DISCUSSION PAPER

Land is Boss

Outdoor and Land-based Standards of Practice for Early Childhood Educators

AUTHORS

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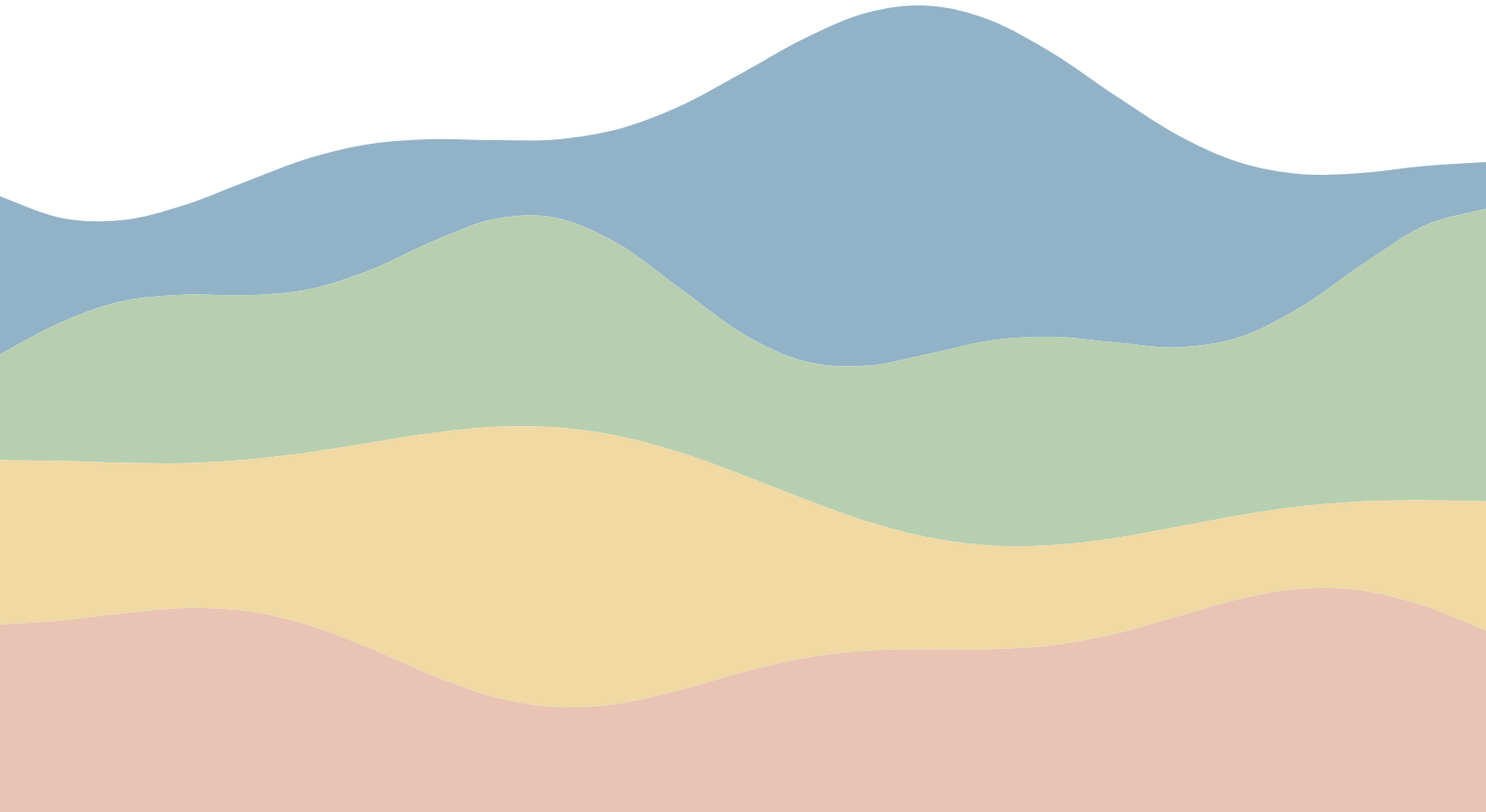
2026



Acknowledgements

Gratitude

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Thank you to the Land who teaches and guides us, sharing wisdom and forgiveness. We do our best to listen and acknowledge that there is still much to learn. Children listen to the Land naturally and their relationship with Land is essential for a healthy future. That is why we do this work.

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Executive Summary

This discussion paper begins from a simple teaching: **Land is boss.**

Leaders and policymakers working across post-secondary programs, curriculum development, and regulations and licensing, as well as community partners, are invited to consider what is needed to support educators in outdoor and Land-based teaching and learning in a good way.

Learning on-the-Land comes from authenticity: real places, histories, relationships, and responsibilities. This discussion paper offers standards of practice, and related knowledge and competencies required so this work is safe, respectful, relational, culturally grounded, and accountable to place.

Outdoor and Land-based learning does not mean simply taking programming outside. It means learning in relationship with Land: water, plants, animals, seasons, weather, stories, language, culture, community, and responsibility.[1, 2] The Land is not a backdrop for education. It teaches. It guides. It sets the conditions. Learning cannot be separated from the impacts of colonization—education systems have played a major role in separating Indigenous Peoples from Land, including languages, cultures, families, and identities. This history continues to shape access to Land and trust in institutions.

As interest in outdoor and Land-based learning grows, shared guidance is needed. Without clear standards and competencies, this work can be misunderstood as outdoor recreation, recess time, environmental programming, or field trips. It reproduces harm when Indigenous knowledge is overlooked or used without permissions, protocols, relationships, or Indigenous leadership. Educators need time and capacity for the thoughtful intention required to do it safely and ethically.

The paper is written within a lens of ethical space, a concept from Cree philosopher Willie Ermine. This means that process is very important. The structure reflects this, with each section building essential context for the standards—which should not be read in isolation.

Parts I and II offer the words of Métis Elder Sabrina Broadhead, an introduction to Land is Boss, messages from the advisory circle and the authors, and an outline of the paper's purpose and approach. Here readers can find where they fit, and the relationships and responsibilities the standards rest on.

Part III provides context: key terms, what standards of practice are, and why they are needed now. The paper carries more narrative than may be expected from a policy paper, and this is intentional. The way Indigenous knowledge is handled and transmitted is very different from Euro-Western approaches, and reading the narrative alongside the standards is part of understanding the bigger picture.

Part IV introduces eleven standards of practice that, collectively, serve as a starting point for educators and the systems that support them. The standards are interwoven, and the order is intentional: each builds on what comes before, paving the way for letting the Land lead learning.

1. Sharing Love and Belonging
2. Recognizing the Impacts of Colonization
3. Prioritizing Indigenous Knowledge Systems
4. Connecting Regularly with the Land
5. Exploring Your Own Identity
6. Centring Relationships
7. Embracing Flexibility
8. Sharing Power
9. Supporting Safety (Risky Play)
10. Letting the Land Lead Learning
11. Reflecting for Growth

Each standard sets out the knowledge and competencies for educators to embody in their practice, followed by implications for early learning and curriculum frameworks and for post-secondary programs. The implications are posed as reflective questions, intended to support local adaptation. Through them, frameworks can make room for learning shaped by Land, season, relationship, and community. Post-secondary programs can prepare educators to understand outdoor and Land-based learning as serious practice rather than optional enrichment.

Implications for licensing and regulations follow the standards to tie it all together. Regulations and licensing can consider safety, accountability, Indigenous knowledge, Land-based expertise, and community authority together as a whole, including the qualifications and ongoing professional learning that outdoor and Land-based educators need.

Caution must be used against turning outdoor and Land-based learning into a rigid checklist. The standards are meant to be practical and relational. Standards can support safety, preparation, and accountability, but they must not flatten local knowledge, replace community authority, or force every place into the same model. Good standards need enough structure to guide practice and enough humility to remain accountable to Land, local Nations, Indigenous knowledge systems, community protocols, and the people who carry these teachings.

Outdoor and Land-based learning offers an important path forward for early childhood education. It can help children (and adults!) understand who they are, where they are, and how they are connected to the living world. Supporting belonging, responsibility, respect, and reconnection benefits everyone. The central teaching remains clear: **Land is boss.** Good standards begin there.

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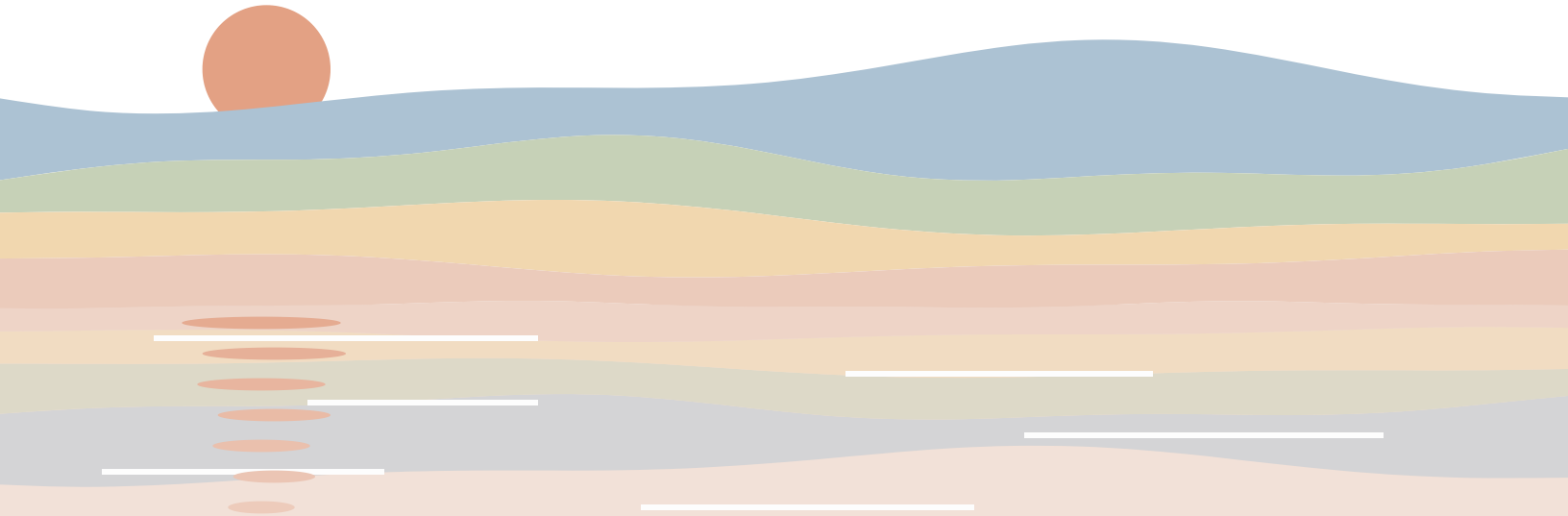
PART I

Situating Ourselves

1. Opening Note
2. Land is Boss
3. Messages from the Advisory Circle
4. Messages from the Authors



Opening Note

I grew up in the ‘60s—no television, no iPads, no computers, and no cell phones. My five siblings and I grew up outside, playing in the yard, in the mud, in the bush, in the fields, in the water, on the water, on the Land, on the hills, in the valleys (ditches), in the rain, in the snow, in the heat, in the cold, in the calm, in the wind, under the northern lights, and under the midnight sun.

We made the best mud pies, tree forts, rafts, snow forts, and what are now called “play structures.” We picked flowers, berries, and spruce gum when they were ready. We even created some of our own terminology: our parents knew where we would be if we were going “frogging.” We learned to fish, hunt, and trap. We brought home strange things for our parents to identify for us. Our little red lard pails carried many treasures and moved lots of water from one place to another. We could handle an axe, a hammer, a saw, a knife, and matches from our earliest days. We used whatever was available to us: moss, grass, wood, trees, leaves, rain water, and rocks; even discarded furniture, construction materials, and household items (we were recyclers before it became a thing).

