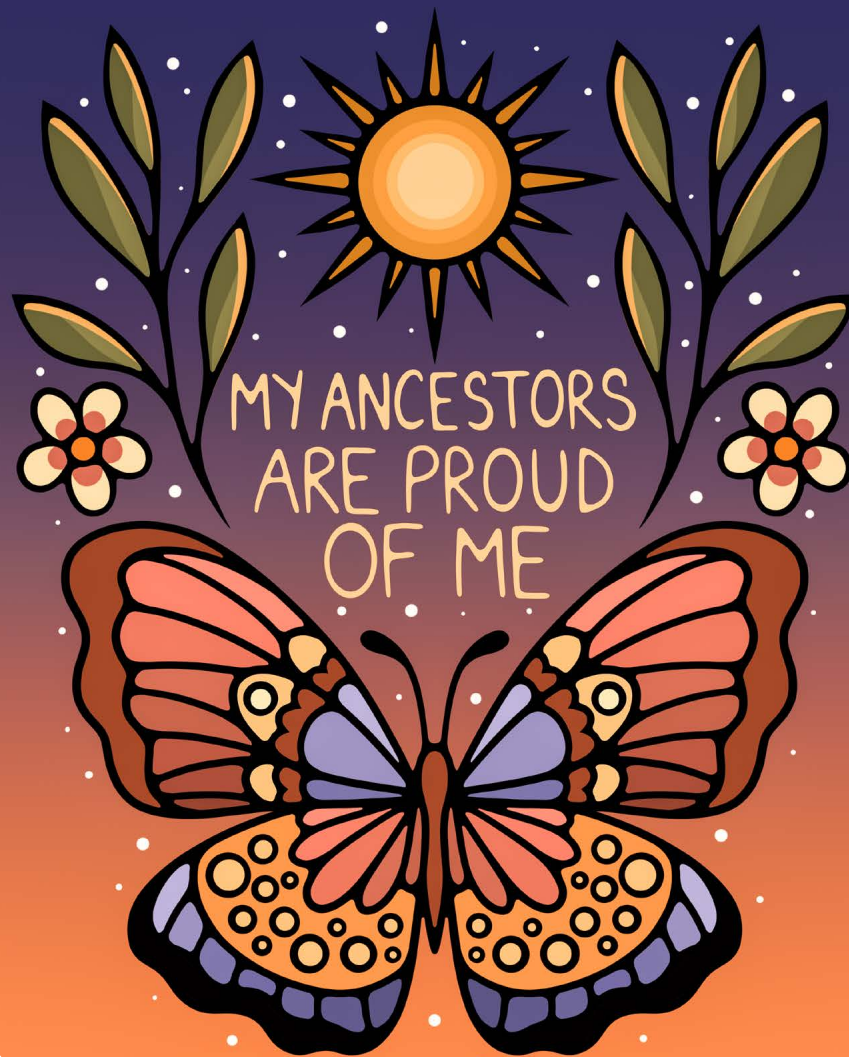


A Review of Indigenous Education Models

Bachelor of Education Students

By Indspire's Research Knowledge Nest



Indspire

Indigenous education, Canada's future. | L'éducation des autochtones, L'avenir du Canada.

Cover Design
My Ancestors Are Proud of Me
by Alanah Jewell

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 2022–2023, Indspire awarded over \$27.5 million through 7,533 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 is guided by an Advisory Committee of researchers, leaders, and key stakeholders who provide direction and input on the development of this important initiative.

Cover Design –

My Ancestors Are Proud of Me by Alanah Jewell

Alanah Astehtsi Otsistohkwa (Morningstar) Jewell (she/her) is a mixed French-First Nations artist. She is Bear Clan from Oneida Nation of the Thames, grew up off-reserve, and currently lives in Kitchener, Ontario. Alanah is an illustrator, painter, and muralist, and organizes local Indigenous art markets through @IAMKitchener on Instagram. She received an Honours BA in Sociology from Wilfrid Laurier University and had dreams of attending law school or pursuing a master’s degree in the years following graduation. However, life took a turn when she decided to pursue art as a hobby in 2019; she quickly developed a love for creating and felt that she could pursue art part-time. Illustrating and painting soon became her life work, and through this, she has been able to connect with other Indigenous creators, participate in community, and express culture, love, and connection through her art.

