University of Alberta

Rooted in Knowledge; Navigating the Path of Land-Based Learning Through Literature

by

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Contents

Abstract

This capstone project embarks on a comprehensive and critical synthesis review of existing academic literature, centered on land-based learning. The focus is on its implications for schools, land, and students in T'Sou-ke territory. The goal is to develop a framework and a set of recommendations to seamlessly integrate land-based principles into the culture and pedagogy of Journey Middle School. Land-based learning is posited as a potent catalyst for decolonization, uplifting Indigenous culture, language, and identity while challenging Eurocentric, capitalist perspectives of the land. By reconnecting students with the land, language, knowledge, community, and story, this approach aims to enhance the holistic success of Indigenous students who have long endured the negative effects of settler colonialism, institutionalized racism, and a colonial education system.

Keywords: land-based learning, decolonization, storytelling, pedagogy, language

Introduction

Who am I?

My name is Alyson, and I am a daughter, sister, granddaughter, niece, cousin, friend, learner, and teacher. I am honoured to have two kind, supportive parents, Dianna and Don, and two younger siblings, Bria and Ethan. I am a woman of Danish and German descent; my father's family were settlers on this land now known as Canada in the 1840s; on my mother's side, I am a second-generation immigrant from Denmark. I was born and raised in Strome, Alberta, which is situated on Treaty 6 territory, the traditional territory of the Nehiyawak, Niitsitapi, Nakawē, Métis, Dene, and Nakota Sioux, who have thrived and enriched this land for tens of thousands of years. I then moved to Amiskwaciwâskahikan, where I was educated at the University of Alberta and received my two undergraduate degrees on the unceded territory of the Papaschase Cree people.

For the past three years, I have been an uninvited guest on Coast Salish territory, specifically the land of the T'Sou-ke people on Vancouver Island. I am a *Na'tsa'maht* Education Teacher at Journey Middle School on T'Sou-ke territory. The term *Na'tsa'maht* is a Salish word and has many different variations throughout the dialect, such as lək̓ʷəŋən, Halkomelem, and SENĆOŦEN. In our school district, we follow the guidance of Elder Shirley Alphonse. She describes Na'tsa'maht as "being of one mind, one spirit" (Sooke SD62, 2021, 01:45). In this role, I collaborate with school and district staff to offer targeted in-class academic and cultural support to Indigenous students. I review, recommend, and promote authentic learning resources and opportunities that support the provincial curriculum and the First Peoples Principles of Learning. I also assist families in establishing connections with available community resources and

services. Within my *lellum*[1], I have 80 First Nation, Métis, and Inuit students, which include 15 on-reserve students who reside on T'Sou-ke and Pacheedaht First Nation, the ancestral land of the Nuu-cha-nulth People.

I am a non-Indigenous woman in the Master of Educational Policy Studies program specializing in Indigenous Peoples Education at the University of Alberta. Because of my ancestry and lived experiences, I do not claim to understand Indigenous realities, knowledge, and ways of knowing and understanding this world. I hope my research will seek a deeper understanding of Indigenous education, sovereignty, and decolonial pedagogy, but this should not supersede Indigenous Peoples' opinions and views.

The "Why"

As the *Na'tsa'maht* Education Teacher (NET) at Journey Middle School (JMS) for the past three years, I have had the privilege of directly supporting all the Indigenous learners. Each student in my *lellum* is exceptional, with their distinct creativity and the wealth of knowledge they bring to our school. They educate me every day as they generously share their histories and cultures. However, regrettably, I have observed a general disengagement from education among most of my students. They often struggle to find meaningful connections with their learning and frequently feel misunderstood by education and their educators. These challenges have manifested in low attendance rates, a lack of enthusiasm for the curriculum, and conflict within our school community, causing various adverse consequences. I entered my master's program to uplift Indigenous students' academic success in school. Throughout my education, I have tried to

[1] *Lellum* is SENĆOŦEN for 'house of learning'. SENĆOŦEN is the language of the T'Sou-ke Peoples.

ascertain how I, a non-Indigenous educator, can ethically engage and uplift Indigenous knowledge and education. I was inspired when I read Leanne Simpson's (2014) article "Land as Pedagogy," in which she wrote, "the *context is the curriculum* and the land, aki, is the context" (p. 10). Simpson (2014), through retelling the story of a traditional Michi Gaagig Nishnaabeg story of Kwezens, observes and learns from all of her relations, modelling the squirrel's actions to receive sap from the tree herself. She "learned both *from* the land and *with* the land" (Simpson, 2014, p. 7). After reading and re-reading this article, the profound promise of land-based education and pedagogy deeply resonated.

