



Creating Ethical Spaces for On-the-Land Learning

This memo outlines policy recommendations to support opportunities to benefit northerners, communities, and Lands long-term. It was written through the Gordon Foundation's Jane Glassco Northern Fellowship program, by Fellow Chloe Dragon Smith. Chloe is from Denendeh (NWT) – she lives in Yellowknife and has family roots around Fort Smith. The full paper will be available by September 30th, 2019.

Opportunity statement:

The GNWT can collaborate interdepartmentally to nurture holistic relationships between Land and community through connection and on-the-Land learning in ethical spaces.

Background:

The benefits of being on Land are extensively proven in both Indigenous knowledge systems, and Euro-western systemsⁱ. The benefits will result in long-term social and environmental solutions for the entire NWT. This policy approach presents opportunities to expand and integrate on-the-Land learning into daily life for citizens living in the NWT, through the support of three departments: Education, Culture, and Employment (ECE), Health and Social Services (HSS), and Environment and Natural Resources (ENR). This approach is of interest to the public because it builds on a strength of our collective identity: our deep connections with Land and each other. Realizing our potential begins with policy changes that can lead to systemic shifts in the NWT – shifts to the foundations of who we are and where we came from. The policy approach itself is mindfully created with Indigenous ways of knowing and being, in balance with western knowledge. For truly representative policy in the NWT, it is critical to think about harmonizing Indigenous and Euro-Western worldviews. This can be thought of as 'ethical space'ⁱⁱ. In this spirit, the policy options proposed in this approach, can be thought of as a dynamic journey, rather than distinct options.

Recommendations:

There are multiple ways to embark upon the journey, and these would certainly look different based on context of Land, community, and peoples. The final recommendations for implementing this policy journey for the GNWT are for the context of the GNWT and the three champion departments (ECE, HSS, and ENR) and their roles in supporting the journey.

- 1. Relational Accountability:** *Establish a tri-departmental committee of the champion departments: ECE, HSS, and ENR for adaptive learning and accountability to ethical space – including training, and honouring Indigenous knowledge holders.*



2. *Outdoor spaces:* *Champion departments collaborate to support locally appropriate outdoor spaces set up at every school in the NWT, that are also accessible to community (including families).*

This approach frames an open invitation for others to contribute, and support a shared responsibility for connection and access to Land in the NWT. This will mean engaging many others; through the tri-departmental committee, but also in the process of implementation of spaces. School boards, schools, and educators will all be part of the set-up of the outdoor spaces. Community members can be engaged with the set-up and vision for spaces. It is within the design of the policy approach, that the collaboration between the three policy departments is be a model and an welcome for others to join in and add their strengths to this journey. It is in this spirit of collaboration and radical inclusion, that solutions for the future can succeed.

Implementation:

The recommendations are suggested to be considered on a 5-year timeline. Many of the details of implementation and vision would be determined by the tri-departmental committee. For that reason, the committee should be convened prior to establishment of the spaces. The cost for the committee will be in-kind from the departments, with additional costs for honorarium for the participation of community members. Those costs can and will vary. The cost of the spaces can be calculated based on the physical space (wall-tent or teepee) and the essentials for use, including firewood, woodshed, woodstove, and maintenance. The cumulative cost summary for the spaces, is below:

- 500,000 in the first year, for 49 spaces (one at each school)
- 110,000 in each consecutive year, for a 5-year pilot
- Totalling an estimated \$950,000 investment over 5 years, between the three champion departments

Conclusion:

These simple recommendations enable a widespread and flexible vision: these spaces are for everyone. Learning outdoors, is for everyone. That means we must integrate time on the Land into our daily lives, rather than simply as extra-curricular and outside of work programs or trips. Intrinsic learning comes from the laws of the Land, as it did for previous generations. Knowledge, culture, language, and ultimately, people come from Land. We find Land, not only out in the bush, away from our communities, but rather within them, and within us. These policy recommendations and approach contribute to honouring that.



ⁱ Canadian Parks Council, *The Nature Playbook: Take Action to Connect a New Generation of Canadians with Nature*, last modified 2016, accessed July 22, 2019, <http://www.parks-parcs.ca/pdf/playbook/nature-playbook.pdf>

ⁱⁱ Willie Ermine "The Ethical Space of Engagement," in *Indigenous Law Journal* 6, Issue 1 (2007), 194-201.