Founding Supporters

This project is funded in part by the
Government of Canada



Supporter



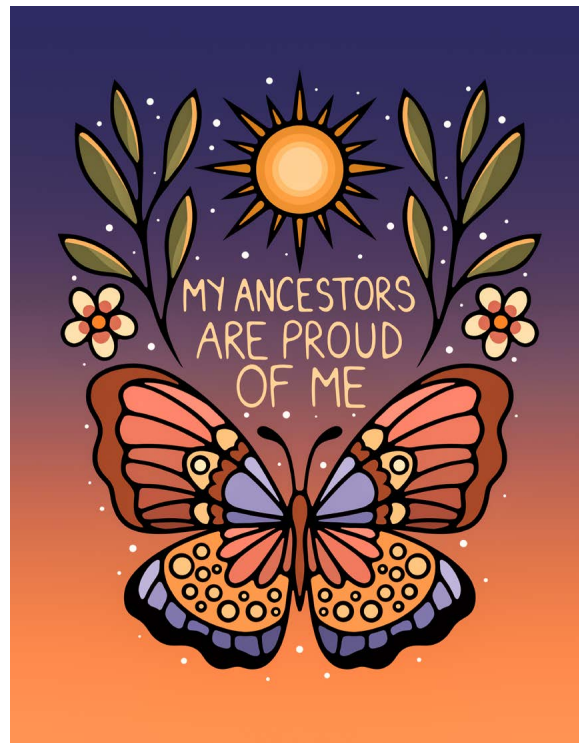
Acknowledgments

Our profound appreciation goes to the Indigenous students who participated in this study. Their stories, shedding light on their unique challenges, triumphs, and experiences, formed the heart of our work. This enriched our understanding and highlighted the experiences of Indigenous students in Bachelor of Education programs across Canada.

Equally significant has been the support of those who contributed to various aspects of this project. This includes Research Knowledge Nest members Tiana Bone (Keeseekoowenin Ojibway First Nation) and Shawna D'Antimo (Wiikwemkoong First Nation), and Indspire staff members Jason Bruce (Mental Health Project Manager) and Nima Dehghansai (Senior Manager, Research and Impact). Their devotion to enriching the educational experiences of Indigenous students, combined with their belief in the importance of this work, has created a solid foundation for this research report.

As we reflect on this journey, it is essential to remember that this project is just one step in the larger quest for educational inclusivity for Indigenous students. Together, we hope to inspire meaningful change, fostering a post-secondary environment where every Indigenous learner feels respected, understood, and empowered.

Chi-Miigwetch.



Cover Design – *My Ancestors Are Proud of Me* by Alanah Jewell

Highlights



While more than 85% of students had engaged with Indigenous pedagogy, 75% said they want more land-based learning and community-based education, with the remaining participants either wanting more land-based learning (23%) or community-based education (2%).



The majority of students highlighted a demand for greater incorporation of Indigenous culture and enhanced support on their campuses. This included a call for increased community engagement, as well as easier access to cultural activities.



Several students reported feelings of isolation during their education experience. While they appreciated their academic studies, the insufficient presence of Indigenous cultural representation and community support on campus left them feeling disconnected.

Recommendations



Integrate Indigenous Knowledge and perspectives in education programs and courses.



Involve Elders and Indigenous Knowledge Keepers for a wholistic learning model.



Foster sense of belonging and community for Indigenous students on and off campus.



Support well-being of Indigenous students with Indigenous Elders/counsellors and events.



Incorporate opportunities for both land-based learning and community-based education.



Provide accessible, safe spaces for Indigenous students to connect and embrace identity.



Educate faculty and administrators on Indigenous students' experiences and needs.



Expand funding and accessibility of support to include more flexible hours and services.

Introduction

Background

This study is the follow-up to the earlier report by Indspire, “Key Components of Indigenous Pedagogies Literature Review” (Bone, 2023). This document outlined the key components of Indigenous pedagogies to explore methods of infusing Indigenous perspectives, knowledge, and culture. This included the importance of relationality, intergenerational learning, and experiential learning to inform the use of a wholistic approach. The research also explored the incorporation of Indigenous teaching methods, considering the representation of Indigenous educators, systemic hurdles, and the challenges faced by Indigenous students within the educational system. The recommendations from this report pointed to the need to create more space for Indigenous perspectives, prioritizing Indigenous pedagogical practices.

Findings from that study led to the current review of Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) program models, specifically looking at Indigenous students’ experiences. This comes from the need to understand how the next generation of Indigenous teachers are being taught and supported within their post-secondary journey. As evidenced by prior research, there exists a pressing demand for Indigenous students to experience representation within the education system via Indigenous educators and culturally pertinent curriculum (Herkimer, 2021). Often, Indigenous students feel excluded within Western education systems and have difficulty navigating these spaces. Therefore, it is crucial to take the necessary steps to make institutions more inclusive and supportive for Indigenous students who are pursuing careers as educators.

Purpose

The purpose of this report is to gain insight into the ways post-secondary institutions are supporting Indigenous students within B.Ed. programs. This assists in understanding the approach institutions are taking to being more accessible and welcoming to Indigenous students through the support the institutions offer, from the application process onward. Recommendations for how Indigenous students can be better supported in B.Ed. programs will emerge from this study.

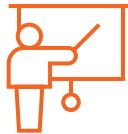
Project Design

Research Questions

An initial literature review was completed to identify the key components of Indigenous pedagogies and barriers experienced. This led to the development of the next stages of the research study which seeks to understand Indigenous B.Ed. students' experiences, including:



Do Indigenous students feel supported and included in B.Ed. or Indigenous teacher education streams?



