

CULTURAL APPROPRIATION & APPRECIATION IN THE EARLY YEARS

A Guiding Document

February 2026

Métis Nation
of Ontario 

The Purpose of this Document

This guidance document supports early childhood educators in respectfully integrating Métis culture into early learning environments. It offers practical tools to help educators build cultural appreciation, avoid cultural appropriation, and create culturally safe spaces where Métis children feel seen, valued, and connected to their identity.

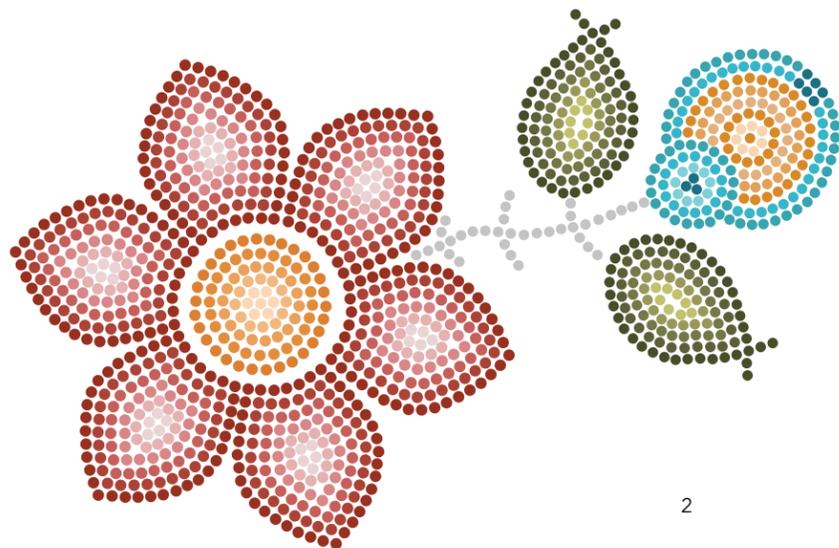
Key Concepts at a Glance

Métis Cultural Appreciation: Respectfully learning about and integrating Métis culture, language, stories, and practices with guidance from Métis people and the Métis Nation of Ontario (MNO). Appreciation is grounded in relationships, consent, and the use of authentic, community-approved resources.

Cultural Appropriation: Using Métis cultural elements—such as symbols, stories, clothing, or practices—without permission, context, or accuracy. Appropriation often occurs when cultural items are used for decoration, entertainment, or generic “Indigenous themes,” or when Métis content is taught without Métis involvement.

Cultural Safety: Creating learning environments where Métis children and families feel respected, represented, and protected from stereotypes, misrepresentation, or harm.

Authentic Resources: Materials created or approved by Métis people, Knowledge Holders, or the MNO. Authentic resources accurately reflect Métis identity, history, and ways of being with cultural integrity.



Role of MNO Early Learning and Child Care Staff

The Education and Training Branch supports Métis learners and families across the lifespan through a continuum of culturally grounded programs and services. Within this continuum, Early Learning and Child Care (ELCC) plays a foundational role. ELCC is where Métis children first encounter learning environments outside the home, and where identity, belonging, and cultural pride begin to take shape. ELCC ensures that Métis children and their families experience learning spaces that reflect, affirm, and honour who they are.

Within this broader mandate, ELCC programs specifically aim to increase access to culturally grounded early learning experiences for Métis children, families, and communities. Through specialized early childhood resources, knowledge-sharing opportunities, and collaborative partnerships, staff help young children and their caregivers build a deeper understanding of Métis culture, traditions, and identity. These efforts also support early childhood educators, community partners, and service providers in learning to respectfully integrate Métis perspectives into their programs.

Staff bring extensive expertise in designing early learning content that meets the developmental needs of Métis children and supports families in culturally meaningful ways. All ELCC materials undergo internal MNO review processes and are approved by the appropriate MNO teams to ensure accuracy, cultural integrity, and alignment with organizational messaging. This collaborative approach reflects the Education and Training Branch’s commitment to high-quality, culturally relevant programming across all early childhood settings.