We knew how to dress to go outside for the day (gumboots and mukluks were the best footwear). Nobody reminded us to dress in layers and to bring our mitts; because we knew what we needed for the day (most days). We rode our bikes everywhere. We went home when we were hungry, when we were hurt (sometimes), when we got a “booter” or when we couldn’t resolve an issue with our siblings and/or our friends. We rarely had adults with us but when they were, they were close by, they didn’t interfere. Mostly, they were there to guide us and for safety.

My dream is that every little kid can have these experiences. I worked hard to provide these opportunities for my children and now I am doing the same for my grandchildren. One of my greatest joys was when my daughter, and my niece, Chloe, named a place in the bush that was special to them: “Klee Kla Klo Klah.”

I am so grateful that there are people, like you, who, in these very different times, want to build programs and spaces to make this happen for children in their early years.

— Sabrina Broadhead, Métis Elder

Land is Boss

Applying standards to anything relating to Land has its challenges. The Land teaches us that one day is not like another. No wolf behaves like another, and no flower grows like another. A raven does not call out in the same way each day. When we listen and stay present, the Land teaches us how to speak, how to live, and what decisions to make. The interactions between every plant, animal, rock, stream, and cloud shape a kind of rule book: **Boundaries. Obligations. Roles. Responsibilities.**

Over long periods of time, this becomes structure and governance. It becomes ways of knowing, doing, and being for everyone on the Land, including people.

Indigenous knowledge means the systems of knowledge, including the processes of obtaining, understanding, and applying knowledge developed over time by Indigenous Peoples.

Land with a capital L includes the physical land base and everything that exists on it. This includes animals, plants, rocks, water, soil, and air. It includes Indigenous Peoples and their cultures, languages, and knowledge systems that were created over time, in relation with others on the Land. This capital L is meant to appropriately recognize people as part of Land, which is a central concept in Land-based learning.

Like each wolf, every person comes from Land somewhere. Through evolution, the Land has taught Nations of people how to live—shaping cultures, languages, and knowledge systems. In every place on Earth, deep wisdom from the Land is held within local Indigenous Nations and the way they uniquely view the world.

You, too, have been shaped by Land over time, from a place (or multiple places!) in the world. Now you live and work somewhere. Everyone comes with skills and attributes that fit into the big picture. You are unique, important, and valued. Do not try to be someone you are not. A raven does not try to be a wolf, but they relate to one another, work together, and respect each other.

So, know yourself, be yourself and be proud of it—that is what the Land loves the most. Bring your skills, joys, and challenges along with you. As you do, remember: you are also bringing your Land. What that means depends on where you are. If you live somewhere other than the Lands of your ancestors, you must approach your role as a Land-based educator, academic, or policymaker much differently than if you are Indigenous to the Land you are on. It is your responsibility to find where you fit and how your gifts can contribute to the bigger picture.

As you find where you fit, remember: Indigenous cultures, languages, and knowledge systems are foundational for listening to the wisdom of the Land. That listening is what helps us do good work as Land-based educators, policymakers, or collaborators. Without appropriate partnerships and relationships with local Nations and peoples, the most significant piece of understanding Land (and thus our roles and responsibilities) is missing.

You will find this paper references Land-based knowledge and Indigenous knowledge frequently. This is what letting the Land lead learning means.

Messages from the Advisory Circle

This work is important to me because thoughtful frameworks help policy analysts and decision-makers support regionally based Land-based and outdoor learning that is rooted in local place, story, and community. Every relationship begins somewhere—with a moment, a place, or an experience that creates connection. I hope this work supports communities across Turtle Island in strengthening relationships between educators, children, and the Land.

Kay Rasmussen
Policy, Research, and Resource Consultant, Northwestern Ontario, Treaty #3 Territory

I believe all children belong outdoors, and that both children and adults benefit when we create the conditions for meaningful relationships with the Land. In Newfoundland and Labrador, the Land and surrounding ocean shape who we are, and I learned early in my career that I was a better educator and parent outside, where well-being and belonging have always been central to my practice. In this vein, I believe families and educators deserve the opportunity to participate in regulated Outdoor and Land-based programs, and that making this possible for communities across Canada will create the kind of impact we all strive for in the field of Early Learning and Child Care.

Sandy Gow
Professional Learning Coordinator for the Association of Early Childhood Educators of Newfoundland and Labrador

As an educator of young children and post-secondary students, outdoor play has been a critical aspect of my pedagogy. I strive to inspire students of all ages to hold reverence for the natural world; and hope they find a sense of belonging and a sense of self. To be just a small part of nurturing relationships between students and nature has inspired me to always be a learner of the Land.

Lee Makovichuk
PhD, Early Childhood Education (retired), Edmonton, Alberta

Tánsi. As a Cree woman and mother who grew up on the Land and water, supporting others to bring children to the Land and water is important to me. Connections to the Land strengthen relationships—those between-and-among children and adults, the relationship to spirit and the natural world. These relationships can result in protection of the Land and water now and in the future, as well as facilitating reconciliation in our country now known as Canada. Kinanáskomitináwáw. I thank everyone for their work in this area.

Monica Lytwyn
Early Childhood Development Research Team, Red River College Polytechnic, Winnipeg, Manitoba

It is important to include the history of the Land and the knowledge that Land holds. Everything is better when you are on the Land; everyone has the right to thrive outside, especially those who are often left inside.

Sheila Grieve
Métis, Professor of Early Childhood Education and Care, Vancouver Island University (legally blind)

If early learning sets the foundation for lifelong well-being and the Land is the source of nourishment physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually, bringing these together provides a path for a stronger, healthier society.

Ruth Lane
Manager, Quality Early Learning Programs, Government of Yukon Department of Education

My childhood was spent outdoors, from the urban spaces of Vietnam to the beaches of refugee camps in Malaysia, and the fields and woods of Mi'kma'ki (which encompasses present-day Nova Scotia). These landscapes nurtured my well-being, independence, curiosity, and creativity, and they continue to shape my work today. As a public servant accountable for the development of early learning frameworks and standards for early childhood educator training, professional learning, and early learning programs, I now have the responsibility to help ensure children experience the same nurturing power of outdoor and Land-based learning.

Hoa Truong-White
Director, Quality, Innovation and Professional Learning, Nova Scotia Department of Education and Early Childhood Development

Messages from the Authors

Chloe

My name is Chloe Grandjambe. My parents are Brenda Dragon and Leonard Smith. My grandmother, Jane Dragon (Mercredi), is a Dënesųłiné-Métis woman, as are our grandmothers before her. My grandfather, David Dragon, was a Frenchman. My father is German-Ukrainian-Polish. He was born and raised in Edmonton, and moved North to pursue his career where he met my mother and stayed. I now live in Denendeh on the traditional territories of my maternal ancestors, raising my children near Fort Smith, NT, with my husband on our trapline.

As an on-the-Land educator, my roles and responsibilities are unique to me, to the Land I live on, and to the communities that I am part of. As an Indigenous woman living on my home territories, I know it is on me and my generation to rebuild the knowledge and cultures of my Lands in a system that was meant to abolish them. That is a huge responsibility that often feels like a heavy weight.

I know my ancestors lived and learned on the Land for thousands of years before new models of education were violently thrust upon them. We have lost much knowledge and skills because of this, but I believe the Land and our communities have the answers we are looking for. With time and patience, we can tune back into the natural ways we relate to the Lands around us.

This means spending time on the Land myself to listen and learn. It means spending time with my family and communities who carry knowledge and processes for living well with the Land. If I go somewhere else, even to a community close by, I have lots to learn from the Indigenous Peoples of those Lands. I bring gifts and share learnings from my home. But I can never assume my ways will work for others, where the Land and culture are unique.

I also recognize my responsibilities as a mixed-blood woman. A big part of this, to me, means creating balance and building bridges. My mixed ancestry has led to experiences in the world that are unique to me. I have privilege from skin that passes as white, and ancestry that aligns with colonial ideals of the world. I grew up in two different worlds and I relate to both systems.

How I practise my role as an on-the-Land educator shifts and changes with those around me, the situations I'm in, what's happening internally for me, and ultimately, listening to the Land.

Wendy

My name is Wendy Lahey. My mother was Phyllis Lahey. Her first language was Polish and my grandparents, Juliana Adas and Roman Bryk, came to Hamilton, Ontario just before WWII from Poland and raised their family on a farm. My father was Sandy Lahey. He grew up in Main-à-Dieu, Nova Scotia, a small village relying largely on lobster fishing, raised by extended family due to the tuberculosis outbreak. My grandfather was George Lahey also from Main-à-Dieu and my grandmother was Beatrice Lahey who grew up in the small communities of Glace Bay and Scatarie Island, Nova Scotia.

I grew up in Burlington, Ontario, on Brant Tract Treaty 8 and Treaty 3¾ Land, home of the Haudenosauneega, Attiwonderonk, Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation, and Anishinabewaki peoples. I moved to Sǫ̀mbak'è (Yellowknife) in 2004, Treaty 8 Land, home of the Yellowknives Dene First Nation, North Slave Métis and countless other Indigenous nations who call this place home. It was only after moving here that I began to understand the history of Canada and the privilege of my family as settlers to this Land. It is my responsibility to always continue learning about these hard truths. I am learning how to uphold my obligations as a Canadian, and therefore a treaty person, especially through the work that I do as a Land-based educator at Bushkids.

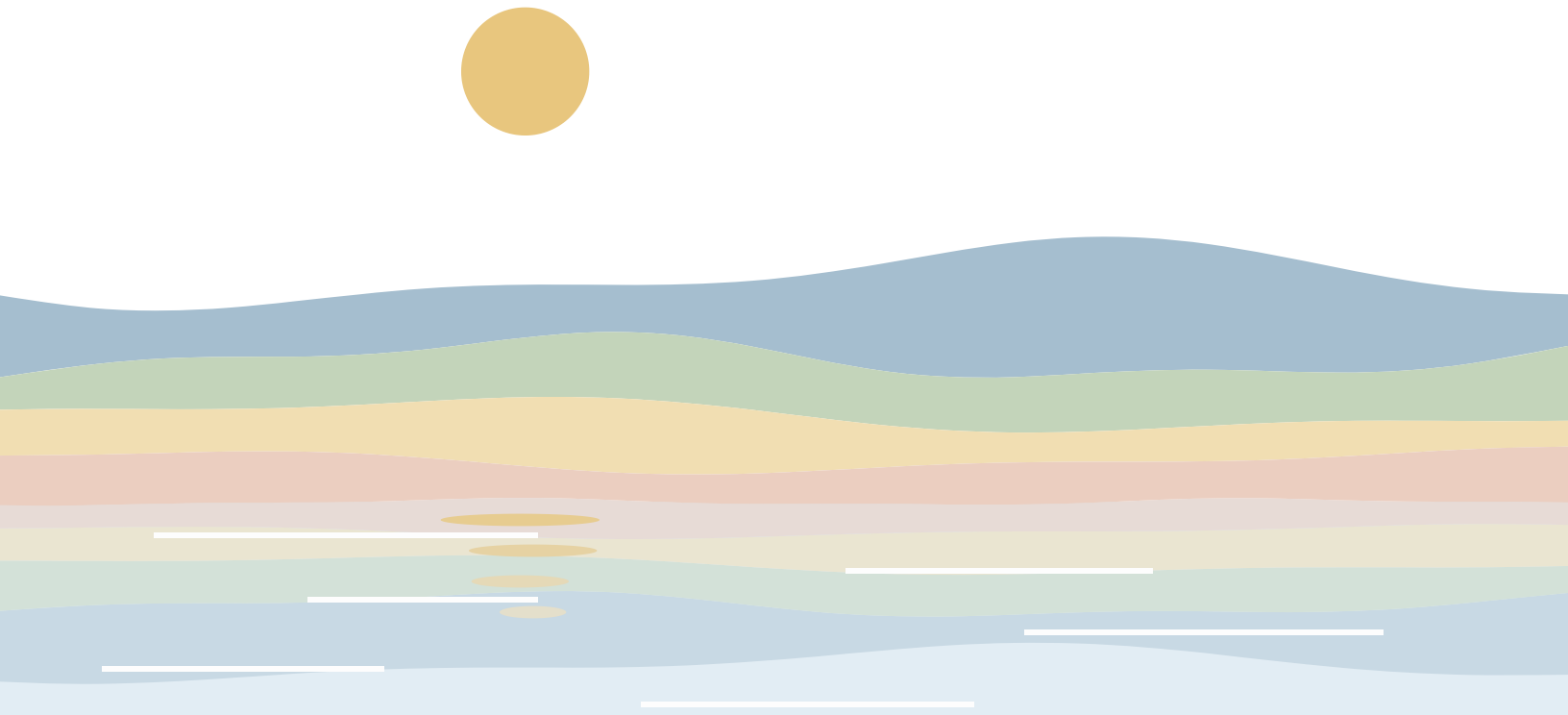
As a non-Indigenous person working as a Land-based educator, my role is to prioritize Indigenous Peoples, cultures, languages, and knowledge systems in a Euro-Western education system that was imposed on intact and thriving systems. I can use my voice and my privilege to advocate for the need to create space for Indigenous systems of teaching and learning. The only way to do this is to make time to develop relationships within the community. These relationships have taught me that teaching and learning from an Indigenous worldview is beautiful, it is inclusive, and should be foundational in any Land-based programming.