Do B.Ed. programs provide Indigenous students with culturally responsive teaching skills that are practical?



Are there opportunities for Indigenous students to engage in land-based learning or community-based education?

Methodology

A survey was administered to B.Ed. students to learn about the current support their institutions and programs offer. This included opportunities to explore Indigenous pedagogies such as land-based learning and community-based education, as well as any recommendations students wanted to share to improve the cultural inclusiveness of their programs. This approach was used to gain a more wholistic understanding of B.Ed. students' experiences in their programs.

Survey Method

The 2023 Bachelor of Education Survey was sent out in March 2023 to 285 previous successful B.Ed. Building Brighter Future (BBF) recipients and had a respondent rate of 20.4%. Of the 58 responses, some questions were incomplete or not applicable. As such, the total number of responses (*n*) is shared with every figure in this report. Most respondents were in their fourth or fifth year (54%) or had graduated (37%). The remaining (9%) reported being in the first, second, or third year of their program (see Appendix).

The survey asked students to rate their experience within B.Ed. programs on multiple aspects around Indigenous support/inclusion and Indigenous pedagogies. A set of Likert-scale (e.g., "Poor" to "Excellent") questions were used to capture participants' rating of the overall support offered to Indigenous students in their programs and overall experience in programs. Follow-up and open-ended questions prompted responses around areas that needed improvement which are captured within the themes that are presented in the report.

Results

Distribution of Students' Institutions Across Canada

The majority of B.Ed. students who responded to the survey attended their educational program in Saskatchewan (26%) and Alberta (19%), followed by British Columbia (17%) and Manitoba (16%). We also see representation from Ontario (10%) and Quebec (5%), and a smaller representation from Nunavut (3%), New Brunswick (2%), and Nova Scotia (2%).

Figure 1: Province Location of Educational Institutions

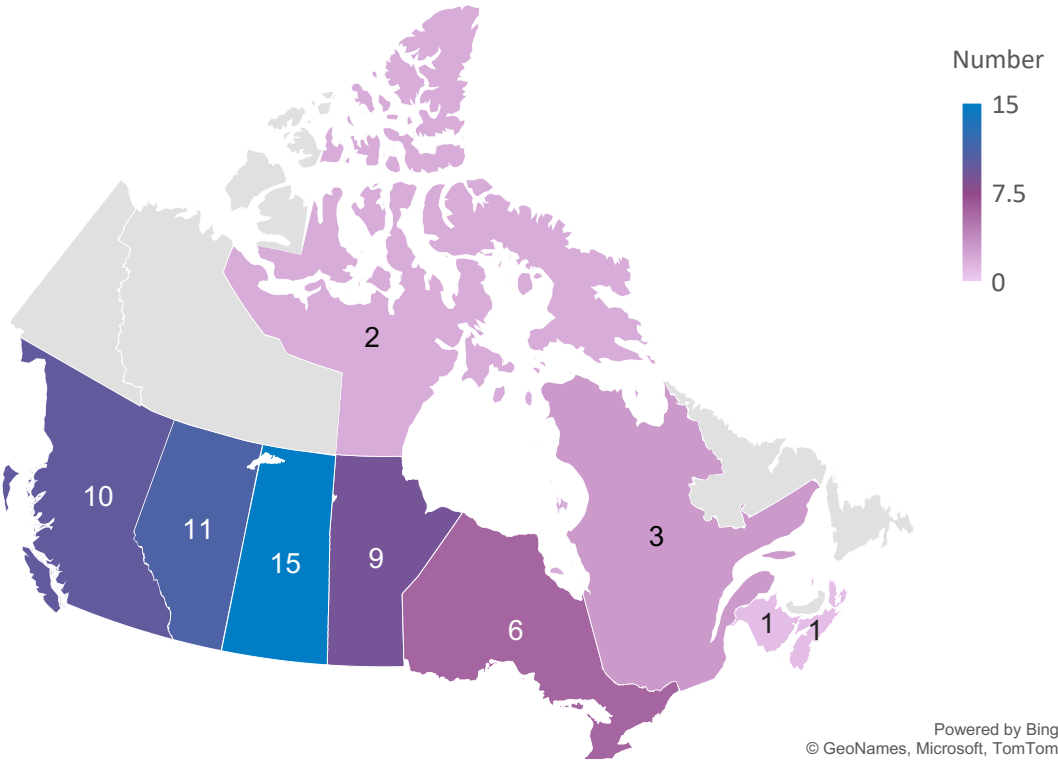
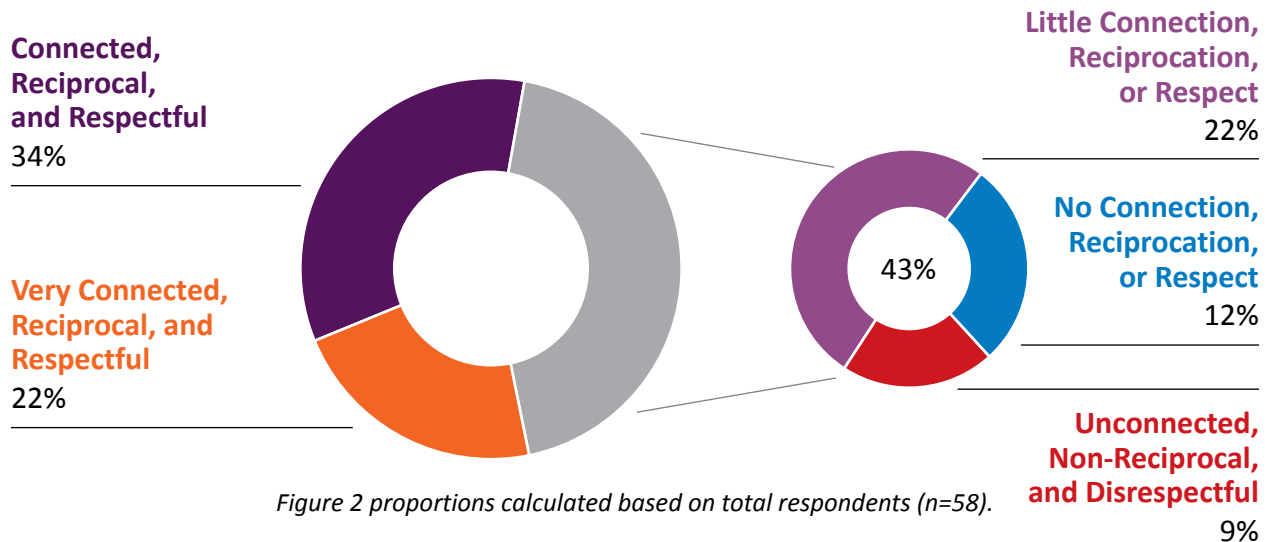


