

Portfolio Narrative

Unsettling Who I am from A Mi'kmaw Point of View:

Building Relationship with the Mi'kmaq by Practicing Indigenous Allyship

Introduction

As I look back over the year and a half that I've been a doctoral student, I am truly amazed at all that I have learned and how I have changed. Preparing the portfolio is an example of my recent educational journey that has helped shape not only who I am today, but where my research will go, and ultimately how I choose to live. To say this new academic chapter in my life has been transformative is an understatement.

Before entering the doctoral program, I was a special education teacher for over 20 years. My area of focus within special needs teaching was students who struggled both emotionally and behaviourally. This is in part because I was a teacher that welcomed the students that no one else wanted, I found my students interesting and I also enjoyed the challenge of working with them.

Managing a classroom with students struggling with both behavioural and emotional needs was demanding to say the least. However, I firmly believe that one of the reasons I had success with my students was that I tried to build a genuine relationship with each one. This relationship was built on mutual respect for each other as well as believing in the possibilities and not deficits of my students and their abilities.

Important to building this sense of trust was that I would hold a meeting with each new student and I would say to them "Don't worry it's my job to figure out how you learn and once we figure it out it'll be your job to be a student!!" I also told my students that I would never get angry with them, put them in detention or give up on them. This statement by me usually elicited a counter response such as, "Miss do you know how bad I am??" or "Miss do you know I like to throw things??" or "Miss you don't know what I can be like, I can really get on your nerves!!" My response to any of these remarks was always the same. "If I ever get angry with you, have to put you in detention or give up on you then I have failed. You see this is about you and me working together so we can figure out how you can be successful in school." Through the relationships that we formed I tried to connect with my students in genuine ways such as showing an interest in who they were outside the classroom. My students and I formed real friendships which had a positive influence on their emotional well-being. As a result, they were more apt to be respectful, listen and participate in academically productive ways.

The reason I bring up my time spent as a special-education teacher is because I believe the success of my students was directly related to the positive relationship and mutual respect we shared for each other. I don't think it's a coincidence that my doctoral work is based on relationship and its intersection with knowledge production and other relationships that are integral to practicing research in a holistic way. Thus, it makes sense that my portfolio narrative

reflects the many types of relationships that exist among all the artifact pieces of the portfolio and are at the forefront of my PhD work.

When preparing each portfolio artifact and how they relate to my research interests, I asked myself a number of questions. First, I asked myself how does this artifact support what it means for me, personally, to practice Indigenous allyship? Second, how does this artifact support unsettling settler ideology within myself, others, the local community and broader contexts? Third, when preparing an artifact, consider how it helps to foster relationship between myself and the Mi'kmaw community? Last, how does this work foreground, process over product?

While working on each artifact and tying them altogether I also kept specific themes in mind that I felt are important to the overall research process that I will be doing with and among the Mi'kmaq of Lunenburg County. The topics of narrative themes that helped to unify all the artifacts include: Msit No'kmaq, Allyship, Relationship, Indigenization, Decolonization, Jo-ann Archibald's (2008) Indigenous storywork principles and Bartlett, Marshall and Marshall's (2012) Two-Eyed Seeing.

The rest of this narrative describes each of the 14 artifacts that make up my portfolio. I have organized these descriptions according to the five competency areas that are outlined in the PhD program requirements.

General Knowledge Competency

Through the teaching assistantship with Dr. Sharpe and being part of the group that created an Indigenous garden at Mount Saint Vincent University, Elder Joe Michael "Elder Joe" and I have gotten to know each other quite well and as a result have become good friends. Elder Joe has taken his personal time to teach me about his culture, traditional teachings and Mi'kmaw knowledge-based systems. This includes the Mi'kmaw ways to understand the world of Netukulimk, Msit No' kmaq, Thinking Seven Generations Ahead, and Bartlett, Marshall and Marshall's (2012) Two-Eyed Seeing. He has also shared with me many personal stories about his family and the hard-colonial truths of how European colonization, The Indian Act, residential schools and other types of assimilation have negatively impacted the Mi'kmaq, his community, family and himself.