My role is to be my true self, and to always reflect on who I am and what I bring to the many relationships that I have. I need to share power with Indigenous educators so that they determine how the Land leads learning in a way that is authentic, and reflects who they are and where they come from. I am constantly undoing prior learning, which requires thoughtful reflection. It is vulnerable and I need to be open to being uncomfortable, to making mistakes, and to letting go of my initial expectations. Because my relationships feel strong, I can trust the process even when it feels lonely. I am humbled and full of gratitude for the gifts from the Land and the many people who generously guide me at Bushkids.

PART II

Purpose and Approach

1. Purpose and Audience
2. Process and Methods
3. Ethical Space in Process and Policy



Purpose and Audience

This paper is for the leaders and policymakers who support early childhood educators, and others who have the power to break barriers to getting children outdoors and are engaged in Land-based learning. The standards of practice are written to centre the educator, as educators are leading this work as the ones charged with the care of our future generations. Everyone around the educators—post-secondary institutions, curriculum developers, regulators, licensing bodies, administrators, and community partners—all have roles and responsibilities in creating the conditions for educators to succeed in this work.

Leaders and Policymakers: We intend to support you to develop standards for educator practice, to influence the development of related post-secondary programs and curricula, regulations, and provincial/territorial frameworks that affect the capacity of educators to take their programming outdoors.

Educators: If you have already begun this work, we hope you feel united and validated in having a skillset more formally acknowledged and respected by decision makers. If you are just beginning, we hope this provides an entry point and that this document supports your work. We know you aim to do what is best for children and there is a lot on your shoulders.

The standards of practice, knowledge, and competencies offered are intended to support local adaptation. We encourage each reader to be creative and bold to advance this important work.

Educator is used to mean anyone working with children in the field of Early Learning and Child Care, including practitioners who do not have formal Western education in a post-secondary institution. These standards of practice, however, articulate expectations for qualified early childhood educators and others recognized as early childhood education (ECE) professionals within their respective jurisdictions.

Programming is used to refer to the active process of instruction. It is the day-to-day work that an educator is doing.

Program is used to refer to the overarching big picture, curriculum or framework of an educational program.

Process and Methods

Over the last ten years, the Lawson Foundation has worked to advance outdoor and Land-based early learning in Canada. In 2024, the Foundation published *More Than a New Course: A Framework for Embedding Outdoor and Land-based Pedagogies in Post-Secondary ECE Programs*.[3] That framework used a systems lens to help post-secondary institutions embrace and embed outdoor and Land-based teaching and learning in ECE programs. It did not address curriculum or educator pedagogy. Building on that work, this discussion paper offers guidance for developing standards of practice for early childhood educators that can inform post-secondary curricula, provincial and territorial early learning frameworks, and early learning and child care (ELCC) regulations.

We (Wendy and Chloe) were invited by the Lawson Foundation to write this paper because of our experience practising in an ethical space of engagement, as defined in the Ethical Space in Process and Policy section of this paper. Coming from both a Euro-Western education system of training (Wendy) and Indigenous on-the-Land learning (Chloe), we have been collaborating, learning as we go, in a model of ethical space for eight years through the program we co-founded in the Northwest Territories: Bushkids. We do our best to model ethical space in practice throughout this paper, so that it honours both the current Western research and best practices, as well as makes room for local Land-based knowledge and processes.

The way Indigenous knowledge is handled and transmitted is very different from Euro-Western approaches. Learning and applying this takes time and effort in each individual context. It means considering the standards shared here, and reading the narrative parts of this paper, to understand the bigger picture.

In writing the paper, we consulted with a national advisory circle of seven members. They came from different places and held varied expertise including outdoor and Land-based educators, post-secondary faculty, ELCC policymakers. There were both Indigenous and non-Indigenous advisors. Sabrina Broadhead, a Métis Elder from Hay River, Northwest Territories provided overall guidance and direction to the authors and the advisory circle. There were three advisory circle meetings alongside additional open opportunities to provide feedback on drafts of the paper.

The discussion paper was also informed by a 2026 environmental scan (described below) that included a literature review to determine what standards of practice and associated knowledge and competencies might already exist for outdoor and Land-based early learning in Canada and internationally. It also examined provincial and territorial standards of practice for early childhood educators, early learning and curriculum frameworks, and ELCC regulations.[4] The findings of this scan are described in subsequent sections.

Ethical Space in Process and Policy

This paper is written within a lens of ethical space. Ethical space is not a new concept, it is a way to describe something that has been happening since the beginning of time as different worldviews, knowledge systems, laws, and responsibilities come together. Willie Ermine describes ethical space as an encounter between distinct thought worlds, where new ways of relating can be created that honour all involved.[5]

For outdoor and Land-based learning, ethical space matters deeply. This work sits with tension between Indigenous systems that are informed by the Land, and the Canadian systems that shape early learning today: policy, regulation, curriculum, post-secondary training, licensing, insurance, administration, and research. These vastly different systems do not meet on equal ground. Canadian systems have deliberately been used to separate Indigenous Peoples from Land, language, culture, family, governance, identity, and authority.

Because of this history and context, ethical space requires more than inclusion. It requires attention to power, history, consent, and responsibility. It must be operational, not symbolic. This means considering: how decisions are made, whose laws and knowledge are respected, who holds authority, how relationships are built, and ultimately how institutions change. Ethical space is different from bringing Indigenous knowledge into existing Western systems—it is creating conditions where Indigenous knowledge systems can stand in self-determination.

For this paper, modelling ethical space means that relationship comes before content. We, the paper's authors, work actively to intentionally balance each other's worldviews, with one coming from Euro-Western education system training and one from Indigenous on-the-Land learning. This is why, for instance, we situate ourselves before offering standards. It is also why the paper has more narrative than may be expected from a policy paper. It may look different than what readers are used to engaging with—this is intentional.

Ethical space is a concept designed to support dialogue and partnerships between distinct worldviews—most commonly Indigenous and Western knowledge systems. Coined by Cree philosopher Dr. Willie Ermine, it bridges cultural divides by establishing a safe, respectful environment where neither perspective dominates.[6]

There are many entry points and paths to build your understanding of ethical space. We invite you to learn more about it. There are readings and videos online, as well as training offered to groups or individuals. This paper will discuss some concepts related to ethical space, but it is by no means comprehensive.

The Land is the perfect place for anyone to practise ethical space, as it calls us to meet each other in our humanity, with humility.[7] It has a way of grounding us and bringing us together. So, before you act on the recommendations

in this paper, go for a walk, sit outside, and listen in stillness for a moment or more. We have made an effort to write this paper with ethical space in mind, in the hopes of inspiring readers to make the same effort in whatever way that means for them. If we each take a small step towards change within the process, the outcome may change too—and the outcome MUST change. For children, for Land, for learning, for the future.

PART III

Context

1. Outdoor and Land-based Terminology
2. About Standards of Practice
3. 2026 Environmental Scan Findings and Application

Outdoor and Land-based Terminology

Outdoor teaching and learning and Land-based teaching and learning have similarities, and important differences. The earlier section “Land is Boss” may help you to conceptualize Land-based learning. Land includes people, cultures, languages, governance systems, and long-developed culturally appropriate strategies for teaching and learning. Because of this, Land-based learning must take place in partnership and collaboration with Indigenous peoples. It builds on engagement with local Indigenous stories, ideas, places, and people.

‘Outdoor learning’ encompasses Euro-Western approaches and tools for learning in nature, some of which are compatible with Land-based learning. These methods include play- and inquiry-based holistic learning; experiential and place-based[i] learning in, about, and for nature; and support for risk.[8] Outdoor learning can be influenced by environmental education, outdoor education, forest and nature school, and risky play, among many others. These tools can be a good entry point and complement to Land-based learning.

Nature carries deep knowledge and wisdom, so building relationships through regular and repeated outdoor play and experiences is critical in all approaches. Getting outside with children is essential, trailblazing work that is not always easy.

To be Land-based means prioritizing these processes and wisdom from nature, through listening to and learning from the Land itself, and those who know it culturally.[9, 10] Even if a program does not have the capacity to get physically outdoors, there are relevant Land-based teachings and learnings that come from people, cultures, languages, and knowledge systems as part of Land. A program in the city could be run by or connected with the local Nations, could have traditional food and seasonal offerings brought in. It could be based on reciprocity, letting the children build their own relationships with what, and who, are around them.[11] It could teach and share the local Indigenous language.

There are many different manifestations and combinations of outdoor and Land-based early learning programs across Canada. No matter your role in running them or supporting them, it is okay to start from wherever you are now, and it is okay (and expected) to have gaps in understanding. The Land unites us all in this work, and when we meet together outdoors in spaces meant to promote learning and create positivity for future generations, we have the capacity to be greater than the sum of our parts.

i Place-based Education is sometimes misunderstood and used interchangeably with Land-based learning. It is a teaching and learning approach that is centred on the lived experience of the children and what is happening in local culture, in the community, and in nature. Children are taught to use their surroundings to make meaningful contributions to their community.[12]

> When I first began my journey as a Land-based educator, I made many mistakes. Looking back after 10 years, I am grateful for those experiences because they taught me the importance of learning local Land histories, understanding colonization and reconciliation, and building meaningful relationships with local communities. If Land-based or outdoor learning is new to you, that's okay—it was new to me once, too. We all start somewhere when learning something new. Mistakes will happen, and so will successes. We are gentle with the children in our care; we can also be gentle with ourselves as we learn. The goal is to recognize that learning is continuous and that the Land will always have something to teach us if we're open to learning.
>
> **— Kay Rasmussen**

About Standards of Practice

This section is drawn from Beverlie Dietze, Kelsey Robson, and Melanie Manitowabi, An Environmental Scan of Outdoor and Land-Based Early Learning in Canada: Evidence, Policy Gaps, and Recommendations for Action (The Lawson Foundation, 2026).

Standards of practice for outdoor and Land-based early learning are a set of shared expectations that guide educators in what they should know and what they do (skills). These standards of practice can inform educator training, certifications, policies and procedures, safety regulations, and professional development. Standards of practice can guide how educators are prepared, supported, and recognized for this specialized work.