Purpose

The primary goal of my capstone project is to conduct a comprehensive and critical synthesis review of the existing academic literature related to land-based learning. This review will specifically focus on the implications and further insights applicable to the context of the school, land, and students on T'Sou-ke territory. Drawing from a wide array of land-based academic literature, I aim to develop a framework and recommendations that can be braided into Journey Middle School's culture and pedagogy. This research will not only serve as an insightful exploration of land-based learning, but it will also provide intentional strategies for successfully integrating land-based principles to uplift the culture, language, identity, and holistic success of all Indigenous students within my school.

Braiding land-based learning into contemporary schooling can uplift Indigenous culture, language, and knowledge and have a profound impact on our Indigenous students. It is a "process that centres respect, reciprocity, reverence, humility, and responsibility as values connected to the land through Indigenous knowledges" (UNESCO, 2021). This way of seeing

and understanding the land is in direct contrast with the Eurocentric, capitalist way of understanding land as a resource, which has permeated our society and curriculum (Ballantyne, 2014). Marcom (2022) states, “Land-based pedagogy allows students to be immersed in the land, become closely acquainted with the land, and develop a personal relationship with the land” (p. 118). By braiding this into our education, we not only uplift Indigenous knowledge but also decolonize capitalist and settler colonial thought and help students reconnect and think critically about their responsibilities.

Land-based learning not only decolonizes Eurocentric ideas and thought but also uplifts our Indigenous learners, those who have been continually beaten down by settler colonialism and institutionalized racism and are legally required to attend contemporary colonial education. When land-based education is rooted in the history and Indigenous peoples of the places, there are benefits to their minds, bodies, hearts, and spirits (Simpson, 2014; Battiste, 1995).

Research Objective

My research objective is to conduct a comprehensive review of academic literature focusing on Indigenous education, place, land-based education, and decolonial pedagogy. The synthesis will identify intentional practices, cultural relevance, and chief pedagogical approaches to land-based learning. The findings of the literature review will be utilized to inform the development and design of a purposeful land-based learning year plan, ensuring that it ensures a strong correlation within our particular context and *lellum*.

Theoretical framework

The theoretical foundation on which I am basing my capstone project is through the lens of decolonial theory and theorists such as Emma Pérez (1999), Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2012), and Walter Mignolo (2011). Throughout my master's experience, I have engaged in decolonial theory to understand the paramount roles that community, land, language, and story have concerning the continuing impact of colonialism on Indigenous Peoples. During the 'Age of Exploration,' colonialism and imperialism were forced upon indigenous people across the world, attempting to disintegrate Indigenous language, epistemology, ontology, and axiology (Perley, 1993; Restoule et al., 2013). Paternalism, Eurocentrism, and legislated racism have resulted from this continued oppression of Indigenous Peoples around the world (Battiste & Barman, 1995). The legacies of colonialism influence educational systems worldwide, often marginalizing and erasing Indigenous knowledge, language, and ways of knowing and being in the world.

Linda Tuhiwai Smith stated in her book *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* that decolonial theory is "coming to know the past" (2012, p. 36), in which oral tradition, story, history, and knowledge reconstruct institutions and society. Decolonization is an intentional defiance that "must not be limited to rejecting and transforming dominant ideas; it also depends on recovering and renewing traditional, non-commodified cultural patterns such as mentoring and intergenerational relationships" (Restoule et al., 2013, p. 74). This continuous, deliberate act of resistance involves uplifting knowledge, relationships, stories, and languages that have been braided into this land since the beginning of time. It is through this theoretical perspective that land-based learning fits, as we are bringing to the forefront a different, more

holistic approach to education that is a direct contrast to the industrialized, Eurocentric, factory-style education entrenched in colonized nation-states.

