

Land-Based Learning

Dr. Erick Jackman Institute of Child Study

The Land-Based Learning program aims to connect students with a way of learning from the land throughout the seasons. Using our senses to notice the natural surroundings, to explore changes, to share wonders, are the initial behavioral goals of this program. Information is shared about how various species and elements are connected. The role of humans is also developed, incorporating both the humility of understanding that insects, animals, and plants have knowledge that we may not understand, as well as a sense of responsibility to nurture and care for what we can.

Depending on the seasons and student wonders, topics explored may include pollination, fungi, animal tracking, signs of change, mapping, focused observation and scientific sketching, seed collecting, planting and harvesting food, improving growing conditions for various creatures, developing experiments to better understand our impacts, mounting cameras to explore who else uses the space when we are not outside, and ensuring that students feel comfortable in nature. This work is deeply informed and grounded in Indigenous teachings that have been received from various teachers including Isaac Murdoch (Anishinaabe), Doug Anderson (Bungee Metis), Tom Porter (Mohawk), Niigaan Sinclair (Anishinaabe), and the Natural Curiosity text. This time also provides an opportunity to share truths and connections to the history of this place, based on Indigenous stories shared by Philip Cote III and others. Through sharing about practices connected to the times of year, by planting and harvesting medicines, caring for important objects, and through visits from Indigenous teachers and land-based educators, we ensure that many voices are shared in this work.

The relationships developed in this program will hopefully ensure that over time, the students will come to know many of the plants and insects that share the outdoor space with us. We aspire to share the seeds of native plants, as part of our responsibility, to recover and restore land in various places in Toronto. We will continue to explore ways to show reciprocity both to the Land and to the Indigenous people who live here.

Krista.spence@utoronto.ca