

Integrating Environmental Education at Lakehead University

Lakehead has a number of faculty members strongly committed to environmental education and the survival of the planet. We include environmental education across the program in a number of ways, and we are using the planning process for the two-year BEd to formalize our commitment and work on including it in more places, and more explicitly.

Lakehead offers a number of courses with an explicit environmental education focus. Our flagship offering is *OE3 – Outdoor Experiential Ecological Education* – the Intermediate/Senior Environmental Science teachable. This consists of a full course that must be taken with two quarter courses – *Authentic Group Project & Community Service Project*. For many years now 30 to 50 students have completed this course each year, which includes two to three trips, hiking or paddling in the fall and trips to the Kingfisher Outdoor Education Centre in the winter. Students enrolled in this course may complete one of their student teaching placements at an outdoor education centre. Many enthusiastic graduates are teaching in classrooms and in alternative settings across Canada and around the world.

Students who are not able to take the OE3 teachable can take one of three quarter-course (18 contact hours) electives. Several sections of *School Based Outdoor Education* always run in the fall, along with a section of *Outdoor Experiential Environmental Education* – an open elective for students from any division. In the winter of 2014 the elective *Climate Change Pedagogy* will be taught for the first time. These courses give students, who may have no background in EE, the inspiration and some beginning tools to help bring EE into their future classrooms.

Many Lakehead teacher candidates get some exposure to EE that is integrated into other courses, especially in Aboriginal Education, science courses, and multicultural education. A few years ago in preparation for an OCT accreditation, we asked all faculty in an online survey to tell us if, and how, they integrated EE into their courses. We were heartened by the response, which showed a myriad of ways it is being integrated, large and small, from a focus on place, to explicit teaching about the science of climate change. There is an especially fertile overlap between many courses focused on Aboriginal Education and EE, with significant Indigenous perspectives in many of the EE courses and a strong land component in many Aboriginal Education courses. For example, an in-depth course on *Indigenizing Perspectives* emphasizes Indigenous knowledge integration and land-based pedagogy.

In our work we are lucky to have a Canada Research Chair in Environmental Education, a Centre for Place and Sustainability Studies, and a thriving graduate program that attracts master's and PhD students with expertise in EE. Most of these students in turn

hold graduate assistantships and enrich the Initial Teacher Education program through their contributions to the planning and teaching of classes. A few years back some of the graduate and OE3 students painted three wall-sized environmentally themed murals in one hallway and two classrooms, disrupting the otherwise institutional feel of the main education building. Plans are afoot to have an outdoor classroom, and in the meantime we purchased a class set of foam pads for sitting on to make it easier for anyone to take a class outside into the nearby field or woods.

We can and want to do more. We have some evidence that most students, despite awareness that climate change is a 'problem,' have no idea of its depth or breadth – and this may be true for most faculty as well. We are pleased with the good things that are happening at both the Thunder Bay and Orillia campuses, and we look forward to the work ahead.

Paul Berger, Lakehead University