A ~Too~ Brief History and Overview of Education on Turtle Island

Teaching and Learning Before the Newcomers

Since the beginning of time, traditional Indigenous education has been deeply holistic, permeating every aspect of life and being a lifelong journey (Neeganagwedgin, 2013). Indigenous children's education was not the parents' sole responsibility, but immediate and extended family members would share and model their knowledge and skills (Neeganagwedgin, 2013; Kirkness, 1998). This form of education "was largely an informal process that provided the young people with specific skills, attitudes, and knowledge they needed to function in everyday life in the context of a spiritual world view" (Kirkness, 1998, p. 10). Children were educated on their land, immersed in language, story, and orality, and instilled with the knowledge and wisdom passed down through countless generations of existence, resilience, and sustainability. The nature of this education is adapted in response to the needs of the land, family, and community and is a lifelong process (Kirkness, 1998; Battiste, 2010). The traditional knowledge imparted is a complete knowledge system with its concepts of epistemology, philosophy, and scientific and logical validity" (Battiste, 2010, p. 21). The transmission of this knowledge is unique to each First Nation and has its own learning approaches, processes, and pedagogy, generationally shared over a lifetime.

Residential Schools: The Agent for Epistemicide

When European empires travelled to the Pacific and Turtle Island to plunder, imperialize, and colonize, they were accompanied by missionaries. These missionaries lived with Indigenous communities, and during this time, they "believed the Aboriginal students should be removed from the "poor" influence of their communities and especially from the influence of their parents and elders" (Perley, 1993, p. 123). As a solution to their perceived problem, they created Residential Schools, which were established and run by churches and the government, and forcibly removed Indigenous children, as young as five years old, from their families and communities (Neeganagwedgin, 2013). The true intent of these schools is demonstrated by Duncan Campbell Scott, the Deputy Superintendent General of Indian Affairs in 1920, who stated, "I want to get rid of the Indian problem... Our objective is to continue until there is not a single Indian in Canada that has not been absorbed into the body politic and there is no Indian question, and no Indian Department" (Scott, 1920, p. 55 (L-3) and p. 63 (N-3)). In truth, these institutions were not schools; instead, they were mechanisms employed to destroy the languages, cultures, and spirits of children (Hansen, 2009; Perley, 1993).

The Residential School System systematically eroded Indigenous, First Nations, Métis, and Inuit cultures throughout Canada, leaving a lasting legacy of disrupted families that spans generations. This historical impact broke the essential connections that have typically been passed down and safeguarded Indigenous culture, leading to a significant loss of language and cultural traditions (Hansen, 2009). The last Residential School closed in 1996, less than 30 years ago, and the enduring intergenerational trauma and the profound loss of language and culture

continue to have severe negative impacts on Indigenous communities, families, and children (Wildcat et al., 2014).

Contemporary Education: The Creation of a Eurocentric Individual

The current education system is entrenched in neoliberal ideologies, moulding students into market-oriented, autonomous, competitive individuals (Donald, 2019; Sanger, 1997; Hansen, 2018). British Columbia's social studies curriculum aims to "develop graduates who have the knowledge, skills, and competencies to be active, informed citizens" (British Columbia Education, 2019). It emphasizes the independence required for success in our contemporary market-driven society and the imperative to achieve individual potential (Sanger, 1997; Donald, 2021). The content of the curriculum is inherently political, "the political and economic dominant group of the internal colonial situation made the educational decisions for the colonized: they determined who would go to school, how long the children of the colonized group would attend school, what would be learned in school, and in what language it should be learned" (Perley, 1993, p. 121).

How does this standardized curriculum align with the unique needs of my students who live in T'Sou-ke or Pacheedaht? Is it shaping them into 'citizens' as defined by government mandates, or does it genuinely embrace their knowledge, culture, ontology, and epistemology? Curriculum objectives, such as the British Columbia curriculum, are attempting to create a "particular kind of human being - *homo economicus*—who is primarily motivated by economic self-interest and the material gains that come with it" (Donald, 2015, p. 3). This human being values progress, innovation, individualism, competition, and success, and only looks forward and not to the wisdom that has come before. It is easy to see why my Indigenous students struggle to

connect with the content; it fails to resonate with their lived experiences and how they learn. Contemporary schooling does not align with their values, educational practices, knowledge, and ways of seeing and knowing the world. So, we must find a new way.

