THOMPSON RIVERS UNIVERSITY | Education & Social Work

Inquiry Project Plan

Inquiry Title:	How do we learn together on this land?	**Time Frame**	Two-day workshop	**Inquiry Approach:**	Design Thinking
Name:	Clint Maltais	**Subject(s):**		**Grade(s):**	Educators

Inquiry Project Rationale & Overview

Why does this topic matter to students?

Land-based learning is inherently imaginative, engaging, and with teacher support, students will develop the habits of thought for connecting learning to themselves, to others, and to place (Clifford and Friesen, 2003). Yet school yards and local greenspaces continue to be an underutilised curricular resource in teaching and learning practices (Judson, 2018). In order to capitalize on these resources and the benefits of routine nature-connectedness, educators need to look inwards at their own beliefs, values, and assumptions and explore how learning can be perceived. It is important to recognise the inquiry topic as an adaptive challenge and not a technical one (Kegan & Lahey, 2009). Technical expertise, like engagement strategies and lesson sequences, come up in professional development but these represent practices and not sustainable pedagogies. The focus of our inquiry will be on educators developing adaptive expertise, that is using "deep conceptual knowledge to understand and work effectively to problem solve in novel situations" (La Fevre et al., 2015, p. 1). Building our collective capacity and adaptive expertise of land-based learning, educators can be supported in transferring and applying these principles across grade-levels and curriculum.

The design of this unit is a two-day professional learning workshop for educators and educational stakeholders (including administrators, parents, and community members). It represents a beginning in which participants can collectively explore nature connectedness and land-based learning and begin the process of reflecting on their beliefs, perspectives and assumptions. The work of introspection is inherently vulnerable, and feelings of anxiety and fear of making mistakes are normal. It can be difficult to share these feelings with a group of strangers. So while this unit might be used with larger groups, a small group of educators who are comfortable sharing with each other, such as a school-based team, will work best. It is important that participants feel both supported in the process, and challenged in the questions being asked of them. Professional learning communities offer safe spaces for educators to collectively question their practice and refine their principles and beliefs through collaborative inquiry into teaching and learning.

The essential questions play an important role in the emergent nature of this inquiry. Essential questions are there to provide focus and prompt discussion, but ultimately they are there to offer as a vehicle for personal meaning making. The sequencing of lesson topics and activities, then, is a loose framework and participant discussion and questions should guide the timing and direction of topics. The role of the facilitator is to try to ensure everyone has the

opportunity to share, synthesize information, and try to make connections to what is being shared.

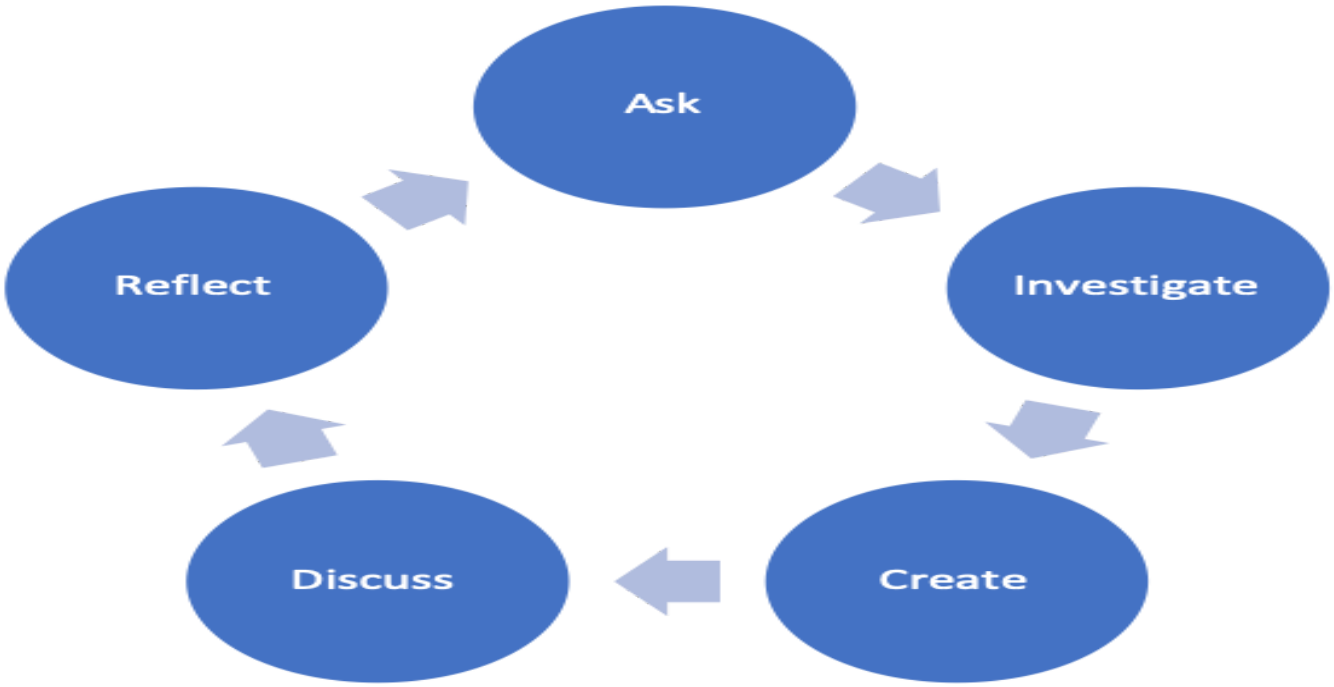
At the core of this unit, is the recognition that it is a teacher's beliefs and values that are the "catalyst for effecting pedagogical change" (McGregor, 2013, p. 21), and it is the development of beliefs and values that are at the heart of the inquiry. This inquiry does not end at the end of the two-day workshop, instead it is hopefully a commitment to a long term, reflective practice on our pedagogical choices and the instructional decisions that we make on a daily basis.

