



Employment and  
Social Development Canada

Emploi et  
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Canada



# Piloting a Holistic French Language Learning Program with Indigenous Learners

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# Overview

- The goal of this pilot project is to help First Nations, Inuit and Métis employees achieve a BBB level of proficiency in French and prepare them to use their second official language at work.
- Led by ESDC, this pilot is an interdepartmental initiative in response to the Deputy Minister Task Force on Reconciliation.
- ESDC has responded by drawing on the expertise of internal and external language learning and cultural experts. The training design adopts a holistic approach to language learning by integrating body, mind and heart relationships as well as an Indigenous cultural component. It is based on a model that emphasizes the oral tradition and incorporates three language-learning methodologies (neurolinguistic, communicative, and action-based). See Appendix A.



# Partnerships

- The role of ESDC is to monitor outcomes, and provide pedagogical guidance and administrative support.
- The University of Québec à Chicoutimi (UQAC) is our main partner for the design of learning materials and the delivery of the training to the pilot group.
- ESDC used the Exchanges Canada program to obtain the services of French teachers from UQAC.
- The program was developed in consultation with Federal partners.
- Internal and external partners include ESDC Indigenous Employees' Circle, Elders and a language didactician.



# Responding to the Pandemic

- The original intent was to deliver the pilot training in-person in the NCR.
- Due to restrictions imposed by the pandemic, the decision was made to still deliver the training on a full-time basis, but through a virtual platform.
- The switch to a virtual delivery made it possible for ESDC to expand to other regions and include employees across Canada. The learners in the project come from the NCR, Ontario, Western and Atlantic regions.
- The ESDC selection pool was large enough to create two control groups in addition to the pilot group. The control group learners are following a standard full-time training solution offered by the College@ESDC.



# Pilot Updates

- The pilot was launched on September 7<sup>th</sup>, 2021.
- The pilot group is composed of ten learners. They are testing a holistic approach and pedagogical activities adapted to Indigenous culture. The participants are progressing and have completed over half of their training.
- The control groups are composed of ten learners. The objective of the control groups is to compare the methodologies and activities of the pilot program with standard training solutions in order to identify best practices in language learning.
- ESDC is gathering feedback from the pilot and control groups. This will continue throughout the duration of the training program.



# Next Steps

- During the winter of 2022, a mid-term evaluation is being carried out to provide information on the results of the first part of the pilot training program.
- In autumn of 2022, when all groups have finished their training, an analysis measuring the effectiveness of curriculum activities, the new approach, and the new methodologies will be completed.
- ESDC wishes to share best practices in terms of adaptations at the interdepartmental level.
- Lessons learned from the way Indigenous people learn, (culture focused on oral tradition), as well as adaptations of the program to Indigenous culture, will allow for the improvement of language training programs for all public servants.



# Questions & Comments



# Appendix A

## **Holistic Elements as implemented by the teachers:**

- A holistic approach places emphasis on the whole person and takes into account the mental, social, emotional, physical, spiritual, creative needs of the learner, etc. This approach is based on cultural security and emphasizes the importance of the bond of trust between learners and teachers.
- The teachers' role is to guide the learners; they consult with learners who become involved in their own learning; learners are on an equal footing with teachers (mutual respect).
- Teachers consult learners on the creation of activities; what they find difficult, what could help them; this helps to create a group spirit.
- Teachers use activities with an Indigenous perspective & activities that target all aspects of the person (e.g. sharing personal objects, talking about themselves; getting to know others; engaging emotions and senses e.g. guided relaxation, storytelling; engaging other modes than the cognitive mode; playful activities, yoga, movement, etc.)
- Teachers try to motivate the learners beyond language; the language becomes a tool and they forget that they are learning.
- Teachers choose themes and activities that are meaningful to the learners; they also adapt existing exercises (from PFL2) to what the learners are living/experiencing.
- Students learn by observing and doing (modeling / neurolinguistic strategies) – teachers give preference to authentic communication, work a lot with dialogues, contextual elements and concrete application of knowledge and skills (at this level the PFL2 is more mechanical and lacks context).

