

Workshop Follow-up Report:

‘A Clean Environment Makes a Healthy Community’

Identifying youth place-based values in School District 91

July 2017

What is the CIRC?

The Cumulative Impacts Research Consortium (CIRC) is a research and community outreach initiative located at the University of Northern British Columbia focused on better understanding the cumulative environmental, community and health impacts of resource development in northern B.C. For more information on our ongoing research and related initiatives, please visit www.unbc.ca/cumulative-impacts.

About the Workshop

In order to better understand youth perspectives on regional environmental, community and health values, CIRC held a workshop with grade 8 students from School District 91 (SD91) on May 25, 2017. The overall goal of this workshop was to learn about the kinds of values that are important to youth living in SD91 in relation to resource development—a school district with 30 educational sites, 5,500 students, and nearly 700 staff located across a region approximately 70,000 square kilometres. While youth will be deeply impacted by the land use and resource management decisions we make today, their perspectives are typically under-represented in land use decision making processes. In addition, this workshop introduced the concept of cumulative impacts and began an ongoing conversation with youth participants about the positive and negative impacts of resource development.

What We Did

CIRC led an arts-based mapping activity with three different grade 8 classes from SD91. Each class was divided into three groups located at one of three mapping stations (environment, community and health) and provided with a transparent map depicting the region around SD91. At each table, students were invited to share stories and perspectives on either environmental, community or health values, and were encouraged to locate a place, feature or area on the map that corresponded to their value. Students were also provided with various other art materials to experiment with throughout the mapping session. Each group spent 20 minutes at each mapping station, before rotating on to the next station. After the three groups rotated through the environment, community and health tables, we gathered together as a large group to debrief the activity and highlight important themes.

What We Learned

Students shared numerous stories regarding the local area, highlighting a wide variety of values and information. Though we discussed many values, the following themes were particularly prominent:

- **Environment:** Access to the outdoors, either through participation in outdoor recreation activities or in organized sports, was the main environmental value highlighted by all three classes. Students noted that they thoroughly enjoy time spending time in nature through camping, hiking, hunting and fishing, as well as playing outdoor sports.

- **Community:** Students value spending time with friends and family while participating in indoor and outdoor activities. They also noted that they enjoy attending the multiple community events that occur annually, suggesting that being part of their communities as a whole is very important to them.
- **Health:** Students in every class discussed the importance of good food, exercise, a clean environment, a healthy amount of sleep, access to adequate medical services, and time for both social activities and alone-time. These activities might take place at school, local sports fields, the hospital, hunting and fishing spots, community gardens and their own homes.

While we discussed environmental, community and health values separately, students also made note of integrated values that cut across these themes. Conversations around resource development, food, and the importance of mental health occurred at every table. Resource development was recognized as something that is needed to provide jobs, while students also discussed potential environmental impacts associated with resource development (i.e. destruction of animal habitat). While students discussed the potential negative health impacts of resource development, they also recognized that it brings more medical services into their communities. Access to food was highlighted at all three tables: students at the environment table located places where they like to gather food, either by hunting, fishing, or harvesting plants; at the community table, food was identified as a way to bring people together; and at the health table, food was identified as intrinsic to good health. In reflecting on important elements of mental health, students noted being active and outside made them feel great, along with striking a balance between spending time alone and with friends. They also noted a need for further mental health support services located directly in their communities, rather than in larger centres.

What Comes Next?

We are very grateful to all the students who participated in this workshop, and to the teachers and school administrators from SD91 that helped to make them happen. We learned so much about the region, and the particular ways youth understand and experience local environment, community and health values. We will be returning the maps to the school for future use and ongoing discussion, at which time we hope to present them to the community with the help of student participants. Along with the important stories and values shared by participants, students also highlighted how much they appreciated being engaged in a collaborative process where they could share their thoughts and perspectives on important issues. We are very appreciative of these reflections, and will be sure to incorporate them into ongoing community, and especially youth, engagement activities.



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