Literature Review

In order to weave land-based learning into Journey Middle School, it must be anchored in literature, community, and location. A thorough examination of scholarly works will focus on land-based education, decolonial pedagogy, place, and related elements. Following, a synthesis will be shared that highlights the best practices and pedagogical approaches of land-based education. Additionally, I will incorporate insights and knowledge gained during my Master's Education at the University of Alberta, contributing to a comprehensive synthesis.

Much of the literature that has been studied in this project agrees on the detrimental effects of colonialism and contemporary education on Indigenous students (Ballantyne, 2014; Barman & Battiste, 1995; Donald, 2021; Hansen, 2019; Marom & Rattray, 2022; Restoule et al., 2013; Simpson, 2014; Wildcat et al., 2014). The way curriculum and pedagogy are constructed and taught, influenced by capitalistic, anthropocentric ideas (Donald, 2019; Sanger, 1997; Hansen, 2018), attempts to mould students into a certain individual, which Donald (2021) terms *Homo Economicus*. The curriculum is inherently political, intertwined with settler colonialism and hegemonic dominance, where one specific people controls what, how, and in which language the colonized are taught (Donald, 2021; Lees et al., 2021; Perley, 1993; Sanger, 1997). The effects on our Indigenous students result in internalized racism and colonialism (Perley, 1993), a lack of emotional development (Hansen, 2018), dropping out (Battiste & Barman, 1995), and sedentary individuals (Donald, 2021). In Hansen's (2018) study with six Cree Elders,

the Elders identified critical challenges to the well-being of students, including issues such as disconnection from the land, the historical impact of colonization, and the misuse of traditional medicines. Marom and Rattray (2022) take this issue further when they discuss the romanticization of reconciliation, where efforts by settlers have been simplified to a ‘check the box’ activity in order to continue to maintain the status quo with no real reconciliation being done. They argue that achieving education for reconciliation requires a shift from the traditional classroom setting to hands-on experiences on the land, where individuals can directly engage with Indigenous culture (Marom & Rattray, 2022). This move is a crucial step in fostering a deeper understanding and connection to Indigenous traditions and knowledge.

Moreover, there is a consensus that incorporating land-based education into the existing curriculum and teaching methods is of utmost importance. The land is the educator (Marom & Rattray, 2019), signifying the recognition that it is the primary teacher, a member of the community, and is rooted in the language, epistemology, axiology, and ontology of Indigenous people (Ballantyne, 2014; Donald, 2021; Marom & Rattray, 2019; Restoule et al., 2013; Simpson, 2014; Wildcat et al., 2014). Of paramount importance is that “while we will learn from each other, the delivery of land-based education must always be rooted in place and the histories of Indigenous peoples from those places” (Wildcat et al., 2014, p. 12)

Simpson (2014) and Hansen (2018) emphasize the importance of providing Indigenous youth with an education within the land, where they can be fully immersed in the language and culture nurtured and sustained by the land since time immemorial. When students learn from and with the land, they come to know a “whole body intelligence practiced in the context of freedom, and when realized collectively, it generates generations of loving, creative, innovative, self-

determining, interdependent, and self-regulating community-minded individuals" (Simpson, 2014, p. 7). Hansen's (2018) research study with interviews with six Creee Elders from Northern Manitoba all spoke to the importance of the spiritual connection to the land and the interconnectedness of all living spirits, and this will contribute to the personal development of an individual. This learning from and with the land, grounded in language and culture, is a foundational aspect of land-based education and is in direct contrast to settler-colonial capitalism, which is in contemporary education (Ballantyne, 2014).

