

## **Program of Study**

My program of study is a Doctor of Philosophy in Education with an interest in decolonizing education. The outline for this research proposal evolved from the original work I completed during my master's degree. My thesis research question asks: "How can privileging the Mi'kmaw voice and practicing Indigenous allyship support the decolonization of colonial narratives?" This study will focus on the L'nu/Mi'kmaw Peoples of Atlantic Canada and their traditional unceded territory Mi'kma'ki.

I began the doctoral program in July 2017. All of my course work is completed, and I am currently working on my portfolio with an anticipated defense in February 2019. My goal is to defend my thesis proposal late spring of 2019 and subsequently begin the formal research process for my doctoral dissertation. Dr. James Sharpe, Associate Professor at Mount Saint Vincent University, who supervised my most recent master's degree, has offered to stay on as supervisor for my doctoral studies.

This work will incorporate and practice several Indigenous methodologies, the first of which is the Indigenous methodology as outlined by Jo-ann Archibald's (2008), *Principles of Indigenous Storywork: Educating the Heart, Mind, Body and Spirit*. This methodological approach establishes Indigenous storywork as a pedagogical tool to build relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Peoples and supports socially just learning across all levels of education. Archibald's (2008) Indigenous storywork principles include: respect, reverence, responsibility, reciprocity, interrelatedness, holism, and synergy. This program of study is connected to "relationship as methodology" as defined by Linda Tuhwai Smith (2013) in *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*. Relationship, in the context of decolonizing colonial history, is a type of Indigenous methodology which is based on Indigenous allyship which fosters friendships between Indigenous Peoples and others for the purpose of supporting socially just interests. Finally, this research project will use the Indigenous methodology of Two-Eyed Seeing (Etuaptmumk) created by Albert Marshall in 2004. This guiding principle gives structure to our research by integrating Indigenous and mainstream research frameworks. This Indigenous research methodology is a type of Mi'kmaw epistemology that celebrates an integrative co-learning journey between the Mi'kmaw Peoples and others.

One major output of this research project is a proposed book co-created by myself and a local Mi'kmaw Elder. The book will be a history of Lunenburg County that privileges the Mi'kmaw voice in describing who they are as a people. Drawing on lived experiences, Mi'kmaw oral traditions, personal interviews, document analysis, and archeological evidence, readers will be presented with the significant connections that the Mi'kmaq have had to this place for many millennia. The book will also re-story the history of colonization of Lunenburg County from a Mi'kmaw perspective and will comment on the present-day relationship of the Mi'kmaw and settlers in the area.

In order to achieve excellence for this manuscript, we will listen to valuable stories told by Elders and other knowledge-keepers regarding the Mi'kmaw's holistic connections to the land. An example of this is a chapter that is told by a Mi'kmaw Elder archeologist on the relationship that the Mi'kmaq have as it relates to the importance of the rivers, bays and oceans as key transportation routes and natural elements that supported Mi'kmaw life. Another chapter will be devoted to understanding the significance and meaning of local Mi'kmaw place names and how these words and concepts are tied to the Mi'kmaq and their connection to the land.

A second project that demonstrates both the feasibility and potential contribution of this proposed research is my involvement with the Mahone Bay Museum in Mahone Bay, Nova Scotia, Canada. Since

the conception of Canada as a European settler nation, much time and energy has been spent on positioning this as the dominant historical narrative at the expense of the original people's history, culture and heritage. The museum aims to change how history is traditionally represented and is honouring the voices of the Mi'kmaw Peoples and their right to tell their stories about their history in Mahone Bay and surrounding region.

I have been fortunate to be invited to be part of a volunteer collaborative committee of Mi'kmaw members and non-Mi'kmaw associate members. We have been tasked with exploring the Mi'kmaw approaches to decolonizing settler ideology that exists in the museum and co-create Mi'kmaw history in a way that privileges their voices. Part of my responsibility has been to connect the museum with the local Mi'kmaw community to build relationships and foster the co-creation of knowledge. I have also shared with museum staff my journey of becoming an Indigenous ally, so they can understand how to build this important relationship. As well, I am assisting the museum in researching historical Mi'kmaw and settlers' versions of Eurocentric narratives.

This Mi'kmaw community-based endeavour prioritizes the understanding of settler historical narratives of Lunenburg County from a Mi'kmaw perspective. The ultimate purpose of the museum's change in museological practice is to instill a sense of reverence, respect and reciprocity for museum visitors as they begin to understand the preservation, interpretation, and celebration of Mi'kmaw local history, culture and knowledge-based systems.

The third element of my research journey is that I have begun co-presenting at various peer reviewed academic conferences throughout Canada with a Mi'kmaw Elder who has taught me about traditional Mi'kmaw knowledge-based systems and world views. By practicing Indigenous allyship and Archibald's (2008) storywork principles our relationship emphasizes the mutuality of giving and receiving knowledge. An important part of our work is acknowledging this Elder's scholarly contribution in post-secondary academic settings. By working together in this format, this important Mi'kmaw knowledge-keeper is given a voice which is then given priority and respect. Our work together is an example of some progress towards indigenization and decolonization of education.

Following the work of Indigenous scholar Marie Battiste (2013), this program of study's overall objective is to provide a basis for educational reform that synergistically combines Mi'kmaw and Eurocentric epistemology, ontology, methodology, and axiology. While privileging the Mi'kmaw voice, this unique style of research draws on both Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities to become actively involved in an emancipatory approach to education.

The mandate for this study is directly linked to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission: Calls to Action (Government of Canada, 2018) which asks all government bodies to collaboratively work with Survivors, Indigenous Peoples and educators to "Make age-appropriate curriculum on residential schools, Treaties, and Aboriginal Peoples' historical and contemporary contributions to Canada a mandatory educational requirement." As well, this research aligns with the Nova Scotia Department of Education and its plans for the development of Nova Scotia Treaty Education. This endeavour requests that all Nova Scotians must be responsible for learning about their shared history of Mi'kma'ki with the Mi'kmaq.

Ultimately this program of study understands that decolonization and indigenization include Indigenous Peoples and settlers working in solidarity which privileges the voice of Indigenous Peoples, such as the Mi'kmaq. The hope is that transformative education that produces constructive social change.

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