

Key Components of Indigenous Pedagogies

Literature Review

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Indspire

Indigenous education,
Canada's future. | L'éducation des autochtones.
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Cover Design
Heartbeat
by Emily Kewageshig

About Indspire

Indspire is an Indigenous national registered charity that invests in the education of Indigenous people for the long-term benefit of these individuals, their families and communities, and Canada. With the support of its funding partners, Indspire disburses financial awards, delivers programs, and shares resources with the goal of improving educational outcomes for First Nations, Inuit, and Métis students. Through Indspire’s education offerings, we provide resources to students, educators, communities, and other stakeholders who are committed to improving success for Indigenous youth. In 2021-2022, Indspire awarded over \$23 million through 6,612 bursaries and scholarships to First Nations, Inuit, and Métis youth, making it the largest funder of Indigenous post-secondary education outside the federal government.

About Research Knowledge Nest

The Indspire *Research Knowledge Nest* is the first Indigenous research program of its kind in Canada. With data analysis skills rapidly becoming critical to economic success, the *Research Knowledge Nest* is poised to seize this exciting opportunity to foster Indigenous engagement and leadership in quantitative research and data science roles. The program will be guided by an Advisory Committee of researchers, leaders, and key stakeholders who will provide direction and input on the development of this important initiative.

Cover Design – *Heartbeat by Emily Kewageshig*

Emily Kewageshig is an Anishinaabe artist and visual storyteller from Saugeen First Nation No. 29. Her work captures the interconnection of life forms using both traditional and contemporary materials. Her work is centred around themes of birth, death, and rebirth, as they are closely intertwined in both her cultural teachings and personal lived experiences. Emily celebrated her first solo exhibition titled *Mooshknemgog Bmaadziwin: Full Circle (2020)*, which was shown at the Tom Thomson Art Gallery in Owen Sound, Ontario. She continues to create artwork for various organizations to highlight Indigenous knowledge and culture. She graduated from Sheridan College’s Visual and Creative Arts Diploma program with Honours in 2017, receiving the Best in Show award at the final graduate exhibition. She attended OCAD University in the BFA Indigenous Visual Culture program (2017–2020).

Founding Supporters

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Introduction

Background

The education system in Canada is historically known for displacing, challenging, and causing harm to Indigenous people. Considering the history Indigenous people have within colonial institutions, there is a lot of mistrust and leniency for Indigenous people to pursue and attain Western education, whether that is their high school diploma or post-secondary certificates, diplomas, or degrees. From the 1950s onward, Indigenous leaders began advocating for new Indigenous education policy that would give Indigenous communities the responsibility and control of their schools and curriculum (Perkins, 2015, p. 6). Between then and now, “transferring control of schools and Indigenous education to local authorities” and communities, helped to regain self-governance and self-determination by restoring cultural autonomy within Indigenous communities (Perkins, 2015, p. 7).

Purpose

At Indspire, supporting the education of Indigenous people is at the forefront of the organization. Whether that is through providing bursaries and scholarships for post-secondary students or through programs such as Teach for Tomorrow: Indigenous Educator Apprenticeship Program. The program is a pathway for Indigenous high school students to become certified teachers or educational assistants through a supportive cohort experience (Indspire, 2022). This literature review serves to supplement an environmental scan of how Indigenous pedagogies (how knowledge is taught) are included and implemented within teacher education programs across Canada. To better support Indigenous students that are considering a career as Indigenous educators, Indspire is interested in reviewing and defining Indigenous pedagogical practices and approaches. Indspire intends to help Indigenous students decide where to attend post-secondary education by creating a checklist based on identifying which programs include Indigenous pedagogies and provide other forms of support for Indigenous students.

Method

This research involved examining bodies of literature related to Indigenous pedagogy and learning. Specifically, exploring forms of teaching Indigenous perspectives, knowledge, and culture. It was also critical to identify the barriers faced when it comes to implementing Indigenous pedagogy, practices, and approaches for a better understanding of the gap between identifying what is Indigenous pedagogy and why it is not fully incorporated into mainstream teacher education programs. Since the development of Indigenous education policies, there has been a lot of research offered on Indigenous pedagogy and how to incorporate the practices. However, there is a disconnect when it comes to the implementation and delivery of Indigenous pedagogy.

