

Towards reconcili-aCTION:

Shifting power relations to Indigenize the Humber Office of Sustainability

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Abstract

Indigenous people and knowledges have been traditionally excluded through acts of colonization and government policy. It has been established that Indigenization is a key practice that challenges these notions and supports Indigenous student success. This study aims to determine how the Humber Office of Sustainability can further incorporate Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) practices and create space for Indigenous led knowledge. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with seven staff and faculty to learn about current EDI and Indigenous inclusion practices at Humber College, and how these can be incorporated into the Office of Sustainability. The transcripts were examined in relation to our research questions to analyze the data and develop emerging themes. Common themes, patterns, and trends were identified to provide results and arrive at conclusions.

The results are organized in terms of current practices around Indigenization which include Indigenous inclusion, Decolonial indigenization, Reconciliation indigenization, and Indigenous student support. The discussion offers practical suggestions for the integration of Indigenous knowledge and providing ongoing support for Indigenous student success in relation to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Calls to Action. This article encourages moving beyond words and into taking action to build a more equitable, diverse, and inclusive society. Building capacity for an increased understanding of Indigenous knowledge and culture is a strong approach for challenging dominant systems and increasing mutual respect. This is significant because it adds an improved framework for EDI in relation to Indigenous inclusion within the Office of Sustainability.

Keywords: Community Development, EDI, Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, Indigenous, Indigenize, Reconciliation, Sustainability

1. Introduction

Conversations around Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) have been increasing, and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) Calls to Action are a meaningful opportunity towards reconciliation with Indigenous peoples. Academic institutions play a key role in shifting power imbalances and steering these Calls to Action to redress the legacy of colonialism and impact of residential schools. Relationships between how power and identities intersect to form multiple experiences of oppression and privilege were examined throughout the study and literature for an increased understanding.

Indigenization is a key practice McNamara and Naepi describe that challenge historical colonial agendas and support the success of Indigenous students in Canada and New Zealand. To work towards decolonization and structural change, approaches are identified through respecting Indigenous knowledges, opposing colonial practices, building collaborative projects, and increasing student success through cultivating relationships (McNamara & Naepi, 2018). This ties into Gaudry and Lorenz's discussion on how indigenization exists on a spectrum consisting of Indigenous inclusion, Reconciliation indigenization, and Decolonial indigenization. To truly indigenize Canadian academics Indigenous scholars argue that we need more than inclusion

in numbers, and to focus on decolonial positions that change the structures in which institutions engage with Indigenous people and communities (Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018). This relates to Burns' example of including Indigenous knowledge with sustainability through integrating an Okanagan lens of the intellectual, emotional, physical, and spiritual self into the Burns Model of Sustainability Pedagogy. Through an Indigenous worldview, aspects of self were directly connected to the land and living in balance with the world (Burns, 2015). An integrated model and approach highlight the interconnection between all relations and challenges dominant systems through offering an inclusive transformative learning opportunity.

Building capacity for an intercultural understanding and integration of Indigenous knowledges strongly connects to the TRC Calls to Action (TRC 61, 2015). This study examines how the Humber Office of Sustainability can incorporate EDI practices to promote the equitable, diverse, and inclusive participation of students, staff, and partners. This article focuses on approaches used to challenge dominant structures and create space for Indigenous led knowledge. This is significant because it promotes dialogue and provides an improved framework for EDI in relation to Indigenous inclusion for the Office of Sustainability.

2. Research Methods

This qualitative research is exploratory and used a non-probability purposive sampling method to identify participants. Humber staff and faculty with knowledge of EDI practices were identified as candidates for our research. Potential participants were emailed and introduced to our study through our community partner and research supervisor. Interested candidates were recruited through email and sent a letter of invitation to participate in an interview. Prior to the interview our participant consent form and interview question guide were provided to participants for review.

Principles of the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS 2) were followed through informing participants on the purpose of the study, data collection methods, confidentiality, and data usage (TCPS 2, 2018). Semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted to learn about current EDI and Indigenous inclusion practices, and how these can be incorporated into the Office of Sustainability. The interviews were audio recorded over Zoom and lasted approximately 30 minutes. In accordance with the TCPS 2, each interview participant was asked to provide verbal consent to participate and record audio.

Interviews were transcribed from a total of seven participants at Humber from equity related departments and Faculty of Social and Community Services. The method used for data analysis was inductive and utilized thematic coding. Transcripts were examined in relation to our research questions and data was reduced into emerging themes and subcategories. Collaborative theme generation sessions were conducted to identify common themes, patterns, and trends. Diagrammatic reports were used to reinforce themes and provide data validation. These approaches were used to generate results, recommendations, and conclusions.

3. Results

3.1 Indigenous Inclusion

We learned the Indigenous Education and Engagement (IE&E) department displays an open-door policy for Indigenous learners of all kinds. These programs are designed to encourage learning and discussion around Indigenous culture and topics. There is also Indigenous specific programming that is offered to students in a safe space. Indigenous representation on committees and land acknowledgments at events, trainings, or meetings were mentioned as an important opportunity "to reflect on our relationship with the land and Indigenous people" (Araujo *et al.*, 2021). To become more inclusive at the Arboretum, Indigenous language has been incorporated into their signage. An example of collaborations with IE&E include the Principal's Office Wellness Talk: Representation Matters – Becoming Better Allies.

