

MAKING INDIGENOUS-LED EDUCATION A PUBLIC POLICY PRIORITY:

The Benefits of Land-Based Education and Programming

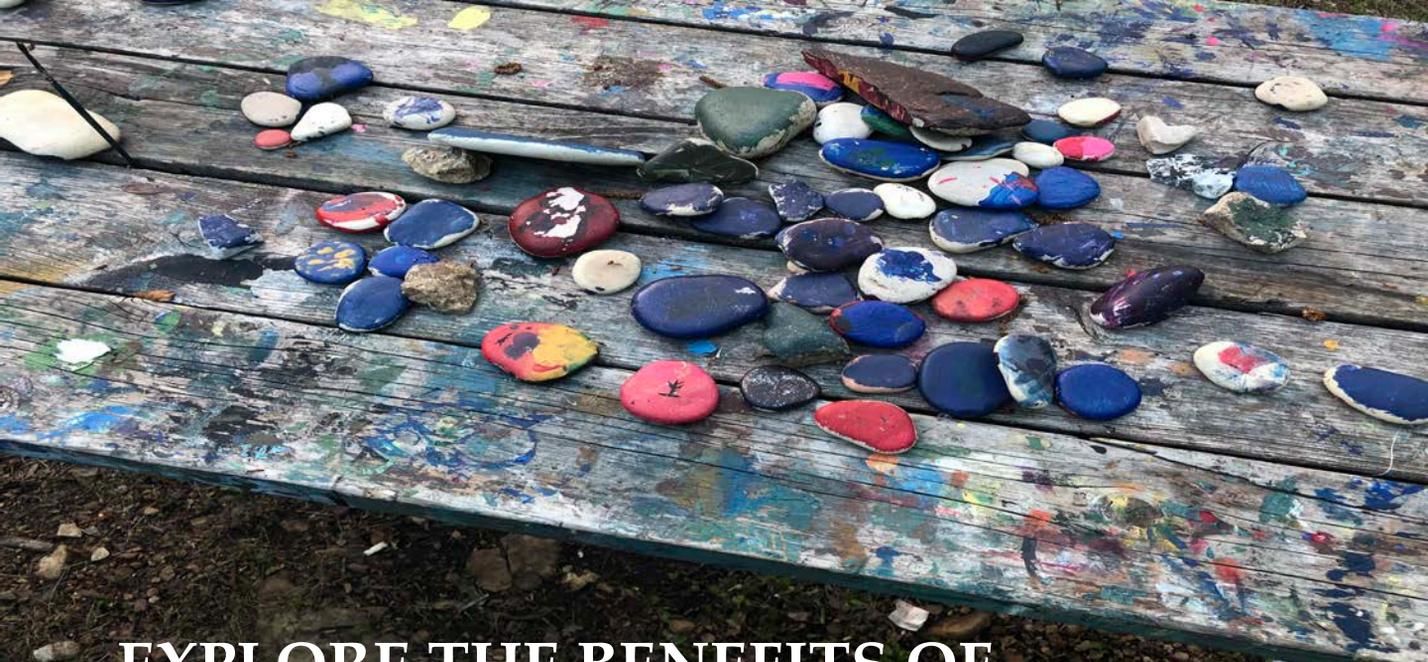


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EXPLORE THE BENEFITS OF INDIGENOUS-LED, LAND-BASED EDUCATION, AND THE WAYS IN WHICH THIS TYPE OF PROGRAMMING ALIGNS WITH:

- **CLIMATE ACTION AND ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP**
- **THE UNITED NATIONS SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS (SDGS)**
- **THE UNITED NATIONS DECLARATION ON THE RIGHTS OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES (UNDRIP)**
- **RECONCILIATION IN CANADA (TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION COMMISSION'S CALLS TO ACTION)**
- **MISSING AND MURDERED INDIGENOUS WOMEN AND GIRLS (MMIWG) RECOMMENDATIONS**
- **THE RIGHT TO BELONG**

The contents of this document are inspired by the work of the Misipawistik Pimatisiméskanaw land-based learning Program in Misipawistik Cree Nation, Manitoba, and by Becky Cook, the coordinator of the program. Thank you to the Elders, youth, helpers, and to Becky for creating a wonderful program, and for welcoming me to participate and observe.

All photos were taken by Danielle Cherpako during the program.



WHAT IS INDIGENOUS-LED, LAND-BASED EDUCATION?

Land-based learning typically uses an Indigenous and environmentally-focused approach to education by first recognizing the deep, physical, mental, and spiritual connection to the land that is a part of Indigenous cultures. Each land-based learning program is unique, and therefore some may use different titles, or may not focus on Indigenous knowledge at all. This document, however, focusses on Indigenous-led, land-based learning.

Research shows that learning in an outdoor environment has mental health benefits, improves understanding for active learners, and can help students to develop environmental awareness and a connection to the land.

