

Report I March 20th & 21st, 2021

Pilot Study: Ionhntionhnhékwen Land-Based Wilderness Program in Partnership with Concordia University



Photo taken by: Kahérakwas Donna Goodleaf
Indigenous students and faculty from Concordia university and Ionhntionhnhékwen Wilderness Skills
Land-Based facilitators, Kahnawake community, March 20th & 21st, 2021

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Animal tracking activity led by land-based facilitator Shakohaiiostha.

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“Across Turtle Island, the impact of Indigenous land-based education extends beyond the boundaries of ‘school’ and is a critical component to nation-building, political and cultural resurgence, decolonization, and addressing gender-based violence. It also plays an important role in both physical and mental health, empowering students, educators and community members to (re) connect with Indigenous ways of knowing and being, centering them within their own educational programs and giving them the tools to care for themselves and their communities using Indigenous practices”.

From: Dechinta, (March 2020: 2).

Executive Summary

Project Overview

In March 2021, the Iontionnhéhkwén Wilderness Skills hosted a two-day pilot Land-based Wilderness Skills program in partnership with Concordia University. The weekend program took place in the local Kanien’kehá:ka community of Kahnawake, located on the south shore of Tiohtià:ke /Montreal. The goal/s of this pilot project was to develop and implement a two-day land-based survival skills education program in partnership with Iontionnhéhkwén Wilderness Skills located in the Kanien’kehá:ka community of Kahnawake and Concordia university. Findings stemming from students’ feedback on the overall program indicate immersing students in a land-based program positively contributes to their overall physical and mental health and well-being, increased sense of (re)connection to land, and increased understanding and applied knowledge of land-based survival skills.

The strength of the pilot project is the co-design and collaborative implementation of the Iontionnhéhkwén Wilderness Skills program with Kanien’kehá:ka from Kahnawake - Iontionnhéhkwén Wilderness Skills land-based facilitators and Kahnawakeró:non Concordia staff, (the Director of Decolonizing Curriculum and Pedagogy) who was the lead project coordinator of this project. As author of this report, who also participated and observed in this project, I will identify myself as lead project coordinator throughout. Concordia faculty Prof. Elizabeth Fast also took part in this project who provided guidance and support in helping to organize the travel for students to Kahnawake as well as a participant immersed in the land-based program.

Indigenous Concordia student participants selected for this project filled out an online application that was shared with the Concordia Otsenhákta Student Centre for distribution to undergraduate and graduate students who were asked to compose a brief essay explaining why they wished to participate in this project. Participants identified as members from diverse Indigenous nations/community identity backgrounds ie., Kanien’kehá:ka, Algonquin Anishinaabe, Cree Nation, Metis and 2SLGBTQIA+ .

Key land-based activities that took place over the two days included:

- talking circles around the fire each morning and at the end of each day;
- guided meditation exercise using the Rotinonhsíon:ni Ohén:ton Karihwatéhkwén as a guiding methodology;
- fire making, fire structures, making tinder bundles;
- animal tracking;
- tutorial on appropriate Clothing attire for land-based survival skill activities;
- Rotinonhsíon:ni teachings on Wáhta (maple) ceremony and the cultural/spiritual significance of collecting sap water from Maple trees;
- knots and shelter making, knife safety;
- and two unplanned activities that consisted of wooden carving-making utensils for eating on the land; and skinning a small animal such as a squirrel.

See *appendices* for more detailed description of scheduled land-based activities.

Navigating the Design and Delivery of Land-Based Program Amidst the COVID 19 Pandemic: Challenges and Opportunities

Navigating the design and delivery of a two-day land-based pilot project amidst the COVID 19 pandemic certainly posed its challenges and opportunities during this pilot study. At the initial stage of conceptualizing the design and delivery of the project, the original intent was to recruit a total of 14 Concordia Indigenous students, Concordia faculty and staff associated with this project. After consulting with the Kahnawake's COVID 19 Task Force, it was recommended to reduce the number of participants to eight students. In total, there were 14 participants that consisted of the four land-based facilitators, one Concordia faculty and staff and eight students.

Additional protective safety measures were in place to limit the level of physical involvement of local community Elder Amelia Tekwatonti McGregor, who participated in two virtual activities, the pre-orientation circle and a post-talking circle with all participants involved in the project.

As the lead project coordinator, I and the local land-based facilitators from Kahnawake had to revise and co-construct the program in ways that met the local community of Kahnawake's COVID 19 Task Force's safety and medical regulations. Documents (see Appendices) were prepared that outlined the Ionhntionhékwen Covid 19 regulations, a visual map outlining the area and the pedagogical approach in line with the Task Force's regulations. Selected participants were required to fill out a contact tracing forms approved by the Kahnawake COVID Task Force prior to their arrival on site each day.

Having to decrease the number of participants and re-design the pedagogical approaches to carrying out the scheduled land-based activities gave rise to new insights in designing and successfully implementing a small-scale land-based program amidst the COVID 19 pandemic era we are all living in.

Recommendations

Developing Indigenous-led, land-based education programs in meaningful and respectful partnership with local Indigenous communities is a fundamental and necessary decolonizing strategy that can support and transform Indigenous students' educational journey. The recommendations outlined below reflect the perspectives of participants (students, faculty and staff) who participated in this pilot project.

Develop an Indigenous led, land-based certificate program in partnership with local Indigenous communities and Concordia University

- Develop an Indigenous-led, land-based program in partnership with local Indigenous communities and existing program units across the university that centers, advances, and values Indigenous epistemologies, language and knowledge systems and hands-on experiential land-based experiences that meet the personal and educational needs of Indigenous and non-Indigenous students.
- Position the creation of an Indigenous land-based program as a stand-alone academic program under the Faculty of Arts and Sciences to complement existing academic program/s such as the First Peoples Studies Program as well as other program units across the University system.

