

# Guideline to Working with Dakelh Elders and Knowledge Holders in Education



*“Anditdzin uk’uyalhduk bunde no tso tiyalh.”*  
*“Today a reader, tomorrow a leader.”*

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to thank NIB Trust Fund for making this document possible. It is our hope that this guideline supports the continued presence of Dakelh Elders and Knowledge Holders as ongoing Partners in Education for Reconciliation within our local schools. The *Guideline to Working with Dakelh Elders and Knowledge Holders in Education* is intended to facilitate respectful and meaningful engagement, but should not be considered an exhaustive guide as, even within our local Nations, there are cultural differences and preferences.

Thank you to local Elders, Knowledge Holders and educators for their open, informed and creative participation in this process:

**Hilda Scheilke**, *Yekooche First Nation Elder*  
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Finally, **NENACHALHYA** to the students, educators and support staff whose experiences in working with Elders and Knowledge Holders over the 2019-2020 school year informed this process and document.

***"This document must be considered a living document - regularly reviewed and updated."***  
**- Ruby Prince**

## INTRODUCTION

In 2019, Chuntoh Education Society secured funding through NIB Trust Fund to support the inclusion of Elders and Knowledge Holders as ongoing Partners in Education for Reconciliation within local schools. This funding also allowed for the development of a Guideline which would support these mutually beneficial relationships into the future. Francois and Ruby Prince, of NEYU Professional Services, were contracted to hold consultations and interviews, draft the guidelines, and ensure the cultural integrity of the project.

## CULTURAL CONTENT IN EDUCATION

When British Columbia's Ministry of Education released their new curriculum in 2016, it included First Nations content and competencies in every subject area, at every grade level. As **only Dakelh Elders and Knowledge Holders can authentically transmit Dakelh content**, this created questions around how educators could include Elders and Knowledge Holders to support these learning outcomes. Educators and administrators often have limited knowledge of local cultural protocols and procedures, while Elders and Knowledge Holders often have limited knowledge of western education practices and pedagogy.

The following working guidelines are intended to assist schools and communities in feeling more comfortable and knowledgeable when engaging local Elders and Knowledge Holders, and to support Elders and Knowledge Holders in feeling more welcomed and valued within educational institutions.

***“An Elder is someone who has respect for themselves and their community.”***  
***- Hilda Schielke***

## PROCESS

During the 2019-2020 school year, participants contributed to this document by attending focus group sessions and one-on-one interviews, and by providing feedback after school visits. Ten questions were collaboratively identified by participants. These questions were answered by each participant individually. Written and verbal answers were then compiled, and a consensus for working guidelines reached over three revision sessions.

Below is the list of questions which were identified to support the format of the guidelines:

1. Who is an Elder?
2. Who is a Knowledge Holder?
3. How does education extend an invitation to Elders and Knowledge Holders?
4. How does education respectfully host Elders and Knowledge Holders?
5. Is there room for Elders to be assisted by someone who is familiar to them?
6. What kind of aftercare will ensure the connection is continued?
7. What is the value of Elder and Knowledge Holder participation to educational institutions?
8. How do we determine if preparation time is needed and included in the honourarium?
9. How do we ensure that an honourarium is reasonable?
10. Who needs a criminal record check?

## BARRIERS

When working with Elders and Knowledge Holders in education, it is important to consider the barriers they may experience. Several barriers to participation were voiced, depending on the age and stature of the Elder or Knowledge Holder speaking:

1. They associate schools with feelings of abandonment and shame, due to Residential School experiences and/or experiences with institutionalized racism.
2. Once inside the four walls of a classroom, they feel they must automatically defer to an undefined “authority”.
3. They feel that their language, knowledge, and processes are not valued.
4. They are cautious or fearful around non-Indigenous persons and anyone in uniform.
5. They are intimidated by specialized western terminology and acronyms.
6. They may not say when they do not understand what is being said to or asked of them.
7. Reconciling differing worldviews
8. They may be unfamiliar with modern technologies or uncomfortable incorporating them into their cultural practices.