Indigenous-focused groups often bring together Elders and youth, so that Elders can pass on their knowledge. This can include teaching about ceremonies, traditional medicines, the history of the land, how to be good stewards of the land, and how to speak traditional languages, among other activities. These programs may also use culturally relevant methods of teaching provincially-required or elective courses such as Math, History, Art, or Science.

Ultimately, Indigenous-led, land-based learning can re-engage Indigenous youth in their own education, build community connectedness, and revitalize Indigenous languages and practices.





CLIMATE ACTION AND ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP

“It isn’t the land that is broken, but rather our connection to the land that is broken, and must be fixed.”

Connection to the land is an important part of physical, mental, social, and spiritual wellness.

Indigenous communities are already experiencing the effects of the climate crisis, and will increasingly, and disproportionately be affected by changes in the future.

Severe weather, changing temperatures, increased garbage and algae in bodies of water, already-high costs of living, and existing colonial settlements and resource-development projects all affect the land, and subsequently, the connection that Indigenous peoples have to the land.

HOW DOES INDIGENOUS-LED, LAND-BASED EDUCATION ADDRESS THIS?

- Increases understanding of the history of the land, and the importance of the land by connecting youth with Elders who can pass on this knowledge
- Provides opportunity for youth to develop their own connection with the land, which in turn nourishes them spiritually, physically, and mentally
- Teaches youth how to be good stewards of the land (how to hunt, fish, trap, and monitor the lands, waters, and species)
- Teaches youth about the importance of protecting the land and treating it with respect as their Ancestors did before them
- Empowers youth to fight for their rights, including their rights to protect their own land
- Provides awareness of jobs, educational programs, and funding opportunities in the areas of conservation and environmentalism
- Empowers youth to share their knowledge about the land with others, which will increase awareness and understanding

THE UNITED NATIONS SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS (SDGs)

- Indigenous communities are considered vulnerable communities when it comes to the effects of the climate crisis because they are often in Northern areas which are warming at faster rates, and because local economies are often centered on the use of the land
- Indigenous-led, land-based education is, and should be recognized as, a form of alternative climate action
- Youth who participate in these programs gain a strong understanding of, as well as sometimes experience conducting, local monitoring work and conservation
- Youth learn about the history of their lands as well as the current environmental issues facing those lands, and can use this area-specific knowledge to address the unique needs of their own communities in regard to climate action, with funding from municipal, provincial, and federal governments

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOAL ARTICLES

13.3 Improve education, awareness-raising and human and institutional capacity on climate change mitigation, adaptation, impact reduction and early warning

13.B Promote mechanisms for raising capacity for effective climate change-related planning and management in least developed countries and small island developing States, including focusing on women, youth and local and marginalized communities

15.5 Take urgent and significant action to reduce the degradation of natural habitats, halt the loss of biodiversity and, by 2020, protect and prevent the extinction of threatened species

15.7 Take urgent action to end poaching and trafficking of protected species of flora and fauna and address both demand and supply of illegal wildlife products

15.8 By 2020, introduce measures to prevent the introduction and significantly reduce the impact of invasive alien species on land and water ecosystems and control or eradicate the priority species

15.9 By 2020, integrate ecosystem and biodiversity values into national and local planning, development processes, poverty reduction strategies and accounts

15.A Mobilize and significantly increase financial resources from all sources to conserve and sustainably use biodiversity and ecosystems

15.C Enhance global support for efforts to combat poaching and trafficking of protected species, including by increasing the capacity of local communities to pursue sustainable livelihood opportunities

THE UNITED NATIONS DECLARATION ON THE RIGHTS OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES (UNDRIP)

EDUCATION AND UNDRIP:

*Article 11: 1. Indigenous peoples have the right to **practise and revitalize their cultural traditions and customs**. This includes the right to maintain, protect and develop the past, present and future manifestations of their cultures such as archaeological and historical sites, artefacts, designs, ceremonies, technologies and visual and performing arts and literature. (6)*

*Article 13: 1. Indigenous peoples have the right to **revitalize, use, develop and transmit to future generations their histories, languages, oral traditions, philosophies, writing systems and literatures, and to designate and retain their own names for communities, places and persons.** (7)*

*Article 14: 1. Indigenous peoples have the right to **establish and control their educational systems and institutions providing education in their own languages, in a manner appropriate to their cultural methods of teaching and learning.***

*2. Indigenous individuals, particularly children, have the right to **all levels and forms of education of the State without discrimination.***

*3. States shall, in conjunction with indigenous peoples, take effective measures, in order for indigenous individuals, particularly children, including those living outside their communities, to have access, when possible, to an **education in their own culture and provided in their own language.** (7)*

