



Natural Curiosity

A Resource for Educators

Building Children's
Understanding of the World
through Environmental Inquiry



2nd
EDITION

Preface to the Second Edition: An Indigenous Lens on the Natural Curiosity Resource

The first edition of *Natural Curiosity* began to reflect Indigenous approaches to learning in significant ways. One Anishinaabe¹ Elder – also a retired elementary school teacher – said, after reading the first edition, “I actually cried when I read it. I said to myself, they’re finally starting to get it!”

The second edition highlights Indigenous perspectives to a greater and more meaningful extent. We invite educators to begin considering a journey into Environmental Inquiry that is increasingly informed by Indigenous knowledge. We hope that this edition will support awareness among educators of why this journey is important, and why it is beneficial to learners and educators of all backgrounds. We also hope this edition inspires educators to connect with possibilities for developing greater understanding, knowledge and practice.

In this second edition of *Natural Curiosity*, we clarify and provide some examples of how Indigenous perspectives confirm and deepen principles and

practices laid out in the *Natural Curiosity* resource. We ask, “How do Indigenous perspectives relate to *Natural Curiosity* and Environmental Education? How might they enhance educators’ understanding over time as educators explore Environmental Inquiry?” And, we begin to ask, “What Indigenous perspectives and principles apply to all of us, and how might these increasingly be supported – in an ethical way – in any classroom?”

These questions need to be approached with humility, and a recognition that exploring them will take time, and involve the development of meaningful relationships and reconciliation with Indigenous peoples. The Indigenous lens that has been applied to this document provides a glimpse of what Indigenous perspectives and practices have to offer in relation to the *Natural Curiosity* resource and the field of Environmental Education. Unpacking these ideas and perspectives in the classroom, and in partnership with Indigenous communities and schools, will be the work of both current and future educators.

¹ The Anishinaabek (plural of Anishinaabe) include the peoples of the Three Fires Confederacy (Odawa, Potawatomi and Ojibwe) surrounding the Great Lakes region, and the term is also applied to closely related groups, such as the Algonquin in the east, or sometimes to the Saulteaux in the west, for example.

Educator Support for Natural Curiosity

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“Having taught in many Indigenous communities, one consistent characteristic I have observed is how students relate to and naturally learn from their environment – there is a real connection to the land. Over the years, the engagement and success of my students would thrive with every lesson and project that took us outdoors.

One specific example of this is from an inquiry my class did into trees. Although it was hard to know where to start, a simple nature walk showed an obvious connection between my students and the trees in their community. Our inquiry grew into learning about the trees that are indigenous to that land, their traditional medicinal uses, and how to harvest bark, branches, and sap, depending on the season. Together we also learned to incorporate important traditional practices such as respectfully making an offering to Creator before receiving resources from the land. Learning the culture and language was easily integrated into our environmental inquiry; they went hand in hand. From there, the students were motivated to write persuasive letters to advocate for protecting and conserving the trees in their community. They planted new trees around their community in an effort to be sustainable, and they generated funds to donate trees to be planted in other parts of the world. This amazing inquiry into trees grew from one nature walk into community action and global citizenship.

Indigenous students have taught me how our environment is our classroom, while *Natural Curiosity* supported me to have confidence as a teacher to find the pathway to bring the learning outside where curriculum, our cultures, and language are naturally connected to the environment, and where questions grow beyond learning.”

Rebecca Birtzu, Educator
Grade 1/2 Educator
Christian Island Elementary School,
Beausoleil First Nation

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“During one of my early trips to visit the Laboratory School I was asked to peruse a draft edition of *Natural Curiosity*. As I browsed through the book, I was pleased to see teacher stories, visuals, quotes and a very user-friendly format – a resource for teachers written by teachers. But it wasn’t until I read the acknowledgement to First Nations peoples on page 13 that I was totally and completely hooked. I knew right there and then that this was a resource that would work for us in the Winnipeg School Division. I was deeply moved by and excited about this respectful recognition.



Since then I have had the good fortune of sharing *Natural Curiosity* with many teachers. What has resonated the most and has had the greatest impact on the work we do is the Knowledge Building Circle. In WSD (Winnipeg School Division) we built on the connection to sharing circles. Through KBCs we have learned so much about the importance and value of student voice. As teachers we have learned to let go, to talk less and listen more, to ask thoughtful, open-ended questions, to embrace the philosophy that “all ideas are improvable” and to identify depth of understanding in a conversation.

I am greatly looking forward to the 2nd edition of *Natural Curiosity*. I feel the resource will encourage educators to see the deep connection between Environmental Inquiry and Indigenous knowledge and perspectives. I believe this will enhance the education of all students.”

Chery Zubrack
Consultant, Teacher Support for the
Winnipeg School Division

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New Stories from Teachers

Velvet Lacasse
Grade 3 Educator
The Grove Community School,
Toronto, ON

When I was introduced to inquiry-based learning, I couldn’t figure out what it would look like or sound like in my classroom. I went to workshops and I visited exploration classrooms and I asked a lot of questions. It took me a long time before I realized that “Inquiry-based Learning” was not something that I could schedule into my timetable, like “Activity Time.” Now, I understand that inquiry is more about “how” I teach, and the strategies that I use to discover and “uncover” the curriculum with my students.

As part of our inquiry, I decided that we would collect our own family journey stories, and investigate the impact of settlement and migration in Ontario. This family project would help strengthen the home-school connection, as well as establishing a sense of place by honouring the past, present and future of Indigenous communities on this land.



Truth and Reconciliation Commission - Calls To Action

Natural Curiosity and the Dr. Eric Jackman Institute of Child Study Laboratory School (OISE/ UofT) are committed to take up the call to action put forth by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission:

63. We call upon the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada to maintain an annual commitment to Aboriginal education issues, including:

- i. Developing and implementing Kindergarten to Grade Twelve curriculum and learning resources on Aboriginal peoples in Canadian history, and the history and legacy of residential schools.
- ii. Sharing information and best practices on teaching curriculum related to residential schools and Aboriginal history.
- iii. **Building student capacity for intercultural understanding, empathy, and mutual respect.**
- iv. Identifying teacher-training needs relating to the above.



www.trc.ca/websites/trcinstitution/File/2015/Findings/Calls_to_Action_English2.pdf

“Reconciliation between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians, from an Aboriginal perspective, also requires reconciliation with the natural world. If human beings resolve problems between themselves but continue to destroy the natural world, then reconciliation remains incomplete. This is a perspective that we as Commissioners have repeatedly heard: that reconciliation will never occur unless we are also reconciled with the earth.”



www.trc.ca/websites/trcinstitution/File/2015/Honouring_the_Truth_Reconciling_for_the_Future_July_23_2015.pdf

To view our entire online resource and learn more about our Inquiry Institutes and Awards please visit www.naturalcuriosity.ca

New Excerpt from Branch I - Inquiry-based Learning

It is natural law that all growth proceeds from within, from the unseen, so of course learning proceeds from within the child, which corresponds to the sense of wonder emphasized in inquiry-based learning.