Create Culturally Safe Spaces for Indigenous 2SPLGBTQIA+

- Create Indigenous-led, land-based learning opportunities that are inclusive, culturally safe spaces/places for Indigenous two-spirit, non-binary, LGBTQIA+ students.
- Ensure that Indigenous Land-based facilitators and faculty associated with land-based activities are aware of non-binary, gender fluid, trans, and other forms of gender expressions that reflect and promote inclusive, culturally safe, respectful relationships in curricular design and implementation.

Develop Culturally Safe, Respectful, Ethical Land-Based Pedagogical Practices

- Develop culturally safe, Indigenous land-based pedagogical approaches that respect and support the fundamental need for Indigenous students to have their own learning spaces' that allow them to critically reflect and engage about the deeper historical and on-going issues of settler-colonialism and its intergenerational impact on self, identity, culture, families, land and communities.
- Develop a pre-orientation seminar that increases settler students' knowledge, understanding, applied critical discourse and analysis on issues related to history of colonialism and on-going impacts of colonialism on Indigenous Peoples as a pre-requisite for enrollment in the Indigenous land-based certificate program.

Develop Flexible Indigenous Pedagogical Land-Based Practices Amidst COVID 19-Pandemic

- With respect to, and in accordance with local Indigenous community protocols and safety measures concerning the COVID 19 pandemic, curate flexible Indigenous land-based programming (ie., small-scale land-based activities, smaller cohorts, blended learning strategies, online,) in the design and delivery of Indigenous Land-based programs.

“Knowledge is innately tied to the land, it’s right there, it’s waiting for us to pay attention to it, to guide us, through dreams, through visions, through practice, and maybe that’s our greatest strength, is getting people reconnected to the source of knowledge”

(Hill. R., in Goodchild, M. 2021: 15).

Context to Indigenous Land-Based Programs -What the Research Says



Talking circle

Prior to European colonization, Indigenous nations had, and continue to have, their own diverse Indigenous education systems. These were grounded and reflected in Indigenous epistemological frameworks and land-based survival skills that equipped Indigenous learners with the necessary knowledge and skills to survive and strengthen their relationships and connections to land, family and community. When one critically examines the history of Indigenous education through the lens of Indigenous scholars, communities, and Elders, the premise of Indigenous education is grounded in philosophical frameworks based on reciprocal, relational, kinships with the land that promotes sustainability for humans, the land, and the natural world (Cajete, 2020, Claxton & Elliot, 2020, Abolson, K., 2020).

The history of colonization, residential schools, and on-going settler colonialism has, and continues to fundamentally dispossess, dis-empower and dis-connect Indigenous peoples from their lands, culture, kinship, language and communities. As Wildcat et al. (2014:2) succinctly state: “if colonization is fundamentally about dispossessing Indigenous people from land, decolonization must involve forms of education that reconnect Indigenous peoples to land and the social relations, knowledges and languages that arise from the land”.

The current impact of the climate crisis coupled with the COVID 19 pandemic demands the decolonization of settler-academic institutions by de-centering and critiquing eurocentric educational

frameworks and supporting Indigenous led, land-based programs that center Indigenous knowledge systems in relation to land, culture and community in partnership with local Indigenous communities, (Simpson, L., & Coulthard, 2014, G., Wildcat, et al, 2014, Battiste, 2013, Truth and Reconciliation Report, Recommended Actions, 2015, & Dechinta, 2020).

Increasingly, many Indigenous communities and Indigenous educators are working in partnership with universities such as the Dechinta Institute for Research and Learning, University of Saskatchewan, Red River College and Algoma University to create Indigenous-led, land-based education systems that aim to center Indigenous epistemologies, reconnect and ground Indigenous students in Indigenous epistemologies, promote health and social/cultural well-being, strengthen cultural identity, kinship and community responsibilities and language revitalization (Wildcat, McDonald, Irlbacher-Fox, Coulthard, 2014; Simpson L. & Coulthard G. (2014), (Wilson, & Laing, 2019), (Fast, et al., 2021).

In the context of theorizing and applying Indigenous land-based education, Anishnabeg scholar Leanne Betasamosake Simpson succinctly elucidates in her article *Learning from the Land: Indigenous Land Base Pedagogy and Decolonization* (2014) that if we are serious about decolonizing education and educating people within frameworks of Indigenous intelligence, we must find ways of reinserting people into relationships with and on the land as a mode of education (p. 15). For example, In 2014, a local Kanien'kehá:ka community of Akwesasne created a land-based education for youth grounded in the Kanien'keha language that "gave learners the opportunities to apprentice with master knowledge holders to learn traditional, land-based, cultural practices, including hunting and trapping, medicinal plants and healing, fishing and water-use, and horticulture and black-ash basket making (Alfred, 2014: 2).

Indigenous-led, land-based education, as one strategy of decolonization, has profound potential to re-boost, transform and support Indigenous students to become culturally grounded, transformative leaders equipped with knowledge, experiences and skill sets and ready to make informed decisions and take action in the best interest of their communities and the natural world.

Indigenous land-based education provides diverse frameworks for teaching and learning that address the spiritual, social, emotional, intellectual and physical health and well-being of students and promotes healing for the land and community (Radu, I., House, L.M., & Pashagumskum, E., 2014). It also leads them to understand the significance of being in relationship to land and their responsibilities that come with this relationship and gain a better understanding of ecosystems and the changes brought on by global warming.

As well, an Indigenous land based education program must also cultivate in students, the ability for critical discourse and analysis about the history of colonization, loss of land and disconnection to land and community for many Indigenous nations across Turtle Island (Wilson, 2018; Alfred, T., 2014; Simpson L., & Coulthard, G., 2014; Cornstassel, J., 2012) in order to unlearn and reframe new ways of thinking and developing the tools needed to exercise self-sufficiency and promote health and well-being on an individual and community level. As Kathy Abolson (2020) comments, "we have a responsibility to learn about colonization and its impact and to unlearn about colonial ideas. We then have to relearn our own Indigenous philosophies and learn in an Indigenous way. We have a responsibility to restore land-based programming and education", (p: 96).