Key has been Elder Joe's teachings about the resilience and strength of the Mi'kmaq. Like Elder Joe says, "Even after all that has happened to us we are still here!! Elder Joe firmly believes that the Mi'kmaw's self-determination can be seen when you look at their common political and cultural organizations and their right to self-government of their unceded territory Mi'kma'ki. But in this same breath of optimism he also sheds his concerns about the hold that colonization has on his peoples. Another phrase I have heard Elder Joe say is, "It took 400 years to get us in this mess and it will take 400 years or seven generations for us to restore to who we are as a people.

On one occasion, when Elder Joe was explaining to me what decolonization meant to him, the subject of co-presenting at conferences came up. We decided this was a good idea since decolonization is about validating, acknowledging and learning from other worldviews. Since

academic conferences traditionally use a western approach to how knowledge is produced and delivered it would be a good way to decolonize and indigenize this scholarly learning space. We also thought it was a good way to practice Indigenous allyship and that it would be fun!!

Through our new relationship, and interests in social justice and social literacy, last fall Elder Joe and I presented at two different conferences together. Our first conference was the “Atlantic Universities’ Teaching Showcase on Experiential Learning AUTS”, Truro, NS. Next, we flew to Toronto to attend the “Centre for Integrative Anti-Racism Studies (CIARS) Decolonizing Conference”, at the University of Toronto.

Having the honour of spending long periods of time with an Elder, such as attending a conference together, is a very unique experience filled with endless learning. There are so many eventful moments that I remember, but one that sticks in my mind was at the CIARS Decolonizing conference during the end of Dr. Marie Battiste’s keynote speech.

When Dr. Battiste was giving her closing remarks, a conference moderator announced that since the conference agenda was on a tight schedule there would only be time for about three questions for Dr. Battiste. During the third question, Elder Joe nudged me and urgently said: “I need to talk to Marie right now, can you tell the moderator?” Hesitantly, I raised my hand and asked a moderator if it would be possible for the gentleman sitting next to me to speak with Dr. Battiste, even though there was no time left. I explained that he was a Mi’kmaw Elder and had something important that he wanted to talk about with Dr. Battiste. Then Elder Joe stood up and began a conversation in Mi’kmaq with Dr. Battiste.

I cannot speak for the whole audience, but I noticed several people sitting near me, including myself, that became very emotional and began to cry upon hearing this Mi’kmaw dialogue between these two wise Elders. I had no idea what they were talking about but that didn’t matter. Experiencing the synergy and energy move back and forth between two Mi’kmaw scholars fluently conversing in their traditional language, at a decolonizing conference, in downtown Toronto, was a very momentous event. Once Elder Joe sat down, everyone stood up and Dr. Battiste received the only standing ovation of the conference. There was a total of 500 people in the auditorium and 1,000 more who watched via live streaming in the University of Toronto/OSIE library and classrooms.

Another highlight at the same conference was on the last day when a conference organizer came up to Elder Joe and asked him if he would like to attend next year, as an Elder, all expenses paid. Later when Elder Joe told me about this, he said, “All I did for my good deed of the day was buy a cup of coffee for a homeless person this morning...and look what happens!”

Attending conferences with Elder Joe has been a very profound experience for me. I believe these experiences demonstrate intellectual growth in learning. A key component of these experiences is that Elder Joe and I attended and co-presented together. This meant that every aspect of the conference we shared together. For example, at the opening plenary of the CIARS Decolonization conference proceedings, Elder Joe and I immediately noticed that despite the name of the conference the physical set up and delivery by most speakers was very western in its approach. This is important to mention because Elder Joe and I wanted to do something different

than normal university conference protocol. When I look back at the time we shared together, my key learning moments did not come from the insightful revelations by presenters or guest speakers, but instead arose from understanding a very privileged educational setting from a Mi'kmaw Elder's point of view.

Unfortunately, Elder Joe was ill and could not attend the regional CASAE Conference, at Mount Saint Vincent (MSVU) in October 2018. Despite his absence, this conference turned out to be pivotal because of the many thought-provoking questions and discussions that occurred during my presentation. St. Francis of Xavier professor, Dr. Leona English asked me one question in particular about my work that has stuck with me. She said she was asking the question more for herself but wanted to know how an individual knows the difference between cultural appreciation versus cultural appropriation. Or how do I deal with being a privileged settler, researching colonial history from a Mi'kmaw perspective?

