

STARTING FROM THE HEART

GOING BEYOND A LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Starting from the Heart: Going Beyond a Land Acknowledgement is an online resource created to support education workers and students in moving beyond the scripted land acknowledgements that have become our regular practice at large/local events. This has been made available in a digital format on our website etfofnni.ca.

“There has been debate about the authenticity of land acknowledgements. It is important to be reflective of why you do one. Making a territorial acknowledgement that comes from the heart is a good start and through your actions of learning and inclusive instructional practices, is a good practice in demonstrating your commitment to the land, respect for the Indigenous Peoples and to continue your reconciliation journey.

“This document was developed to provide you with information, ideas and resources that promote further learning while supporting you in your reconciliation journey. It will invite you to acknowledge your own values, your relationship with family, the community and the land. It will also explore our collective responsibility to protect the natural environment. As you go through the resource, you will be invited to engage in the activities and to examine the importance of nurturing relationships with the Indigenous communities in your region. To further support your learning, there are many hyperlinked resources for you to review which have been interwoven throughout the document. At the heart of this resource is you, and in the spirit of reconciliation, we wish you a good journey in your learning.”

– **Starting from the Heart: Going Beyond a Land Acknowledgement, 2019**



THE LAND

“Reducing Indigenous perspectives to simplistic terms is problematic; even leading Indigenous Elders, scholars, and knowledge keepers cannot be expected to always agree on particulars. However, with this in mind, commonly agreed on qualities of most, if not all, Indigenous perspectives include: A strong sense of spirituality; deeply rooted sense of place; recognition that everything is related; and an emphasis on reciprocity” (Anderson, Chiarotto & Comay, 2018, pg. 6).

When you step outside your door each day to interact in the natural world, do you consider who may have walked this land before you and who will walk this land after you are gone? Do you acknowledge your personal relationship to the land? Do you think about how the land supports your health and well-being, and that of your family, community and all non-human entities within the web of life? It is through these relationships to land that we come to understand that everyone has a role to play in taking caring of the land. Being an environmental steward is everyone’s responsibility.

How we honour the land and maintain its health so that it can nurture future generations is up to each of us.

Being outside on the land has a direct impact on mental well-being, where even a short walk tends to make a person feel better. According to McCormick (2017), access to natural environments can benefit children in various ways, including improvements in confidence, social interactions, cognitive development, academic achievement and emotional health. Taking classes outside can be beneficial to both the students and the teacher. For Indigenous Peoples, the meaning of the land and how one interacts with it includes the interconnectedness humans have with the environment and the holistic benefits to their physical, mental, emotional and spiritual well-being.

It is important to consider the ways we feel connected to the land when thinking about territorial land acknowledgements. What thoughts come to mind when we think about land? What do you envision? In your mind’s eye do you see images of the woods, lakes, rivers, mountains, a playground, a field, a garden, a farm or a cityscape?

How each of us conceptualizes and interacts with the land is dependent on our cultural traditions and worldviews of the land. There are significant differences between the Western and Indigenous worldview of land. “Aboriginal Title” to land in Canada is still an ongoing dialogue on land ownership and access to lands. In the western worldview, however, land is abstracted and viewed for transactional purposes and accorded monetary exchange value. For that matter, fixed political and geographical borders and boundaries are a concept imposed upon Indigenous Peoples without their consultation and without acknowledging the Indigenous worldviews and territorial ‘boundaries’ between nations. No



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matter how diverse Indigenous Peoples are, there are shared perspectives about land and connection to it. The land is alive and has conscience and therefore she and her incalculable multitude of living inhabitants cannot conceivably be ‘owned’.

There is a belief in kinship to the customary lands that Indigenous Peoples share globally. Indigenous Peoples are supported by this kinship with the land as the Earth is viewed as the first mother. For Indigenous Peoples, the bond between themselves and the land is unbreakable; it is tied to their culture and language. In the Indigenous worldview of land it includes the respect and sharing of resources, as it is it provides everything needed to survive for both humans and our non-human relations. In this sense, land is sacred and must be respected and cared for by all. For Indigenous Peoples, the land is not separate from all life that resides upon it. This connection to land is also a part of other non-Indigenous beliefs and values. Land acknowledgements are a critical first step to placing this essential kinship once again at the forefront of our collective priorities.

For the Haudenosaunee, recognition of the land and the natural world is part of their daily routine, and this is acknowledged through the Ohén:ton Karihwa-tékhwen (The Opening Address). It is also sometimes called The Thanksgiving Address and “it teaches mutual respect and responsibility to understand that what is done to one part of the Web of Life, we do to ourselves.” Everything in the natural world is thanked, beginning with our mother; the earth (Yethinihsténha tsi Ohwentsy`a:te) and everything on the earth and above the earth.

There has been debate about authenticity of land acknowledgements. It is important to be reflective of why you do one. Making a territorial acknowledgement that comes from the heart is a good start and through your actions of learning and inclusive instructional practices, is a good practice in demonstrating your commitment to the land, respect for the Indigenous Peoples and to continue your reconciliation journey. The land sustains all life and everyone must recognize the values of the Indigenous Peoples who respected and cared for this land long before the arrival of Europeans. Borders and boundaries can be opened up, at least conceptually, and we can be more inclusive by connecting with others and welcoming them into our

respective communities. In your journey, learning about or creating relationships with Indigenous Peoples in your area provides an opportunity to appreciate the larger community that you are a part of.

**ACTIVITY 1:
Relationship with the Land**

To reflect on and acknowledge our relationship with the land.

Instructions:

1. Find a variety of photos of landscapes or videos to share with students. Alternatively, you can invite students to share photos of landscapes or places that are important to them or provide time to draw a landscape of some place special to them.
2. Use the following prompts to generate discussion:
 - In what ways do you use the land? Think of the many ways the land provides for you daily (from the time you wake up until the time you go to sleep).
 - How does it make you feel? What does it do for your mind, body or spirit?
 - How do you show appreciation for the land?

**ACTIVITY 2:
Views on Land Acknowledgements**

To generate classroom discussions on differing perspectives on land acknowledgements.

Instructions:

1. Use the following background articles to create a discussion on why going beyond a land acknowledgement is important.
 - Are Indigenous land acknowledgements a step forward or an empty gesture?
 - What are land acknowledgements and why do they matter?
 - Here’s why land acknowledgements are both meaningless and patronizing.
 - ‘I regret it’: Hayden King on writing Ryerson University’s territorial acknowledgement.
 - What is the significance of acknowledging the Indigenous land we stand on?
 - Reconciliation more than land acknowledgements Indigenous groups say.
 - Canada’s impossible acknowledgement.
 - Questioning the usefulness of land acknowledgements.
 - Indigenous land acknowledgements alone won’t advance reconciliation.