

FINDING OUR POWER TOGETHER

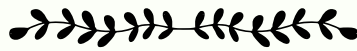
LAND-BASED EDUCATION WITH YOUTH

RESEARCH REPORT

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May 2021



LAND-BASED EDUCATION WITH YOUTH



The Ontario education system continues to emphasize dominant settler-colonial ideologies that are attached to schools' current pedagogical practices. There is little to no space for implementing Indigenous-informed knowledge or challenging decolonizing work to be integrated into education (4).

This paper will examine what Indigenous land-based approaches can teach us in non-Indigenous contexts and discuss strategies to implement land-based practices with youth. We aim to explore land-based education for the youth of all cultures in educational settings as a mechanism to promote wellbeing and cultural learning. This research seeks to contribute to a deeper understanding of the importance of a decolonizing framework and prioritize Indigenous culture and land-based education in children and youth's learning environment.



Connecting to Land

Intergenerational relationships with elders are essential to connecting to the land (15). Creating intergenerational relationships with elders can help rebuild lost connections to the land that has been lost for so many years (15). Intergenerational relationships can foster intergenerational learning, which involves the sharing of traditional knowledge through storytelling (11).

STORYTELLING

Storytelling is one of the many things that can heal the diminishing of traditional land-based knowledge (11). Indigenous storytelling consists of sharing and passing down stories of Indigenous history, customs and values from generation to generation. Sharing Indigenous knowledge and stories benefit Indigenous individuals and non-Indigenous individuals to be aware and strengthen their physical, emotional, and spiritual relationship with the land.



Traditional land-based knowledge is holistic, emphasizing the significance of nurturing the body, mind, and spirit. Intergenerational learning also provides the perfect place for reconnecting to the land. To advance Indigenous education, it has been recommended by Cree Elders that incorporating an Indigenous-based model of learning would also help all students to function in Western society (10).



CLIMATE CHANGE

Multiple Indigenous communities are being impacted the most by the effects of Climate Change. Climate change is damaging our climate because we forgot about taking care of the land with respect. The use of single-use plastic or not properly disposing of garbage is damaging the land, and it brings us further and further away from reconnecting back to land.

Land-based education can reduce the effects of climate change and help heal the land we live on. Indigenous knowledge speaks of reducing the impact of climate change and how to be sustainable regularly (9). Incorporating Indigenous knowledge into educational settings at all learning levels would demonstrate to younger generations the importance of environmental preservation and climate change severity.

Decolonization

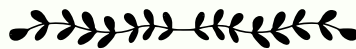
Indigenous land-based education is a fundamental part of decolonization because it promotes an Indigenous model of education in a culturally appropriate way (10). Decolonization starts with unlearning and undoing the dominant settler-colonial culture presently in our everyday lives and self-reflecting to dig deeper and look at our thoughts, feelings, emotions, and actions from a neutral perspective. For us to shift towards a non-colonial relationship in both theories and practice, using a land education approach, Just like environmental education, land education must be necessary for all learning levels, from Kindergarten to Grade 12 (4).



EDUCATIONAL MATERIALS

Since educational institutions' pedagogical practices hold such dominant ideologies of settler-colonial perspectives, it is challenging to implement Indigenous informed knowledge into education (4). Educational materials used in the learning environment involve textbooks that have outdated information and promote the centrality of settler colonialism, which makes decolonizing harder to incorporate. This proves to be accurate as there is a need for new inclusive textbooks that move away from settler colonialism practices.

However, this would require the need for extra funding from the government. This calls for the government to recognize that just reusing old textbooks is not a way of 'moving forward in Education,' as education is constantly changing and developing.



Having many land-based healing/education programs would be very useful for organizations that provide Indigenous peoples programs to secure funding to continue fighting for land-based rights (14). Indigenous technologies, such as clay making and weaving are often reduced to artistic expressions only or are deemed as irrelevant to society (3).

Land-based healing/education programs advance the reclaiming of traditional forms of making in maker spaces and serve to counter Indigenous erasure and settler-colonial constructions by centring Indigenous knowledge systems (3).

THE SOCIAL WORLD

Educators continuously engaged in regular discussions about revitalizing Indigenous culture with their students to ensure that decolonizing work is integrated into the curriculum. Since the social world plays a huge role in everything we do, it is vital to have regular discussions regarding a wide range of social issues with youth to enrich all areas of their education.

