**Environmental Science: Outdoor Education**

**Dear students:**

Respect for each other’s beliefs, values and opinions are imperative to the overall success of this outdoor education journey we are exploring as a united team. We will be discovering and experiencing (but will not be limited to) the following:

-Indigenous teachings, games and values and perspectives

-Communication though a “needs based” lens

-Acknowledgment and respect for: fears, frustrations and differing viewpoints

-Expression of creativity and emotional impact

-Story telling and listening skills

-Inquiry and project based learning

-Cooperation, leadership and teamwork

-Love and appreciation for nature and the earth’s gifts

-How to balance society’s expectations in our search for “Success and Happiness”

-Empowerment though self-confidence and risk taking

Remember that although we come from different cultural backgrounds, economic privileges or disadvantages and educational focuses, we all have something to contribute towards equality and equity in our communities. We will learn from each other and build trust and respect through embracing our differences and uniting in the experiences we will share together this semester. I look forward to the challenges we will face together as we play games, learn survival skills, create meaningful discussions and explore the vast outdoor experiences that Manitoba has to offer us.

**Indigenous Games: Activities and Teachings**
Many of the games and activities will require you to let go of your personal insecurities and judgements and those of your peers. Please be respectful to and acknowledge your own personal needs as you participate. You are encouraged to express your emotions during these exercises and games, while observing the intended teachings and structures.

Note: We will all be journaling about the games and activities you participate in each week and what you learned about yourself, others and associated teachings in regards to our connection to the natural earth and human nature.

Please review the Feelings and Needs charts and Healing Circle document as we begin the conversation around communicating our feelings, needs and give respect to the Indigenous Healing Circle and connected teachings. You will be encouraged to take a variety of risks and put a tremendous amount of trust in your classmates during; games, skill based tasks, navigation, associated camping risks and most importantly as you share experiences and emotions during Ring of Fire meetings and every day activities. You will be invited to bring these documents to class for meetings and games so please keep them in your journal and reference them as a tool to clarify and articulate your understanding.

**Teaching Communication and Empathy Though Games and Sharing Circle Meetings (Ring of Fire)**

Personal Philosophy/Pedagogy: Growing up I was fortunate enough to be immersed in both nature and human connection. I spent summers at the cabin with family and friends, camped on islands and explored trails and lakes for days without contact from the outside world. I also played primarily team sports from a very age and participated in many clubs, camps and recreational activities that connected me with other children and experienced adults. In doing this, I feel I that became very connected to both nature and people and have always had to find a balance between them in order to find the balance in myself.

My times with family and friends at the lake and during extracurricular activities developed my communication skills, empathy for others needs and an appreciation for companionship. I am a person that feeds off of the human connection and at times I struggle to spend time away from others or be alone. I thrive off the sharing of experiences and tend to believe that just as, Christophor Mcandless once said, “Happiness is only real when shared.” (Into the Wild) At times I judge myself for this philosophy as I wish I had the courage to camp and travel alone, but making deeper connections to those that join my journey and sharing these experiences makes them that much more rewarding to me.

Nature is my escape from society at times and is the only place where I can pause and block out the influences of media, technology, negativity and daily expectations demanded of me to fit in or be “successful.” There is a place that I can go to in my head that some people refer to as “the zone” and this escape can refresh my mind, body and spirit like nothing else. It brings me to a place of true appreciation for what I have in the world and to be honest and happy with who I am.

When I finally had the opportunity to teach Environmental Science or Outdoor Education as we call it, it opened my eyes to a whole new way of education and communication with my students. I was finally able to apply my experiences in my teaching and build a program that encourages students to be themselves, have empathy for one another, appreciate/respect the beauty of nature and acknowledge the gifts of the earth. I hope you all enjoy learning in this course as much as I enjoy teaching it!!! Thank you for joining our team this year and remember, “Wilderness is In-Tents!”