To strengthen and promote land-based learning opportunities for Indigenous youth, current research by (Fast, E., et al, 2021., Wilson, A., & Laing, M. 2019, Dechinta (2020) highlights the importance of creating

land-based education programs that are supportive, inclusive, culturally safe spaces/places for Indigenous two-spirit, non-binary, LGBTQUIA+ students.

Furthermore, Tuck et al, (2014) highlight the importance of land-based pedagogies that examine the intersections of land and Land-based pedagogies and “the urban experience as storied Indigenous lands. In (re)storying Chicago as Indigenous land through urban Indigenous land-based pedagogies,” (p. 10) provides another critical lens for creating Indigenous land-based programs that explore pedagogy of land within the frameworks of both rural and urban contexts Styres et al, (2013).

The design and delivery of a post- secondary Indigenous land-based wilderness skills program in partnership with local Indigenous community/ies is one innovative approach that provides a model of land-based education that equips current and future Indigenous leaders with the tools, knowledge and skillsets to transform, support and sustain local Indigenous communities and economies engaged in environmental conservation and protection of lands, waters and ecological systems.

Concordia University Context

The creation of an Indigenous Land-based wilderness program is in alignment with the Concordia University’s Indigenous Directions Action Plan to decolonize and Indigenize the academy. Recommendation 2.6 of the Action Plan (2019) states:

“New Indigenous land-based programs are researched, developed and offered in partnership with Indigenous communities and on campus”, (p.18).

An Indigenous land-based program is undoubtedly mutually beneficial for Concordia University and local Indigenous communities, specifically the Kahnawake community, by advancing and supporting an Indigenous land-based education program that centers Rotinonhnsión:ni epistemologies and pedagogical land-based practices guided by community experts and cultural knowledge holders.

Overview of Ionhntionhékwen Land-Based Wilderness Skills Pilot Program

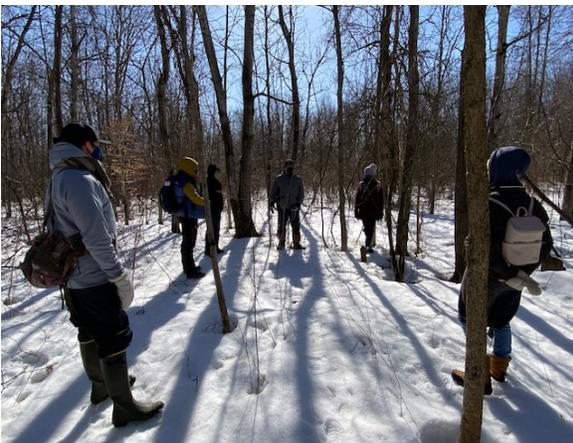
Pre-Orientation Talking Circle

Prior to the launch of the two-day weekend land-based program, a two-hour pre-orientation circle took place virtually online in which students, land-based facilitators, Elder Amelia Tekwatonti McGregor and Concordia faculty and staff (Drs. Fast and Goodleaf) gathered to meet one another. Following proper Rotinonhsíon:ni cultural protocol, Elder Amelia Tekwatonti opened the meeting with the Ohénton Karihwatéhkwén (the words before all else, or thanksgiving address to the natural world) which grounded participants in Rotinonhsíon:ni cultural protocols and land-based ethics, thus contextualizing the land-based activities. Once the meeting was opened, all participants extended greetings and introductions. The student and faculty participants shared which communities/nation they come from and their interest in participating in this land-based program.

The lead project coordinator provided an overview of the scheduled land-based activities set out for each day while the Ionhntionhékwen land-based facilitators reviewed the Ionhntionhékwen Wilderness Skills Covid measures and guidelines (see appendices) and expectations of participants. It was also explained to participants that in order to observe and respect Kahnawake's COVID Task Force guidelines, the pedagogical approach used to immerse participants in the various land-based activities, participants would be organized into two groups to ensure social distance protocols were observed.

Summary of Day One Activities

On the morning of day one, participants gathered in a circle around the fire while land-based facilitators shared teachings about the importance of the sacred fire. A basket containing traditional medicines (cedar, tobacco and sage) was made available for their use throughout the two-day program should they need it.



Tutorial on Animal Tracking



Participants engaged in fire making

The first activity opened with a large group exercise in which one of the land-based facilitators immersed participants in a meditation exercise using the Rotinonhsíon:ni Ohén:ton Karihwatéhkwén as a method to 'quiet' or ground participants on a deeper inward reflection to acknowledge and give thanksgiving to the natural world, for their continued existence and the sacred responsibilities we as humans have in relationship to the natural world.

To deepen participants' connection to the land, they next participated in a 'sit spot' activity in which students had to search and isolate alone in a spot on the land and spend 20 minutes to ground and immerse themselves so they can open up their 'senses' emotions, smell, feel, touch, see, etc., to increase their awareness of self in relationship to the natural environment they situated themselves in to set their intentions in preparation for the day.

Afterwards, students regrouped around the fire and shared their experiences and reflections. For the remaining morning, the land-based facilitators separated the participants into two group activities: fire making and animal tracking.

Wáhta and Clothes Hacking Teachings

After lunch, cultural teachings were shared with the participants on the meaning of Wáhta and the method on how to tap maple water from maple trees from a Rotinonhsíon:ni lens. As well, participants were given a brief tutorial on clothes hacking - demonstrating the importance of wearing proper attire when engaging in land-based survival skills opportunities.



Wáhta Teaching Activity



Teachings on Clothes Hacking Attire for land-based survival

Debriefing Talking Circle

After completion of the afternoon activities, participants regrouped around the sacred fire to share, listen and reflect on what they experienced, new insights about self in relationship to ethics and meaningful engagement with the land, land-based facilitators, their peers and participating in team-based activities. Positive emotions and feelings were shared by everyone. Afterwards everybody packed up their gear and departed for the day.