All staff are encouraged to feel confident sharing information, insights, and questions throughout the development of ELCC programs and resources. Asking questions, offering alternative ideas, and seeking clarity are essential parts of culturally grounded program design—especially in early learning, where relationships, curiosity, and responsiveness guide practice. Engaging in discussions about Métis culture, including asking questions and contributing ideas, is not cultural appropriation; it is a necessary part of respectful learning and collaborative development. Staff are supported in seeking guidance from other branches and teams, such as Culture and Way of Life or Métis Language Initiatives, to ensure that ELCC programming reflects Métis knowledge, values, and ways of being.



MÉTIS CULTURAL APPRECIATION

Cultural appreciation in early learning and child care means respectfully learning about, valuing, and integrating Métis culture, language, stories, and practices, guided by Métis people and grounded in community authority. This approach honours the distinct identity, history, and rights of the Métis Nation (*Métis Nation of Ontario, 2017; Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015*).

Cultural appreciation requires relationship-building, consent, and the use of authentic, community-approved resources to ensure that Métis children “see themselves reflected in learning resources and spaces.” That cultural knowledge is shared accurately and respectfully (*Métis Nation of Ontario, 2017*).

These practices align with broader Indigenous education principles that emphasize respect, relevance, reciprocity, and responsibility in engaging with Indigenous knowledge systems (*Canadian Council on Learning, 2007; Kirkness & Barnhardt, 1991*).

Why this definition fits ELCC

The Métis Nation of Ontario emphasizes that ELCC environments must be rooted in Métis knowledges, cultures, and languages, and that cultural content must be created or approved by Métis people to ensure authenticity and respect (*Métis Nation of Ontario, 2017*). This aligns with broader Indigenous education principles that emphasize cultural integrity, community authority, and respectful engagement with Indigenous knowledge systems (*Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015*).

Cultural appreciation is a respectful, relational process of learning from and engaging with Métis people, knowledge, and cultural expressions in ways that promote understanding, connection, and reciprocal relationship-building. It involves approaching Métis culture with humility, curiosity, and care, and recognizing that Métis knowledge is held within families, communities, and generations (*Simpson, 2014; Styres, 2017*).

By authentically using reputable MNO resources, as well as works by Métis authors, artists, Knowledge Holders, and educators, individuals and partners can honour the beauty, diversity, and resilience of Métis traditions. Cultural appreciation requires acknowledging the origins, meaning, and cultural significance of Métis practices and teachings, and seeking guidance from Knowledge Holders or designated MNO branches or teams whenever possible (*Canadian Council on Learning, 2007; Kirkness & Barnhardt, 1991*).

Practicing cultural appreciation ensures that educators, partners, and service providers have the tools, knowledge, and relationships needed to understand Métis identity and traditions. This supports the creation of learning environments and programs where Métis ways of knowing, being, and doing are embedded with integrity, respect, and cultural safety (*Derman-Sparks & Edwards, 2010; Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015*).

Cultural Appreciation Checklist

Before planning any activity involving Métis content, ask:

- **Is this resource Métis-authored or MNO-approved?**
- **Do I understand the meaning and context?**
- **Is this activity culturally safe and respectful?**
- **Does it reflect Métis ways of knowing, being, and doing?**
- **Are Métis children represented authentically?**
- **Have I avoided stereotypes or generalizations?**

If unsure, pause and seek guidance.

Our website has several resources for your reference: www.metisnation.org



MÉTIS CULTURAL APPROPRIATION

Cultural appropriation in ELCC refers to using Métis cultural symbols, stories, clothing, language, or practices without permission, proper understanding, or community guidance—particularly when these elements are taken out of context, misrepresented, or used for decoration, entertainment, or curriculum “themes.” In ELCC settings, this includes non-Métis educators creating or teaching Métis cultural content without Métis involvement, or using stereotyped or inaccurate representations that disconnect cultural elements from their meaning and living community (*Métis Nation of Ontario, 2017; Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015*).