How does this project incorporate the inquiry cycle?

This project falls within the "Ask" and "Investigate" phases by exploring learning as it relates to nature and developing a collective commitment for integrating land-based learning on a routine basis. Our inquiry further develops the beginnings of the "Create" phase. In recognising integrating land-based learning as a core pedagogy requires patience and time, this inquiry does not complete the inquiry cycle, and instead our final step together proposes to support educators in developing a personal, actionable step in embedding nature-connectedness as a core pedagogy. There is space to return to our inquiry group at a later date to discuss and reflect on our practice, identify new learnings, and begin the next cycle of inquiry to more deeply exploring land-based learning.

Key Questions For Inquiry

Core Question	Supporting Questions
How do we learn together on this land?	What is learning? Where do people go to learn? How do people learn? Who (or what) do they learn from? Why and for what purpose do they learn?



Inquiry Approach and Rationale

For this project we will be using a design thinking approach to inquiry. The design thinking process works well when used as a framework for working on an adaptive challenge because much of the deep work we are doing within the inquiry involves reflecting on our own beliefs, values, and assumptions. This introspective process aligns well with the first stage of the design cycle, empathising, to collectively understand the needs and insights of the participants in order to support one another (d.school at Stanford, n.d.). Together, we will define the problem which we will frame as a commitment (i.e. *We are committed to integrating nature-based learning on a routine* basis in our classrooms),* and then we will return to the empathising stage to explore more learning through the immunity map experience. Ultimately we want participants to prototype by designing curriculum and making instructional decisions based on core beliefs and values rooted in land-based principles. Our design approach is limited in that the test and reflection stage fall outside the scope of our two-day workshop, although we would encourage educators to remain connected to debrief their tests together (perhaps in a PLC).

Core Principles of Effective Teaching (Sharon Friesen)

Core Principle 1: Effective teaching practice begins with the thoughtful and intentional design of learning that engages students intellectually and academically. **What aspects of the inquiry are the most challenging and meaningful for students?*	In one of my deep in-depth journal posts, I proposed: "I wonder how our teaching practices would change if we spent more of our professional learning time looking inwards and determining our own principles, values, and beliefs instead of being told what

	principles and beliefs we ought to use as our guiding framework for designing student learning" (Maltais, 2020). This wonder has been the driving influence in my design for creating a space that educators, individually and collectively, can reflect on their beliefs and values around land-based learning. This is a hard, but necessary step that needs to happen before we can "have the courage to act out [our beliefs]" (Wagamese, 2016).
Core Principle 2: The work that students are asked to undertake is worthy of their time and attention, is personally relevant, and deeply connected to the world in which they live. **What makes this inquiry valuable, meaningful, and "alive" for the students and teachers?*	Land-based learning is inherently imaginative, engaging, and with teacher support, students will develop the habits of thought for connecting learning to themselves, to others, and to place (Clifford and Friesen, 2003). Yet school yards and local greenspaces continue to be an underutilised curricular resource in teaching and learning practices (Judson, 2018). In order to capitalize on these resources and the benefits of routine nature-connectedness, educators need to look inwards at their own beliefs, values, and assumptions and explore how learning and place can be perceived. The focus of our inquiry will be on educators developing adaptive expertise, that is using "deep conceptual knowledge to understand and work effectively to problem solve in novel situations" (La Fevre et al., 2015, p. 1). This means that just because a school doesn't have close access to a green space or forested-area, that land-based learning shouldn't be a part of our pedagogical repertoire. Instead, we can explore what is available in our specific context and how we can connect that to a land-based practice using adaptive expertise. Building our collective capacity and adaptive expertise of land-based learning, educators can be supported in transferring and applying these