Key Topics

Throughout this literature review there are three key topics of discussion, and within those topics are sub-themes. These include:

- 1) Key Components of Indigenous Pedagogy:**
Indigenous wholistic approaches through intergenerational and experiential learning, and teachings of relationality.
- 2) Implementation of Indigenous Pedagogy:**
Dual role of faculties of education, systematic barriers in Indigenous education, and the limitations of Indigenous pedagogy.
- 3) Recommendations for Practice and Delivery:**
Including and creating space for Indigenous pedagogical methods within all teacher education programs.

Literature Review

Key Components of Indigenous Pedagogy

There are numerous aspects to Indigenous pedagogy, the most central being identified as Indigenous wholistic approaches through intergenerational and experiential learning, and teachings of relationality.

Relationality

Relationality is the interconnected relationships between humans to each other, to the land, animals, the ancestors, and future generations. In a pedagogical sense, it is teaching Indigenous and non-Indigenous students alike about the importance of the balance these relationships hold, and how relationships can affect and influence one another (Antoine et al., 2018, p. 17).

Intergenerational Learning

Intergenerational learning comes from Elders being the knowledge keepers of the community's culture and language by passing that knowledge down from generation to generation. Elders have been the educators of the community, and still are looked to as the experts when it comes to Indigenous pedagogies (Antoine et al., 2018, p. 19).

Experiential Learning

Indigenous pedagogies are experiential to the core because of the emphasis on learning by doing that was established by Indigenous communities long before contact was made (Antoine et al., 2018, p. 18). Indigenous communities prefer "learning through observation, action, reflection, and further action" because of the high value placed upon personal experience and the ability to communicate and incorporate those experiences to build understanding (Antoine et al., 2018, p. 18). Courses that allow for ethical engagement with Indigenous pedagogical methods such as the talking circle, land-based activities, community learning, sharing, and witnessing stories would be a form of experiential learning (Madden, 2015).

Implementation of Indigenous Pedagogy

The implementation of Indigenous pedagogies can be addressed through the following areas: the education of future Indigenous teachers, the learning environment, and the systems in place to achieve success.

Dual Role of Faculties of Education

The responsibility for implementing Indigenous pedagogies falls into the hands of the faculties of education where Indigenous students attend to become Indigenous educators. Therefore, two main areas faculties of education should focus on are how they intend to “respond to the educational needs of Indigenous students and communities in post-secondary institutions, as well as preparing pre-service and practicing teachers to carry on similar work” (Madden, 2015, p. 2). There is a responsibility in teacher education to reconceptualize historical narratives being taught in Canadian schools by inviting settler teachers to understand the role they play in the education of Indigenous and non-Indigenous students (Phelan et al., 2020, p. 46).

Systematic Barriers in Indigenous Education

There is a need for recognition and actualization of a major barrier taking place in Indigenous education – and that is racism. It is important for educators and schools to recognize the role that racism and the racialization of Indigenous students plays into the low graduation and educational attainment rates (Gebhard, 2018). On one hand, Indigenous students are not always given the chance to see themselves within their education. On the other hand, there is an overrepresentation of “culturally-based” solutions in education systems. There is a disconnection between understanding Indigenous pedagogies and implementing Indigenous pedagogies. Indigenous pedagogies are often overlooked and replaced in schools by cultural-themed lessons that invite Indigenous dancers and drummers to perform or Elders to share stories in classrooms. This occurs in place of creating ethical engagement and knowledge transference between students and Elders, dancers, and drummers. Implementing Indigenous pedagogy “requires learning about and plugging into the broader context of decolonizing and Indigenous education” (Hanson & Danyluk, 2022, p. 3).

The Limitations for Indigenous Pedagogy

In Canada, there is a need for educational policy reform at the federal level. As of right now “it is the parents who are responsible for the education of their children, and in order to support them each province or territorial government administers and regulates an education system” (Perkins, 2015, p. 13). There is a department within the Council of Ministers of Education dedicated to Indigenous education that has helped with shaping the provincial Indigenous education policy frameworks to improve Indigenous education gaps (Perkins, 2015, p. 13). Each provincial Ministry of Education is responsible for the creation of policies and curriculum. However, if a school division is unsupportive of Indigenous pedagogy or any culturally responsive education, there will be limitations to what an educator can incorporate into their lesson plans (Reid, 2022). When school divisions are not receptive to cultural responsiveness, the curriculum also reflects this issue, and in turn Indigenous and other culturally diverse students disengage from the learning environment (Reid, 2022).