**Ring of Fire: Day ONE Preparation**

-Review Human Nature, Power of a Circle and Dream Catcher (stone)
-Welcome all students and present staff into the circle, have a new student take attendance each day (build in compliment as semester goes on) and begin with a lesson/story/share/object to settle the group and create focus.

1. Come prepared to tell a story about a unique experience you had while exploring, “playing” or camping outdoors. Be sure to include the moral of the story or in other words, what you learned from the experience and what makes it important to you.
2. What is your best attribute OR what do you think is the most important Human Nature characteristic to have?
3. Rant about something that is frustrating you lately or something that is making your week great! (~30 sec.)
4. Showing appreciation (to self, peers, nature etc.) Who is a person in your life that you are appreciative of? What is something you like to do outdoors that helps you to relax and foucus?

Note: These are the types of guided concepts that help to facilitate conversation and sharing within the Ring of Fire. You will also have an opportunity to reflect on activities from the week, experiences at home and school and themes/topics/lessons studied in class. We will build trust and respect within our group and let our emotions and experiences guide the conversation as the semester progresses.

**Unit Schemata**

**-Human Nature and the “Teachings”**

 \*Students will generate their own understanding as a class and learn develop a sense of empathy based on what others physical, spiritual, emotional, mental needs are. (The 4 directional teachings)

 \*The 7 Sacred Teachings

 \*Spirt Wheels and Spirit Animals

**-Indigenous Games**

 \*Learning and connecting through “play” and guided connection

 \*Each game has a teaching and students will reflect on the experience of both the games and the teachings each week. (Both written and verbal)

**-Connection to Nature and Earth**

 \*Stones (Grandmother and Grandfathers)

 \*Story Telling (students learn about history of story telling and how to improve both their ability to express their feeling/honesty AND listening skills.

 \*Elders, learning from each others stories of (empathy, trust, fear, love, success and failure, morals)

**-Ring of Fire (ROF) Meetings**

Students ideally meet in an outdoor space in a large circle. Topics, scenarios, activities, reflections and themes are prompted by teacher and/or students for discussion.

 **\*** Communicating Needs and Giving Respect(prior to first meeting)
Feelings/Needs and Values Handouts (Posted link on Weebly)
*Healing Circle and The Power of the Circle Handout*

\* Passing around an item found in nature or dream catcher or feather etc. Students will have context built around the importance of these items and why they are considered sacred to the land and peoples.

**Evaluations: Reoccurring Outcomes, Practices and Principles**

You will be evaluated on a number of outcomes and mini projects/tasks throughout the semester. Remember that these outcomes are based on a PROECESS and that you demonstrate you are trying to better yourself as a critical thinker, compassionate communicator and an appreciation for the Indigenous and Needs based teachings and exercises. You will be assessed out of 5 on all of the following categories for a total of 40% of your final grade.

**Journals and reflective writing/Teams Postings:**

You are expected to reflect on: themes, topics, participation and willingness to take risks, ROF conversations, games, team build activities, physical tasks and skill-based learning activities. You will be given a specific rubric for journals and asked to reflect on: What we did, what the teaching was, how you understand it, why we did it and how/when you will be able to apply it in future experiences?

**Inquiry Based research and writing/presenting:**

Each week you will be given a; topic, theme, concept, object, skill or cultural tradition/practice to research and outline. Be sure to make your choices based on your interests and use support from the video, article or some form of exterior source to support your finding and opinion on the subject. Most of these inquiries will be posted on a Teams channel for others to read and you should be prepared to share your finding with the class verbally on occasion.

**Self-evaluation on participation and communication:**

At the end of each week and throughout the semester you will be asked to give yourself a grade accompanied by a written or verbal explanation. This course is only as beneficial to you as you choose to make it and therefor you should have some say on how you wish to be graded. We will have regular conversations around what makes a good listener and what is means for you to be “present” and active in all aspects of the program. Take risks, make mistakes and come to class with an openness and positive attitude to try new things and you will learn form the unique experiences this course has to offer.