***“No Elder will ever complain.”***

***-Danny Alexis***

## HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Identifying Elders and Knowledge Holders required meaningful discussion and careful consideration of the many ways colonization has disrupted the intergenerational transmission of cultural knowledge:

1. Residential School experiences
2. Family separation
3. Intergenerational trauma
4. Influences of Catholic/Christian teachings
5. 1951 Cut-Off (Indigenous women stripped of title and/or status rights)
6. 60's Scoop (Indigenous children raised without any cultural teachings)
7. Non-Indigenous women receiving title and/or status rights through marriage
8. Trauma and stigma resulting from off-reserve cultural oppression, racial profiling and institutionalized racism
9. Blended families, resulting in very recent influence over or appropriation of cultural knowledge
10. Non-Indigenous Knowledge Holders who practice traditional seasonal harvesting practices that are not exclusively Indigenous (sewing, fishing, hunting, trapping, cooking, gardening, crafts, etc)
11. Technology alone should never be considered an authentic means of transmitting cultural knowledge (e.g., videos, apps).

It is also important to understand that there are currently three distinct generations of Elders and Knowledge Holders. Their age and experiences will be reflected in their perspectives, what they teach and how they teach:

1. Elders who lived on the land and did not attend Residential School: there are very few of these Elders remaining. We should be aware of the cultural revitalization responsibilities they have and do whatever we can to prevent and reduce physical and emotional fatigue.
2. Elders who were taken from reserves and forced to attend Residential School: many are still living and continuing their personal healing journeys. We should consider that this generation may be especially susceptible to emotional triggers when participating in in-school sessions. They may be more comfortable outside the four walls of the classroom.
3. Elders who did not attend Residential School and have incorporated modern tools and technologies in their traditional and cultural practices.

***“Repetition grows Elders.”***  
***- Francois Prince***

## DAKELH CULTURAL PROTOCOLS

Protocols are a vital part of cultural belief practices and need to be recognized as an authority over communication with and treatment of Elders and Knowledge Holders in every facet of life's journey - whether at home, in the community, or in the work environment. Protocols support cultural competencies by ensuring the relationship between Elders, Knowledge Holders and educational institutions is respectful and meaningful on both sides.

1. Extend invitations in person when possible.
2. Plan for physical needs and safety: facility layout, accessibility, temperature, washrooms, etc.
3. Meet them at the door and stay with them until they are settled into the teaching environment.
4. Offer a comfortable seat, a drink, and serve Elders first when food is provided.
5. Teachers should model and encourage attentive listening when an Elder is speaking.
6. Never interrupt an Elder.
7. Use clear, direct language when speaking with Elders; avoid the use of specialized western terminology or acronyms.
8. Be specific in your requests – they do not like to guess.
9. Keep two worldviews in perspective.
10. Long ago, all older people were called 'Utsoo (grandmother) or 'Utsiyan (grandfather).

*"You can't have culture without language, they go together."*

*Danny Alexis*

## GUIDELINES TO WORKING WITH DAKELH ELDERS AND KNOWLEDGE HOLDERS IN EDUCATION

### 1. WHO IS AN ELDER?

Elders are those who have respect for themselves and others.

- a. Need a familiar personal assistant in their work
- b. Need help with transportation and setting up a workspace
- c. May need physical accommodations and communication supports
- d. It is respectful that Elders be allowed to identify their own personal assistant, especially where they have selected someone to 'take their name', or apprentice their cultural practices.

- e. Their personal assistant can help with communication, planning for accommodations and clarifying the work requested.
- f. Many Elders fatigue quickly, so 1-3 hour sessions would be most appropriate.
- g. Elders are often set in their ways and have an expectation of 'understanding without saying'. When we invite Elders into schools, we are removing them from their context of holistic, cyclical, and repetition-based cultural teaching. They need to be allowed to present their teachings in their own ways, which may feel non-linear or incomplete to western educators.

## **2. WHO IS A KNOWLEDGE HOLDER?**

Knowledge Holders are those who have received extended, authentic, intergenerational transmission of knowledge, and who hold that knowledge for transmission to the next generation.

- a. Can work independently and usually without personal assistants
- b. May request help from teachers and students with such tasks as setting up, carrying supplies, etc.
- c. Can express needs and wants verbally without assistance
- d. Often are considered 'Elders in-training'
- e. Are able to read and write fluently
- f. In most cases will provide materials and supplies when requested

## **3. HOW DOES EDUCATION EXTEND AN INVITATION TO ELDERS AND KNOWLEDGE HOLDERS?**

Education may extend an invitation to Elders and Knowledge holders by personal invite and discussion of topics to be presented.