Summary of Day Two Activities

On day two, the first thing participants did upon arrival in the morning was demonstrate initiative and apply the skills and knowledge they learned by making a fire without the help of the land-based facilitators.



Students take initiative to make sacred fire

Sitting around the fire, Lee guided the participants once again in a meditation activity to ground and re-center them in preparation of the land-based activities that were to unfold for day two. I and the land-based facilitators opened up the space to check in with the participants on how they were doing. Participants shared with each other how they were feeling and reflected on what they experienced on the first day and the impacts it had on them. Participants organized in their groups while the land-based instructors each gave a tutorial and demonstration on the different methods of knot-making skills such as the Bowline, Truckers, hitch and prussic deemed essential to know and apply as part of the shelter making activity – a critical component of a land-based wilderness survival skill program.

They also learned how to make different versions of shelters as noted below.



Tutorial on shelter making



Version of a shelter

After completion of the shelter making activity, the land-based facilitators brought the participants together around the fire and led a tutorial on topic of knife safety measures that went with the carving of wooden utensils activity – another critical land-based survival skill to learn. This was an added survival skill activity that the land-based instructors demonstrated and had participants engage in. The purpose of this activity was to ground them and give them time to focus on inner-self-reflection on what they experienced throughout that day while learning a new survival skill.



Version of a shelter

Debriefing Talking Circle

At the completion of the last day, all participants gathered around the sacred fire. Each individual shared and told stories of the deep emotions and rich experiences they had participating in a land-based survival skills program over the course of the two days and the impacts it has had on them. Nobody wanted this time to end and all expressed the urgent need to create a land-based survival skills program that they and Concordia students in general can integrate and experience as part of their educational journey

Post-Talking Circle

As a follow up to the weekend land-based program, a post-talking circle took place via virtual online four days later. All participants were notified via email prior to, and at the start of the zoom session that the post-talking circle zoom session was being recorded for the purposes of collecting and summarizing preliminary data from participants feedback as part of the overall program evaluation. As lead facilitator of this zoom session, I welcomed all participants and opened the floor and made space for each participant, including the land-based facilitators to share their reflective thoughts, feelings, challenges, issues and new insights they experienced about self in relationship to the meaningful impacts they experienced while immersed in the two-day land-based experience.

Findings and Impacts: Participants Testimonials

The aim of this pilot study was to explore how a land-based wilderness skills program can serve as an Indigenous education platform that empowers, centers and strengthens participants cultural identities, promotes physical and mental health and cultural well-being in ways that deepen their (re)connection to land, community and education. Several methods were employed to gather preliminary data such as reflective journaling, program course evaluation, observations, debriefing talking circles during and post-land-based activities to assess the impacts of participants experiences in the various hands-on land-based experiences. In regards to the journaling process, the lead project coordinator encouraged students to keep a daily journal to record their inner reflections on what they experienced and learned about self in relation to the land-based activities they participated at the completion of each day. Below are few examples gleaned from participant's reflective journaling that illustrates the positive impacts participants experienced in the land-based program.

Samples of Students Journal Reflections

"I think it is important to remember that confidence is at least partly rooted in competence. It was very refreshing and stimulating to be part of a learning environment in which everyone was engaged and committed to playing their part in the process...I saw the sense of accomplishment on many of my fellow student's faces when they accomplished the tasks that were set before them and I felt like the way the material was presented gave us all a boost. There is something about hands-on learning experiences in general that brings pleasure and a sense of accomplishment that is not experienced the same way as getting an A on a paper".

Student Journal Reflection, March 20th, 2021



Students applying new survival knowledge and skills on how to make a fire



Student making fire with flint

“we learned how to make fire with flint, animal tracking, and we gained some insights into shelter making. The experience brought back memories of me watching my dad make fire in the woodstove at my house back in my youth. Animal tracking brought out knowledge I didn’t think I had that I then contributed to the group. I felt reinvigorated being with the group and critically engaging with the work. It brought me one step closer to culture, as I imagine that my ancestors would’ve used much of the same tactics and techniques for surviving on the land as well”.

Student journal reflection, March 20, 2021

I felt very humble, aligned, and connected to my spirit in a way that I haven’t felt in a while...I feel that the 2 days on the land has rejuvenated me, grounded me and uplifted my spirits very much like coming out of ceremony. In academia I’m confronted with so much of a feeling of inadequacy. With nature, it feels that my skill sets are embedded in the land. That the learning experience is energetic, spiritual, nourishing and full of much rich wisdom. I feel full, and extremely humble.... Each activity offered a multitude of deep reflection and awareness. I felt so humble and in awe with the trees in the sit spot, near tears in learning to make fire. So very proud. And a range of emotions during the tracking, discovering my openness to how I see, seeing the invisible/visible and how the knowledge within pours out. I sat and was confronted with anger and grief during the carving and in much delight surprised at how quick and hands on my instincts worked for building a shelter.

Student Journal Reflections March 21, 2021



Student completes knot and shelter making activity

It was important to share with the reader examples of student journal reflections they composed at the end of each day because their stories give an immediate, unique, and deeper layer to their experiences on a daily level while students' feedback on the overall program conveyed an added rich layer of students' testimonials and perspectives on how the program impacted them in multiple ways.

In honour of the Rotinonhsión:ni oral tradition, the findings of students' feedback is conveyed in its 'raw data' form and not summarized by the author of this report. Each section of the findings will present a few examples of students' experiences and the rest of the testimonies is presented in the appendix under '*Additional Summaries of Findings and Impacts of Students Testimonials*'.

Impact Findings:

Positive impacts: increased Rotinonhsión:ni cultural knowledge, understanding about land ethics, cultural protocols in relationship to self, land and community.