Without standards of practice, educators are left unprepared, unsupported, and unrecognized in their work. This results in a lack of Land-based opportunities for children; and educators can experience burnout due to filling gaps, advocating for the sector, and feeling unsupported by administrators, leaders of their organization or business, and families.

Funding and support can increase when programs are evaluated using standards of practice. Without standards, post-secondary programs cannot establish field placement courses that offer training for Land-based learning. Land-based learning opportunities can be inaccessible because those that do exist are private programs.

Well-designed standards of practice serve multiple functions across the early learning system. They are meant to be a foundation that strengthens educator preparation, elevates professional recognition, improves program quality, and ensures that all children across Canada have access to high-quality outdoor and Land-based learning.[13] The following chart identifies and describes those who are impacted by the standards of practice identified in this paper.

For Educators	Professional recognition, clearer career pathways, improved preparation and mentorship, and stronger advocacy tools for fair compensation and working conditions.
For Children	More consistent, high-quality programming delivered by well-prepared educators who understand child development, ecological learning, and culturally responsive practice.
For Post-Secondary Institutions	Clear benchmarks for curriculum design, consistent learning outcomes, field placement expectations, and assurance that graduates meet sector standards.
For Families	Ability to make informed choices about programs, understand educator qualifications, and have confidence in program quality, safety, and cultural responsiveness.
For Regulators & Funders	Evidence-based frameworks to inform licensing, quality assurance, curriculum expectations and goals, and consistent investment decisions.
For Indigenous Communities	Accountability for reconciliation in early learning, respectful engagement with Land-based knowledge systems, and meaningful representation in standards development.

2026 Environmental Scan Findings and Application

The 2026 environmental scan of outdoor and Land-based early learning in Canada by Dietze, Robson, and Manitowabi found that standards of practice for early childhood educators in jurisdictions across Canada are limited.[14] Where they do exist, standards for outdoor and Land-based teaching and learning are largely absent despite new and existing programs expanding rapidly across Canada. Further, where standards of practice exist for early childhood educators—such as the College of Early Childhood Educators Standards of Practice in Ontario, or professional competency frameworks in British Columbia and Alberta—they are written for generalist ECE practice and do not explicitly reference outdoor environments, Land-based teaching and learning, ecological literacy, Indigenous Land relationships, risk-benefit assessment, or any of the specialized competencies required for outdoor and Land-based programs. This means that even in jurisdictions with the strongest professional infrastructure for ECE, outdoor and Land-based practice remains professionally invisible: not recognized, not assessed, and not required.

From the literature review in the environmental scan, eight core competency domains emerged that describe what educators are being asked to know and do in outdoor and Land-based settings.[15] These domains are: Child Development and Pedagogical Knowledge; Ecological and Environmental Literacy; Indigenous Perspectives and Ways of Knowing; Cultural Humility and Relational Practice; Health, Safety, and Risk-Benefit Competence; Reflective, Ethical, and

Professional Practice; Outdoor and Land-Based Pedagogical Competence; and Children's Rights, Voice, and Participatory Practice.

The standards of practice proposed in this paper build on these domains by integrating Indigenous systems thinking through each standard, rather than isolating it within two categories (Indigenous Perspectives and Ways of Knowing; Cultural Humility and Relational Practice). The reason for this is that the domains reflect a scholarship perspective. Literature comes from a Western-based process. It is important to acknowledge that Indigenous ways of knowing, doing, and being are a gap within this research, largely because they do not fit within a Euro-Western research frame—nor should they.

At a systems level, the environmental scan examined four domains that shape educator preparation and practice with regard to outdoor and Land-based early learning in all 13 Canadian provinces and territories. Analysis revealed a critical four-way disconnect across core policy domains, resulting in a key recommendation to address system alignment, in addition to developing supportive policy in all four domains.

The Critical Four-Way Disconnect

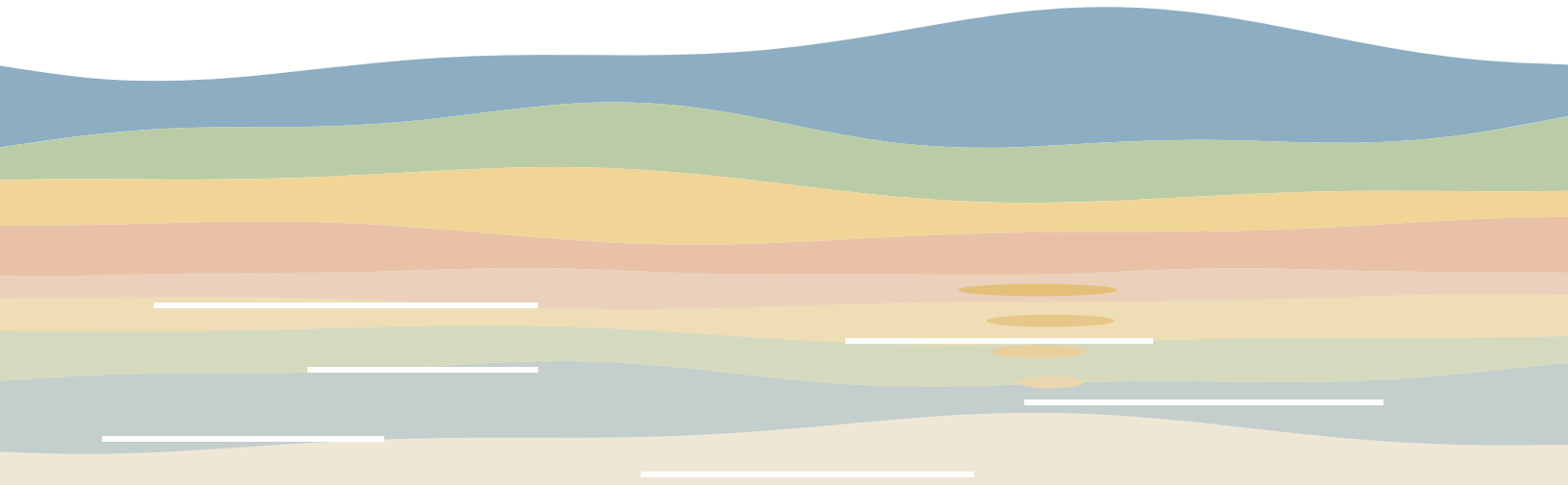
Standards of Practice	Early Learning and Curriculum Frameworks	Post-Secondary Programs	Licensing Regulations/ Standards
Where standards of practice exist, none explicitly identify outdoor or Land-based competencies as part of professional practice.	Philosophically support outdoor and Land-based learning, but do not define measurable educator competencies.	Inadequately prepare educators: only ~7% of Canadian ECE programs include any outdoor module.	Focus on safety compliance and facility requirements; outdoor pedagogical competence is absent.

This discussion paper recognizes the interconnectedness of these policy domains and offers both standards of practice for educators and implications for the other three policy domains to foster system alignment.

PART IV

Standards of Practice and Implications

1. How to Apply the Standards
2. There is No Right Way
3. The 11 Standards
4. Implications for Regulations and Licensing



How to Apply the Outdoor and Land-based Standards of Practice and Implications

Each educator deserves the opportunity to develop and hone the skills that are necessary to be effective in their roles. They can't be expected to do it alone—leaders and policymakers must support them.

Using the standards

Each standard identifies knowledge and competencies for educators to embody in their practice, followed by implications to help inform the development of early learning and curriculum frameworks, and post-secondary programs and curricula.

This work asks institutions to move with humility, care, and accountability. Some staff, faculty educators, and students may be at the beginning of learning about colonization, Indigenous rights, Land-based learning, and relationship with local communities. Post-secondary programs and collaborators of frameworks need to create open, trauma-informed spaces where this learning can happen with honesty, emotional safety, and respect.

Using the implications

The discussion paper offers implications for post-secondary programs, early learning and curriculum frameworks (henceforth referred to simply as frameworks), and ELCC regulations. The implications following each standard use reflective questions to guide framework and post-secondary program developers toward meaningful implementation. At the end of the discussion paper, implications for regulations are written as a single section to tie it all together and include a table summarizing the qualifications and professional learning that policymakers should consider as part of regulatory requirements.

Frameworks articulate the pedagogical principles, approaches, and goals for educators which guide curriculum and pedagogy. Post-secondary institutions prepare educators for outdoor and Land-based teaching and learning in alignment with those frameworks. This work cannot be confined to one principle, one designated area of a framework, one course, one assignment, or by one Indigenous instructor. Rather, it should be woven throughout entire frameworks, including visions, goals, principles and practices, and whole post-secondary programs, including program design, faculty practice, course objectives, practicums, and relationships with local Indigenous Nations, Elders, knowledge holders, families, and communities.[16]

The following questions can guide approaches to frameworks, post-secondary programs, and leaders as they review how outdoor and Land-based teaching and learning is envisioned, taught, modelled, and practised.

Post-secondary program and framework developers can ask:

- How can the program and framework developers commit to working towards an ethical space of engagement (or using an approach such as Etuaptmumk/Two-Eyed Seeing[17, 18]) when beginning a long-term relationship with local Indigenous Peoples and Nations?
- How can frameworks and post-secondary early childhood education programs be co-created with local Indigenous communities, Elders, and knowledge holders, in all stages and phases?
- How can faculty be supported to build respectful, long-term relationships with local Indigenous communities and organizations?
- How can these relationships guide post-secondary institutions to model effective Land-based programs? How can instructors model the competencies in each course that they teach?
- How can faculty and students learn on the Land as much as possible, not only in classrooms?
- How can Indigenous worldviews be reflected throughout the framework or post-secondary program rather than added as separate content?
- How can the responsibility for this work be shared across faculty and collaborators instead of placed mainly on Indigenous staff or only a few instructors?
- How can framework developers and post-secondary students be prepared to understand and advocate for curriculum competencies being achieved through outdoor and Land-based learning?

There is No Right Way

The best advice we can share is to never assume a “right way.” Nothing can be applied everywhere and to everyone. Land has been shaped over time by those who belong to it (and everyone belongs to Land somewhere). Trusting the process, the Land, and the people that shape it must come first.

The standards of practice, knowledge, and competencies presented in this paper are intended as a starting point, not a universal model. If ever in contention, all should ultimately defer to the Land you are on, and the standards of practice that have been developed by the Nations of that place.

Existing Indigenous-developed frameworks and guiding documents for further understanding include: First Nation principles of ownership, control, access, possession (OCAP©); the Métis principles of ownership, control, access, stewardship (OCAS); and Inuit Qaujimaningit (IQ); the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP); the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC); and the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls and 2SLGBTQQIA+ (MMIWG2S+). Together these provide additional and important perspective and learning.

The 11 Standards and Implications for Frameworks and Post-Secondary Programs

The standards are interwoven and work together. The order is intentional, as each competency and implication builds on what comes before.

While the standards centre educator practice, it is the shared responsibility of faculty members, policymakers, regulators, administrators, and others that serve educators to ensure the standards of practice and associated competencies and knowledge are supported.

The eleven standards at a glance

1. Sharing Love and Belonging 22
2. Recognizing the Impacts of Colonization 23
3. Prioritizing Indigenous Knowledge Systems 24
4. Connecting Regularly with the Land 25
5. Exploring Your Own Identity 26
6. Centring Relationships 27
7. Embracing Flexibility 28
8. Sharing Power 29
9. Supporting Safety (Risky Play) 30
10. Letting the Land Lead Learning 31
11. Reflecting for Growth 32

1 STANDARD 1 OF 11

Sharing Love and Belonging

ABOUT THIS STANDARD

There is room for all to grow and learn in the field of Land-based learning. Alongside beautiful and important differences, everyone working in this field shares one thing in common: wanting what is best for children and for the future. Being on the Land, as has been proven again and again, is necessary for healthy childhood development.[19, 20] Everyone (especially children) thrives when they feel loved, and that they belong and add value to their community. This love drives all decisions, planning, and ongoing learning.

