

‘We get our education from the land’: Exploring Student Perspectives of Indigenous Food Sovereignty

Summary of Research Findings (conducted in August 2018 by Megan Matthews, MA, RD, KPU’s Student Health Promotion Coordinator!)

Purpose of the Research

- In August 2018, a 5-day Summer Institute was hosted in Mi’kma’ki (Nova Scotia) that explored the relationship between land, food and overall health and wellbeing, with a focus on Indigenous food sovereignty (IFS) and Two-Eyed Seeing.
- IFS can be defined as *“The right of Indigenous peoples to produce and acquire their own healthy and culturally appropriate foods in a sustainable way, while also defining their food and food systems”* (Forum for Food Sovereignty, 2007; Martin & Amos, 2016).
- Two-Eyed Seeing is a way to position Indigenous and Western knowledge systems alongside one another to address major environmental and social issues our society is facing. It encourages us to *“learn to see from one eye with the best in the Indigenous ways of knowing and from the other eye with the best in the Western ways of knowing..”* (Marshall, Marshall, Bartlett, & Iwama, 2015)
- This qualitative study explored the experiences and perspectives of students who attended the Summer Institute.

Rationale

- Ongoing, systemic colonialism faced by Indigenous populations in Canada, including the disregard of traditional, Indigenous knowledges’, has resulted in a decreased connection to land, food and culture.
- There is a growing body of literature that suggests reconnecting to traditional Indigenous knowledge systems and reclaiming culture are important ways to improve the health and well-being of Indigenous peoples.

Study Design

- There were 9 attendees and they identified as both Indigenous (First Nations) and non-Indigenous (settler background).
- All attendees were either post-secondary students or early-career researchers, and they were either interested in or actively researching Indigenous health topics.
- Two sets of focus groups took place; the first at the Summer Institute and the second via video-conference 8 weeks later.

Research Findings

Theme 1: Understanding and Critiquing IFS

Participants indicated that by attending, they were able to gain a deeper understanding about IFS by exploring the topic further and critiquing it with other attendees. They also identified the problematic language often used to describe IFS. Several participants discussed how they often feel disconnected from their own Indigenous cultures and face barriers while trying to communicate their beliefs with others.

“What non-Indigenous people don’t realize is the connection that food has to all the aspects of spiritual, mental, and community well-being, and, it’s to raise awareness to that issue, that there is a connection with all the elements, they are all woven together” (S, non-Indigenous)

Theme 2: Two-Eyed Seeing as a means to deepen understanding of IFS

Participants began to view Two-Eyed Seeing as a means to deepen their understanding of IFS. Additionally, they discussed how the activities of the Summer Institute allowed them to explore what Two-Eyed Seeing is, critique its’ current use in academia, and learn about its intended use from Mi’kmaq Elders and scholars. Students also identified how they plan to use Two-Eyed Seeing moving forward.

“Indigenous people all over the world have a perspective on Two Eyed Seeing but they don’t call it Two-Eyed Seeing...but its values, it’s something that’s deeper than a methodology” (ER, Indigenous)

“For me there wasn’t... it’s not new territory...but what I would say is that, you know, I feel like I’m going to need time to reflect on a lot of what I heard and shared and heard other people share, and I feel like I’m you know, I’m getting glimmers of the evolution in my understanding” (S, non-Indigenous)