- ◆ "This learning experience was powerful on many levels. I gained a deeper appreciation to my personal connection with the land and traditional teachings that were not clear to me prior to this event. I plan to apply many of the things I learned to my thesis writing"; connection to applying to educational journey, deeper connection to land".
- ◆ "This experience has shown me how to really ground programs in cultural protocol from beginning to end. It has been a great example for me to think about the ways in which I can ground my work in the ethics of my own community.
- ◆ "The first thing I learned that weekend was to calm my mind and believe that this was/is a foundational part of being able to ground myself in Rotinonhsión:ni context, in relation to myself, land, and my community. We learned to find our sit spot and to expand our consciousness to connect with our senses to the surroundings. I learned to both keep my vision wide open and be able to focus on the task at hand. Each of these principles was repeated in each activity. I learned to have confidence- without ego, humility without shame, to recognize and allow for fear without letting fear take over, and to understand abundance, and all that the land has to offer, without being greedy or selfish.
- ◆ Taking in time to observe my surroundings and be on the land has helped to remind me of the distinctive spiritual relationship I have with the land, water, and resources and to hold them with consideration, mindfulness, and care. Ultimately, this has reaffirmed my understanding of the responsibilities that we have to uphold our resources for future generations of animals and humans".
- ◆ "The experiential learning provides an opportunity for an immersive experience that supports embodiment of practice. Emphasis on the doing through all of my senses, sight, taste, hearing, feeling, dreaming, touching. I think that the understanding and application around ethics and cultural protocols ground in Rotinonhsion:ni context – relating to self, land and community was introduced in an accessible way. A grounded process and practice that allows for individual and collective learning, exchange, and dialogue".



Impact Findings:

Increased health and well-ness, self-confidence, deeper connection to land and culture, transferable and applied knowledge and survival skills to self and education context.



- ◆ “Personally, I feel more confident in relation to the forest. I feel that I would have a much higher chance of being able to survive in the forest. It allowed me to connect more to myself as Anishinaabe person, even though everything was in a Rotinonhsón:ni context. The skills I learned I feel are very transferable and applicable to my own life and my journey to reconnect to my Anishinaabe culture”.
- ◆ “I felt a deep connection to the spirit in the land and in myself. The practical skills that I learned are priceless and I can’t wait to put them to use in my own practice. The spiritual teachings that I learned are just as priceless, I discovered a profound fire within myself. All the knowledge that I gained over the course of those two days will stay with me for the rest of my life. The teachings also helped me gain clarity within myself and will be instrumental in completing my thesis for my graduate studies”.
- ◆ “This experience has significantly benefited my mental health. Being on the land reduced significantly improved my mental clarity, reducing high levels of anxiety and stress. Learning from the land has taught me the importance of giving care and attention to oneself and surroundings in order to effectively execute tasks at hand. This emphasis on care and attention is especially important for me to bring into pedagogical practice as an educator”.
- ◆ “I often feel a deep spiritual void and a disconnection to daily tasks while operating in settler colonial societies. When I arrived at the Land-Based Wilderness Program I felt immediate connection. Being on the land gave me a sense of belonging, confidence, and a drive to learn more. The skills I did learn will help me in facilitating future traditional hide tanning camps and has inspired me to explore further learning of wild plants in the area”.

Impact findings:

increased feelings of empowerment, capability, personal growth, applied skills development

- ◆ “One of the most memorable experiences I had while attending this course was when we had the chance to carve some wood to make survival utensils for when we harvested some food. I could feel in my hands the desire to continue the practice. It has that ancient feel to it, but also the sense of work and accomplishment that goes along with it. I want to look in the old books and exhibits of my Anishinaabe culture and remake new things, as well as to explore the practice in contemporary times.....It made me think of the little sparks we are giving off when we try something new in our lives, whether that’s a new art practice, hobby, or career change. I like learning new things, and this is what it reminded me of”.
- ◆ “I found it really profound to build a fire and have this skill in my body. It felt so natural and instinctive. My family up north a few years back offered one of our family’s cabins to live in, in the bush. Far in the bush isolated.... To build the skills to be more in relation to nature, it’s life forces. The personal growth in what felt like a short time was extensive, critical. The memories and lived experience will stay with me for a lifetime”.
- ◆ There were moments that were incredibly challenging such as failing over and over again in starting a fire with the fire-starting flint and tinder. The values of patience over pride, the importance of helping others and accepting help and the removal or artificial hierarchy created by academia (faculty-student) all become very apparent when focusing on survival. The true meaning of collaborative learning and problem solving become crystal clear even when practising the skills our ancestors needed to stay alive.



Impact findings:

invested in ability to apply new knowledge and survival skills to education, increased enthusiasm about self-care and confidence

- ◆ “I want to include more experiential learning in whatever I do. One example was when Tom was teaching us about the proper angles and physics of making a proper shelter, and I remember thinking “Wow, I just learned about physics.” Nothing heady about it, just plain practicality. It was easy for me to understand, and made me think of all the kids in the classroom who might not have the intellectual grasp from a book, but would be able to understand the principles if they were demonstrated, as it was for me. I think this is an important takeaway”.
- ◆ “I intend to apply what I’ve learned to my own pedagogical practice and research journey. I really admired the balance of care, hospitality, honesty, and generosity of our guides. Further, I think there is a way to bring together land-based learning and the arts. The observational and pattern recognition skills required for tracking and being in the forest are important for learning to think critically with a given data set and may be a useful way of engaging with formal analysis in art history. Further, learning from the land encourages both independent and collective learning in addition to bridging theoretical and material/experiential forms of engagement”.
- ◆ “The teachings gained from this pilot course will serve to deepen my conviction in the enormous need for and potential of land-based learning to transform students (and all who participate) personally and also as communities and societies that need to develop healthier relationships with the land, with mother earth, in order to ensure that the next seven generations have a healthy planet. The intersections of healthy relationships with land and those with social justice movements all over the globe are clear and resonant and the values learnt can and should be applied to the fights for land, social and human rights and dignity”.