Donald (2021) utilizes the *nêhiyaw* (Cree) concept of *wâhkôhtowin*, the "enmeshment within kinship relations that connect all forms of life" (Donald, 2021, p. 55), and walking on the land. Canada's educational system must transform, moving away from its conventional assembly-line model and towards one that fosters connections with all aspects of our environment. This form of land-based education focuses on walking as a relational activity that steps "into the organic flow of knowledge and knowing that generates attunement to relationality" (Donald, 2021, p. 58). This concept of connections with all our relations on the land connects with Simpson's (2014) concept of visiting, which is entrenched in storying oneself through principled and respectful consensual reciprocity with another living being. Visiting is lateral sharing in the absence of coercion and hierarchy and in the presence of compassion." (Simpson, 2014, p. 18). Donald's (2021) inclusion of sharing stories as he leads students, teachers, and colleagues on walks along the Saskatchewan River, waking their "*wâhkôhtowin* imagination" (Donald, 2021, p. 61). Studies have shown a positive impact of cultural knowledge on overall well-being and health, highlighting the crucial role of storytelling in nurturing this capacity (Greenwood & de Leeuw, 2007).

Greenwood and de Leeuw (2007) utilize storytelling to convey that the health and welfare of Indigenous children and communities are intrinsically linked to their connection to the land and culture. This cultural capacity is transmitted through education, which teaches from and with the land. The authors (2007) underscore the importance of Indigenous language and stories in this transmission of knowledge, for the language holds the people's spirit, thought, and soul. This article is similar to Restoule et al.'s (2013) project committed to respecting the Mushkegowuk Cree principles regarding the land, environment, and life within the Fort Albany First Nation. The project followed a 10-day canoe trip with youth, adults, and Elders in their traditional territory. It explored *paquataskamik*, "a way of relating to land based on laws and governance arrangements that were in place long before European settlers arrived" (Restoule et al., 2013, p. 78). This article includes transcripts of Elders and adults and brings forward the importance of creating space for the connections and learning between Elders and youth in unison with strengthening the bond with the land. Both articles underline the positive impact on the overall health of Indigenous children and youth when they are connected with the land and Elders, and teach and learn in harmony with the land.

Marom and Rattray's (2019) research study was conducted within a five-day Tahltan Band Gathering for Canadian and Indigenous youth, where the non-Indigenous youth were engaged in a cultural interface, which led to a deeper understanding of Indigenous knowledge systems, reciprocity, and sovereignty (Marom & Rattray, 2019). This article is fascinating as it discusses the benefits of land-based education for non-Indigenous people, as do Lees, Laman, and Calderón in their article on land and teacher education. Lees et al. (2021) utilize land education as an educational approach to combat settler colonial education and curricular

epistemicide that dominate the United States schooling system. This article underscores the positive impact of land-based education on unsettling settler innocence and prompting non-Indigenous individuals to become "epistemologically unsettled" (Lees et al., 2021, p. 282). Lees et al.'s (2021) article on the benefits of land-based education for non-Indigenous peoples has similarities to Marom and Rattray's (2019) article and the concept of cultural interface, where non-Indigenous peoples began their transition from a colonial and decolonial mindset. Their article showed the transformative effects of land-based learning, where one begins "from one's positionality and evokes tensions and contradictions that, in turn, lead to a more critical exploration of self and relations" (Marom & Rattray, 2019, p. 125). This investigation involves actively and introspectively engaging with the connections within one's own ways of knowing, values, and understanding of existence, all while participating in Indigenous pedagogy, collaborating with educators, and interacting with knowledge systems (Marom & Rattray, 2019).

Dechinta Bush University, an Indigenous-led place-based university, offers valuable lessons on the practical implementation and institutionalization of decolonization efforts in the ongoing struggle against settler capitalism. Ballantyne (2014) presents a synthesis of the process of this grass-roots educational institution, providing a framework for the hard work of returning education to the land. While it serves as an exceptional resource for the institutionalization of decolonial education, its scale is better suited for larger institutions. It may not directly align with the needs of our smaller school.