	principles across grade-levels and curriculum.
Core Principle 3: Assessment practices are clearly focused on improving student learning and guiding teaching decisions and actions. **How do I define learning and success in this inquiry? How is learning expressed and articulated in peer, self and teacher assessments?*	This inquiry unit uses essential questions rather than learning outcomes. This is partially in acknowledgment of FPPL and the emphasis on a more holistic and culturally responsive approach to learning, and partially in holding to emergent curriculum and ending the workshop (but not the inquiry) as "something of a surprise to both teacher and pupil" (Eisner, 2017, p. 131). Exploration of beliefs, values, and perspectives involves reflective learning that is profoundly personal and I do not wish to constraint the learning to outcomes. Instead, essential questions will "serve as doorways to understanding; that is, by exploring questions, learners are engaged in constructing meaning for themselves" (McTighe and Wiggins, 2013, p. 19). This means that for assessment I will not be looking for what participants might know or be able to do by the end, but rather the connections, extensions and challenges they add to the focus question posters, and their ongoing contributions in the small and whole group conversations.
Core Principle 4: Teachers foster a variety of interdependent relationships in classrooms that promote learning and create a strong culture around learning. **How do I connect students with each other, with experts in the field, with larger communities and nature, and across disciplines?*	This inquiry proposed to use the en'owkin wix approach with the community of learners. En'owkin wix is from the Okanagan-Syilx language, *nsyilxcən*, and is based on the idea that "everyone in the community has different viewpoints, ideas, concerns, knowledge, and passions. This approach considers these differences to be strengths of community because every single person has a small piece of the answer inside of them to offer" (Cohen and Chambers, 2016, p. 26). Whether participants are experienced outdoor educators or new to the exploration of

	nature-connectedness, their knowledge and contributions will be valuable to the group In addition, participants will be invited to extend the inquiry - it does not end at the end of the two-day workshop, instead it is hopefully a commitment to a long term, reflective practice on our pedagogical choices and the instructional decisions that we make on a daily basis. This professional learning community will offer means for educators to support one another in testing their assumptions and share their new learnings.
Core Principle 5: Teachers improve their practice in the company of peers. **How do I reflect on the inquiry together, and/or collaborate with others?*	This inquiry provides a great opportunity to explore how PLCs can positively disrupt and affect school culture, and how we can leverage a PLC to facilitate innovation and change within our school. We recognise that all participants bring a "personal foundation of experience" (Boud, 2001, p. 12) and we needed to share these experiences and begin the process of building our collective knowledge from a place of strength. The result of teachers sharing their knowledge and experience is in their "gaining deeper knowledge, creating more thoughtful plans, and providing more varied and detailed student supports" (Mindich & Lieberman, 2012, p. 36). In utilising the knowledge of the whole group, and making visible the adaptive expertise of the PLC, we will be able to support each other in building capacity around our developing pedagogies in land-based learning.(La Fevre, Timperley, and Ell, 2015; Mindich & Lieberman, 2012).

BC Curriculum Core Competencies

Communication	Thinking	Personal & Social

I communicate purposefully, using forms and strategies I have practiced. I contribute during group activities with peers and share roles and responsibilities to achieve goals.		I can interact with others and the environment respectfully and thoughtfully.

BC Curriculum Big Ideas (STUDENTS UNDERSTAND)

Science (Grade 4)
All living things sense and respond to their environment.

English Language Arts (Grade 4)
Exploring stories and other texts helps us understand and make connections to others and to the world.

BC Curriculum Learning Standards

(STUDENTS DO) **(STUDENTS KNOW)**

Learning Standards - Curricular Competencies	Learning Standards - Content
Science *Questioning and Predicting* Demonstrate curiosity about the natural world Observe objects and events in familiar contexts **English Language Arts** *Comprehend and Connect (reading, listening, viewing)* Use personal experience and knowledge to connect to text and deepen understanding of self, community, and world Identify how story in First Peoples cultures connects people to land	**Science** Sensing and responding (humans) **English Language Arts** Strategies and processes (metacognitive strategies)

Indigenous Connections/ First Peoples Principles of Learning

How will I incorporate Indigenous knowledge and principles of learning?

Learning is holistic, reflexive, reflective, experiential, and relational (focused on connectedness, on reciprocal relationships, and a sense of place).
Learning requires exploration of one's identity.

Participants will take part in core routines and learning that will recognize the importance of place.

Respectful Relations

How will I invite students of all backgrounds, interests and skills into the inquiry?

-This inquiry proposed to use the en'owkin wix approach with the community of learners. En'owkin wix is from the Okanagan-Syilx language, nsyilxcən, and is based on the idea that "everyone in the community has different viewpoints, ideas, concerns, knowledge, and passions. This approach considers these differences to be strengths of community because every single person has a small piece of the answer inside of them to offer" (Cohen and Chambers, 2016, p. 26). Whether participants are experienced outdoor educators or new to the exploration of nature-connectedness, their knowledge and contributions will be valuable to the group.