Figure 1 number of total B.Ed. student respondents (n=58).

Students' Experiences of Indigenous Pedagogies

Students were asked to reflect on Indigenous ways of knowing and learning and how these knowledges were incorporated into their courses. Fifty-six percent of the students reported feeling connected, reciprocal, and respectful. In contrast, 43% felt little to no connection, reciprocity, or respect (these proportions are broken down on the right side of Figure 2).

Figure 2: Inclusion of Indigenous Ways of Knowing and Learning



When asked which type of Indigenous pedagogies students would want to participate in, there was a strong interest in both land-based learning and community-based education (75%) while a portion wanted more land-based learning (23%) or community-based education (2%) only. When asked about participation in Indigenous pedagogies, 15% indicated having no participation in land-based learning or community-based education during their program (see Appendix).

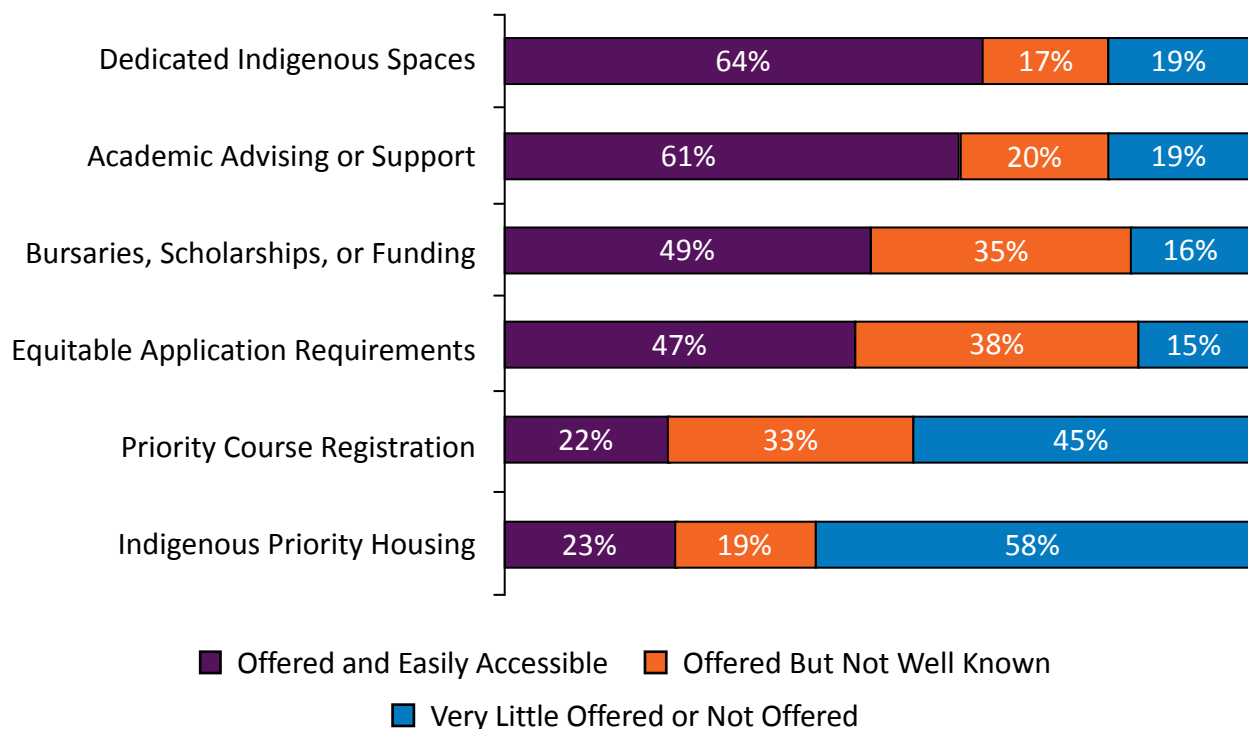
Figure 3: Desire for Land-Based Learning and Community-Based Education