This understanding aligns with Indigenous cultural safety guidance, which emphasizes that educators must avoid practices that misuse or distort Indigenous cultures and instead adopt culturally safe, community-led approaches (*Government of British Columbia, 2020*). Cultural safety frameworks highlight the importance of relationship-building, community authority, and respectful engagement with Indigenous knowledge systems to ensure that cultural teachings are represented accurately and with integrity (*Canadian Council on Learning, 2007; Kirkness & Barnhardt, 1991*).

Cultural appropriation occurs when elements of Métis culture, knowledge, or resources are used without respect, understanding, or acknowledgment of their significance. It involves taking cultural practices, teachings, symbols, or materials out of context, presenting them as one’s own, or using them in ways that disconnect them from Métis people, history, and way of life (*Métis Nation of Ontario, 2017; Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015*). Appropriation can also occur when individuals or organizations benefit financially, professionally, or socially from the misuse or misrepresentation of Métis cultural knowledge (*Kirkness & Barnhardt, 1991*).

Cultural appropriation occurs when external educators, partners, or institutions use Métis resources inaccurately, without proper attribution, or in ways that distort or oversimplify Métis identity, traditions, and perspectives. Sharing incorrect information, plagiarizing content, or failing to acknowledge the source of Métis knowledge contributes to misinterpretation and reinforces harmful stereotypes (*Canadian Council on Learning, 2007; Derman-Sparks & Edwards, 2010*).

Cultural appropriation also happens when Métis culture is treated as a generic Indigenous identity, when teachings are taken without permission or relationship, or when cultural expressions are used without engaging the appropriate MNO branches or teams, Knowledge Holders, or community-approved resources. These actions undermine Métis self-determination and disconnect cultural knowledge from the people to whom it belongs (*Simpson, 2014; Styres, 2017*).

By contrast, respectful engagement requires accurate attribution, relationship-building, and the use of authentic, community-approved materials. Ensuring that Métis culture is represented with integrity protects the rights, histories, and voices of Métis people and supports culturally safe learning environments across all MNO programs and partnerships (*Métis Nation of Ontario, 2017; Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015*).

Red Flags for Cultural Appropriation

- **“Indigenous” or “Métis-inspired” crafts**
- **Replicating cultural items (e.g., sashes, beadwork)**
- **Teaching Métis stories without permission**
- **Using inaccurate or stereotyped images**
- **Treating Métis culture as a theme or costume**

Cultural Appreciation through an early years lens

Introducing culturally rich learning experiences in the early years begins with understanding how young children learn best. Research in early childhood education shows that young children construct knowledge through hands-on, experiential exploration (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014; Piaget, 1952). These active forms of learning deepen their understanding of the natural world, strengthen problem-solving and critical-thinking skills, and support holistic development (Katz & Chard, 2000; Vygotsky, 1978).

When children engage in practical, sensory-rich experiences, learning becomes relevant, concrete, and meaningful (Dewey, 1938; Montessori, 1967). They develop curiosity, confidence, and the ability to connect what they see, feel, and know. This approach is critical when introducing Métis-specific culture into early learning environments. The vision of the ELCC program is to offer authentic, culturally grounded experiences that help educators and children build a deeper understanding of Métis culture, traditions, and practices, creating lasting meaning. These experiences bring Métis ways of knowing, being, and doing to the forefront of children's learning.