- a. Consider personal visits to Elders. Knowledge Holders may only require a phone call or email, depending on their digital fluency.
- b. Establish clear, supported communication - through a personal assistant for mediation and translation where necessary - defining the scheduled times, dates and topics.
- c. Ask about mobility needs and accommodations.
- d. Be direct with requested content expectations.

## **4. HOW DOES EDUCATION RESPECTFULLY HOST ELDERS AND KNOWLEDGE HOLDERS?**

When hosting, ensure the Elder or Knowledge Holder feels physically and emotionally supported in the workspace.

- a. Welcome the guest at the school entrance.

- b. Ensure mobility needs are met: consider stairs, elevator, distance, flooring, accommodations, etc.
- c. Ensure physical needs are met: temperature, beverage, snacks, washrooms, etc.
- d. Provide a comfortable working area: soft seating and flooring
- e. Seat the guest so the classroom door is visible to them and seat students in a circle (equal distance from guest) where possible.
- f. All materials needed for the class should be prepared and ready.
- g. Prepare students, ensuring they are mindful of the Dakelh meaning of respect: *awareness of and consideration for oneself and others.*
- h. Consider hosting Elders and Knowledge Holders in outdoor learning spaces whenever possible. This supports traditional land-based learning practices, encourages storytelling and is healing for all generations.

**5. IS THERE ROOM FOR ELDERS TO BE ASSISTED BY SOMEONE WHO IS FAMILIAR TO THEM?**

Elders and Knowledge Holders should be respected with the choice of a personal assistant for support where they feel it is necessary.

- a. The personal assistant should be identified and invited during the planning stage, so they may assist the Elder throughout the process.
- b. At the request of the Elder, a personal assistant may provide support with communications, on-site mobility, transportation, content preparation and delivery, and Elder advocacy.
- c. Some Elders and Knowledge Holders have identified an individual to ‘take their name’ or apprentice their cultural practices. Inclusion of these individuals not only provides support for the Elder or Knowledge Holder – it also supports authentic knowledge transmission and models intergenerational learning practices.

**6. WHAT KIND OF AFTERCARE WILL ENSURE THE CONNECTION IS CONTINUED?**

To ensure the connection to Elders and Knowledge holders is continued, schools can:

- a. Provide a simple gift of student-created drawings or cards.
- b. Educators can make a friendly follow-up call or visit to personally thank them for their participation.
- c. Schools can host an annual lunch in honour of all the Elders and Knowledge Holders who have participated in education for the year. This would help to build a positive, healing relationship between schools, families and communities.

**7. WHAT IS THE VALUE OF ELDER AND KNOWLEDGE HOLDER PARTICIPATION TO EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS?**

Dakelh Elders and Knowledge Holders are the only individuals who can authentically transmit Dakelh knowledge, providing:

- a. Hands-on First Nation teachings which are mandated by the BC Ministry of Education
- b. A comforting presence to First Nations students
- c. Cross-cultural learning opportunities for non-First Nations students
- d. A collaborative educational experience for educators
- e. A tangible connection between First Nations communities and educational institutions
- f. Reconciliation through teaching and understanding of First Nations cultural systems and beliefs
- g. Dissolution of systemic racial profiling

**8. HOW DO WE DETERMINE IF PREPARATION TIME OR MATERIALS SHOULD BE INCLUDED IN THE HONOURARIUM?**

Preparation time and materials should be discussed during the planning stages.

- a. Be mindful of preparation time, which will be determined by the needs and wants of the educational institution. Food, medicine, tools and ceremonial activities may require extensive preparation time and additional costs for material procurement, verses Residential School teachings, which may not require any additional preparation or materials.
- b. Intellectual properties and materials are based on a lifetime of training and practice. They require periodic maintenance, updating and duplication.

**9. HOW DO WE ENSURE AN HONOURARIUM IS REASONABLE?**

To determine a reasonable honourarium for Elders and Knowledge Holders:

- a. Consider and clearly state what the school can afford when extending an invitation.
- b. Elders should be revered higher than Knowledge Holders in all circumstances.
- c. Elders usually require a personal assistant.
- d. The workload of an Elder should never be more than one to three hours.
- e. Preparation time and material expenses should be considered.