On-the-Land work is relational and will look different for everyone. Showing up every day with heart and soul is the only real prerequisite. If you believe in the work and are here for the journey (including the mistakes), and bring to it your love of the children, community, and yourself, there is room for you to be a professional Land-based educator. You are exactly where you need to be.

Brave Searching[21] is having the courage to go past observing. It is finding the spaces where you can express yourself and engage appropriately.

KNOWLEDGE AND COMPETENCIES

- Demonstrate love through time and commitment to the Land, each other, and ourselves.
- Practise self-reflection and hold consistent boundaries for your own well-being.
- Communicate love with others in various ways: using words, facial expressions, body language, and actions.
- Model the behaviour that is required for building ethical space: fostering empathy, active listening, brave searching, self-awareness, and having a willingness to engage.[22]
- Ensure all identities are celebrated and valued within your program.
- Notice and amplify meaningful moments with children, families, and collaborators.
- Be curious when approaching behaviours and situations: use positive guiding techniques such as redirection, validation, and teach self-regulation strategies.
- Learn and use trauma-informed approaches:[23]
  - Provide choice, voice, and opportunities for self-determination;
  - Establish safety and trust with each child and family in your programming; and
  - Celebrate strength and resilience.
- Practise patience and empathy with yourself, collaborators, children, family, and the Land, especially in moments of dysregulation.[24] This is hard work!

IMPLICATIONS FOR FRAMEWORKS

Frameworks can include:

- Love, belonging, and relational safety in the vision and principles.
- The need for children to feel valued, connected, and safe in who they are, including their culture, language, family, identity, and lived experience.
- Well-being of the educators.

How can the framework guide educators to:

- see the Land as helpful in responding to children with compassion, co-regulation, redirection, and respect?
- see the Land as an equalizer for everyone in the program, regardless of race, abilities, neurodivergence, gender identity and expression, age, socioeconomic status, religious beliefs, and so many other characteristics?

How can the framework guide programming to:

- better reflect trauma-informed approaches in daily routines, transitions, and daily educator-child interactions?
- provide daily opportunities for children, families, and communities to build and express love and belonging with each other and the Land?
- affirm a child's identities (culture, language, family, gender, neurodiversity and lived experience) across all learning environments?

IMPLICATIONS FOR POST-SECONDARY PROGRAMS

Post-secondary programs can model the kind of relational, trauma-informed, inclusive practices they expect future educators to offer children and families.

Programs can ask:

- How can the post-secondary institution support the program to create a sense of love, belonging, safety, and respect for all students, faculty, Elders, knowledge holders, and community collaborators?
- How can an equitable, diverse, inclusive, and accessible (EDIA) environment be created in an outdoor and Land-based setting that celebrates and welcomes post-secondary students with disabilities, as well as children with disabilities in practicum settings, each of whom are often left indoors? What kind of professional learning is needed for faculty and staff?
- How can the faculty and staff be trained to use a trauma-informed/empathy-informed approach in an outdoor and Land-based setting with students?
- How can students be supported to understand that people's relationships with Land are shaped by history, displacement, racism, privilege, poverty, safety, and lived experience?
- How can Elders, knowledge holders, language speakers and harvesters be welcomed, respected, and compensated according to local protocols and current ways of life?

> *I notice Trisha sitting, still, intent, and I wonder what holds her attention so tightly for so long. As I make my way closer, I hear her speaking. "Red, dots, soft." Then I see the small, round creature that holds her reverence. A tiny ladybug moves along her hand to her arm, then onto her other hand. It seems to sense her interest and care. Her tiny fingers show me how caring two-year-olds can be, gently cradling, not squeezing awkwardly, the way so many toddler-age children are perceived to be. The other children stop for a moment to look, but move along just as quickly. Only she sits, engaged with this tiny being on what turns out to be the last warm day before the snow flies.*
>
> **— Lee Makovichuk**

EDIA means equity, diversity, inclusion, and accessibility. It is a framework used to break down systemic barriers to ensure all individuals—regardless of their background or abilities, and especially for those who are marginalized—have fair and equal opportunities to thrive.

2 STANDARD 2 OF 11

Recognizing the Impacts of Colonization

ABOUT THIS STANDARD

Thriving systems of Indigenous on-the-Land learning were once abundant in what is now Canada, much more than we see today.[25] Colonization forcefully replaced and interrupted Indigenous governance and ways of life with Euro-Western models. Notably, residential "schools" were a major tool in dismantling Indigenous ways of life, including Land-based teaching and learning, and the impact of this system affects every Indigenous person in Canada today. It is colonized learning that sent our children indoors and that caused challenges we still face today in getting children outside. Before we can make change, it is essential to understand what happened in as much depth as possible.

Today in Canada, colonization affects every person—Indigenous and non-Indigenous Peoples, settlers, and new Canadians, too. This is a shared history that we all have responsibility for. As those who teach and learn every day on the rock, soil, and earth that carry these stories, we as educators must learn the full story of Canada's history, and the local history of where we live.

KNOWLEDGE AND COMPETENCIES

- Accept that before colonization, Indigenous knowledge and learning on the Land was thriving as the primary education system: the original outdoor and on-the-Land learning.
- Acknowledge the privilege you have to be on the Land where you live, if your ancestors came from somewhere else.
- Identify what it means to uphold obligations to the treaty(s) where you live.
- Commit to developing your knowledge of colonization, treaty, the Indian Act, residential schools, assimilation, and enfranchisement.[26]
- Be familiar with the UNDRIP, the MMIWG2S+ Inquiry, and the TRC.[27, 28]
- Implement relevant Calls to Action of the TRC and the Calls for Justice of the MMIWG2S+ Inquiry within your programming.[29, 30]
- Be familiar with Jordan's Principle.
- Recognize that colonial harms are ongoing today and how they are embedded in all mainstream systems.
- Seek and share examples of self-determination, resurgence, and self-governance.

IMPLICATIONS FOR FRAMEWORKS

Frameworks can include:

- Acknowledgement that Indigenous Land-based learning existed long before colonization (e.g., UNDRIP Article 14 Education Rights calls for inclusion of Indigenous pedagogies and Land-based learning approaches).
- The history and ongoing impacts of colonization, including how education systems in Canada were shaped by policies meant to erase and assimilate Indigenous Peoples.
- The TRC Calls to Action, UNDRIP and MMIWG2S+ Calls for Justice.
- Principles and practices that support learning about colonization, residential schools, treaties, Indigenous rights, and reconciliation in ways that shape daily practice (e.g., TRC Call to Action 62 calls for education about residential schools, Indigenous history, treaties, and Indigenous contributions).

How can the framework guide educators to:

- build respectful, reciprocal relationships with Indigenous communities and families?

How can the framework guide programming to:

- include Indigenous ways of knowing, learning, and teaching throughout program design? (e.g., UNDRIP Article 23 declares the right of Indigenous Peoples to be actively involved in determining and developing priorities and strategies for their development.)

IMPLICATIONS FOR POST-SECONDARY PROGRAMS

Post-secondary programs can help students understand the local and national histories that shape relationships with Land, education, families, and communities.

Programs can ask:

- How can the program situate itself within the treaty, unceded, or traditional Lands where it operates?
- How can colonization, treaties, residential schools, the Indian Act, Indigenous rights, and current realities be taught across the program?
- How can the TRC Calls to Action, UNDRIP, and the Calls for Justice from MMIWG2S+ reports guide faculty and student learning?
- How can students be supported to understand why this learning matters for outdoor and Land-based early childhood practice?

> *Building relationships with our urban Indigenous friendship centre has been such a meaningful and important learning experience. As an Early Childhood Educator, and as someone who supports other Early Childhood Educators in the field, it has been deeply empowering to know who to reach out to for guidance and collaboration, how to create meaningful opportunities for engagement, and how to use the lens of truth and reconciliation to guide our work together. Through this process, my worldview and my relationship with the Land have grown in the best possible way.*
>
> **— Sandy Gow**

3 STANDARD 3 OF 11

Prioritizing Indigenous Knowledge Systems

ABOUT THIS STANDARD

With an understanding of the history of colonization, it is clear that Indigenous knowledge systems have been erased from the current education system in Canada.[31] Local Indigenous practices and worldviews must be the foundations for rebuilding healthy relationships with Land-based learning.[32, 33] Because they have been dismantled over many years, Indigenous systems must now be prioritized to create anything close to balance.

Indigenous knowledge systems are complete, living, place-based systems with their own protocols, responsibilities, laws, and ways of teaching. They are not to be inserted into existing programming wherever convenient. Some teachings require permission. Some belong to particular families, Nations, territories, seasons, ceremonies, or relationships. Some should not be taught outside the proper context. Respecting Indigenous knowledge means knowing when to listen, when to seek guidance, when to step back, and when leadership belongs with Elders, knowledge holders, families, Land users, and communities.

Prioritizing local Indigenous worldviews looks different depending on your identity, roles, and responsibilities. Indigenous educators can prioritize their own knowledge and that of their community and family. Non-Indigenous educators must be able to make space and share power.

It is essential that Indigenous children, educators, and collaborators can see themselves, their languages, their cultures, their stories, and their worldviews reflected in day-to-day programming.[34] Regardless of your background, Land-based learning cannot be done alone. Educators must welcome communities, families, knowledge holders, and Elders to provide foundational guidance to Land-based programming.[35] Indigenous stories, knowledge, wisdom, and direction will look different depending on where you live and who you work with.

KNOWLEDGE AND COMPETENCIES

- Take responsibility for understanding the local context, history, and Indigenous stories of the Land where you are.
- Earn respectful relationships with Elders and knowledge holders and invite them regularly to spend time on the Land with you. Ensure they are comfortable and their needs are met.
- Welcome people of different ages and skills. From babies to Elders, and every age category in between, we acknowledge a shared responsibility for the next generation.
- Encourage and value the inclusion of families. Welcome family members to participate in programming, and invite the children to share learning and culture from their family in the programming.
- Use and share local Indigenous languages, collaborating where possible with local language teachers and speakers.
- Provide children access to traditional foods by hiring and supporting harvesters and knowledge holders from local communities where possible.
- Practise active listening and understand that you may have to move outside of your comfort zone.

IMPLICATIONS FOR FRAMEWORKS

Frameworks can include:

- Local languages, seasonal practices, and protocols in collaboration with Elders and knowledge holders in the context of the framework.

How can the framework guide educators to:

- have ongoing opportunities to learn directly on the Land with Indigenous knowledge holders and Elders?
- integrate Indigenous languages in collaboration with local speakers and language holders?
- involve Indigenous communities in shaping what Land-based learning looks like in daily program design that responds to seasonal changes?

How can the framework guide programming to:

- provide children with opportunities to engage with local knowledge systems respectfully?

IMPLICATIONS FOR POST-SECONDARY PROGRAMS

Indigenous Knowledge Systems should be treated as foundational, living, place-based, and governed by local protocols.

Programs can ask:

- How can local Indigenous histories, languages, stories, protocols, and responsibilities respectfully be included across the program in relationship with local Elders or knowledge holders and without appropriation?[36]
- What is needed so that Elders and knowledge holders are readily accessible?
- How can course objectives support students in understanding that Indigenous knowledge systems have been built for thousands of years, recognizing that people, language, culture, and knowledge are interconnected and all come from Land?
- How can indoor and outdoor learning spaces be welcoming, safe, and accessible for Indigenous families, Elders, and community collaborators?
- How can faculty and staff be encouraged to use active listening particularly with Elders and knowledge holders?

