

The Elders and Knowledge Keepers in Schools Initiative Symposium

WHAT WE HEARD

2022

The Elders and Knowledge Keepers in Schools Initiative Symposium

Overview

The Elders and Knowledge Keepers in Schools Initiative supports students, educators, and families as they learn First Nations, Métis, and Inuit histories, cultures, traditional values, languages, contemporary lifestyles, and traditional knowledge systems across all learning environments through **authentic engagement**, one of the four policy directives articulated in *Mamàhtawisiwin: The Wonder We Are Born With—An Indigenous Education Policy Framework*.

Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning and 11 school divisions piloted the Elders and Knowledge Keepers in Schools Initiative in 33 schools from January 2022 to June 2022 to increase school division capacity for respectful and relational partnerships with Elders and Knowledge Keepers.

On April 26, 2022, the department announced \$1.6 million to support provincial-wide implementation of this initiative for the 2022/2023 school year. This included an annual Elders and Knowledge Keepers in Schools Initiative Symposium to promote shared and collective community learning, as school divisions requested opportunities to learn from the engagements and events within the Elders and Knowledge Keepers in Schools Initiative pilots.

On Thursday, November 17, 2022, Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning was pleased to invite Elders and Knowledge Keepers working alongside school divisions, Elders and Knowledge Keepers in Schools Initiative Advisory Council members, Indigenous Inclusion Directorate Advisory Council members, community consultation participants, superintendents, and Indigenous education leads to the First Annual Elders and Knowledge Keepers in Schools Initiative Symposium in Winnipeg.



(L-R) Faylene Sutherland, Floyd Sutherland, Ron Cook, Becky Cook, Gordon Walker, Madeline Gamblin

The event demonstrated Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing. Attendees received give-away bags, a traditional expression of respect, relationship, and reciprocity. Additionally, student volunteers from the Winnipeg School Division helped throughout the day, serving refreshments to Elders and Knowledge Keepers and supporting them as they moved to their various sessions.

Over 230 attendees enjoyed presentations and discussions. **Dr. Herman Michell**, a member of the Barren Lands First Nation, delivered the morning keynote address, *Land Based Education*. Dr. Michell completed a PhD in education from the University of Regina in curriculum and instruction—Cree culture and school science, a master's degree in education from the University of British Columbia, and has a background in educational psychology and special education from both UBC and the University of Manitoba. Dr. Michell initially obtained a bachelor of arts degree in sociology from the University of Winnipeg.



Dr. Herman Michell

Dr. Michell presented critical learnings of the importance of land and language in our work. Dr. Michell shared the view that “land-based education is not a trend,” but a life-giving force that is critical to decolonization and survival. Dr. Michell described how the land is both teacher and healer as a school and classroom. He explained the underlying cultural and philosophical teachings of First Nations people while making links with local Elders, communities, world views, languages, values, stories, history, and ways of knowing.

Breakout sessions from participating pilot school divisions and topical areas of interest continued the learning:



Dr. Laura Forsythe

- **Mountain View School Division** shared their process of making connections with Indigenous community members, Elders, and Knowledge Keepers, and of laying the groundwork at the school board, senior administration, and school levels.
- **Dr. Laura Forsythe, Indigenous Studies Instructor, University of Winnipeg Faculty of Education**, shared approaches to implementing Métis content into the classroom in a good way by honouring the voices of Métis curriculum and content creators.



Grandmother
Martha Peet

- **Pembina Trails School Division** presented their school-based experiences and learning reflections from a variety of perspectives: divisional, Early Years, Middle Years, and Senior Years.
- **St. James-Assiniboia School Division** explored how their pilot experience has become a catalyst for further growth within the school division as a whole. They highlighted the planning and professional development process that took place with school teams, and what these learning experiences looked like in classrooms from Kindergarten to Grade 12, and in a wide variety of curricular areas.

- **Louis Riel School Division** presented Manito Ahbee Aki, the first Minecraft teaching resource in the world that honours, celebrates, and explores a Manitoba Anishinaabe community.
- **kiwētōtētān: ininiw kiskinomākēwin:** Ron Cook, Gordon Walker, Becky Cook, Floyd Sutherland, Madeline Gamblin, and Faylene Sutherland discussed what a decolonial education is, and how it overlaps or differs from the land-based education programs of schools and communities.
- **School District of Mystery Lake** led participants through the numeracy and literacy activities they run at *akihtaso camp*. *akihtaso camp* embodies the spirit and integrity of the Seven Sacred Teachings and traditional knowledge from Elders and Knowledge Keepers, while integrating curriculum outcomes. These camps offer opportunities to develop and strengthen relationships, and a chance to build community for students and adults alike.

