.g., name-giving, spiritual activities and guidance</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Father/Uncle (men)               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– hunting; shelter; raiding and warfare; name-giving; basic cooking skills</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Mother/Aunt (women)               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– foods; hides; domestic objects; medicine; fires; shelter</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Older Brothers and Sisters/Cousins               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– helping and learning from adults; behaviours and attitudes toward adults; rites of passage into adulthood</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Younger Brothers and Sisters               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– listening and learning; imitating adult roles; playing; singing; helping (young girls with women; young boys with men)</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Babies               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– care</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Together (all camp members)               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– travelling; camp; games and play</li> <li>– gatherings (many different camps): season; camping by clan; membership/relatives; spiritual activities</li> </ul> </li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Spring, Summer, Fall, Winter</li> <li>• Primary Seasonal Activities               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– hunting, gathering, fauna, flora</li> <li>– survival skills</li> <li>– gathering food and medicine</li> <li>– food preparation</li> <li>– sinews and hides: tanning, sewing</li> <li>– making of tools and weapons</li> <li>– making of domestic objects</li> <li>– caring for domestic animals</li> <li>– travelling</li> <li>– shelters</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Social and Spiritual Life               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– gatherings</li> <li>– legends and storytelling</li> <li>– ceremonies and rituals</li> <li>– singing, dancing</li> <li>– games and play</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Travel, Territory, Land               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– location of Confederacy tribes</li> <li>– location of enemy tribes</li> <li>– alliances</li> <li>– relationship with territory</li> </ul> </li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conserving Nature of Traditional Culture               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– respect for nature; knowledge of nature; little wastage; no hunting of dependent young; hunting only when required</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Ceremonies and Rituals Season               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– meaning and purpose; symbolism; treaties; kinship</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Blackfoot Philosophy and Spirituality               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– cycle of life; emotions; morals and values; mind, spirit and body; symbols</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Land and Territory               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– traditional use and concept of territory; travel routes; territorial boundaries; intertribal trade; treaty and land claim implications</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Camp Roles and Interactions               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– interaction and relationships; role of Elder and Chief; specialists; educating the youth; decision making</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Seasonal Calendar               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– role of seasons</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Gatherings               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– who, when, where, why and what they would do; relatives; ceremonies and rituals; drumming, singing and dancing; hand games and competition; storytelling</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Change               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– trading economy; settlers; government; treaties (with the arrival of the Europeans)</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Lifecycles               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– changes in lifetime; phases; rites of passage into adulthood</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Technology/Material Culture               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– personal adornment/clothing; hides; shelter; domestic objects; weapons; musical instruments; travel; medicine; food; material culture</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Differences in Native Cultures               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– comparison with different Native cultures</li> </ul> </li> </ul> |
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2. Legends

Attitudes, morals, values, beliefs

Regional legends in more depth  
Comparing legends with those of other Native cultures

3. Daily Routines

Home

- my house: eating, cleaning, chores, sleeping
- playing indoors; e.g., music, television, games, visiting and pretending
- playing outdoors; e.g., skating, hunting gophers, games

About the house, interaction with siblings, gatherings, television, visiting, interaction with adults, prayers

Interaction with siblings and adults; gatherings

School

- before school: riding the bus, preparing lunch
- about school: new school year, schoolwork, recess
- after school: chores, games

Awards day, open house, tournaments, intramurals, dances

4. Contemporary Blackfoot Events and Lifestyles

Seasonal ceremonies and rituals

Dancing

Native crafts

Survival skills

Drumming, singing and dancing

Preparation of memorial feast

Occupations of Native people

Contemporary hunting, fishing, farming

Summer activities (swimming, camp-outs, cookouts, visiting)

Intertribal gatherings (cultural, sports, etc.):

preparation, travel, arriving and leaving the event

## Required and Elective Components

The **required component** is comprised of the cultural and language content. It is expected that the curricula produced in the various regions will be based upon a thematic approach. All the themes will be based upon major thematic headings chosen from the cultural content of the program. All language will be taught through or within the cultural themes.

The content of the **elective component** will be determined by: a) the individual communities in keeping with the communities' values, needs, cultural and environmental differences; and b) the teacher, who knows the differing needs of his or her students.

The **elective component** will take into account:

- Students' need for **acceleration** and **enrichment** (students who are Native language speakers in a class of non-Native language speakers). These students could define and explore cultural topics of their own choice, research topics covered in class in more depth, or look into more topics than are covered in class. In terms of language, students can be required to gain facility with more difficult notions and functions and with literacy.
- Students' need for **remediation** (students who are behind the majority of their classmates). These students could be given extra practice with already learned language notions and functions by being given more concrete activities, structured activities and varied modes of communication, such as tapes, drama and music, interviews and student interaction.
- A community-expressed desire for more time to be spent with any one of the cultural components. For example, an urban school may want to spend more time with contemporary events due to the lack of student experience with those activities in their routine lives. On the other hand, a rural school may want to increase the time spent on traditional activities, such as tanning a hide.

- Other topics and activities of interest to the community.

Below is a list of suggested topics and activities that might be useful in choosing the elective component:

- language styles and language change
- language dealing with humour, insult and correction
- local history and important figures
- comparing and contrasting Native languages and cultures
- history since the arrival of the Europeans; change and impact of change
- cross-tribal exchanges
- pan-Indianism: borrowing, boundaries, essence of "Indianness"
- talks from "successful" Natives
- parental involvement in teaching, dancing, drumming and making costumes
- cross-tutorage: younger children being tutored by older people
- study of plants
- various treatments of legends: drama, puppetry, poetry, storytelling
- stereotypes
- contemporary issues: land claims, treaty rights, local control, alcoholism, suicide
- political issues: aboriginal rights, Canadian constitution, self-government.