> *Our hope with Bushkids is to one day completely support Indigenous staff and collaborators to be on the Land and with family, understanding that this is critical to developing and maintaining knowledge and wisdom to share in our Land-based learning. The knowledge that Indigenous Peoples have is sought after, but it's often forgotten that this knowledge can only come from way of life. Without that way of life, it's not fair to expect it. To support this way of life means giving many paid cultural days, paid family days, and compensating harvesters for time spent on the Land even if they don't come back with food. We're not quite there yet but it's our vision. We do what we can, where we can, to work towards that.*
>
> **— Chloe Grandjambe**

4 STANDARD 4 OF 11

Connecting Regularly with the Land

ABOUT THIS STANDARD

To let the Land lead learning, you must have your own ongoing relationship with the Land on which you live, work, teach, learn, and play.[37] The way you do this will be unique to you and some of you may be at the starting point. No matter how you choose to spend time outdoors, maintaining your own practice is essential for integrating wisdom from the Land into program processes and outcomes, and for understanding people as part of Land. Showing up early to have some quiet time, spending your own time at the outdoor site, giving offerings to the Land, practising your own outdoor skills and learning with other adults are some ways to connect regularly with the Land.

In the same way, regular and repeated time outside is necessary for children. When given the opportunity, they use all their senses to build their own relationships with the Land. While you can't control learning outcomes, your own personal journey is an important pillar of understanding and an example you can share.

Spending time in nature can show you how all living things depend on each other.[38] It can help you to internalize the benefits of Land for human well-being and to show up for others from a more grounded and flexible place—good for you, good for children, good for the Land.[39]

KNOWLEDGE AND COMPETENCIES

- Prioritize spending regular and repeated time on the Land for yourself, outside of work hours, both at your site and around your area.
- Be present and open to embrace the seasons and cycles, as the Land is always changing.
- Develop a relationship with local plants and animals; notice how they change and adapt to the seasons.
- Ensure you can identify local plants and animals, both for safety and for your ability to share teachings.
- Develop Land-based skills needed for your context (e.g., fire making, wood chopping, shelter making).
- Prioritize regular, repeated time outdoors for children as much as possible, for long stretches of play.

IMPLICATIONS FOR FRAMEWORKS

Frameworks can include:

- The explicit benefits for educators and children to have regular and meaningful time outdoors everyday and across the seasons to build direct relationships with, and to see the interconnections between, plants, animals, water, weather, and local ecosystems.
- The promotion of co-learning about ecological literacy, seasonal Land-based learning, animals, local ecosystem, and bush skills such as fire making, wood handling, and shelter building.
- The protection of children's rights to extended outdoor play and exploration across all seasons and environments (UN Convention on the Rights of the Child).[40]

How can the framework guide educators to:

- facilitate regular and repeated opportunities of outdoor, child-centred learning in all seasons?
- include seasonal changes, climate, biodiversity, and ecological responsibility in daily learning?

How can the framework guide programming to:

- build a regular connection with the Land into the structure of the schedule?
- ensure children have opportunities to connect with the Land in all seasons?

IMPLICATIONS FOR POST-SECONDARY PROGRAMS

Students need repeated, meaningful time on the Land throughout their training and practicum placements across seasons and courses.

Programs can ask:

- How can the program ensure students spend regular time on the Land in all seasons and during practicum placements?
- What partnerships or agreements can support consistent access to safe, nearby outdoor learning spaces?
- How can students be supported to build confidence outdoors, regardless of their previous experience?
- Where in the curriculum are there opportunities to teach about ecological literacy, seasonal awareness, local plants and animals, and environmental responsibility?
- How can students be given opportunities to practise Land-based skills such as fire making, shelter building, harvesting, preparing food, and planning for cold weather?

> *Each year, I travel across Newfoundland and Labrador to engage in professional learning with Early Childhood Educators. In every region, I make time to walk local trails and visit ponds, rivers, and beaches. Along the way, I have found partridgeberries and bakeapples, the skeletons of last summer's pitcher plants, and candle ice on the shore, which sounds like a thousand tiny chimes when caught by a wave. I have watched moose calves with their mothers in Terra Nova National Park, a herd of caribou running below as my plane flew over St. Anthony, and even a bear cub on my way to a waterfall near Happy Valley-Goose Bay.*
>
> *After meeting the black bear, I considered walking a new trail, but even along the busy Birch Island Boardwalk, a sign warned: "This is Bear Country." Before I could leave, I met two sisters finishing the trail with their mother and asked what they had seen. "Lots of ducks, birds, and rabbits," they said. "And what about bears?" I asked, ready to return to my car. The youngest laughed and held out her hands. "That's what the sticks are for! You use them to make noise and the bears will stay away." She convinced me to try the walk, then ran back moments later to give me her stick so I could feel safe, just as she had with her mother and sister.*
>
> *I did not see another bear that day, or on any walk in the woods since. But she reminded me that sometimes you just need to carry the right stick, and that being prepared on the Land is better than staying off it altogether.*
>
> **— Sandy Gow**

5 STANDARD 5 OF 11

Exploring Your Own Identity

ABOUT THIS STANDARD

Self-reflection helps you notice what is informing your decisions and approaches to teaching and learning. Land-based learning requires you to understand where you come from, where your families come from, and what histories and context they inherently represent. These histories can carry conflict and privilege, or trauma and hurt. We must sit with the realities of this truth. Reflecting on all of this can help you find ways to engage with others in your community on equal ground.[41] This is a part of your own journey of connecting with Land. Knowing yourself and where you fit, being confident about it, and owning who you are allows you to find your roles and responsibilities in this space.[42, 43] Some parts of on-the-Land learning will not be your responsibility. No one can do it all, so being very clear about who you are is the best way to play your part.

Your program itself also carries an identity that is important to assess. Consider how an organization functions, who its partners are, what knowledge systems guide its mandate, and how decisions are made.

KNOWLEDGE AND COMPETENCIES

- Identify where you come from. Your ancestors may or may not come from the community where you work and live.
- Find curiosity and pride in your own ancestry and share it.
- Reflect on your ancestry, privilege, background, identity, race, gender, language, physical ability, and socio-economic status. Consider how all of this together (your positionality) affects your role as a Land-based educator.
- If you are not Indigenous to the Land you live on, prioritize making space for local cultures, belief systems, protocols, and ceremonies but understand that you are not being asked to adopt these for yourself.
- Explore the history, culture, and identity of the communities around your place of work in relation to your own identity.
- Access and practise brave searching within yourself when exploring your own identity feels uncomfortable.

IMPLICATIONS FOR FRAMEWORKS

Frameworks can include:

- Educator positionality, self-reflection, and identity development as foundational to outdoor and Land-based early childhood education; and for shaping relationships with children, families, communities, and the Land.

How can the framework guide educators to:

- recognize that their identities can carry histories of privilege, trauma, and cultural context that shape their teaching and learning practice?
- develop confidence in sharing their identity while practising humility, creating a culture of inclusion, and respecting Indigenous knowledge systems?

How can the framework guide programming to:

- regularly review their program identity (values, partnerships, and decision-making processes) to ensure alignment with outdoor and Land-based learning and Indigenous community-guided practice?
- include multiple knowledge systems without appropriation?
- embed structured opportunities for ongoing educator reflection on identity?

IMPLICATIONS FOR POST-SECONDARY PROGRAMS

Students and faculty need supported opportunities to reflect on identity, positionality, privilege, culture, trauma, and responsibilities.

Programs can ask:

- How can the program examine its own identity, history, partnerships, and decision-making structures within the local community context?
- How can the program create safe and supported spaces for conversations about privilege, colonization, identity, and positionality, which could be difficult?
- How can reflective journals, portfolios, storytelling, creative assessments, and Land-based documentation be used to support faculty and students to reflect on how identity intersects with the cultures and communities around them?
- How can students be encouraged to learn about the communities where they live and work?
- What learning opportunities support critical reflection, cultural humility, and relational practice?

6

STANDARD 6 OF 11

Centring Relationships

ABOUT THIS STANDARD

If you are on a journey of understanding your identity, your relationships with the Land, and the implications of your programming, you may be ready to bring others along. If you skip the work beforehand or rush collaboration, you may risk causing harm to others or to your process. However, once you understand your role and responsibilities, you can collaborate with others who fill gaps in knowledge, worldviews, skills, and perspective.[44] Allowing these relationships to influence everyday decisions in your programming, as well as long term goals, will support your practice to evolve as it needs to over time.

Centring relationships means you are a connector and a facilitator of knowledge, rather than a director or a manager. It takes time, patience, and love to develop these types of relationships. Your programming can be a place where the magic comes together; you are not creating the magic, but rather you are creating the conditions for it to thrive. You will find that the same skills that help you bring people together and accept shared leadership are the same ones that you use when listening to the Land itself—to the rocks, water, trees, plants, weather, animals, and seasons.

KNOWLEDGE AND COMPETENCIES

- Develop and maintain local connections and authentic relationships with many different collaborators and supporters in varied roles, including local Elders and knowledge holders.
- Ensure relationships are fair and equitable for the educator and the collaborators.
- Practise ways to honour and hold space for multiple worldviews (e.g., ethical space, Etuaptmumk/Two-Eyed Seeing, and local protocols).[45]
- Appreciate that each person has gifts and challenges, and work with both.
- Find ways to collaborate with programs and organizations that are already doing Land-based learning.
- Invite friends and families of participants to contribute to the programming.
- Make space in the programming for the sharing of diverse knowledge and cultures.
- Ensure the space is open and welcoming to children, families, and collaborators of all races, abilities, cultures, gender identities, religions, sex, economic, and social status.

IMPLICATIONS FOR FRAMEWORKS

Frameworks can include:

- Family and community engagement in the vision and principles.
- Collaboration and partnerships as a foundation for supporting continuous improvement in outdoor and Land-based programming, and for staying connected with the current needs of the community.
- A definition of educators as facilitators, relationship-builders, guides, and co-learners.

How can the framework guide educators to:

- create inclusive spaces where all identities are welcomed, shared, and celebrated?
- support children to build respectful and reciprocal relationships with each other, with their communities, and with the Land?

How can the framework guide programming to:

- include families, communities, knowledge holders, and Elders in planning of, delivery of, documentation of, and reflection on outdoor and Land-based teaching and learning?
- value building long-term, respectful, and reciprocal relationships?

IMPLICATIONS FOR POST-SECONDARY PROGRAMS

Programs can model long-term, reciprocal relationships with local Nations, families, Elders, knowledge holders, community organizations, and Land-based programs.

Programs can ask:

- How can the program create time and flexibility for relationship-building?
- How can faculty maintain ongoing relationships with local communities instead of engaging only when needed for courses?
- How can partnerships be built on reciprocity rather than short-term program needs?
- How can curriculum and practicum experiences prepare students to build respectful relationships with families, communities, collaborators, and the Land?
- How can pedagogical documentation/narrative approaches be used in ways that are meaningful to families, communities, and cultures?

7

STANDARD 7 OF 11

Embracing Flexibility

ABOUT THIS STANDARD

As outdoor and Land-based educators, the Land is our greatest guide and teacher. The Land is adaptable and we must be as well. Change shows up in every moment on the Land (when it snows, when it rains, when an animal visits, when a tree falls from the wind).

Listening to the Land, to other people, and to ourselves means being aware of these changes and being able to see and take advantage of opportunities as they arise. The ability to be flexible means responding with intention to the circumstances presented, rather than reacting or controlling. This intention must show up in daily planning, which may change due to weather, collaborators, the moods of children, or a set of tracks running through the site.

It must show up in long-term development of programming, where we respond and adjust as needs or changes arise in the community.[46] It must show up in our relationships with ourselves, our own relationships with the Land, our relationships with others, and how we choose to proceed each day.

KNOWLEDGE AND COMPETENCIES

- Be adaptable to changes in weather, children, behaviours, learning needs, seasons, programming, other collaborators.
- Embrace opportunities to problem solve and create anew when things do not go as planned.
- Let the children's relationships with themselves, each other, and the Land guide schedules and process.
- Honour the child's individuality and process more than outcomes and finished products. Follow the lead of the child.
- Believe in the child's capacity, capability, and curiosity; follow their cues rather than adhering to schedules and agendas.
- Be open to changing identities of children and how they see themselves.