The afternoon keynote address, delivered by **Ginew School** (Manitoba First Nations School System) and **Niverville High School** (Hanover School Division), supported understandings of the importance of relationships and respect when working alongside Elders and Knowledge Keepers.



(L-R) Gail Lakatos, Josephine Hartin, Brett Schmall, Kimberley Funk, Emma Ginter, Jason Parenteau



Grandmother Myra Laramie and Minister Wayne Ewasko

What We Heard

Topic

Inclusive and Culturally Safe Learning Environments:

The Symposium promoted deeper learning of protocols and respectful engagement.

"I shared what I learned about oshkaabewisag (oh-shkah-bay-wiss-sag) (helpers) at the Symposium, and connected with a colleague and community member to think through some of the logistics of meeting the Elder's needs in the work."

– Borderland School Division

"The room was full of positive energy and I took that energy home with me. I was asked if I needed anything or needing help wherever I went. I was further given energy with/during the Pipe Ceremony."

– Grandmother Martha Peet

"Learnings and understandings around what is ceremony and what is not—with this understanding, we would build more comfort amongst teachers about what is appropriate to experience in the classroom and who can support the learning."

– Division de la Rivière Seine River School Division

Topic

Understanding of World Views, Values, Identities, Traditions, and Contemporary Lifestyles:

There were immediate take-aways to support and strengthen teaching.

"I have already incorporated some of the land-based teachings from Dr. Herman Michell into school lessons, and shared with our teachers."

– Seven Oaks School Division

"There were direct instructional take-aways for implementing within our own school settings: how to make Elders/Knowledge Keepers feel welcome and secure, different levels of implementation, and different methods of implementation (Zoom and in person). I appreciated all the presenters for being authentic and resourceful in their sharing."

– Brandon School Division

Topic

Putting Students at the Centre:

Student voice through the presentations and presence of the youth volunteers was important.

"I appreciated the inclusion of student voice and found it the most powerful."
– Southwest Horizon School Division

"It is important to hear from partners who are new on their journey. Hearing from the staff and students about their partnership and initial work in Niverville was uplifting. This session gave us pause to consider what a partnership with a First Nation may look like for River East Transcona School Division."
– River East Transcona School Division

Topic

Authentic Engagement:

Attendees valued opportunities to create relationships with Elders and Knowledge Keepers.

"Made some connections with Ginew School and will be able to visit them in the near future."
– Hanover School Division

"Divisionally, we will look at sending more people next year to be able to cover more of the sessions. As soon as there is a save-the-date, we would ensure that it is earmarked on our divisional calendar."
– Division de la Rivière Seine River School Division

"Having attended this session, our division has additional insight to inform our planning—I think simply continuing with providing information on how Elders and Knowledge Keepers can assist schools and divisions in advancing Truth and Reconciliation."
– Park West School Division

"I couldn't help but be emotional while listening to the beautiful stories of the relationships being created between First Nations communities and school divisions across the province. This is both the future of education in Manitoba and what it always should have been. It truly is exciting to see this happening!"
– Indigenous Inclusion Directorate Advisory Council member

Next Steps

The Coordinator of the Elders and Knowledge Keepers in Schools Initiative will support school divisions in embedding learning strategies and actions, articulated as **authentic involvement** in *Mamàhtawisiwin: The Wonder We Are Born With—An Indigenous Education Policy Framework*, to collectively realize the vision for all Manitoba students to succeed, no matter where they live, their background, or their individual circumstances. The Coordinator will meet with divisional leadership teams to facilitate high-level planning and, as needed, foster linkages with Elders and Knowledge Keepers.

A guidelines document, informed through Talking Circles with Elders and Knowledge Keepers, evaluation findings from the Elders and Knowledge Keepers Schools Initiative School pilots, conversations with Indigenous education leads, and Symposium feedback, will support school division capacity for respectful and relational partnerships. These guidelines will be released in Spring 2023.



Minister Wayne Ewasko

The 2023 Elders and Knowledge Keepers in Schools Initiative Symposium will be expanded to a larger facility and will include a Gallery Walk of programs and resources in school divisions. The second annual Symposium will include a virtual option.

Thank you to all who attended. We look forward to the Second Annual Elders and Knowledge Keepers in Schools Initiative Symposium November 2023.