3.2 Decolonial Indigenization

We found that participants identified a responsibility to recognize origins of oppression and implicit biases. Faculty are working to embed critical race theory and anti-Indigenous/Black racism into course learning outcomes. It was expressed that they would like input on how to decolonize curriculum through receiving support from EDI consultants or IE&E staff. The Indigenous Knowledges Gathering held at Humber was discussed as a space where professors and students could learn from Indigenous people and communities. To reflect these connections there was an interest in working to create a definition of sustainability combining the United Nations definition with Indigenous teachings around the Seven Generations and Dish with One Spoon.

3.3 Reconciliation Indigenization

We learned that staff and faculty at Humber are participating in an IE&E training called Four Seasons of

Reconciliation, which is a cultural awareness training to learn about the historical context of reconciliation. This is a response to the TRC Calls to Action number 62, Education for Reconciliation that calls for the creation of curriculum on residential schools. The TRC Calls to Action number 92 was mentioned in terms of obtaining free and prior informed consent when working with businesses and “making sure that Indigenous folks are involved throughout the process” (Araujo et al., 2021). This was spoken about to encourage others towards understanding and learning about the TRC Calls to Action.

3.4 Indigenous Student Support

We found that support looks different in terms of unique experiences of identities and that equity-seeking groups need to be provided equal access and opportunity. To provide best outcomes, support for students is offered through peer, alumni, staff, and community engagement initiatives. It was mentioned that a work study student split between IE&E and the Office of Sustainability would be very beneficial. There was a positive connection between departments and they reflected a shared interest around goals. It was suggested that student socials and collaboration events between departments could get Indigenous students involved, and that a call for volunteers could be posted to encourage Indigenous students to form connections with the Office of Sustainability.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

4.1 Integration of Indigenous Perspectives and Knowledges

Aspects learned from Gaudry and Lorenz in relation to Indigenous inclusion, Decolonial indigenization, and Reconciliation indigenization are ways to integrate Indigenous perspectives and knowledges into post-secondary institutions. Efforts such as the implementation of anti-Indigenous racism into curriculum and the Four Seasons of Reconciliation training should be expanded campus wide for an increased understanding of Indigenous communities. These are also methods that challenge dominant structures, and the Indigenous Knowledges Gathering is an excellent opportunity to learn how to integrate Indigenous knowledges and teach decolonial practices into programs on campus. These initiatives align with McNamara and Naepi's ideas around achieving structural change through building collaborative projects and to the TRC Calls to Action to build capacity for cultural understanding (TRC 61, 2015). To support these approaches a statement or reconciliation plan issued by the Office of Sustainability could be impactful for

the department in furthering EDI practices. This document could speak on the actions being taken in relation to the TRC Calls to Action and could increase commitment to actively work towards reconciliation (TRC 53, 2015).

4.2 Providing Ongoing Support for Indigenous Student Success

Methods to increase Indigenous student success through cultivating relationships offered by McNamara and Naepi are key for providing support and promoting Indigenous inclusion. The suggestion of a work study or volunteer position as an opportunity for students from equity-seeking groups is an approach that can further reflect the goals and interests of the Office of Sustainability. The Burns Model of Sustainability Pedagogy is an excellent example of integrating sustainability with Indigenous worldviews and fostering a transformative connection between all relations. Continued collaboration and engagement initiatives can be used to form connections with Indigenous students and encourage opportunities to increase student capacity and mutual respect in relation to the TRC Calls to Action (TRC 63, 2015). This is also an approach which can allow for the creation of space for Indigenous led knowledge and understanding. Land acknowledgements can be used to show commitment to reconciliation through respecting and honouring Treaty relationships (TRC 45, 2015). The Office of Sustainability can transform this into a more meaningful opportunity, not only to demonstrate, but to encourage learning and action towards reconciliation.

4.3 Limitations, Future Recommendations and Conclusion

Limitations involved with this study include the number of participants interviewed which reduces its generalizability. Participants included Humber staff and faculty which can have an influence on our findings. This also means that student perspectives were not included in this study and could have provided us with alternate insights. For future recommendations, research can be conducted on how to decolonize and indigenize curriculum at Humber. This could be an important area to expand on to ensure staff and faculty have access to ongoing support and feel encouraged to implement changes confidently. A collaborative project to create a definition for sustainability based on Indigenous and United Nations values could also be a valuable initiative to build cross-cultural relationships and understanding. This study is significant to the sector because it encourages staff, faculty, and students to further EDI initiatives and work towards reconciliation with Indigenous peoples. It provides an important learning opportunity that can be taken beyond

the classroom and placed into action. This can work to shift power relations and inspire positive changes within Humber and the greater community it serves to impact.

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