Project Overview

Time Estimate		Description of Teacher and Student Activities	Assessment Activities
Ask	Day 1 AM/PM	**Empathise** -Overview workshop intentions and set norms for collaborative inquiry -*What is learning?* (Initial discussion and personal definitions) -Land acknowledgement -Practice or Pedagogy? Connected First Peoples' Principles of Learning to a land-based practice and framing land-based learning as an adaptive challenge and not a technical one -What are we currently doing to integrate land-based learning in our classrooms?	Making thinking visible routine: Connect, extend, challenge -Ongoing, formative assessment to guide dialogue and prompt questions. Check to ensure all voices are being heard

		-*Where do we go to learn?* -Core routine: nature walk. Thinking about plants - what do we know about dyeing materials? Looking through the forest, what colours do you see? What if we rub these on paper? -How do we envision land-based learning to look like? to sound like? to feel like? -Small group collaboration with gallery walk -*Who (or what) do we learn from?* -*captikwł* of the Four Food Chiefs (*How Food Was Given* by Barbra Marchand) -Introduce concept of *en'owkin wix* **Define** *-Why and for what purpose do we learn?* -What is our one BIG thing. What can we collectively commit to around learning and nature connection.	
Investigate	Day 2 AM	**Ideate** *What are the hidden or competing commitments that might prevent educators from embedding First Peoples' Principles of Learning as a core pedagogy?* -Land acknowledgement -Introduce sit spot routine with story and practice (connecting with land) *-How do we learn?* -Moving from sensory to introspection. -Facilitate collaborative immunity map (Kegan and Lahey, 2008). Column 1: Our one BIG thing Column 2: Fearless Inventory Column 3: Hidden, Competing Commitments Column 4: Big assumptions	Making thinking visible routine: Connect, extend, challenge -Ongoing, formative assessment to guide dialogue and prompt questions. Check to ensure all voices are being heard.
Create	Day 2 PM	**Prototype** *What learning do we need to continue to engage in?*	Making thinking visible routine: Connect, extend, challenge

		-Core routine: nature walk (wandering). Passage from *Embers* by Richard Wagamese as prompt. -Complete immunity map -Participants to Identify a big assumption that is true for them and that is in conflict with our one BIG thing. -Prompt: What concrete action can I take to test this assumption to determine if it is actually true for me?	-Ongoing, formative assessment to guide dialogue and prompt questions. Check to ensure all voices are being heard.
Discuss and Reflect	Day 2 PM	-Sharing circle: Share (or pass) your actionable step moving forward. -Open discussion: -Has your definition of learning changed or stayed the same? -What learning do we need to continue to engage in?	
Continuity of Learning	(Ongoing)	**Test** -Participants test their actionable step within their school and class-specific context. It is important that as participants begin pushing back on their assumptions, that they are mindful of how they feel before, during, and after the test to determine if that assumption does indeed hold true for them. -Hopefully participants will have more chances to routinely meet, share their tests, and reflect and refine their beliefs and perspectives on taking learning outdoors.	

Materials

-Chart paper and markers for *Connect, Extend, Challenge*
-Post it notes and paper
-AV equipment and projector
-*Embers* by Richard Wagamese
-*How Food was Given* by Barbra Marchand (or told by Indigenous advocate)

Organizational Strategies

-Be fluent in technical challenges and adaptive challenges and why a commitment to nature-based learning might be considered an adaptive challenge. This will support the explanation of the immunity map and how participants interact with it.

Proactive, Positive Classroom Learning Environment Strategies

-Develop norms for collaborative online work. Present the question in our first session: *We want to maximize our time in our group. What are some norms we should observe in order to be fully present* (i.e. no phones, share with permission, non-judgemental, giving space…)
-Periodically review norms throughout the workshop as needed.

Extensions

-Our one BIG thing is collectively created and honours the individual intentions and experiences of the participants. Some participants might be committing to taking students outside once a month, and some might be committing to taking students outside 3-5 times a week, but all can contribute to the collective knowledge of the group.
-There is a need to return to this inquiry after the workshop is complete to share how testing our big assumptions was experienced by educators. Educators who wish to extend could begin to identify and explore opportunities for new learning in the form of books, research articles, or additional workshops to theoretically support this shift in pedagogy. They could bring this new learning to future sessions as our initial workshop morphs into a professional learning community.

Reflections (to be completed after Project Completion)

What did I learn about Inquiry Based Pedagogy?
What challenges and successes did I experience?
What would I adapt for next time?
What questions do I still have about Inquiry Based Pedagogy?