Recommendations for Practice and Delivery

When trying to identify new potential partners for Teach for Tomorrow, it would be important to consider programs that value Indigenous pedagogical methods. This means partnering with institutions that include and create space for Indigenous perspectives, practices, and cultural knowledge within teacher education programs.

Including Indigenous Perspectives

Unpacking and disrupting settler narratives on Canadian history, culture, and experiences by including Indigenous perspectives in teacher education courses is integral for the delivery of Indigenous pedagogy. Currently, Indigenous perspectives are being “pushed to the periphery, if not completely excluded, and therefore contribute to the reproduction of settler citizens who continue to be unaware” of Indigenous history and current topics (Phelan et al., 2020, p. 45). Without the decentering of settler-dominant discourse, Indigenous perspectives will remain being reduced to “narratives of marginalization, victimization, corruption and tragedy” (Phelan et al., 2020, p. 50). It is one thing to advertise the value in Indigenous perspectives, and it is another to incorporate those perspectives into the discourse being taught.

Centering Indigenous Pedagogical Practices

Creating space within teacher education allows for Indigenous educators to leave with applicable knowledge by utilizing culturally responsive pedagogy. The use of culturally responsive pedagogy “recognizes students’ differences, validates students’ cultures, and asserts that cultural congruence of classroom practices increase students success in schools” (Ragoonaden & Mueller, 2017, p. 25). This prepares Indigenous teachers for the process of restoring and elevating Indigenous nations as the storytellers by creating curricula aligned with their own cultural teachings and practices. An example of culturally responsive pedagogy would be teaching how to adapt lessons plans to reflect Indigenous pedagogies for Indigenous educators or educators working with Indigenous students. The University of British Columbia library offers links (2022) to different Indigenous education lesson plans for elementary and middle years that reflect Indigenous pedagogies on subjects such as math, science, and social studies.

Conclusion

Summary

Indspire is an organization that seeks to support the education of Indigenous students in the hope of positively affecting the future generations of Indigenous people, communities, and Canada. The Teach for Tomorrow program is carving a path for Indigenous students to become educators, which is the purpose of this literature review on Indigenous pedagogy. To grow the program, Indspire needs a sense of Indigenous pedagogies and how they are being implemented into teacher education programs. It is also important to see any barriers or limitations that Indigenous educators and teaching programs face while trying to incorporate Indigenous pedagogy into their curriculum and programs. The key factors of Indigenous pedagogy are taking relational and holistic approaches to teaching and creating intergenerational and experiential learning environments. Challenges to implementing Indigenous pedagogy stem from systematic barriers and limitations that need to be addressed directly within the faculties of education or the Ministers of Education. Recommendations for the scale-up of the Teach for Tomorrow program would be to partner with institutions that have actionable and attainable implementation strategies for Indigenous pedagogical methods and approaches. It will be critical to see how potential partners uphold Indigenous education by including Indigenous perspectives and centering Indigenous pedagogical practices into their teacher education programs.

Further Research

Since the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's (TRC) reports came out in 2015, education systems in Canada began shifting their curriculum to be aligned with the findings of the TRC (Webb & Mashford-Pringle., 2022). It has been seven years since the TRC was published, and it is interesting to witness the different approaches institutions and provincial governments take to Indigenize or decolonize their curriculum and communities. The next step for our research includes conducting an environmental scan of the implementation of Indigenous education models in education programs across Canada. A major gap found within this literature review is the barriers to implementing Indigenous pedagogies or education models. There is a researched understanding of what Indigenous pedagogies and education models are, however, the implementation process is often slowed once updated educational policies are created. The following are questions guiding the environmental scan:

The following are questions guiding the environmental scan:

- a) How non-Indigenous streams within education programs are bridging the implementation gap?
- b) What applicable culturally responsive skills Indigenous and non-Indigenous teachers are being given?
- d) How is funding being provided to include land-based or community-based practicums within teacher education programs?

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