

5 - 7 December 2025

Paris , France

Community-based Experiential Learning and Desire-based Change: Indigenous Approaches to Economic and Educational Growth

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Abstract

Learning institutions often struggle to authentically implement the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's 94 Calls to Action. As a professor, I have observed that performative actions frequently take precedence over academic rigor, and institutions often "fail to go beyond conditional inclusion" (Stein, 2018, p. 158). In this context, incorporating Indigenous worldviews and cultural practices into education systems, policies, and structures not built on the premise of inclusion presents a persistent challenge.

Community-based learning provides an environment where cultural dissonance and discontinuity are minimized. In the courses I offer, including Entrepreneurial Reconciliation, community members are vital contributors to student learning, and students engage with real-life, community-informed experiences. This study documents the experiences of students, community members, and facilitators across three anonymized First Nation communities (A, B, C) in New Brunswick, Canada. Guided by principles of Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) and desire-based change, this work emphasizes relational learning, reciprocity, and Indigenous approaches to economic and educational growth.

Our findings highlight four key themes: understanding the purpose of community, community-based learning, fostering desire-based change, and contributions to economic and educational growth. Through qualitative interviews and reflective dialogue, this paper demonstrates how embedding learning within Indigenous communities amplifies student agency, supports self-determination, and strengthens both community and economic vitality. Ethical practices, including adherence to OCAP principles, Tri-Council Policy Chapter 9, and institutional REB approval, guided this research. The study contributes to

scholarship on community-based experiential learning, ABCD, and desire-based approaches, emphasizing transformative possibilities when education and economic development are grounded in Indigenous knowledge, relationality, and local assets.

Keywords: First Nation, Abcd, Economic Development, Experiential Learning