Availability of Indigenous Support at Institutions

Students were asked about various types of support offered for Indigenous students at their institutions. Positively, more than two-thirds of respondents said there were dedicated spaces for Indigenous students and access to academic advisors at their institutions. However, more than half identified funding and equitable application requirements to be not well known and/or very little offered or not offered to Indigenous students. The results also suggests that respondents experienced a significant lack of availability for priority housing and course registration.

Figure 4: Accessibility and Availability of Indigenous Student Support



*Figure 4 proportions calculated based on responses:
Dedicated Spaces (n=53), Academic Advising (n=54), Funding (n=57), Application Requirements (n=53),
Registration Priority (n=49), and Housing Priority (n=31).*

Education Program Experience and Satisfaction

Students were asked about their feelings of connection and support in their education programs. Sixty-eight percent of respondents felt connected and included in their programs, while 32% felt some sense of connection and inclusivity, and 9% felt unconnected and/or excluded. When looking at feelings of support offered, 60% of respondents felt supported and connected, while 26% felt some support and connection, and 14% felt isolated and unsupported.

Figure 5: Connection within Education Program

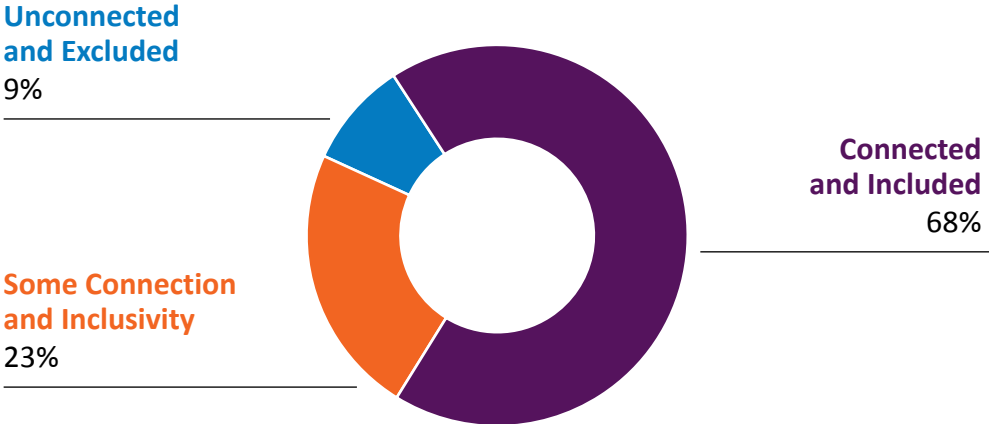


Figure 6: Support within Education Program

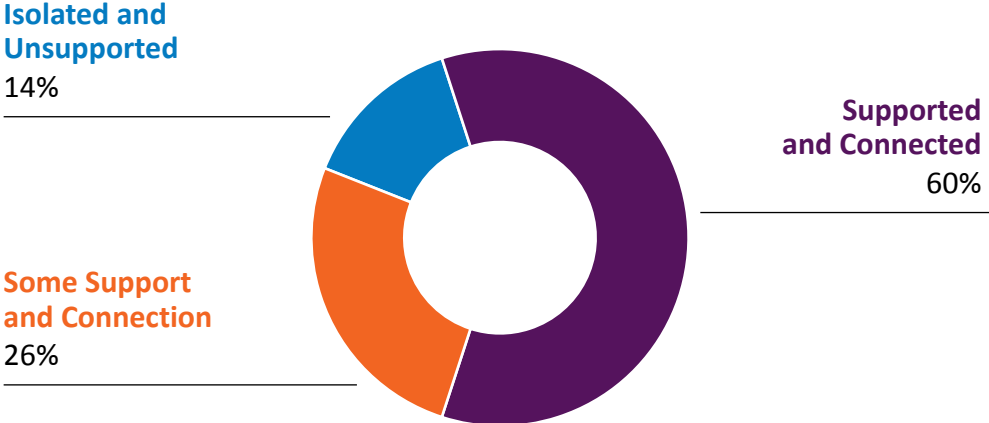


Figure 5 and 6 proportions calculated based on total respondents (n=58).