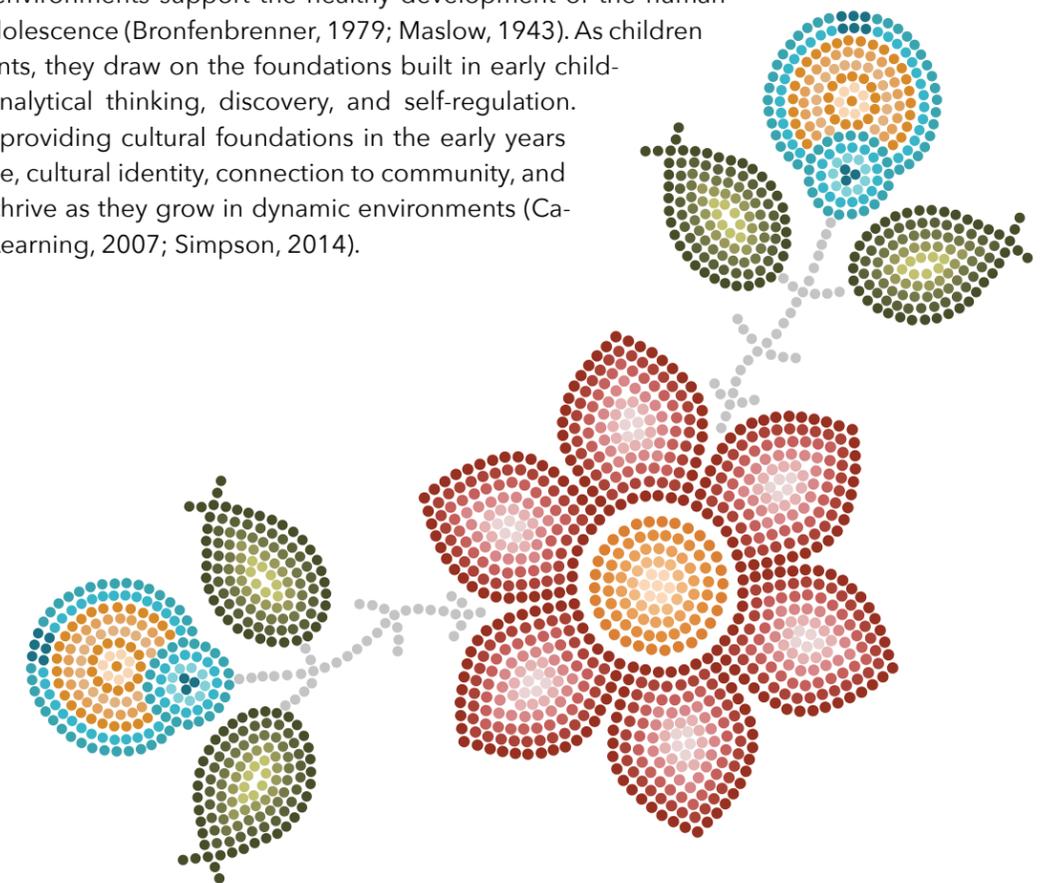
For Métis children, seeing their culture reflected in stories, materials, language, and daily experiences nurtures pride, a sense of belonging, and a strong identity (Canadian Council on Learning, 2007; Kirkness & Barnhardt, 1991; Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015). For all children, learning about Métis perspectives promotes diversity, empathy, and respect for many ways of being in the world (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Maslow, 1943). When children feel seen, valued, and respected—and when relationships form the foundation of learning—they are better positioned for future academic and personal success.

The ELCC vision is grounded in a research-informed blend of play-based and land-based learning, supported by well-established child development theories (Simpson, 2014; Styres, 2017). These include Piaget's stages of cognitive development, Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, Vygotsky's concepts of scaffolding and the Zone of Proximal Development, and Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. Together, these theories reinforce the ELCC framework for integrating Métis knowledge into early learning environments in ways that honour children's developmental needs and cultural identities (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Maslow, 1943; Piaget, 1952; Vygotsky, 1978).

Why do the early years matter?