CANADA AND UNDRIP FAST FACTS

- UNDRIP is a declaration. It seeks to establish international norms, but is not legally binding under international law.
- The General Assembly of the United Nations adopted UNDRIP on September 13th, 2007.
- Canada cited concerns about the declaration's wording in regard to lands and resources, stating that many of the provisions were too broad and unclear, which could lead to the reopening of settlements over land claims.
- Canada held objector status to the declaration until May of 2016, but endorsed the document in 2010.
- In April of 2016, an NDP Member of Parliament, Romeo Saganash tabled Bill C- 262, now often referred to as the 'UNDRIP bill,' which would make Canada the first state to harmonize its laws with UNDRIP.
- The bill was passed in the House of Commons but was held up in the Senate by Conservative senators who cited concerns about the implications of the bill for Canada's sovereignty.
- The death of the bill in the senate has been described as a step backward for reconciliation and Indigenous rights in Canada.



INDIGENOUS-LED, LAND-BASED EDUCATION:

- Provides a safe place which nurtures mental, physical, and spiritual wellness in which to practice and revitalize traditional ceremonies, languages, stories, and more.
- Brings together Elders and young people to pass on knowledge and teachings.
- Uses culturally relevant methods for teaching provincially- required or elective courses such as Math, Art, History, and Science.
- Indigenous-led means Indigenous educators, including Elders and Knowledge Keepers. This ensures authenticity and the opportunity to teach in traditional languages.
- Indigenous-led also means that educators have a stronger awareness of intergenerational issues and other barriers to learning that are unique to, or disproportionately affect, Indigenous youth. An empathetic approach to teaching means greater student retention.
- Greater recognition of, and funding for Indigenous- led education by the provinces means greater access for Indigenous youth living outside of their communities to culturally- relevant education.

RECONCILIATION IN CANADA

(TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION COMMISSION'S CALLS TO ACTION)

Some of the TRC's Calls to Action:

8. We call on the federal government to draft new Aboriginal education legislation with the full participation and informed consent of Aboriginal peoples. The new legislation would include a commitment to sufficient funding and would incorporate the following principles:

- i. Providing sufficient funding to close identified educational achievement gaps within one generation.
- ii. Improving education attainment levels and success rates.
- iii. Developing culturally appropriate curricula. **(Both require culturally- relevant teaching!)**
- i. Protecting the right to Aboriginal languages, including the teaching of Aboriginal languages as credit courses.

(Indigenous- led ensures the opportunity to authentically teach traditional languages)

12. We call upon the federal, provincial, territorial, and Aboriginal governments to develop culturally appropriate early childhood education programs for Aboriginal families. **(Partner with Indigenous educators, Elders, and Knowledge- Keepers)**

13. We call upon the federal government to acknowledge that Aboriginal rights include Aboriginal language rights.

- i. The preservation, revitalization, and strengthening of Aboriginal languages and cultures are best managed by Aboriginal people and communities. **(Indigenous-led language revitalization is happening in land-based education programs across Canada)**

62. We call upon the federal, provincial, and territorial governments, in consultation and collaboration with Survivors, Aboriginal peoples, and educators, to:

- i. Make age-appropriate curriculum on residential schools, Treaties, and Aboriginal peoples' historical and contemporary contributions to Canada a mandatory education requirement for Kindergarten to Grade Twelve students.
- ii. Provide the necessary funding to post-secondary institutions to educate teachers on how to integrate Indigenous knowledge and teaching methods into classrooms. **(There must be further inclusion of Indigenous knowledge in required coursework such as Science, Math, and History to bridge understanding)**
- iii. Provide the necessary funding to Aboriginal schools to utilize Indigenous knowledge and teaching methods in classrooms.
- iv. Establish senior-level positions in government at the assistant deputy minister level or higher dedicated to Aboriginal content in education.

63. We call upon the council of ministers of education to maintain an annual commitment to Aboriginal education issues, including:

- i. Developing and implementing Kindergarten to Grade Twelve curriculum and learning resources on Aboriginal peoples in Canadian history, and the history and legacy of residential schools. **(Including teaching about the innovative ways that Indigenous peoples are revitalizing their languages and cultures!)**
- ii. Sharing information and best practices on teaching curriculum related to residential schools and Aboriginal history.
- iii. **Building student capacity for intercultural understanding, empathy, and mutual respect.**
- iv. Identifying teacher-training needs relating to the above.