IMPLICATIONS FOR FRAMEWORKS

Frameworks can include:

- Support for flexibility, inquiry, responsiveness to weather/seasons, and learning that unfolds over time.
- Value of the process, curiosity, and responsiveness over pre-determined goals.
- A context that encourages outdoor and Land-based programming to evolve as new truths, relationships, and community priorities emerge over time.

How can frameworks guide educators to:

- improvise, problem-solve, and make responsive decisions while teaching and learning on the Land?
- use children's cues, identities, and relationships with the Land to guide learning experiences and daily rhythms?

How can frameworks guide programming to:

- embrace schedules and planning approaches that are flexible and responsive to weather, seasonal changes, children's interests, and opportunities that arise on the Land?

IMPLICATIONS FOR POST-SECONDARY PROGRAMS

Outdoor and Land-based learning requires flexibility. Programs can prepare students for weather, seasonal change, children's interests, community priorities, and unexpected learning opportunities.

Programs can ask:

- How can the program and instructors model adaptability when plans change due to weather, Land conditions, community priorities, and student needs?
- How can faculty be supported to value process, curiosity, and relationships (inquiry-based learning approach) over pre-determined outcomes in outdoor and Land-based learning?
- How can course objectives focus on competencies rather than only finished products or fixed content?
- How can practicum placements be an opportunity to practise responsive planning that follows children's interests and Land-led learning?
- How can students develop the competencies to adapt safely in changing outdoor environments?

> *"I don't build fairy houses," Evan declares.*
>
> *"I would never ask you to do anything you don't want to do, but do you think you could come along to see what it's about before you make up your mind?" I ask. Plans to be in the river valley were well underway, with snacks, books, water, and first aid loaded up. As we dress for our hike through the community to make our way into the trees lining the riverbank, I am expecting the children to feel a sense of contentment, creating stories about the tiny creatures they meet.*
>
> **— Lee Makovichuk**

Before I know it, the children engage with natural loose parts, rocks, sticks, leaves, and moss. The bits of trash we find are placed in bags that we cart back home to discard, hopefully leaving the riverbank better than when we arrived. I notice Evan, head down, intent on balancing bark on two sticks he places upright. His eyes move from his building to me, "You didn't tell me we were going to be in the forest!" He declares. Then he turns back to the little house he is constructing at the base of a large old tree.

8

STANDARD 8 OF 11

Sharing Power

ABOUT THIS STANDARD

Sharing Land-based teachings and processes with children means undoing a lot of what we have been taught about power. As educators, we are meant to guide and connect, to offer safety and boundaries but not impose our strict schedules, or even our ideas on children. Children can be given power through responsibilities—helping to keep camp, be part of chores, and taking care of each other. Each child builds their own self-determined relationship with the Land through play, finding their unique boundaries and tolerance for risk, and in doing that, they build identity, confidence, and skills that support healthy development and learning for life.

It is important to model sharing power in how we facilitate programming, in our approaches with collaborators, and in how we listen to the Land each day. Sharing power is a skill that spans every relationship.

KNOWLEDGE AND COMPETENCIES

- Give space and respect to the Land so that you can notice its many teachings, and integrate the teachings into your programming where possible.
- Make space for the priorities of collaborators, supporters, and communities.
- Share power with children, co-workers, and other educators.
- Be responsive to others' ideas and curiosities.
- Give responsibility and choices to the children wherever possible.
- Trust in the capacity, capability, and knowledge of children.
- Be a co-learner with the children and let go of the expectation of having all of the right answers.
- Model your own curiosity about the Land and about each other.
- Use words and body language that are welcoming and that demonstrate openness.

IMPLICATIONS FOR FRAMEWORKS

Frameworks can include:

- The importance of sharing power with children, co-workers, and collaborators as a guiding principle for educators.
- The significant role that families and educators play when they empower children and believe that they are capable, unique, and full of potential.
- Recognition of the child as capable and self-determining, and of educators as guides, collaborators, and co-learners.

How can frameworks guide educators to:

- balance safety responsibilities with children's rights to make choices, take risks, and direct parts of their own learning?[47]
- see the Land as a powerful teacher for them and the children?

How can frameworks guide programming to:

- include families and communities as important partners in empowering their children and supporting self-determined learning?

IMPLICATIONS FOR POST-SECONDARY PROGRAMS

Post-secondary programs can model shared leadership and co-learning so students can carry those practices into early learning environments.

Programs can ask:

- How can the institution model shared leadership and collaborative decision-making across the program?
- How can faculty be encouraged to share power with co-instructors, guests, students, and community collaborators, let go of rigid expectations and respond to emergent learning opportunities in outdoor and Land-based programming?
- How can instructors be encouraged to have more trust in the students and see them as capable, knowledgeable, and self-determined in projects, practicum placements, and assessments?
- How can instructors model being co-learners rather than experts to help minimize the power dynamic that often occurs?[48]
- How can students be prepared to share power with children, families, and communities in future practice?

9

STANDARD 9 OF 11

Supporting Safety (Risky Play)

ABOUT THIS STANDARD

Any healthy relationship needs boundaries, as well as the confidence and freedom to move within them and see the wide range of possibilities that can exist there. Relationships with the Land are no different. This means supporting children to take developmentally appropriate risks within appropriate boundaries of health and safety.[49, 50] It means knowing the Land well enough to determine what a reasonable risk is. It also means supporting children as they build confidence and resilience, and as they learn to recognize their own limits physically, emotionally, mentally, and socially.

Risky play is a research term used to describe play where there is some uncertainty and the possibility of a physical injury. Heights, speed, exploring alone, rough-and-tumble play, tools, elements (frozen lake, wind, fire), and crashing are examples of risky play.[51] This type of play helps children to be comfortable with risk, creating lifelong skills to help them make good decisions that keep them safe. Play on the Land, with all of its risks, has always been a way of life for Indigenous families and their children. Play on the Land, with all of its risks, is an important and defining component of supporting safety, and it has largely been regulated and legislated out of children's play.[52]

KNOWLEDGE AND COMPETENCIES

- Assist children to manage their own risk-taking while playing (through physical literacy, self assessment, confidence building, communication).
- Integrate concepts of healthy childhood development into program planning.
- Be comfortable in and wise to the conditions of each season, and support children to adapt as well.
- Use words and phrases that reduce fear and foster a child's interest in trying something challenging that is developmentally appropriate.
- Communicate the benefits and the skills that can be learned by children when they participate in risky play.
- Use risk management strategies such as dynamic risk assessments, activity risk-benefit assessments, seasonal site assessments, and daily assessments.

IMPLICATIONS FOR FRAMEWORKS

Frameworks can include:

- Risky play, activity risk-benefit assessments, dynamic risk assessments, and site assessments as guiding principles and practice.
- Risky play principles and practices recommended by those with expertise in the field of risky play (e.g., local educators, families, Indigenous Nations, other programs, academics, and established training for outdoor and Land-based programming).

How can frameworks guide educators to:

- value and apply activity risk-benefit assessment and dynamic risk assessment as approaches for reducing injury while maintaining rich learning opportunities?
- support daily outdoor risky play to help children develop the important life skill of managing their own risk taking?

How can frameworks guide programming to:

- educate and engage families about the holistic benefits of outdoor and risky play to strengthen wrap-around support for children and reduce the fear of injury?
- educate and engage educators about the holistic benefits of outdoor and risky play and reduce the fear of injury and liability?

IMPLICATIONS FOR POST-SECONDARY PROGRAMS

Post-secondary programs need to prepare educators to support children to take risks with confidence, skill, and care.

Programs can ask:

- How can the program model that outdoor and Land-based learning spaces can be designed to support safe relationships with fire, water, tools, weather, and natural elements throughout all of the seasons?
- How can faculty and students be trained in dynamic risk assessment, site assessment, and activity risk-benefit assessment?[53]
- How can instructors model calm communication that builds confidence?
- How can courses connect risky play with resilience, physical literacy, healthy development, and Indigenous understandings of children's relationships with the Land?
- How can students be prepared to explain the benefits of risky play to families, colleagues, and licensing inspectors?

10 STANDARD 10 OF 11

Letting the Land Lead Learning

ABOUT THIS STANDARD

All the standards of practice overlap and move together, paving the way for this one: letting the Land lead learning. Once the foundational work is set, this is where we play! We must be able to weave together standards, competencies, and knowledge, and also enjoy ourselves in programming.

Letting the Land lead learning means letting go of control in the moment and supporting play—for ourselves as educators, for the children, for the collaborators. Many Dene Elders and knowledge holders have expressed that time must be protected for play while on the Land, because play is necessary for lifelong learning.[54] Not every moment will see a pre-planned outcome, but over time the trust in process, children, Land, others, and ourselves can lead to outcomes that are better than we could imagine.

KNOWLEDGE AND COMPETENCIES

- Trust the Land and the seasons to provide opportunities to support developmentally-appropriate learning skills for children.[55]
- Find opportunities to merge local curriculum and frameworks with the seasonal teachings of the Land.
- Incorporate teachings and accept guidance from Indigenous collaborators in the community wherever possible.
- Have a thoughtful design that includes inquiry-based teaching strategies.
- Allow all of the aspects of balanced programming to come together through play-based learning.
- Let the Land, and its daily surprises and changes, lead the play and learning.

IMPLICATIONS FOR FRAMEWORKS

Frameworks can include:

- A vision of how Land can lead learning by prioritizing outdoor play-based learning that is led by the seasons and guided by the experiences of local knowledge holders, Elders, and community members.
- Recognition that important learning skills for children can be met through outdoor, play-based, and inquiry-based learning on the Land.

How can frameworks guide educators to:

- trust the Land, follow children's inquiries, and respond to learning opportunities as they emerge?

How can frameworks guide programming to:

- structure play-based and inquiry-based learning so that children's experiences are flexible, responsive, and grounded in the Land around them?

IMPLICATIONS FOR POST-SECONDARY PROGRAMS

Students need to experience Land-led learning directly so they understand it as more than theory.

Programs can ask:

- How can the program model outdoor, play-based, inquiry-based learning led by seasons, weather, children, and the Land?
- How can the program communicate the benefits of Land-led learning for not just children but all staff and faculty in the program?
- How can faculty be supported to weave together curriculum expectations, seasonal teachings, and local knowledge in real time?
- How can instructors model joy, curiosity, humility, and wonder in relationship with the Land?
- How can outcomes for practicum placements support students to follow seasonal changes and Land conditions as part of curriculum planning?
- How can courses show that social, emotional, physical, cognitive, cultural, and spiritual learning can emerge through play on the Land?

> *It was May and the ice was finally starting to melt along the edges of the lake. The kids were curious about the ice: how thick it was and how long it would take to melt. We planned for some inquiries about noticing how the Land is changing with the new season of spring, including the lake, the birds, the plants, the trees. We started our day by putting dried fireweed into the lake—to ask for a good day that is safe, warm, and fun with our ancestors beside us. Then, the entire plan changed. The fireweed surprised a few larger jackfish who were feeding in the open water on the edge of the lake (we didn't notice they were there)! They splashed us and swam away. "Let's go fishing!" We promptly found ways to make our own fishing rods and fished all day along the edge of the lake ice. We heard so many questions. "What are they eating?" "Where did they come from?" "Can we eat one?" "Were they there all winter?" The Land led our learning in this way for two weeks, as we learned how to be safe while fishing and investigating the habitat and behaviours of jackfish in the spring time.*
>
> **— Wendy Lahey**

11

STANDARD 11 OF 11

Reflecting for Growth

ABOUT THIS STANDARD

Reflection is important so that policymakers, educators, children, families, communities, and systems can learn from experience. Reflection means asking questions. When you want to improve something or when things are unfamiliar, asking questions of yourself, others, and the Land can deepen understanding. There are many different places where growth can occur when reflecting on the experiences of a child, reflecting with other educators on day-to-day choices or reflection on the overall program design.[56, 57]

Reflection can help you to pause and look at the objectives of the outdoor and Land-based programming, and to see if they are being met in the day-to-day flow or in the bigger picture. Reflection can help you to stay open to diverse cultures, values, and beliefs. It is a tool for letting the Land lead learning.