The early years are a powerful time to introduce children to diverse cultures and perspectives in ways that build respect and inclusion. Research in early childhood education shows that young children develop understanding through relationships, a sense of belonging, and exposure to meaningful cultural experiences (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014). Embedding the Métis way of life authentically in the learning environment fosters identity, belonging, and community, especially for Métis children (Métis Nation of Ontario, 2017). When Métis culture is meaningfully integrated into the curriculum—not as a one-time activity, but as an ongoing part of the learning process—it helps create an inclusive learning environment that fosters empathy, cultural awareness, and respect for diversity (Derman-Sparks & Edwards, 2010; Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015).

Establishing a foundation of learning the Métis way of life in early childhood is essential for scaffolding more complex cognitive, emotional, and academic development during the middle and teenage years. Developmental theorists emphasize that early experiences shape the brain's capacity for later learning, self-regulation, and problem-solving (Piaget, 1952; Vygotsky, 1978). The development and understanding of cultural awareness within stable, safe environments support the healthy development of the human brain throughout adolescence (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Maslow, 1943). As children grow into adolescents, they draw on the foundations built in early childhood to support analytical thinking, discovery, and self-regulation. For Métis children, providing cultural foundations in the early years increases confidence, cultural identity, connection to community, and the opportunity to thrive as they grow in dynamic environments (Canadian Council on Learning, 2007; Simpson, 2014).



Aligning Métis ELCC with Ontario's Early Years Frameworks

The Ministry of Education's Early Years Frameworks—*How Does Learning Happen? (HDLH)*, *Early Learning for Every Child Today (ELECT)* and the *Full-Day Kindergarten Program (FDK)* share a common vision for children's learning and development. Collectively, they emphasize four foundational pillars: Belonging, Well-Being, Engagement, and Expression.

The ELCC program and services teams design Métis-specific programming that both supports and enriches these pillars by embedding Métis identity, culture, and ways of knowing into early learning environments. This work aligns with Ontario's ELECT's developmental domains and the FDK framework while offering culturally grounded experiences that deepen children's understanding of Métis perspectives and strengthen their sense of belonging and connection.

Through this approach, ELCC programs and services ensure that all children experience meaningful, developmentally responsive, and culturally rooted early learning that aligns with Métis ways of knowing and Ontario's early learning frameworks.

Foundation of Learning (HDLH pillar)	Definition (Ontario's description)	How it Supports Métis Cultural Appreciation (ELCC-specific application)	Extending Connections to ELECT & FDK (Curriculum alignment)
Belonging	Every child has a sense of belonging when they are connected to others and contribute to their world	Embedding Métis stories, language, music, and symbols helps Métis children feel seen, valued, and represented	ELECT Social: Relationships, inclusion, social responsibility Physical: The senses
		Engaging Métis Knowledge Holders and community members fosters authentic relationships and intergenerational learning	Emotional: Sense of self, autonomy, identity formation
		Creating inclusive spaces where all children learn to respect and appreciate Métis identity and diversity	FDK Belonging & Contributing: Connectedness to others, community, and the natural world
Well-Being	Every child is developing a sense of self, health, and well-being	Celebrating Métis identity supports emotional security, pride, and confidence	ELECT Physical: Self-care, safety, physical activity, self-regulation Physical: The senses
		Land-based practices, jigging, fiddle music, and traditional foods promote holistic wellness and connection to culture	Emotional: Sense of self, autonomy, identity formation
		Métis storytelling and relationships to land nurture emotional regulation and grounding	FDK Self-Regulation & Well-Being: Managing emotions, health, and physical well-being