Indigenous-Led, Land-Based Education:

- Addresses the need for culturally relevant education for youth
- Provides opportunity for intergenerational transfer of knowledge from Elders (and Survivors) to youth
- Provides a safe space for healing and for learning for Survivors, where they can bond with other Survivors and youth, and build resilience as a community
- Helps to revitalize lost language and culture for Survivors, intergenerational Survivors, and youth
- Teaches youth about the history of Residential Schools and the Settlement Agreement, as well as about their rights
- Empowers young people to develop their own connection to the land, to protect their land, and to fight for their rights
- Empowers youth to use recommendations from the TRC, the MMIWG report, and their rights outlined in UNDRIP to fight for positive change





MISSING AND MURDERED INDIGENOUS WOMEN AND GIRLS (MMIWG) RECOMMENDATIONS

Calls for Justice for All Governments: Culture

2.2 We call upon all governments to recognize Indigenous languages as official languages, with the same status, recognition, and protection provided to French and English. This includes the directives that:

- i Federal, provincial, and territorial governments must legislate Indigenous languages in the respective territory as official languages.
- ii All governments must make funds available to Indigenous Peoples to support the work required to revitalize and restore Indigenous cultures and languages.

2.3 We call upon all governments to ensure that all Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people are provided with safe, no-barrier, permanent, and meaningful access to their cultures and languages in order to restore, reclaim, and revitalize their cultures and identities. These are rights held by all segments of Indigenous communities, from young children to Elders. The programs and services that provide such access should not be tied exclusively to government-run cultural or educational institutions. All governments must further ensure that the rights of Indigenous children to retain and be educated in their Indigenous language are upheld and protected. All governments must ensure access to immersion programs for children from preschool into post-secondary education.

2.4 ...We further call upon all governments to support grassroots and community-led Indigenous language and cultural programs that restore identity, place, and belonging within First Nations, Inuit, and Métis communities through permanent, no-barrier funding and resources. Special measures must include supports to restore and revitalize identity, place, and belonging for Indigenous Peoples and communities who have been isolated from their Nations due to colonial violence, including 2SLGBTQQIA people and women who have been denied Status.

Indigenous-Led, Land-Based Learning programs run by women or 2SLGBTQQIA people may serve as a safe and welcoming place for Indigenous women, girls and 2SLGBTQQIA people of all ages to restore, reclaim, and revitalize their cultures and identities.

In many land-based learning settings, all people are encouraged to bring other family members or friends to learn with them, which can increase comfort and safety.

These programs often involve reconnecting with one's identity, language, culture, and cultural practices. Many Indigenous ceremonies such as sweats can help Survivors or family members with the healing process after experiencing violence.

THE RIGHT TO BELONG



Kim Samuel is Founder of the Samuel Centre for Social Connectedness, the Chair and President of the Samuel Family Foundation, Professor of Practice at the Institute for the Study of International Development (ISID) at McGill University, and a pioneer in the field of social connectedness and social isolation.

*In March of 2019, Samuel wrote an article titled **Realizing the Human Right to Belong**, which frames the Right to Belong as a birthright, and belonging as intrinsic to being human. She argues for looking at human rights through the lens of belonging and social connectedness and cites especially detrimental, contemporary examples of preventable social isolation.*

She refers to examples of social isolation, such as solitary confinement in prisons, the millions of young children who are stateless (without a birth certificate or birth record), and the disconnect from land, family, and culture which results from forced migration.

Samuel argues that while we must mitigate damage, we also must move towards enshrining positive rights (an entire constellation of different rights) which will work to uphold the Right to Belong. One example of this that she provides is land-based learning. In her words, land-based learning involves,

“Native teachers from Canada’s First Nations empowering young people to know their land and restore their sense of union through culture.”

The Right to Belong must include the right of Indigenous peoples to own, use, and protect their lands as they see fit for the following reasons:

- Land provides a sense of belonging to a shared place, and creates a safe space for sharing and learning.
- The land is deeply connected to spiritual, physical, mental, and social wellness.
- The spiritual connection to the land is intrinsic to belonging within Indigenous cultures, as all people are children of Mother Earth. This is part of one’s identity.
- The land provides food, which is then shared between community members as a way to facilitate connectedness.
- Traditional ceremonies use the land in various ways (for space itself, for fire, for materials such as for drums or clothing, for sweat lodges, and much more). These ceremonies facilitate connectedness.
- Many Indigenous languages are deeply connected to, and shaped by, the land. Language is a powerful tool of connection.
- Learning about the land, including its uses and history, and protecting and caring for the land as a community facilitates community connectedness. This is what Indigenous-led, land-based education is about.



For more information on the Right to Belong, please follow this link:
<https://www.socialconnectedness.org/realizing-the-human-right-to-belong/>

SUMMARY

Land-based programming aligns with a variety of national and international frameworks. It provides benefits such as building community connectedness and resilience, improving mental, physical, and spiritual wellness, advancing reconciliation by decolonizing educational institutions, and improving understanding of course content for students, among others.

Currently, land-based educators operating in rural communities and urban environments are faced with a variety of barriers, including limited resources, and minimal funding and support from school divisions, administration, and provincial and federal governments.

This pamphlet can be used to show the benefits of implementing land-based programming for your institution.

For more information on how to start your program today, visit the SEAS Toolkit at EmergingStewards.org