Areas of Improvement in Education

Indigenous B.Ed. students shared how they felt their institutions could improve support in education programs. Improving education and Indigenization efforts was strongly identified within students' responses. This included greater incorporation of cultural activities, land-based learning and community-based education, and the increase of Indigenous spaces for students to feel supported. This highlights the importance of including a wider representation of Indigenous perspectives to better incorporate Indigenous pedagogy and culture into courses and programs.

Students' open-ended responses were analyzed and categorized into five main themes and 10 sub-themes.



1. Indigenous Culture and Pedagogy:

Culture and Indigenous Ways of Being
Indigenous Courses, Pedagogy, and Perspectives



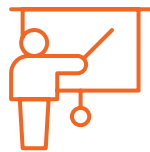
2. Community Connection and Spaces:

Community Connection and Support Systems
Accessible Indigenous Spaces and Support



3. Cultural Education and Support:

Education, Training, and Cultural Safety
Elder and Mental Health Support



4. Academic Advisors and Success:

Academic Advisors and Support
Understanding Faculty and Administrators



5. Financial Support and Resources:

Financial Support Needed to Succeed
Food Insecurity, Housing, and Childcare

Reflections

Indigenous Culture and Pedagogy

Culture and Indigenous Ways of Being

The merging of Indigenous culture with academic pursuits is not just about upholding traditional knowledge, it is about practical, everyday experiences. Classrooms become places where knowledge comes alive, where learning comes from the land and community itself. While involvement with the land and outdoor learning can profoundly impact students, if these engagements are superficial and lack genuine cultural or educational significance, it may feel hollow and fail to establish authenticity. Consequently, this could detract from students' overall experiences.

Indigenous students' insights point to a need for a richer, more interconnected, communal environment where Indigenous culture, traditions, and knowledge are celebrated, integrated, and respected. A recurring sentiment among students is the importance of community involvement in education. Elders play a crucial role in this context, as the carriers of Indigenous Knowledge and wisdom. This also aids in bridging the generational gap between youth and Elders, and fosters a more wholistic learning environment.

"I took a class on land-based pedagogy where we went out onto the land and had land experiences. It was fantastic. I now incorporate that teaching into my own classroom when I teach."

– Student Respondent, 2023

Indigenous Courses, Pedagogy, and Perspectives

On the academic front, there is a clear desire for a greater emphasis on Indigenous courses to include land-based learning and community-based education opportunities. By integrating more Indigenous ways of knowing and learning, institutions can offer a more authentic and enriching educational experience. Another key recommendation is more extensive integration of Indigenous pedagogies across various courses. Beyond history and cultural lessons, students are eager to see Indigenous perspectives incorporated into their B.Ed. programs, where traditional knowledge can offer a unique and enriching learning experience.

Actively engaging with the land fosters a distinctive and interactive learning experience that underscores the significance of recognizing and valuing the environment. Land-based learning opportunities provide students with a more profound understanding of Indigenous worldviews. The addition of Elders and Indigenous guest speakers, especially those who hold connection to culture, community, and land, contribute to providing invaluable insights. It is important to note that even though individuals may be knowledgeable, some students felt guest speakers did not communicate respectfully, undermining the benefits of their contribution.

“I think the University, as well as the Bachelor of Education program specifically, has done a lot of decolonizing work. However, I feel as though Indigenous perspectives could be prioritized more throughout the education program. It often felt like Indigenous perspectives and culture were an add-on to our teacher training.”

– Student Respondent, 2023

Community Connection and Spaces

Community Connection and Support Systems

The journey through higher education is a transformative experience, but for many Indigenous students, it also comes with visible and hidden challenges. While educational programs are appreciated, there is a shared sentiment that more can be done to foster a sense of belonging and community for Indigenous students. Several students have expressed feelings of isolation during their post-secondary educational journey. Even though they enjoyed their academic programs, the lack of a strong Indigenous community contributed to feelings of loneliness and disconnection from community support.

The importance of community is evident. For these students, university is more than just an educational institution, it represents a space where they seek connection and affirmation of their identities. Consequently, there is a need for institutions to amplify their efforts in recruiting more Indigenous students. This is not just for the students’ benefit, but also for the wider educational community and future generations. The presence of diverse voices, perspectives, and experiences enriches the educational environment and ensures that future generations have positive role models.

“I would have appreciated having a support system of fellow Indigenous students to gather with or chat with. If there had been a message board or virtual gathering, that would have been great.”