KNOWLEDGE AND COMPETENCIES

- Use pedagogical documentation/narration approaches of teaching and learning to reflect on the experiences of children, educators, and families, and how these experiences can direct future outdoor and Land-based learning opportunities.
- Invite families and children to reflect on their outdoor and Land-based experiences and what is meaningful to them.
- Be intentional about collaborating, seeking feedback, and reflecting critically on your outdoor and Land-based practice and programming choices.
- Use critical reflection as a consistent tool to build responsiveness and adaptability into your outdoor and Land-based programming.

IMPLICATIONS FOR FRAMEWORKS

Frameworks can include:

- Critical reflection for continuous learning as a guiding principle that supports responsiveness to children, educators, families, collaborators, and the Land.
- The concept of learning stories with the goal of communicating and engaging with families, communities, collaborators and the broader community.
- Thoughtful questions for reflection in areas of learning for both children and educators.

How can frameworks guide educators to:

- examine their decisions, assumptions, relationships, and responsibilities in dynamic Land-based environments?
- support children in their own reflections as they engage in outdoor and Land-based learning?

How can frameworks guide programming to:

- create time and space for reflection with children, educators, families, and partners about meaningful experiences on the Land and program improvement?
- document outdoor and Land-based teaching and learning?

IMPLICATIONS FOR POST-SECONDARY PROGRAMS

Critical reflection can be part of the whole program, as well as an individual assignment.

Programs can ask:

- How can students be encouraged to reflect throughout the program?
- How can course objectives focus on reflection and adaptability for continuous improvement in Land-based practices?
- How can faculty, students, families, Elders, knowledge holders, and community partners be invited into reflective processes?
- How can students be encouraged to invite children and families into reflective conversations about learning?
- How can time be created for collaborative reflection across courses and departments?
- How can learning stories, reflective journals, storytelling, portfolios, and Land-based documentation be used to support growth for post-secondary institutes, faculty, students, and families?

Implications for Regulations and Licensing

As the field of outdoor and Land-based learning for ELCC continues to grow, there is a need for clear regulations to support it.[58] Regulations need to address both educator qualifications and ongoing professional learning, as well as enable structural conditions of the environments for learning. These include access to diverse outdoor spaces (fenced spaces and unfenced landscapes), educator-to-child ratios, group sizes that support safety and engagement with children, and flexibility in program delivery to adapt to local environmental conditions and contexts. There is ample opportunity to consider how regulations can encourage meaningful relationships with the Land, communities, and cultures through quality early childhood education, including the importance of Indigenous partnerships and staffing.[59] This is an exciting time for the field, as regulators are called to think creatively and create strong policies, procedures, and professional learning for the future.

Considering the relationships between educator qualifications and ongoing professional learning is essential. While some competencies can be developed through formal education, others will emerge through mentorship, community relationships, personal Land-based experiences, and reflective practice. Recognizing the value of both formal and community-based learning experiences will help create pathways that are responsive to the realities of outdoor and Land-based learning. Outdoor and Land-based learning has many nuances that are determined by the place and people where the learning occurs. This means that effective regulatory approaches must consider how they can reflect local Lands, Indigenous Nations, ecosystems, languages, and community priorities while maintaining clear expectations for quality, safety, and wellbeing.

Health and safety requirements must support healthy risk taking in children's play, with clear approaches to dynamic risk assessments, site risk assessments, and activity risk-benefit assessments.[60] Facility standards and outdoor space requirements for both fenced spaces and unfenced landscapes support learning environments that are conducive to risky play and the holistic experience of outdoor and Land-based learning. Daily experiences on the Land often require gathering spaces, shelters, fire-based learning areas, natural play environments, and places where Elders, knowledge holders, families, and community members can comfortably participate. Consideration for ratios and group sizes can be made dynamically depending on the context. These spaces may not align with conventional approaches to facility design and require consideration to ensure safety, accessibility, cultural relevance, and practicality, all of which must work together.

Finally, outdoor and Land-based learning often responds to changing weather, seasonal cycles, community involvement, children's interests, and opportunities that emerge on the Land. Regulatory frameworks that acknowledge flexibility, responsiveness, relationship-building, and continuous learning are better positioned to support educators in meeting the diverse needs of children, families, and communities while maintaining high standards of care and safety.

The following table provides considerations for licensing and regulations regarding initial qualifications, and ongoing professional learning for outdoor and Land-based educators.

QUALIFICATIONS *The minimum knowledge and competencies an educator should have before entering the position*	PROFESSIONAL LEARNING *Ongoing learning, mentorship, practice, and reflection needed to deepen the knowledge and competencies over time*
Outdoor and Land-Based Skills • Clear interpretation of outdoor and Land-based learning principles and practices. • Knowledge of healthy child development in outdoor environments. • Application of play-based, inquiry-based, and child-centred learning approaches in an outdoor and Land-based setting. • Knowledge of seasonal and place-based learning.	**Outdoor and Land-Based Skills** • Land-based skills such as fire building, fire safety, shelter building, how to set up a good camp. • Cleaning, preparing, and cooking food from the Land. • Tool use and maintenance; applications to outdoor and Land-based settings. • Navigation and orientation. • Seasonal outdoor skills. **Mentorship** • Seasonal mentorship with experienced outdoor and Land-based educators. • Learning exchanges between programs. • On-the-Land professional learning gatherings.
Indigenous Community Relationships • Appreciation of local Indigenous histories, perspectives, and the impacts of colonization. • Awareness of local protocols when working with Indigenous communities, Elders, and knowledge holders. • Recognition and appreciation of reconciliation, UNDRIP, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Calls to Action, MMIWG2S+ Calls for Justice. • Ability to recognize the importance of Indigenous knowledge systems in Land-based learning.	**Indigenous Community Relationships** • Local history, treaties, and protocols. • History and ongoing impacts of colonization. • Learning directly with local Elders, knowledge holders, and Indigenous communities. • Indigenous language learning opportunities. • Cultural safety and reconciliation learning. • Participation in community-led learning opportunities.
Ecological Literacy • Knowledge of local plants, animals, ecosystems, and seasonal cycles. • Appreciation of environmental stewardship, human interconnectedness, and interdependence with the Land. • Ability to identify common environmental hazards and opportunities for learning.	**Ecological Literacy** • Plant identification. • Wildlife awareness. • Seasonal ecosystem observation. • Climate and environmental change education. • Local natural history learning.
Risky Play Management and Outdoor Safety • Dynamic risk assessment skills. • Activity risk-benefit assessment skills. • Outdoor emergency preparedness and response. • Wilderness first aid (depending on site location). • Modeling of risky play and its role in healthy child development. • Knowledge of seasonal safety considerations.	**Risky Play Management and Outdoor Safety** • Dynamic and site risk assessment training. • Activity risk-benefit assessment training. • Wilderness first aid (depending on site location) and emergency response. • Risky play facilitation. • Communicating risk and safety with families.
Relationships, Community Building and Inclusion • Skills in relationship-based practice with children, families, communities, and colleagues. • Planning of an inclusive and culturally responsive practice that offers a sense of belonging. • Ability to work respectfully and thoughtfully with diverse worldviews and cultures. • Skills in communication, collaboration, and conflict resolution.	**Relationships, Community Building and Inclusion** • Practising ethical space, Etuaptmumk/Two-Eyed Seeing, Strong Like Two People, or other similar approaches of the local community. • Family and intergenerational engagement. • Community partnership development. • Facilitation and communication skills. • Social-emotional learning and self-regulation strategies.
Reflective Practice • Ability to engage in self-reflection and critical reflection. • Preparation of pedagogical documentation/narration approaches. • Ability to evaluate and adapt practice based on reflection and feedback.	**Reflective Practice** • Pedagogical documentation/narration, responsive planning, and learning stories. • Peer mentorship and coaching. • Participation in communities of practice. • Wellness and self-care for educators. • Identity, positionality, and cultural humility learning.

PART V

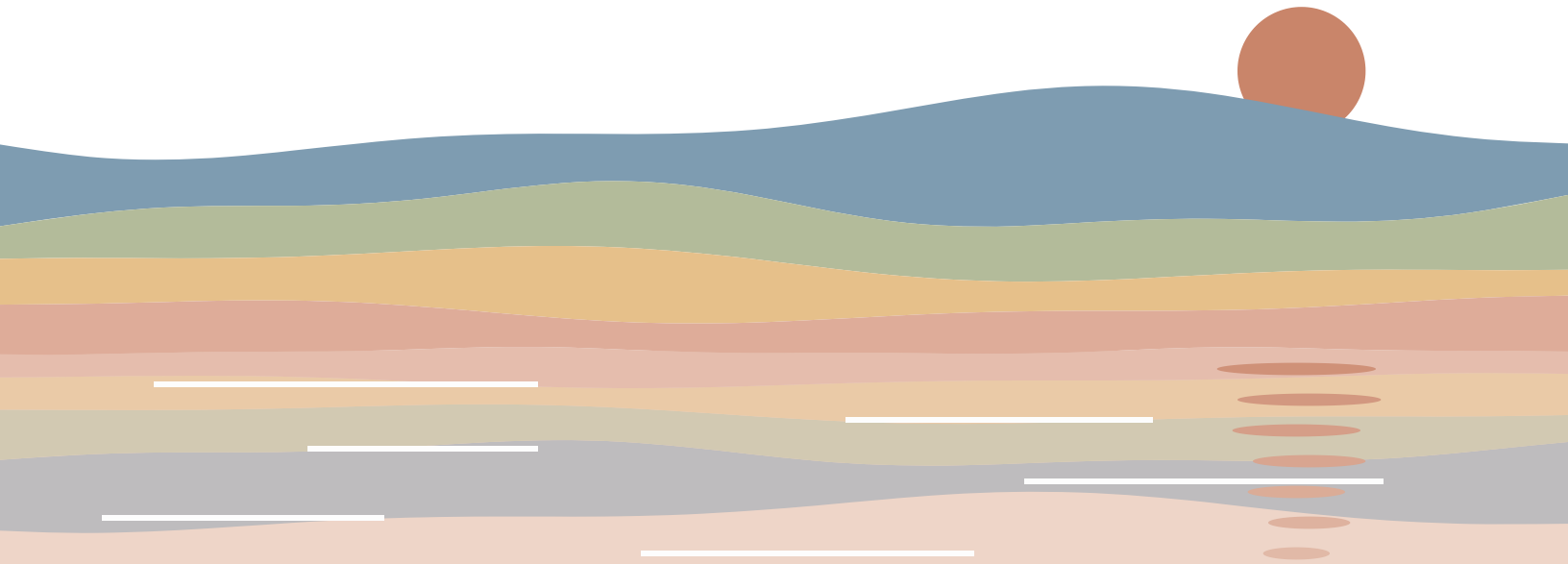
Concluding Thoughts

Ever since I can remember I was taught by my parents, grandparents, and Elders to seek advice from the experts. Lucky for us, so many wonderful experts have contributed to this paper.

It was built with love and caring for those who want the best for the youngest people in our communities. The advice is here, for you, to consider as you build programs that meet the needs of Land-based programs and services. Primarily this guidance is to help you build programs and training for those who work with the little ones. What a wonderful gift for the future.

Every child deserves opportunities for connection to Land—you can make that happen!

tThá Huná,
Sabrina Broadhead
Métis Elder



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