Foundation of Learning (HDLH pillar)	Definition (Ontario's description)	How it Supports Métis Cultural Appreciation (ELCC-specific application)	Extending Connections to ELECT & FDK (Curriculum alignment)
Engagement	Every child is an active, engaged learner who explores the world through body, mind, and senses	Hands-on Métis art forms (beading, sash weaving, jigging, fiddle music) deepen sensory learning and creativity	ELECT Cognitive: Curiosity, problem-solving, inquiry, early numeracy
		Land-based exploration grounded in Métis relationships to place fosters curiosity and inquiry	Physical: The senses Emotional: Sense of self, autonomy, identity formation
		Inquiry into Métis history, traditions, and ways of knowing encourages critical thinking and respectful exploration	FDK Demonstrating Literacy & Mathematics Behaviours: Patterns, symbols, early reading and writing Problem Solving & Innovating: Critical and creative thinking through hands-on exploration
Expression	Every child is a capable communicator who expresses themselves in many ways	Métis storytelling, dance, music, and visual arts offer rich avenues for communication and identity expression	ELECT Communication, Language & Literacy: Expressive/receptive language, emergent literacy, multiple forms of communication
		Celebrating the Michif language supports language development and cultural continuity	Cognitive: Representation Emotional: Sense of self, autonomy, identity formation
		Multiple forms of expression—movement, song, art, oral storytelling—connect children to Métis culture and to one another	FDK Demonstrating Literacy & Mathematics Behaviours: Language, art, drama, music, symbolic representation Demonstrating Literacy & Mathematics Behaviours: Oral, written, visual, digital, and symbolic communication

Sample Scenarios

Scenario 1 – Appreciation

An educator uses an MNO-approved children’s book about Métis identity and invites children to explore colours and patterns inspired by the land. The educator checks with MNO staff to ensure accuracy.

Why this works: Authentic resource, respectful integration, relationship-based.

Scenario 2 – Appropriation

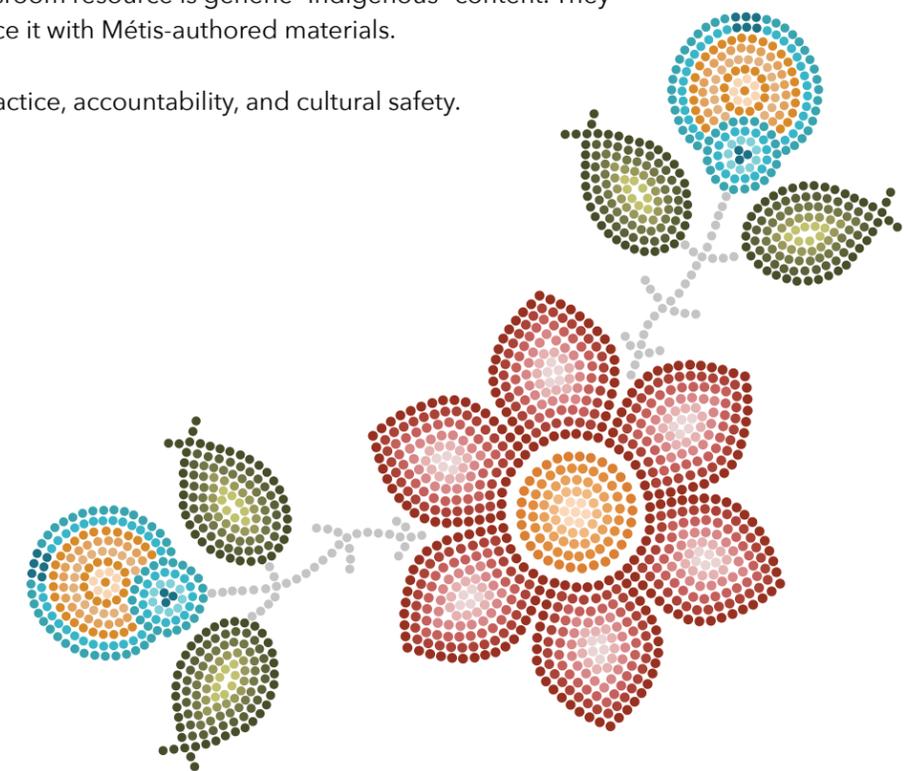
A classroom uses yarn to create “Métis sashes” as an online craft activity.

Why this is harmful: Sashes are cultural items with deep meaning; crafting replicas without context or permission is appropriation.

Scenario 3 – Correcting a Misstep

An educator recognizes that a classroom resource is generic “Indigenous” content. They remove it, consult MNO, and replace it with Métis-authored materials.

