

## Land-Based Learning and Indigenous Perspectives in Educational Technology

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*The shift to online learning has transformed higher education but raises critical questions about integrating Indigenous ways of knowing. This paper explores the potential to bridge land-based learning with virtual classrooms, which centers relationships between Indigenous peoples and the land. While online spaces often reflect settler-colonial narratives, they also offer opportunities to amplify Indigenous voices through multimedia tools and digital collaborations.*

*Educators can create inclusive, equitable environments by challenging misconceptions about online spaces as culturally neutral and fostering collaboration with Indigenous knowledge holders. This approach enriches learning and reimagines students' relationships with the land, blending tradition with innovation in education.*

Keywords: Land-based learning, Indigenous perspectives, Online education, Digital equity

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### Introduction

The introduction and accelerated adoption of online learning has profoundly affected the accessibility of higher education among learners. From erasing geographical constraints to providing more opportunities for adults to pursue additional schooling later in life and the ability to engage with a diverse range of peers, online classrooms have led to significant changes in the education system. While virtual spaces are vehicles for education, we also need to remember that these environments are still in their infancy and that the changes occurring in physical classroom spaces need to be extended to the online space. The inclusion of Indigenous ways of knowing and being is one of the many considerations that we need to make. In recent years, the Canadian

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education system has increasingly looked toward integrating Indigenous knowledges within curriculums (Pratt et al., 2018). There has been some concern, however, on how to bring Indigenous ways of knowing and being to virtual learning spaces (Bujold et al., 2021).. The inclusion of Indigenous voices and perspectives in the classroom is critical to diversity and inclusion practices and needs to be integrated throughout all layers of the education system, and one potential path forward is through the adoption of land-based learning. Land-Based Learning and Opportunities in Online Education

Creating space for Indigenous ways of knowing and being in the classroom is a complex practice, and one that requires a significant reframing of the dominant settler-colonial ideology. For Indigenous voices and perspectives to be brought alongside Western ways of knowing, non-Indigenous educators must set aside the idea that Western knowledges are superior to all others (Sam et al., 2022). There must also be widespread recognition of Indigenous histories, specifically as it relates to the systematic erasure of Indigenous ways of knowing and being as a method of solidifying dominant colonial mindsets, while simultaneously disrupting Indigenous knowledges, cultures, and communities (Pratt et al., 2018). A key colonial worldview that has continued to be perpetuated is “the perception that the land and people are separate instead of understanding people as an extension of the land on which they live” (Bowra et al., 2021 p. 133). As we continue to move further into online spaces, particularly in the classroom, the separation of people from the land becomes even more pronounced.

When imagining the future of education, there is a world in which land-based learning and online learning can come together. Land-based learning centers Indigeneity, while honoring the relationships between the land and Indigenous peoples; it “acknowledges and appreciates the land as its own fundamental, sentient being that has spiritual, emotional, intellectual, and

physical aspects” (Bowra et al., 2021 p. 134). Land-based learning also centres Indigenous peoples, as well as centering Indigenous ways of knowing and being (Bowra et al., 2021). While online learning appears to be the antithesis of land-based learning, there are specific aspects of the online environment that are conducive to supporting land-based pedagogies. As Bujold et al. (2021) explains, using online technologies can provide a wealth of resources that allow students to engage with multiple worldviews and perspectives. The inclusion of different mediums as a learning tool, “including audio, video, text, graphics, virtual and interactive programs, and even live chats” can support educators in bringing diverse voices into the classroom while centering Indigenous ways of knowing and being (Bujold et al., 2021).

We have seen through the rise of social media, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, that online platforms can be leveraged to create communities, centre land-based learning and Indigenous ways of knowing and being, and support students’ connection to nature (Bujold et al., 2021). How these technologies are leveraged, however, does pose concern. Using online education and technology tools as a platform to support Western worldviews that do not “inherently value the natural world could further remove us from it, whereas using technology with [Indigenous perspectives]... encourages us to seek information relating to the land and our relationship to it” (Bujold et al., 2021 p. 58). Land-based learning is distinctly different from Place-based learning, as Place-based education approaches are inherently focused on Western worldviews, and through this teach “about and within the local community and is rooted in connecting people with the outdoors... it does not connect to Indigenous history, knowledges, or stories... [and it] fails to acknowledge that all places were once and continue to be Indigenous lands” (Bowra et al., 2021 p. 134).

### **Indigenous Perspectives and Challenges in Online Education**

There are very notable concerns among Indigenous communities, particularly since online technologies are often framed as Western technologies (Bujold et al., 2021). Given the historical patterns of claiming, erasing, and/or appropriating Indigenous lands, knowledges, and cultures, it is crucial that Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and thinking be centred within online education designs and curricula (Bujold et al., 2021). Today, there are a wide range of challenges in the physical classroom, particularly among non-Indigenous educators who feel anxiety or discomfort over the unfamiliarity they have with Indigenous ways of knowing and being, and these challenges easily translate to the online classroom (Carroll et al., 2020; McKinley, 2020).

