

## Learning From the Land and Indigenous People

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As an Indigenous educator (Anishinaabe – Bear Clan from Kitigan Zibi First Nation), numerous Bachelor of Education students approached me inquiring about including Indigenous knowledge into their curriculum plans. These Teacher Candidates identified a gap in their knowledge and skill regarding inclusionary practice yet had the desire and fortitude to ensure their teaching would be inclusive of Indigenous students and promote healthy cross-cultural sharing. I had enough of these requests to identify a need for an explicit learning opportunity toward the goal of training Teacher Candidates about Indigenous peoples and how to teach Indigenous students as well as non-Indigenous students about Indigenous people. Since all Teacher Candidates in the School of Education at Trent University, where I teach, are required to find a site for an alternative learning opportunity for three weeks in May, I felt this would be an opportune timeframe for an in-depth learning opportunity.

Since the worldview of Indigenous peoples is connected to the environment and since there is a global/universal need for all students to learn about the state of the planet, I felt a land-based program would serve the dual purpose of learning about Indigenous people while instilling an ecological consciousness in Teacher Candidates and ultimately their future students. The *Learning From the Land and Indigenous People* alternative practicum placement was born in 2007 and has been delivered every spring since then.

Teacher Candidates spend 75 hours with me in my home community of Burleigh Falls and Lovesick Lake to experience land-based activities to personally develop a connection to the environment and an awareness of Indigenous culture, specifically Anishinaabe. The placement provides Teacher Candidates with the knowledge, motivation, and skills to facilitate the transmission of an environmental consciousness to their future students. Additionally the placement assists Teacher Candidates in establishing inclusive learning spaces by being better able to teach to and about Indigenous people. These objectives assist Teacher Candidates in implementing *The First Nation, Metis, Inuit Education Policy Framework (2007)*, and the *Acting Today, Shaping Tomorrow: Environmental Education in Ontario Schools Policy Framework (2009)*.



Through an intensive evaluation process including daily student reflections and a pre/post-evaluation questionnaire, Teacher Candidates indicate that the *Learning From the Land and Indigenous People* placement is immensely enjoyed and valued as a learning experience. Many define the placement as the highlight of their teacher education program. Teacher Candidates identify connections that were made on multiple levels: within themselves, with the land/environment, within the teaching and learning group, with their teaching practice, and with the Indigenous culture. These future teachers clearly state that they are better prepared to teach about Indigenous people and teach Indigenous children. Perhaps the experience can be summed up by this Teacher Candidate: “I came away with a better understanding of Anishinaabe culture as well as a new yet familiar approach to teaching and learning. This was a rich experience – a lot was accomplished in a short time. I feel full of possibility with respect to future teaching. I also feel connected with local Anishinaabe culture and the land. I now have new skills so that I can teach about Anishinaabe and First Nations peoples to my classes in a respectful and engaging way. I feel that I am also better prepared to teach Indigenous students.”