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

This especially plays a role in educational settings as we should be having regular conversations with children and youth regarding their development. Non-profit organizations can bring together Indigenous and non-Indigenous allies to support Indigenous communities and work towards Indigenous culture reawakening and decolonization. The work organizations do is essential because they help to fill a gap in services that the government does not provide. Implementing land-based programming for all ages and sharing traditional stories adds to the mandatory work of decolonizing our very Western dominant ideologies in society (1).



Diversity

The current Western education system claims that they promote and practice inclusivity and diversity in schools at all learning levels. Non-Indigenous teachers can work to support the cultural ways of the community by learning to develop lessons that are grounded within the communities' way of life (13). It is essential to become an educator who willingly works alongside a community and not against it. The western-style of education does not currently involve land-based education in the curriculum. The curriculum is a fundamental part of Western-style education, naturally, teachers are mainly concerned with what subjects they will teach (12). Instead, only a few educators understand the importance of 'how this is relevant and 'why this is important' curriculum questions.



By acknowledging and incorporating land-based pedagogy in all environments, it helps children and youth understand that everyone is from different diverse parts of the world. It also promotes the inclusion of embracing and celebrating the differences in every one of us.



REPRESENTATION

Having more Indigenous educators in mainstream education systems can help promote a diverse and inclusive learning environment. It also can give Indigenous children and youth an Indigenous role model to look up to and feel a sense of representation. All educators should continue empowering Indigenous students and honouring Indigenous community knowledge and diversity.




It is imperative to include:


- Diversity and inclusivity in the classroom. Incorporating land-based pedagogy into mainstream education at all levels would encourage Indigenous culture reawakening and critical self-reflection for settlers; the younger, the better. By doing so, children feel a sense of belonging in the learning environment. It creates a welcoming, positive space for them to take part in.
- Family involvement in children's learning process because they can be active members in learning with their children. Including the family would also foster the importance of understanding what it means to be inclusive, practice inclusivity, and understand Canada's diverse communities
- A collaborative approach to have meaningful discussions with children regarding their families and what they experience in their lives.




CALLING UPON THE GOVERNMENT



The challenge involves the fact that Indigenous-based education models require more from the learner instead of simply studying culture from textbooks (10). In order to commit to decolonizing, we must first understand the impacts of settler colonialism on society and its educational institutions.



Ways to promote Indigenous knowledge and culture can involve learning from Elders, Indigenous educators, and knowledge keepers who can pass down knowledge and stories. Unfortunately, in society, Indigenous knowledge is seen as the knowledge that is irrelevant and has been neglected for many years in Canada.



People often think that Canada is 'perfect' due to its diverse communities. Yet, the reality is that the government does not talk about the IRS history and its impact on Indigenous communities, families, and individuals.



Recommendations

It is essential to reiterate that Indigenous culture reawakening and decolonizing are implemented especially in educational environments. Recommendations for educators include ensuring that:

1

Indigenous perspectives are incorporated into the learning environment on a regular basis. It is vital to ensure that land-based curriculum and teachings are implemented all the time and that it is not just something that educators do once just to 'check off the box' (Arellano et al., 2019).

2

Ensure that having a learning environment promotes and embraces diversity and acceptance for all students. When planning an inclusive curriculum for children, educators must connect to various cultures including Indigenous culture to ensure opportunities for youth to engage in a wide range of cultural activities.

3

Begin to confront the status-quo by self-reflecting and looking at their own thoughts, feelings, emotions, and actions in a neutral perspective and getting rid of any potential biases they might have. When wanting to start implementing land-based practices and knowledge, educators can begin with unlearning and undoing the dominant settler-colonial perspectives that are so prevalent today.



Including Indigenous pedagogies would allow all students and non-Indigenous educators to develop stronger relationships to land, other living beings, and our personal wellbeing.



In the learning environment, collaborative relationships created with the teacher, children and the child's family members are essential in order to effectively ensure that students are supported and successful learners. The learning environment should promote a sense of well-being and belonging for the parents and children. This sense of well-being and belonging would benefit both Indigenous and non-Indigenous students.



The ongoing process of unlearning and undoing dominant settler-colonial perspectives can help us to further understand land-based education and its impact on youth. Although there continues to be inclusivity being promoted in the learning environments such as public elementary schools, it would not be 100% diverse and inclusive if Indigenous perspectives continue to be left out.



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