Educators must also acknowledge a crucial misconception associated with online learning in the context of Indigenous knowledges, in which it is mistakenly believed that online environments are culturally neutral spaces (Tessaro & Restoule, 2022; University of Saskatchewan, 2021). The pervasiveness of settler-colonial narratives embedded within the education system is present in any Western educational context, regardless of the medium used to transmit knowledge (Tessaro & Restoule, 2022; University of Saskatchewan, 2021). Moving forward with online learning will require considerable work to create online spaces where Indigenous ways of knowing and being are integrated into course curriculums using land-based pedagogies (Bowra et al., 2021; Tessaro & Restoule, 2022).

As we continue to explore the opportunities and benefits of online learning, educators need to confront their own assumptions of what online learning is and what it could be. The virtual classroom is not limited to a series of modules and short discussion posts each week, but can instead include spaces where students come together to create community, to explore different worldviews, and to engage directly with Indigenous perspectives, experiences, and

histories (Bujold et al., 2021). By applying land-based learning in the online classroom, students learn to see themselves in relation to the land and to better understand Indigenous ways of knowing and being (Bowra et al., 2021; Bujold et al., 2021). There will be challenges to promoting inclusion and diversity in online spaces and combating the dominant Western worldviews, which require out-of-the-box thinking and experiments in online learning, but the first step is recognizing that online spaces are not culturally neutral (Blaskovits et al., 2023; Tate & Warschauer, 2022; Tessaro & Restoule, 2022). How Indigenous voices and experiences are addressed in the classroom is a critical consideration that educators must make to promote equity, diversity and inclusion within online environments (Fuentes et al., 2021; Sam et al., 2022). A significant part of this process is the individual and collective reflection on the colonial-settler perspective and the inherent inabilities of colonial mindsets to consider different worldviews as being equally valid as the Western worldview (St. Denis, 2011). Indigenous ways of knowing and being must be granted the same respect, depth of study, and importance as Western ways of knowing (St. Denis, 2011).

### **Opportunities and Challenges for Online Educators**

Providing students with Indigenous literatures alongside Western literatures. Inviting Indigenous voices to speak to students, asking students to reflect on knowledges they are unfamiliar with. Indigenous students can benefit from engaging with Indigenous ways of knowing and being, and seeing those worldviews represented in the classroom (Bujold et al., 2021). Giving non-Indigenous students the opportunity to identify similarities and differences between their experiences and the experiences of Indigenous peoples, all while linking back to the core coursework within the curriculum. The inclusion of Indigenous perspectives in the classroom—physical or virtual—is not without its challenges. The sociocultural issues

surrounding the promotion of non-dominant worldviews often can create tension within the education system, as it pushes away from established single-worldview, Western curricula and challenges the dominant colonial narrative (Carrol et al., 2020; McKinley et al., 2020).

Non-Indigenous educators may not feel qualified to speak to Indigenous ways of knowing, knowledges, and cultures, due to their own lack of knowledge and experience with Indigenous knowledge systems (McKinley, 2020).

One way to address this is to invite Indigenous voices to the classroom through guest speakers or include first-person accounts of Indigenous writers, storytellers, and artists. In online spaces, the opportunity to bring Indigenous ways of knowing and being into the classroom is limitless, thanks to a rise in Indigenous engagement online and in social media spaces (Bujold et al., 2021). By sharing from online sources, or inviting Indigenous voices into the classroom more directly, non-Indigenous educators reduce the risk of misrepresenting or unintentionally teaching through a Eurocentric lens while also centering a land-based learning approach (Bowra et al., 2021; McKinley, 2020). Educators seeking to teach Indigenous ways of knowing in the classroom must recognize that they are learning alongside students, and that course designs require collaboration with Indigenous communities (online and offline) and Indigenous knowledge holders (McKinley, 2020). With the rise of Indigenous-led and Indigenous-created content online, a new generation of knowledge keepers has begun to share information publicly that can be brought into online education. The more that educators become comfortable seeking out, building relationships, and promoting Indigenous voices in the classroom, the more commonplace the practice will be in the future.

## **Conclusion**

The virtual classroom has become a permanent fixture in higher education, but it is still undergoing research and development to identify its areas of weaknesses. By designing curriculums focused on land-based learning and the inclusion of Indigenous voices, educators and researchers can use the digital space to continue to push for the inclusion of Indigenous experiences and perspectives. A land-based approach, one that centres Indigeneity, honoring the relationships between the land and Indigenous peoples, and centering Indigenous ways of knowing and being, can provide a means of showing students that reimagining their relationship and responsibilities to the land is possible (Bowra et al., 2021). By considering the online classroom as a playground for learning and experimenting with new ideas, we can be excited about virtual spaces' opportunities. Rather than relegating land-based learning and Indigenous perspectives to the physical classroom, we should consider online education as a new avenue for digital equity to benefit all students and the communities that the education system seeks to serve.

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