Reflections from Land-based facilitators

In the virtual online post-talking circle that took place with all the participants involved this project, the land-based facilitators and Elder Amelia Tekwatonti also got a chance to listen and reflect on the incredible stories/experiences shared by the participants. Participants shared how ‘grounded’ they felt and more focused or clarity on the direction of their academic studies. Other participants commented on the difficulty of ‘transitioning’ back to city life’ and trying to find balance with what they experienced on the land and what it means for their educational journey. Elder Amelia listened and shared some encouraging words for the participants and the importance of being connected with the land. Each of the land-based facilitators took turns reflecting on what they heard and were so amazed at the incredible experiences shared by the participants. They expressed amazement and were very appreciative at what they heard and learned from the participants while also offering more tips on what to do once they return back to the city.

For example, in response to the comment/s regarding 'difficulty in transitioning' back to the city, Lee offered the following suggestion to 'bring themselves back in' meaning to refocus and ground themselves by going out to find a space in the city like a park, or river or bird sanctuary that can help them to stay connected to the land; while David commented how appreciative he was that he got to share his teachings with the participants and that they had a good experience being on the land.

Next, Shakohaiostha commented: "It's really interesting to hear the experience that everybody had. It is really uplifting to hear all these nice stories. We've been doing this for a while. We have noticed that it is something that happens quite often when people get back to the land, they remember that they are humans and that connection is made. Being in the city it is easy to forget that. When you remove yourself and you go back to where, in a sense, where we really belong...everybody feels great. New sparks that are formed. Creativity is reignited".

Finally, Tom wrapped up with his insights and reflections and noted: "Wow! Just hearing all your stories everything that you went through it's just amazing. Who knew two days could literally transform people's perceptions and opinions and everything they have going on? And come out of it re-invigorated, having a new trajectory, what you want to do. Enthusiastic, reflecting...it's just amazing".

Hearing everybody's stories and experiences was so enriching and profound to hear because all their stories/reflections/insights just reaffirmed the critical role land-based education can have on positively transforming the lives of all that participants who participated in this pilot project.

Final words!

As a Kahnawakeró:non and Concordia Director of Decolonizing Curriculum and Pedagogy, I have been deeply struck by the amazing experiences and stories all participants shared in this project. Their words and testimonies reaffirm the critical need for Concordia University to join the ranks of other universities and demonstrate its accountability, responsibility and commitment to support Indigenous faculty, staff, students and local Indigenous communities in particular the Kanien'kehá:ka, upon which the university is built on by offering an Indigenous land-based education program that is respectfully designed in ways that center Rotinonhsión:ni epistemologies, histories and lived experiences in partnership with local Indigenous communities such as Kahnawake.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The findings from this project demonstrated that Indigenous land-based programs that center Indigenous participants empowers and contributes to the physical, mental health and cultural well-being of Indigenous participants while grounding and strengthening their reconnection to land, culture and community on an individual and collective level. Developing Indigenous-led, land-based education programs in meaningful and respectful partnership with local Indigenous communities is a fundamental and necessary decolonizing strategy that can support and transform students personal and educational journey.

Recommendations

Developing Indigenous-led, land-based education programs in meaningful and respectful partnership with local Indigenous communities is a fundamental and necessary decolonizing strategy that can support and transform Indigenous students' educational journey. The recommendations outlined below reflect the perspectives of participants (students, faculty and staff) who participated in this pilot project.

Develop an Indigenous led, land-based certificate program in partnership with local Indigenous communities and Concordia University

- Develop an Indigenous-led, land-based program in partnership with local Indigenous communities and existing program units across the university that centers, advances, and values Indigenous epistemologies, language and knowledge systems and hands-on experiential land-based experiences that meet the personal and educational needs of Indigenous and non-Indigenous students.
- Position the creation of an Indigenous land-based program as a stand-alone academic program under the Faculty of Arts and Sciences to complement existing academic program/s such as the First Peoples Studies Program as well as other program units across the University system.

Create Culturally Safe Spaces for Indigenous 2SPLGBTQIA+

- Create Indigenous-led, land-based learning opportunities that are inclusive, culturally safe spaces/places for Indigenous two-spirit, non-binary, LGBTQUIA+ students.
- Ensure that Indigenous Land-based facilitators and faculty associated with land-based activities are aware of non-binary, gender fluid, trans, and other forms of gender expressions that reflect and promote inclusive, culturally safe, respectful relationships in curricular design and implementation.

Develop Culturally Safe, Respectful, Ethical Land-Based Pedagogical Practices

- Develop culturally safe, Indigenous land-based pedagogical approaches that respect and support the fundamental need for Indigenous students to have their own learning spaces' that allow them to critically reflect and engage about the deeper historical and on-going issues of settler-colonialism and its intergenerational impact on self, identity, culture, families, land and communities.
- Develop a pre-orientation seminar that increases settler students' knowledge, understanding, applied critical discourse and analysis on issues related to history of colonialism and on-going impacts of colonialism on Indigenous Peoples as a pre-requisite for enrollment in the Indigenous land-based certificate program.