- f. If the assistant is helping only with transportation for the day, \$50 should be considered; if they are helping with interpretations, delivery and flow of the class for the day, then \$100 should be considered.
- g. Travel and accommodations may be necessary for Elders and Knowledge Holders who leave their communities to participate.
- h. Consultations clearly identified the following honourarium recommendations:

| Time             | Elder   | Knowledge Holder | Personal Assistant |
|------------------|---|------------------|--------------------|
| 1 hr             | \$150   | \$100            | \$50-100           |
| ½ day            | \$250   | \$200            | \$50-100           |
| Full day         |   | \$350            | \$100-200          |
| Preparation time | Determined on case-by-case basis                          |                  |                    |
| Materials        | Determined on case-by-case basis                          |                  |                    |
| Travel           | CRA Mileage Rate  |                  |                    |
| Accommodation    | Hotel reimbursement <sup>OR</sup> \$50 for in-home billet |                  |                    |

- i. The honourarium should be paid via cheque, enclosed in an envelope with the Elder or Knowledge Holder’s name, at the end of the session.
- j. During the planning process it is vital that an honourarium is agreed upon and clarified with both parties. It may be helpful to use a document which outlines the terms and agreements, to support planning success (Appendix 1).

**10. WHO NEEDS A CRIMINAL RECORDS CHECK?**

To guarantee the safety of all parties, it is recommended that some Elders or Knowledge Holders complete a criminal records check (CRC), which is available for free through BC’s Criminal Records Review Program (CRRP) when:

- a. There is potential for the Elder or Knowledge Holder to be left alone with students.
- b. If there will be any physical contact between the Elder or Knowledge Holder and students.

- c. If the Elder or Knowledge Holder is invited to participate and you can guarantee a teacher or staff member will be present at all times, then a CRC may not be necessary.
- d. If an Elder or Knowledge Holder is being utilized by the educational institution on a consistent basis, then it is recommended there be a CRC to protect the school, staff, and students - as well as the Elder or Knowledge Holder.

***“An Elder is someone who is taught the old way.”***  
***- Leslie Prince***

## RECOMMENDATIONS

To continue valuable, meaningful collaboration between educational institutions and Elders and Knowledge Holders into the future, the following recommendations were discussed:

- 1) This document should be revisited at least every two years, to remain responsive and relevant.
- 2) Clearer definition and understanding of the effects of colonization and where First Peoples are in revitalizing their cultural beliefs and traditional practices.:
  - How and where they are taught
  - What was lost and will be lost
  - Impacts on future teaching practices
- 3) Supporting educational staff in understanding the effects of colonization on First Peoples through continued:
  - Consultation with Elders and Knowledge Holders
  - Cultural capacity-building workshops on Residential Schools
  - Understanding First Nations ways of teaching and learning
- 4) Addressing systemic racism
  - Understand the processes
  - Identify the effects
  - Break the cycle
- 5) First Nations protocols and principles research
  - General or area-specific
  - Their importance in authentic, respectful engagement
  - Setting the stage in institutions
- 6) Establish provincial education standards around Elders and Knowledge Holders in educational institutions and incorporate local guidelines into:
  - Integrated Resource Packages (IRPs)
  - District Policies and Protocols
  - Provincial and District budgets
  - Consultations with other First Nations and community partners

**“To be both respectful and meaningful, we must have a larger conversation with other Nations and include their input.”**

**- Francois Prince**

## RESOURCES

Many of the resources which are currently in use at our local schools are borrowed or adapted from other Nations. In reviewing locally relevant resources, we found many are in need of updating or expanding. There is clearly an urgent need to prioritize the updating of existing resources, the completion of in-progress resources and the creation of new resources.

1. **Carrier Linguistic Society**, 25 Kwah Rd W. Fort St. James BC VOJ 1P0, 250-996-2226
2. **Nak'azdli Natural Resources**, 27 Kwah Rd East Fort St. James BC, 250-996-0088
3. **Neyu Professional Services**, P.O. Box 1251 Fort St. James BC VOJ 1P0, 778-7-978-0253

[info@neyu.org](mailto:info@neyu.org)

4. **Tl'azt'en Natural Resources**, 82 Tache Reserve Rd. Tache BC, 250-648-3235

[tnnr@tlazten.bc.ca](mailto:tnnr@tlazten.bc.ca)

5. **UNBC Archives**, 3333 University way Prince George BC V2N 4Z9, 250-960-6603

[archives@unbc.ca](mailto:archives@unbc.ca)