Exploring Key Themes Within Land-Based Learning

The upcoming discussion introduces three key themes, blending insights from an extensive literature review with my experiences during my Master's education. This synthesis comes from braiding together these two learning processes and represents a convergence of theoretical knowledge and practical experiences

Changing our Story

In the summer of 2021, I had the honour of being educated by Dr. Dwayne Donald, a professor in the faculty of education. It was in this class that I was introduced to my first experience of learning on and through the land. One day, Dr. Donald took us on a walk along the North Saskatchewan River and shared stories of the land. He shared stories of Indigenous groups crossing the river to trade, of Fort Edmonton and the Métis history, and of Laurent Garneau. I began to feel grounded in this place, perceiving the world around me differently, in terms of kinship relationality and a circle of interconnected relationships (Donald, 2021). Before this day, I regularly walked the paths around the Saskatchewan River but never felt a deep connection with the land until that day. Since that day in July 2021, I have begun to change my story, how I understand the world, and my responsibilities and place within it (Donald, 2021).

The concept of storytelling when teaching young learners was evident throughout much of the reviewed literature. In Hansen's interviews with the six Cree Elders, one of the Elders, Stella Neff, "stresses the importance of teaching traditional stories and demonstrates the notion that a collective memory of the people is transmitted through the bloodline" (Hansen, 2018, p. 84). The Indigenous Knowledge that is shared has a deep history of the land and teaches the laws

of the natural world (Battiste, 2009). These stories not only come from adults and Elders, such as in Restoule et al.'s (2013) article on the rivers of the Mushkegowuk Cree's territory, but also come from the land (Simpson, 2014) and all of our relations (Donald, 2019). Within these stories, "teachings flow from stories, and embedded in the acts of telling and listening to stories there exists virtually unlimited potential for learning." (Greenwood, 2007, p. 48)

We need to shift the stories that are shared within our education system and reimagine a curriculum that is separate from the capitalist, Eurocentric curriculum and pedagogy. By leading students onto the land, we provide a space for students to create new ways of reimagining knowledge and ways of knowing that "guides us to live on more ethically relational terms with humans as well as our *more-than-human* relations" (Donald, 2019, p. 11).

Fostering Connection with Elders

In the interviews conducted by Hansen with the six Cree Elders of Northern Manitoba, all of the Elders agreed that connecting with Elders is essential to promoting well-being (Hansen, 2018). By listening to Elders and Traditional Knowledge Holders, wisdom passed down for generations is transferred, and these Elders stressed the importance of this knowledge transfer. The imperative role that Elders and Knowledge Holders have within land-based learning and education of Indigenous students is replicated in Restoule et al.'s (2013) article that followed the ten-day river trip with Elders and Youth on Fort Albany First Nation. This river trip facilitated community members in exchanging knowledge related to language, culture, history, and geography. The authors state, "By supporting and creating a space for dialogue and learning between Cree youth and elders, this project fostered learning about strengths binding social and

economic well-being to land and environment and social and families ties and their rootedness in land" (Restoule et al., 2013, p. 84). This quote explains that land-based learning is unstructured; simply providing a space for the connection between youth and Elders is creating a huge impact. This quote emphasizes the unstructured nature of land-based learning. Simply providing a space for the connection between youth and Elders creates a profound impact.

Braiding Indigenous Language

In the first semester of my Master's program, I had the honour of learning from Dr. Cora Weber-Pillwax on revitalizing Indigenous languages. It was in this class that I learned about the importance and sanctity of language within Indigenous culture. I learned that language is the mind and spirit of the people in "that sense of a holy, a component of holiness that pervades people's life the way the culture pervades their life, through their language" (Fishman, 1996, pp. 82–3). You cannot fully entrench students in land-based education if language is not embedded within the pedagogy. Elders in Hansen's (2018) state that language is also a factor that can increase the well-being of Indigenous youth. Simpson's article (2014) articulates the act of 'coming to know' as when Indigenous youth are on the land, braided in culture and "immersed in our languages and spiritualities, and embodying our traditions of agency, leadership, decision-making and diplomacy" (Simpson, 2014, p. 1).

Limitations and further research

In order to braid land-based education into contemporary education, there needs to be sufficient funding provided to the planners and developers. In school contexts, access to funding required for projects is a severe limitation that may require access to a Parent Advisory

Committee or knowledge of grant proposal writing, which requires significant time and mental and physical labour for the teacher leader(s). Another limitation to this could be access to Elders from Indigenous communities and the potential for overburdening them and Elder exhaustion. More research is required to create programs that involve all stakeholders within an Indigenous community working together to build land-based education from the ground up. It's crucial to collect data using Indigenous research methods to see how effective these programs are. We must also look into land-based education that fits specific situations and understand how these programs might change based on the Indigenous groups involved.