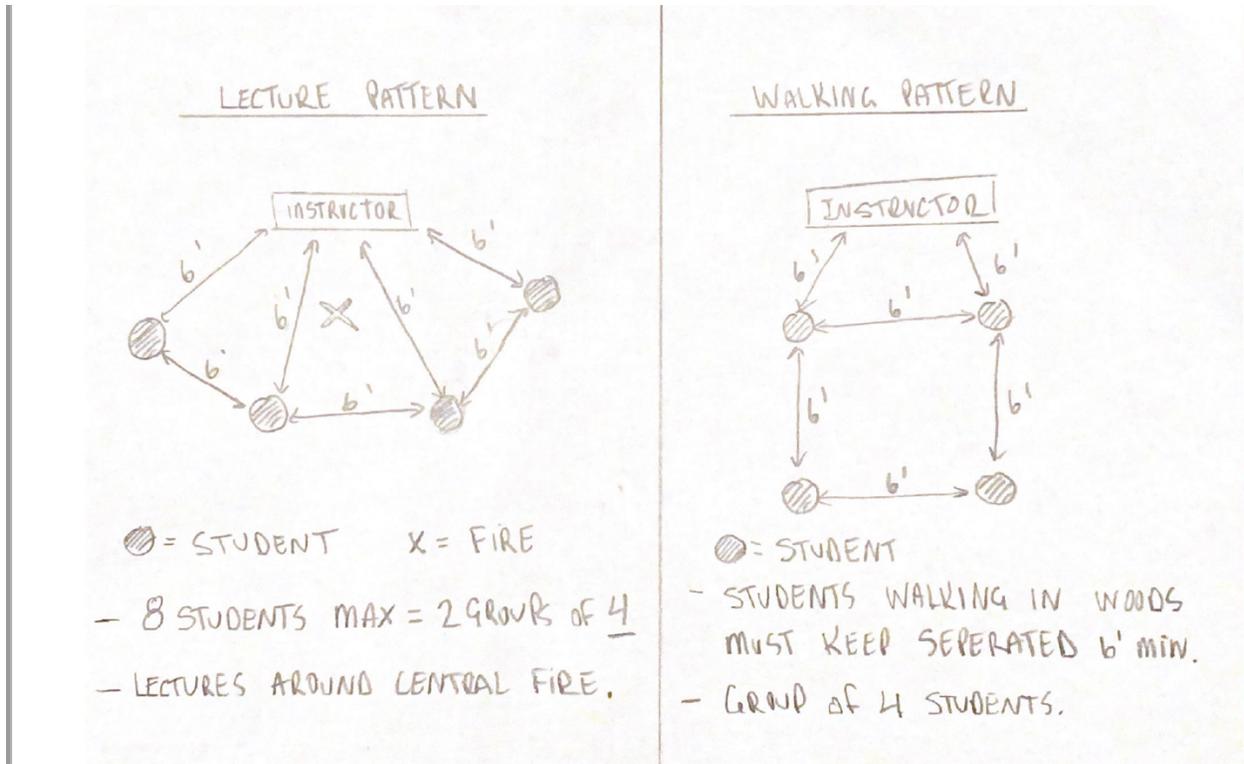
Develop Flexible Indigenous Pedagogical Land-Based Practices Amidst COVID 19-Pandemic

- With respect to, and in accordance with local Indigenous community protocols and safety measures concerning the COVID 19 pandemic, curate flexible Indigenous land-based programming (ie., small-scale land-based activities, smaller cohorts, blended learning strategies, online,) in the design and delivery of Indigenous Land-based programs.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Map outlining pedagogical approach

By: Ionhtionhéhkwen Wilderness Skills



Appendix 2: Iontionhnhéhkwén Wilderness Skills – Covid-19 Information Plan.

STUDENT WITH SYMPTOMS OR WHO WERE IN CONTACT WITH SYMPTOMS ARE NOT PERMITTED ON SITE.

Student Arrival:

- Students will be required to sanitize hands at a hand washing station upon arrival.
- Students will receive masks certified by the Kahnawake Task Force. Masks will be issued using noncontact methods. Mask not issued by our staff will not be permitted on site.

Lecture and Teachings Periods:

- 8 Students max permitted on site. Students will be separated into (2) two groups containing (4) four students each. Students must always maintain 6' distance between other individuals. See attached for proposed assembly pattern.
- If students are from the same household, they will be encouraged to maintain 6' during our course.
- Groups will rotate between fire side lectures and walking lectures in the woods.
- All lectures will be outdoors at all times and there will be no contact between staff and students.

Lunch and Break Periods:

- Students must carry their own food and water. Our staff will have individual 1L bottles of water ready for students who may need more. Our staff will not be serving food or any other drink during this session.
- Students will be required to bring all food waste/ wrappers back to their own household.

Bathroom Breaks:

- A portable toilet will be rented for this class. Hand sanitizer will be stationed outside of the bathroom. Students will be required to wash hands before and after using the bathroom.
- The bathroom handles and seat will be disinfected with Oxivir Plus (industrial disinfectant) after each use. Students must wait 60 seconds before entering bathroom to allow solution to work. Our staff will be responsible for cleaning the bathroom.

Gear and other supplies:

- Students will be issued individual items required for the class. Sharing these items is not permitted. Items will be used for a period of two days and each student will use their assigned items.
- After the two days, all items will be thoroughly disinfected and cleaned.

Student Departure:

- Students will dispose of the masks in an assigned garbage receptacle.
- Students will sanitize hands and depart to their vehicles.

First aid:

- For large emergencies, staff will administer first aid and KFB will be called. For minor issues, staff will tend to students wearing, gloves, mask, and a face shield.

Appendix 3: Proposed Schedule of Land-based Activities

Date	Activities – Day 1
March 18 th 6-8pm – via zoom	Orientation - Ohenton Karihwahtekwen <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Introductions – students, land-based facilitators, Concordia staff and faculty; overview of two-day program; expectations and responsibilities ▪ Safety Protocols re Covid Pandemic ▪ Talking circle – Indigenous land-based education. What do we mean by ‘Learning from the land’?
March 20 th - Saturday, 9 to 12pm	Day 1 – Fire making, Clothe Hacking & Wháta Ohen:ton Karihwatéhkwen – grounding students on and with the land <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Small Group 1: Fire making <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Tinder bundles ○ Fire Structures ○ Modern fire making techniques ○ Material management ○ Knife, axe and saw safety ○ Fire challenges ○ Char cloth ▪ Small Group 2: Clothes Hacking & Tracking <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Dressing in layers and hypothermia ○ Identifying types of clothes to wear for weather ○ Identifying animal tracks on the land
*Lunch	12 to 12:30 lunch – students bring their own lunch
12:30 to 1:30 pm 1 to 4pm Break into small groups	Rotinonhsón:ni cultural teachings re Wáhta and Tapping maple trees <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Small Group 1: Fire making continued • Group 2: Clothes Hacking & Tracking • Wrap up for the Day