**APPENDIX 1: INVITATION CHECK LIST**

|                 |                      |
|-----------------|----------------------|
| <b>School:</b>  | <b>Teacher:</b>      |
| <b>Address:</b> |                      |
| <b>Email:</b>   | <b>Phone Number:</b> |

|   |   |
|---|---|
| <b>Elder <sup>or</sup> KH:</b>  | <b>Date of visit <sup>or</sup> call:</b>  |
| <b>Address:</b>   |   |
| <b>Email:</b>   | <b>Phone Number:</b>  |
| <b>Cultural or Traditional Instruction requested:</b><br>_____<br>_____ | <b>Date:</b> _____<br><b>Time:</b> ____am/pm to ____am/pm<br><b>Student grade:</b> _____ & #: _____ |

|   |  |                             |
|---|--|-----------------------------|
| <b>Educational Expectations:</b>        |  | <b>Elder Support Needs:</b> |
|   |  |                             |
|   |  |                             |
| <b>Supplies needed for instruction:</b> |  |                             |
|   |  |                             |
|   |  |                             |

| Time   | Elders  | Knowledge Holder | Personal Assistant | Total     |
|--|---|------------------|--------------------|-----------|
| 1 hr   | \$150   | \$100            | \$50 - 100         | \$        |
| ½ day  | \$250   | \$200            | \$50 - 100         |           |
| Full day   |   | \$350            | \$100-200          |           |
| <b>Preparation Time</b>                            |   |                  |                    |           |
| <b>Materials</b>                                   |   |                  |                    |           |
| <b>Travel</b>                                      | _____ km at \$0.52 per km                                 |                  |                    | \$        |
| <b>Accommodations</b>                              | Hotel reimbursement <sup>or</sup> \$50 for in-home billet |                  |                    | \$        |
| <b>Total Elder or Knowledge Holder honourarium</b> |   |                  |                    | <b>\$</b> |

## A Story of Understanding

An Elder and a Knowledge Holder enter your school and there is no one to greet them. They stand in the hallway as teachers and students pass them by. They look for an office but do not know where to look, so they wander the halls for a few minutes, trying to get the attention of someone. A student passes by the Knowledge Holder, says, *“Hey!”*, and rushes by. A teacher passes by the Elder and the Elder says, *“Hello.”* The teacher says *“Hi,”* and keeps going.

Finally, a teacher says, *“Hi, can I help you? Who are you looking for?”* The Elder and Knowledge Holder sigh with relief. They explain that they are there to meet with Ms. Hearu. The teacher says, *“Okay, follow me and I’ll take you to the office where you can wait while I go and let her know you here.”* The Elder and Knowledge Holder follow and are told to be seated outside the office. The teacher goes into the office, then comes out and explains she will let Ms. Hearu know they are here.

The Elder and Knowledge Holder sit patiently for about 15 minutes, and another teacher comes out of the office and asks, *“Who are you waiting for?”* The Knowledge Holder says *“Ms Hearu. We have been waiting, but we do not know where to go.”* The teacher says, *“Oh, well I think she is in her classroom. Follow me, I’ll take you there.”* The Elder is getting tired and the Knowledge Holder is feeling a bit out of sorts, but they get up and follow the teacher down the hallway to Ms. Hearu’s classroom.

The teacher says, *“Here you are, enjoy your day.”* The Knowledge Holder peeks his head in the door and the classroom is full of students, but no teacher. The Knowledge Holder asks, *“Is this Ms. Hearu’s class?”* and the students say, *“Yes.”* With relief, the Elder and Knowledge Holder enter the room to find that Ms. Hearu is not in the class, and the students ignore them. The Elder asks, *“Will she be back soon?”* The students say, *“We don’t know, but probably.”*

A few minutes later, Ms. Hearu enters the room and says, *“Hi, I went to go see if you had gotten here yet!”* Relieved, the Elder and Knowledge Holder explain that it took them awhile to find her, with the help of two other teachers. Ms Hearu explains how happy she is and asks, *“So, should we get started?”*

The understanding in this very short story is that Elders and Knowledge Holders rarely complain and never ask too many questions. Often, we take for granted that people will say what they need and will know where to go. In our busy lives and jobs, we often overlook the simple things of taking time to really see and listen to others.

- What do you get from the story? What would you have done?

Written by Ruby Prince