Next Steps

The literature review resulted in three main themes: changing our story, fostering a connection with Elders, and braiding Indigenous language. The importance of sharing traditional stories is echoed by Cree Elder Stella Neff, emphasizing the transmission of collective memory and Indigenous knowledge (Hansen, 2018). These stories, rooted in the land's history, serve as a potent tool for learning and reshaping educational narratives (Battiste, 2009; Greenwood, 2007). Participating in Dr. Dwayne Donald's walk transformed my perspective by connecting me to Indigenous stories, shifting my worldview and sense of responsibility, illustrating the powerful impact of storytelling, and changing our story in education (Donald, 2021). Advocating for a departure from Eurocentric education, there is a call to embrace unstructured, land-based learning experiences to foster ethical relations and reimagine knowledge (Donald, 2019). Connecting with Elders emerges as crucial for well-being, as highlighted in interviews emphasizing the importance of wisdom transfer for Indigenous students (Hansen, 2018; Restoule et al., 2013). In my Master's program, Dr. Cora Weber-Pillwax emphasized the sanctity of

Indigenous languages, stressing their integral role in the mind and spirit of the people (Fishman, 1996). Elders highlight the connection between language, land-based education, and well-being, showcasing language immersion on the land as vital for intertwining culture, spirituality, and tradition for Indigenous youth (Simpson, 2014). Language thus becomes a fundamental component in fully embedding students in land-based education.

Over the past month and in the coming weeks, I have planned land-based learning experiences to take my students out of the school onto the land during the salmon run. We spend the school day at Goldstream Provincial Park and explore, connect, and learn from Elders and Knowledge keepers. Local T'Sou-ke Knowledge Keepers and our Elder-in-Residence informally connect with the students, answering any questions that arise. We share Bannock and hear the stories of Indigenous resiliency during attempted assimilation, famine, and colonization. The students were joyfully watching the salmon spawn up the river and sketching the plants and animals they saw. Students facing challenges in traditional educational environments were actively involved, motivated, appreciative, and calm.

Transitioning from my master's program and this culminating paper to my role at the school on T'Sou-ke territory, my primary focus is establishing connections with community members and esteemed knowledge holders. Joshua Fishman, in his paper about language revitalization, states, "Start low" (Fishman, 1996, p. 79) and take slow, intentional steps forward. This process of land-based education will take years and require much mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual work from the people putting in the work. Braiding in story, knowledge, and language into colonial contexts, it will happen one step at a time.

Conclusion

The primary purpose of my capstone project has been to conduct a comprehensive and critical synthesis review of the existing academic literature on land-based learning. This review focused on the implications and further insights applicable to the context of school, land, and students on T'Sou-ke territory. My intention with this project was to provide a framework and recommendations that can be braided into Journey Middle School's culture and pedagogy. The significance of land-based learning, as highlighted by various scholars, goes beyond decolonizing Eurocentric thought and understanding of land. It is an educational approach that centers on respect, reciprocity, reverence, humility, and responsibility, all deeply connected to the land through Indigenous knowledge. This approach has the potential to uplift Indigenous culture, language, and identity while also decolonizing capitalist and settler colonial ideologies, helping students reconnect with their responsibilities to the land. Land-based learning has the potential to catalyze the holistic success of Indigenous students. These students have long been impacted by settler colonialism, institutionalized racism, and an educational system that has failed to acknowledge their unique needs and values. The shift towards land-based learning and a curriculum that respects Indigenous ontology, axiology, and epistemology is crucial in addressing these challenges.

The literature review highlighted key themes within land-based learning, including the power of storytelling, the significance of connecting with Elders, and the central role of language in nurturing Indigenous culture and knowledge. These themes underscore the transformative potential of land-based education and its capacity to foster deep connections between students, the land, and their cultural heritage. This capstone project is a valuable resource for educators

and policymakers seeking to integrate land-based learning into their educational systems, specifically focusing on Indigenous communities in T’Sou-ke territory and beyond.

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