– Student Respondent, 2023

Accessible Indigenous Spaces and Support

Enhancing on-campus infrastructure by creating more Indigenous-focused spaces can provide students with a place to connect with others and their cultural identity. Some students also found these valuable spaces to study. Dedicated buildings and gatherings that honor culture serve as vital safe spaces, but challenges remain. Some programs struggle to provide comprehensive support, leaving students feeling disconnected. Other Indigenous centres are inconveniently located, or have less than ideal hours, which create accessibility issues.

Several students have highlighted the desire for more Indigenous spaces within institutions and a more virtual presence for networking and support. Yet, the need for community extends beyond physical and virtual spaces. The desire for more interaction with instructors, greater access to Elders, and an environment where both students and staff are culturally responsive is clear. Some students wish for the enhancement of existing supports, like extended operating hours for Indigenous student centers and more extracurricular opportunities.

“I think some community building could help because COVID made us a lot more separate. It would also be nice if there were a few more mental health supports.”

– Student Respondent, 2023

Cultural Education and Support

Education, Training, and Cultural Safety

Authenticity is essential in integrating Indigenous Knowledge into the education curriculum. It requires educators to undergo in-depth training to understand and represent Indigenous perspectives across various subjects. While some universities have taken steps toward decolonization, Indigenous students felt the strong need for deeper integration of Indigenous perspectives and lived experiences in teacher training. Cultural safety was an issue when discussing Indigenous topics in the classroom. Some students felt they were not adequately supported.

“We had a week of Indigenous content, with a little content woven into select classes. The week-long event was quite triggering and not well supported.”

– Student Respondent, 2023

Elder and Mental Health Support

Creating safe and supportive spaces in academia is essential for Indigenous students to succeed. This is underlined by the need to incorporate culturally relevant support for students on and off campus. Indigenous Elders and counselors can provide students with a nurturing environment to connect, find support, and celebrate their identity. Engaging with Elders and counselors who are well-versed in Indigenous cultural knowledge can also provide students with a direct and personal understanding of these living traditions and values.

“I would have greatly appreciated a sharing circle or an Elder to speak with. Unfortunately, the Elder we were told was our support had very religious views on the role of genders and made many of us uncomfortable.”

– Student Respondent, 2023

Academic Advisors and Success

Academic Advisors and Support

Having an academic advisor that is always available to help was seen as an important support service. This includes providing contact information for advisors and connecting students to academic mentors and tutors. For example, it was shared by students that math is a barrier and more tutors are needed. Availability and hours were noted as issues preventing access to these types of supports. In addition, emails and reminders from Indigenous students’ services on supports and communication through social media invitations were identified as being useful to keep students updated.

“Speaking to an academic advisor in person was beneficial, as there have been past issues where communication was not sufficient via email/phone.”

– Student Respondent, 2023

Understanding Faculty and Administrators

There is a need for better understanding from faculty and administrators around the varied backgrounds of Indigenous learners. For example, many students juggle work, family, and the challenges of returning to education after a hiatus. From this, students have stressed the need for mental health and well-being support from their education programs. Check-ins, extensions for assignments, understanding from faculty, and a supportive network can go a long way in helping students navigate personal challenges.

“More math tutors, more profs that understand a lot of us work and have a family, and a lot have been out of school for a number of years, so the things we are learning are new.”

– Student Respondent, 2023

Financial Support and Resources

Financial Support Needed to Succeed

Providing financial assistance and awareness of bursaries and scholarships opens the opportunity for Indigenous students to follow their dreams of becoming educators. Addressing the financial needs of students can help reduce barriers. This includes providing specific funding opportunities for students who are parents or covering travel costs. Amid students' feelings of financial stress, organizations like Indspire stand out as a beacon of support. Our impact resonates deeply with students, offering them financial support and a sense of community, inspiration, and encouragement in their ability to succeed.

“I wish that the university would support Indigenous students who struggle financially and who have food insecurities. I don't have much job opportunity because I am a full-time student. Every year, I struggle financially. So, I have food insecurities which have contributed to my health condition.”

– Student Respondent, 2023

Food Insecurity, Housing, and Childcare

The necessity for increased resources and support is apparent, ranging from experiences of food and housing insecurity to the need for childcare services for Indigenous students. Some students shared that experiences of food insecurity have contributed to the worsening of pre-existing health issues. A lack of housing and childcare support also impacts students' ability to maintain their education. Although progress has been made in some areas, there is more work to do in understanding the diverse experiences and needs of Indigenous learners.

“Many students in my program have at least one child. Having to find daycare for children that are not yet school age is a difficult task in my community. By offering Indigenous daycare within the building, students could focus more of their attention on their schooling and know that their children are safely close by.”

– Student Respondent, 2023

Conclusion

Summary

The trajectory of post-secondary education in Canada, especially relating to Indigenous pedagogies, has progressed in strides while being marked with challenges. This report sought to illuminate the current landscape, highlighting the experiences of Indigenous students within Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) programs and how institutions strive to be more inclusive and supportive of Indigenous students and pedagogies. It became evident that support structures are paramount for Indigenous students.