**Mini Projects and Exit Interview:**

-Healing Shield and Cultural Game Creation (Details on Weebly)

-Exit Interviews will be conducted in the final two weeks in the course when we have completed out overnight camping and Picture Portfolio.

**Non-Violent Communication: Rational and Application**

**The “Gaps” at River East Collegiate**

This is my fifth year teaching at River East Collegiate and the fifth school I’ve taught at. There is an immediate and obvious cultural gap as you enter our building in the predominately white privileged population. Just as in many school cultures, if you do not belong to a social group such as a team, academics, thespians, gamers etc., then you really don’t belong anywhere. For many of the Indigenous, East Indian, African and recently immigrated students, their economic status can create a substantial visible division between students. Unfortunately, the economic gap also perpetuates the racial or cultural gap within the school. Although it may not be an obvious problem for the average person to observe, it becomes much clearer as you take a closer look at the behaviors of many students in the school. Many of these students sit alone and the Indigenous population in particular is quickly stereotyped and often bullied, neglected and misunderstood by a majority of other students. I try to be empathic and understanding for all students on both sides, as I strongly believe that it is our lack of education and commitment of foundational human needs that limits our abilities to close the gap of systemic racism that exists within too many schools in our province.

In my experience, courses with an Indigenous focus on empowerment and appreciation for culture traditions and connection to nature, can make a substantial difference in providing opportunity for the Indigenous students to make connections with others and embrace their culture. Outdoor Education and the Indigenous games unit has provided me with a tremendous opportunity to build this process for a change that I feel can create a ripple effect throughout the entire school culture. The Ring of Fire sharing circle and connections students can make while playing games encourages an environment where students build relationships to peers that they would typically never even engage with at school. If I can help to create a safe environment where students can learn to trust each other, these values will trickle down and infiltrate the social norms within our student body and eventually students begin to feel like they belong.

The Non-violent Communication course has expanded my abilities to communicate with my students and provided me with a number of strategies to help students develop their personal communication skills. Students will receive the “feelings and needs” list early into the course and I will introduce students to many of the new skills and strategies that I learned in the course. Helping my students to have judgment free communication with each other and to use feelings and needs based requests will encourage deeper connections, with honesty and trust. With consistent practice and facilitated reinforcement, students can become habitual in the way they think, react and empathize with each other.

Playing the Indigenous games with a focus on the intended teachings associated with each game will create regular opportunity for me to pair up and group students with peers outside of their comfort zone. The games themselves require collaboration, cooperation and trust and allow them to be successful or fail together. We can then debrief in our weekly sharing circles and even reflect on these experiences using the language of the Four Directions teachings and “feelings and needs” vocabulary. This will also provide students an opportunity to make compassionate requests and expand on the needs that are not being made in their personal lives and within the class.

Another concept that I intend to include in the meetings is communicating our appreciation for one another. With practice, I believe that students will begin to express this appreciation without prompt. Exercises such as the “appreciation circle” where students take turns sitting in the middle of the circle and their peers get to express one thing that they appreciate about the student in the middle, can be used to build students confidence in communicating their appreciation in everyday relationships. This type of exercise can only be successful if teachers create opportunity for students to be appreciative of each other. Through playing games, learning skills that require cooperation and team work and on camping trips, students will have ample opportunity to connect with others and rely upon one another. This will give them a lot to be appreciative of and make it much more natural to empress their appreciation.

I still have a lot to learn in my journey of non-violent communication, but I am confident that as I continue to learn more and practice communication in my personal life, I will be able to guide students in their understanding an application of these skills. I really connected with the lecture and teachings around “behaviors being reflective of needs|” and know that I must show compassion and empathy to my student’s as I put their human needs first before I can make additional requests in my courses. I am very thankful and appreciative for this new found knowledge and intend to honor it and embrace it as an educator.

Work Cited

Bond. T. (2018). *The compassionate book: Lessons from the compassion course*. Orange Lake, NY: ONE HUMAN PUBLISHING