

First Peoples Principles of Learning (FPPL)

Learning ultimately supports the well-being of the self, the family, the community, the land, the spirits, and the ancestors

This principle refers to the understanding that ultimately, the primary purpose of learning is for well-being. Teaching should support the well-being of the self, the family, the community, the land, the spirits, and the ancestors.

- Learning ultimately supports the well-being of the self.

As there are diverse learning styles and needs among all learners, there are diverse learning styles and needs among Indigenous learners. The uniqueness of each learner is valued and appreciated. Each person is perceived as coming into the world with specific gifts that can be nurtured as they grow, and it is the responsibility of the adults in the child's life to acknowledge those strengths so those gifts can be supported to flourish. It is also recognized that as each person is unique, there are many different ways learning occurs. This understanding encourages having options for learners in terms so that they can access ideas and develop understanding through their strengths (as opposed to a deficit model).

- Learning ultimately supports the well-being ... of the family ... [and] of the community.

This element of the principle reflects the understanding that there is always a need to balance individual achievement against responsibilities to, and for, the family and community. Because of this belief, what is learned by individual needs to also be a benefit to their family and community. This idea can stand in contrast to an individualistic perspective where the individual is more important than the community. Responsibility to family and community is also supported by the concept that "we are all related", a view of the world deeply held by most Indigenous peoples in North America (Cajete, 1994; Greenwood & de Ledeeuw, 2007; Kirkness, 1998). Imbedded in this concept is the belief that as human beings, we all share commonality, and what affects one person affects all others, and the world around us.

- Learning ultimately supports ... the well-being of the land.

The relationship to land and place is deeply rooted in First Peoples' cultural perspectives; living and learning is inextricably tied to sense of place, and connection to the land itself. Traditionally, in addition to the learner's family and community, the place in which they live, and the land that supports that life, provide the context and source for teaching and learning. The community and natural environment are regarded as the "classroom".

In contrast with a perception that people "own" land, is the understanding that people "belong to the land" (Hampton, 1995, p. 39). Education is tied to place; the two cannot be separated. This element of First Peoples' worldview includes the understanding that the health of human beings is tied to the health of the land they inhabit. Therefore, what is learned needs to not jeopardize health of the land that sustains us. Place is a way of knowing, experiencing, and relating with the world, and that the understanding of this anchors Indigenous peoples (Coulthard, 2010).

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- Learning ultimately supports ... the well-being of the spirits, and the ancestors.

That last section of this principle honours the understanding that people owe their lives to those who have come before, and learning should respect what has been learned and passed from those ancestors to succeeding generations.

Relation to Other Educational Theory

The emphasis on relationship and connectedness in First Peoples' world-views parallels the stress on collaboration in constructivist learning. It supports the constructivist concept that learning is socially constructed, and the social constructivist theory that learning occurs as a result of the individual's interaction within a group or community (Vygotsky, 1978). The collaborative nature of group learning reflects Vygotsky's understanding that social interaction is the necessary and primary cause of ontological development of knowledge in an individual (Glassman, 1994).

Scardamalia and Bereiter (1994) also suggest that knowledge building is supported by intentional social interaction where participants provide constructive response to each other's work, and the positive effect of collaborative learning is supported by Rogers and Ellis in their explanation of collaboration within the framework of distributed cognition (Rogers & Ellis, 1994) whereby knowledge is shared throughout networks of people.

Implications for Classroom and School Include:

- Critically examining what is/has been considered important to teach and learn and why it is/has been considered important (i.e. asking what, or whose agenda, it serves, and whose knowledge is valued or devalued).
- Critically examining what is being learned in terms of how it affects self, family, community and the land.
- Connecting learning to the broader community. The classroom should extend beyond the walls of the classroom and school, and should also be connected to both "place" and the land. In addition, bringing in community members reinforces the links between school and the rest of the learners' lives.
- Ensuring that there are multiple access points in learning to enable all students to engage from where they are.
- Ensuring that learners have various ways to represent what they learn.
- Making explicit connections to the social responsibility aspect of learning.
- Beginning with looking at local contexts when examining topics or subject material, and then move outward.
- Engaging as much as possible with parents and extended family.