Why this is positive: Reflective practice, accountability, and cultural safety.



Appreciation vs. Appropriation Examples

The examples provided in this section are intended to demonstrate ways to incorporate Métis culture and way of life into early learning environments. The examples provided can be used across different activities and are not exclusive to any one scenario.

Do not Do This (Appropriation)	Do This Instead (Appreciation)	Connection to: "How Does Learning Happen?"
Use Métis-inspired art (e.g., dot art, paper sashes) without context or explanation	Invite a Métis Knowledge Holder or use MNO-developed resources to share the meaning and significance of the art form	Belonging and Engagement: Children connect to authentic cultural meaning and build respectful relationships
Tell a Métis traditional story as a non-Métis educator without permission or cultural context	Use Métis-authored picture books, MNO-published materials, or invite a Métis storyteller to share stories following proper protocol	Expression and Engagement: Children hear authentic voices and connect deeply with cultural narratives
Celebrate Métis culture only during Indigenous Peoples Day or special events	Integrate Métis perspectives, materials, and teachings throughout the year in everyday learning experiences	Belonging and Engagement: Métis children see themselves reflected year-round; all children learn through continuity
Use pan-Indigenous songs, symbols, or teachings without knowing their source	Seek Métis-specific songs, language resources, and teachings with guidance from the MNO or Métis Knowledge Holders	Expression and Engagement: Children explore culture with accuracy and respect for its uniqueness
Teach about Métis culture without consulting the community or using Indigenous-created materials	Build reciprocal relationships with local Métis councils, families, and community partners to guide program decisions	Belonging and Well-Being: Children benefit from culturally safe environments grounded in genuine partnerships

Ways to Appreciate Métis Culture in the Early Years

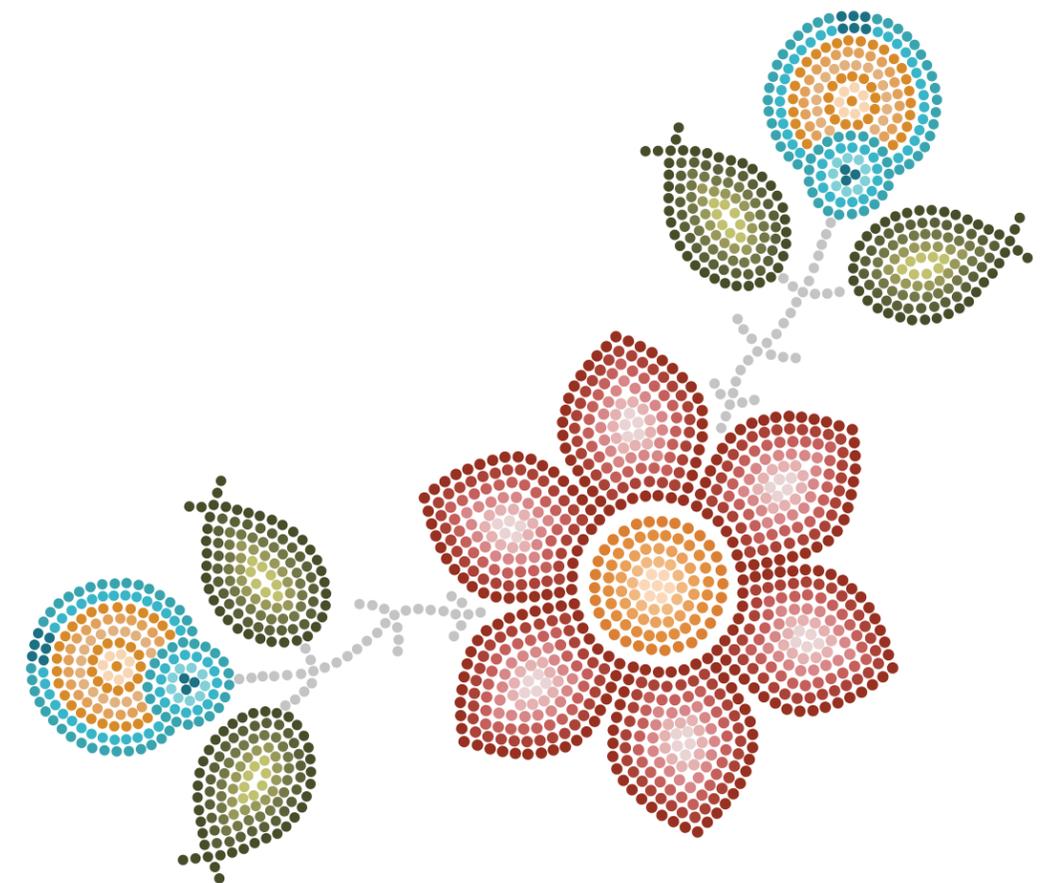
Genuine appreciation is relational, reciprocal, and community-informed. It is not only what you teach, but how you teach it, who you learn from, and why it matters. The examples below offer meaningful ways to integrate Métis culture and way of life into early learning environments.