The responsibility is on institutions to foster environments where Indigenous students do not just survive, but thrive and feel seen, respected, and heard. Our intention in this research serves a dual purpose. First, to act as a catalyst for educational institutions to re-evaluate and amplify their efforts in nurturing a genuinely inclusive environment. Second, to strive for a more supportive learning experience for Indigenous students considering careers as educators.

Further Directions

A critical aspect of Indigenous pedagogies is its reach beyond the traditional classroom setting, to engage with community and the natural environment. Indspire's dedication to advancing Indigenous education remains persistent. As we progress with our initiatives, we are guided by lessons of the past, the realities of the present, and our aspirations for a future where every Indigenous learner feels valued, supported, and empowered in their academic journey.

Our research illuminates the strength and determination of Indigenous students in their journey through post-secondary education. In sharing feedback, students expressed appreciation for the opportunity to voice their experiences, hopes, and concerns. This opportunity represented a genuine effort to understand and address the unique challenges B.Ed. students face. This underscores the importance of initiatives that provide students with a platform to share their stories, aspirations, and feedback.

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Herkimer, J. (2021). *Holding Our Ground: Indigenous Student Post-Secondary Persistence & Early Leaving*. Indspire. <https://indspire.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/Holding-Our-Ground-Report-EN-Final-WEB1.pdf>

Appendix

Demographics of Survey Respondents

The following includes summary information on the Indigenous B.Ed. students who participated in this project and shared their insightful experiences.

Figure 6: Current Year of Study (B.Ed.)

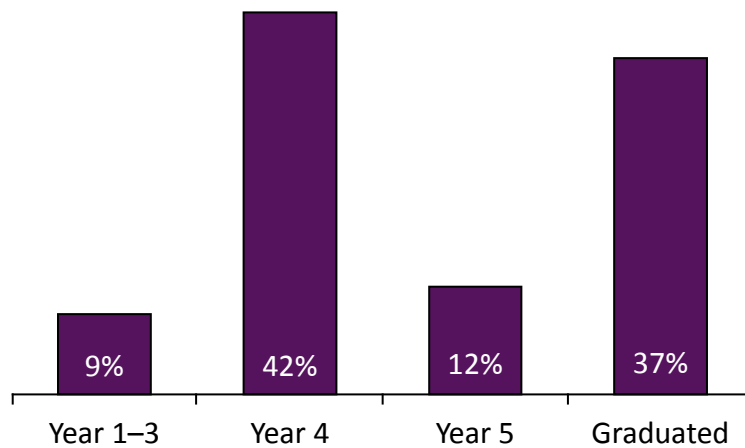


Figure 6 proportions calculated based on total respondents (n=57).

Figure 7: Indigenous Teachers Stream

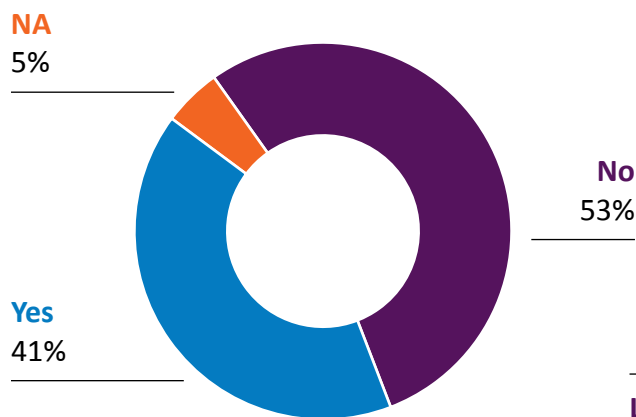


Figure 8: Indigenous Pedagogy Participation

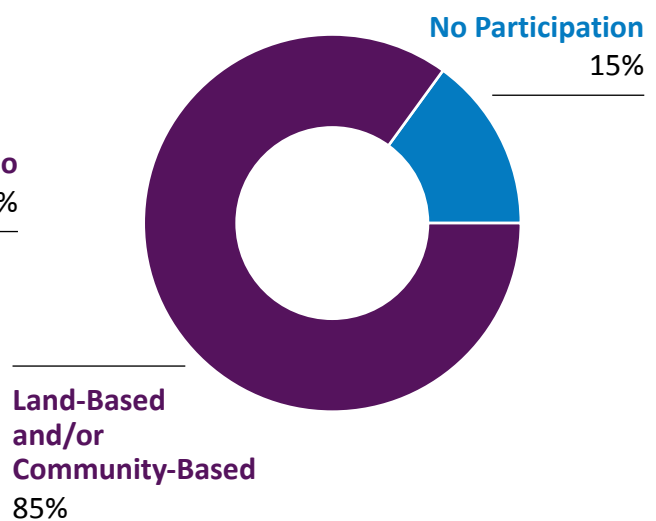


Figure 7 and 8 proportions calculated based on responses (left n=58, right n=53).



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🌐 Websites: Research and Impact Unit

📄 Reports: Indspire Report Catalogue