Date	Activities – Day 2
March 21 – Sunday, 9am to 12noon	Day 2 – Shelter & Clothing Hacks <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Group 1: Shelter Making <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Knots ○ Carving materials for shelters ○ Natural bedding materials ○ Shelter making ○ How to sleep in the woods ▪ Group 2: Clothing Hack & Tracking
*Lunch break	
1 to 3pm	12noon to 1pm <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Group 1: Shelter Making ▪ Group 2: Clothing Hack & Tracking
3 to 4pm 4- 5pm	Talking Circle – large group <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Debriefing/lessons learned; date for post-talking circle to reconvene students via virtual method to engage students in program evaluation of the project. ▪ Due date (March 25th?) to submit feedback on pilot project via online survey, journaling or digital recording ▪ Clean up and pack up to depart
**March 25th – 6:30-8pm	Post-Talking Circle – Virtual gathering Topic – Assessment of the pilot project – self reflections and overall program, lessons learned, insights, strengths, challenges, areas of interest

Appendix 4: Additional Summaries of Findings and Impacts of Students Testimonials

Impact Findings: Positive impacts: increased Rotinonhsíon:ni cultural knowledge, understanding about land ethics, cultural protocols in relationship to self, land and community.

- ◆ “The notion of land-based ethics is an important aspect of my research. Working with instructors who live much closer to the land than I do, who live much closer to the community than I do, and for whom government policies have much different effects on their day-to-day lives reminded me of important aspects of my identity and self-understanding. I was able to connect with other people who have similar experiences in their background, which is not always an option in the city”.
- ◆ “This learning experience has elevated my knowledge, by allowing me access to a safe and welcoming learning space, where I was able to deepen my cultural understanding in relation to the world around me. I was touched by Lee’s guided meditation and sit spot exercises. These were important grounding moments that helped me to slow down”.
- ◆ “This was more than a skills course as the facilitators brought their cultural knowledge to guide and ground the survival skills. Teachings began from the minute we entered the first day of the pilot course that included the importance of having a wide angle view when being on the land, walking lightly and slowly, grounding ourselves before engaging in the time on the land, taking time and space for self-reflection and care, reverence for all of our relations, showing gratitude to all our relations though the opening and closing, and non-interference with the cycle of nature and ability of animals to care for themselves as they have always done”.

Impact Findings: Increased health and well-ness, self-confidence, deeper connection to land and culture, transferable and applied knowledge and survival skills to self and education context.

- ◆ “It was also quite comforting to be among people to whom I did not have to explain or justify my experience and my family’s experiences...it is very relaxing to not have to explain what a residential school is, why they were bad, what First Nations status entails, etc. As a result, conversations are far less pedagogical and more about discussing and dissecting our ideas, sharing knowledge and comparing experience, all of which are deeply helpful in working through questions of identity”.
- ◆ “From a personal level, I came to know better and connect to myself through this time. The weekend brought up a lot for me- emotionally, physically, spiritually. I felt connected as a group and I missed being in a group dynamic so much as I am such a social person and it’s so difficult to spend as much time alone as I have through Covid and in some ways through starting my Masters this year- a lot of time alone. The weekend also (surprisingly) validated the skills I have from dance through transferring ways of learning, understanding, and accepting challenges. Also, patience and ways of pushing through and letting go of expectation”.
- ◆ “The impacts were both immediate and long term. I think immediate it really questioned my current research practice and very recent relationship with academia that feels foreign. It pulled me in a way to deeply reconsider how I will nurture and shape my path at Concordia. I felt aligned in a way I had not felt in a long time with practice, education, community that held my spirit”.

- ◆ “As far as my continued path with graduate studies, I feel that my being informed through my body, land based learning is the most necessary process to myself, learning, family and community. My family and I have been making weekly commitments to be in nature on the weekends, spending time with the trees.
- ◆ “As a faculty dedicated to decolonized learning and pedagogy, learning from the land and learning by doing (instead of by watching or being lectured to) are truly profound learning experiences to engage in and to witness students engaging in. The importance of adapting to whatever the climate and land needs us to adapt to, the opportunities to learn from unanticipated moments (grief and reverence through a squirrel, tapping of a maple tree) were so rich and important for the students to engage in. Learning from the land is truly holistic education that engages with the medicine wheel teachings of learning with the mind, body, spirit and emotions- the way our Indigenous ancestors engaged with learning and teaching children. This is in stark contrast to imposed and controlled classroom environments that do not align with our spirits and are generally absent of the emotions, spirit and physical selves”.

Impact findings: increased feelings of empowerment, capability, personal growth, applied skills development

- ◆ “It was very meaningful for me to hear everyone’s words around the fire and to also have the space to share. One of my greatest take-aways is that learning is an act of remembering. Learning to carve wood was also very satisfying for me. The process was meditative, and it made me feel empowered to be able to create something with my hands”.
- ◆ “There was a moment when I was feeling frustrated with learning how to tie knots. I was feeling panicked and did not trust myself that I knew how to do it. I observed other folks and then kept trying. I learned to ground myself, to take a breath and trust in my ability. This was a moment in which I realized I do this when I am organizing, I forget to trust in myself and that I am capable and to take a moment to reflect and care for myself. I also learned the paths/trails that the deer will take. The knowledge keeper had said that they will often use the same path in order to conserve energy. I thought to myself, how can I apply this to my own ways of moving within urban spaces? How can I conserve energy so that I can live and survive well”?
- ◆ “I want to emphasize the process by which we were taught each activity as being the most meaningful part for me. I felt respected and understood and that everything we learned whether sitting by the fire, at our sit spot or carving the spoons, the meditations- all of it, they were all experiences I will take away both as a student and as a teacher. I teach my daughter every day about life. I am leading by example to her how to be in the world. It's great I can show her my new skills, but how I show her, how I teach her and others is for me the most meaningful part- how to be a better student and teacher”.

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