What to Do	How
Build relationships with local Métis communities.	<p>Invite Métis artists, musicians, storytellers, or Knowledge Holders to share their teachings</p> <p>Partner with your local MNO office to guide cultural programming and ensure accuracy</p> <p>Attend community events when appropriate to build reciprocal relationships</p>
Use authentic Métis books and storytelling.	<p>Create a classroom library featuring Métis-authored children's books and MNO-published resources</p> <p>Include Michif words during story time, using the MNO's pronunciation and translation guides</p> <p>Share stories in ways that honour authorship, protocol, and cultural meaning</p>
Incorporate Métis music and dances.	<p>Play Métis fiddle music during movement time or transitions and teach simple jigging steps</p> <p>Invite a Métis fiddler or dancer, or use MNO-approved videos to demonstrate Métis dance forms</p> <p>Explore rhythm sticks or spoons to engage children in hands-on Métis musical traditions</p>

What to Do	How
Explore Métis art and symbolism.	<p>Introduce dot painting or other Métis art forms only after reading Métis-authored books and discussing cultural significance</p> <p>Display the Métis sash and explain its colours, uses, and history; offer weaving activities that reinforce meaning</p> <p>Use natural materials (dyes, beads, textures) to create land-based art connected to Métis relationships with place</p>
Engage in Métis-informed land-based learning.	<p>Go on nature walks using a Métis lens to explore plants, animals, and seasonal cycles</p> <p>Learn about respectful harvesting, traditional Métis food practices, and the importance of land in Métis history</p> <p>Invite local harvesters or Captains of the Hunt to share knowledge</p>
Centre Métis identity in the learning environment.	<p>Include visual representations such as Métis flags, artwork, images of historic and contemporary Métis people, and Michif language labels</p> <p>Celebrate Louis Riel Day (Nov. 16) with age-appropriate learning about his role in Métis history</p> <p>Recognize Métis Days of Significance using MNO-approved resources</p>
Support educator learning and reflection.	<p>Engage in professional learning on Métis history, identity, and culture through ELCC training opportunities</p> <p>Reflect as a team: Are we using Métis resources respectfully? Are we centring Métis voices? Are we fostering cultural safety?</p> <p>Develop an ongoing appreciation/appropriation plan to integrate Métis culture meaningfully throughout the year</p>

Conclusion

Métis cultural appreciation in early learning is an ongoing, relational practice grounded in respect, reciprocity, and community guidance. By using authentic resources, seeking support from the Métis Nation of Ontario, and centring Métis voices in program decisions, educators help create learning environments where Métis children feel pride, a sense of belonging, and a sense of cultural safety. This guiding document is a starting point—its strength comes from how it is lived each day through relationships, reflection, and a shared commitment to honouring Métis identity and ways of being.



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