Upon reflection, I realize that I only scratched the surface when attempting to answer her question. As a result, I have been examining how my Eurocentric upbringing hinders my ability to understand what Indigenous cultural appropriation is and when it occurs. Henceforth, I keep Dr. English's question at the forefront of everything I do personally, professionally and academically.

Upon further contemplation of Dr. English's question, I think that fundamentally appropriation is a difficult concept for settlers to understand. This is because colonization by its very nature is based on the appropriation of anything for its own use such as land and natural resources. British colonialism in Mi'kma'ki for example, was based on the European understanding of landownership, acquisition and expansion. Extraction of resources such as lumber, fish and furs were tied to economics and profit.

Very different from the colonial mindset that considers land and resources as commodities that can be purchased, sold and owned, is the Mi'kmaw's world view which is tied to their reciprocal, respectful, interconnected relationship with the land, place and nature. In *Living Treaties: Narrating Mi'kmaw Treaty Relations*, Marie Battiste (2016) reminds us that the Mi'kmaq do not consider land as property to be owned. Rather, land is inherently and holistically connected to who they are as a Nation and their way of life. Further to the point, Battiste (2016) argues that it is impossible to separate the Mi'kmaq from the land, they are so inextricably linked. This is reflected in Mi'kmaw constructs such as Msit No'kmaq and Netukulimk.

Chelsea Vowel (2016) critically examines what cultural appropriation means from an Indigenous viewpoint in, *Indigenous Writes: A Guide to First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Issues in Canada*. Vowel (2016) states that cultural appropriation is reinforced by settler ideology that has its foundation in appropriation of land and resources. Vowel (2016) describes appropriation of Indigenous culture to be steeped in the historical legacy of settler power and privilege that enables settlers to steal from Indigenous Peoples without repercussion. Vowel (2016) argues that cultural appropriation extends to the inappropriate adoption or use of Indigenous customs, practices, dress, ideas and so forth with little respect or recognition for their Indigenous origins. As a result, Vowel (2016) says the ability for settlers to appropriate Indigenous culture becomes a normalised practice in mainstream society.

On the other hand, Vowel (2016) observes that appreciation of Indigenous culture requires serious authentic responsibility and ethical engagement on the part of non-Indigenous peoples. Lastly, Vowel (2016) states that cultural appreciation is considered to be characterized by settler meaningful and informed engagement with Indigenous Peoples that must include acknowledgement and permission.

Anne Bishop's (2006) work, *Becoming an Ally: Breaking the Cycle of Oppression*, has been an excellent resource that I rely on for understanding my responsibility when participating in activities outside my own culture in respectful and appropriate ways. Bishop (2006) states that like the term Indigenous ally, cultural appreciation and cultural appropriation are as not as clear cut as they seem. Bishop (2006) asserts that the important thing to remember is that genuine relationship is necessary between settlers and Indigenous Peoples in order for appreciation and not appropriation to occur.

Since I was asked the question on how I understand cultural appropriation, I have been wrestling with cultural appropriation versus cultural appreciation and their intersections with settler power and privilege. I have used the portfolio process experience to help me better understand how settler power and privilege affect me personally and academically. The ability to be able to unsettle my settler privilege in the form of a PhD dissertation is, ironically, a privilege.

Fortunately, my recent educational journey has allowed me to be heavily engrossed in learning about Indigenous worldviews and receiving teachings from Mi'kmaw Elders about Mi'kmaw knowledge-based systems. These immense learning opportunities have guided my insight to better understand the difference between cultural appreciation and cultural appropriation. For example, I have followed the guidelines set out in *Indigenous Storywork: Educating the Heart, Mind, Body and Spirit* by Jo-ann Archibald Q'um Q'um Xiiem (2008) in attempt to be respectful when engaging in Indigenous culture and practices. I have paid particular attention to Archibald's (2008) storywork principles which include interrelatedness, holism, synergy, reciprocity, responsibility, reverence, and respect. The relationship between these concepts are at the heart of how I do research. These storywork principles are built on trust and genuine relationship between myself and the Mi'kmaw community. By practicing Archibald's work (2008) I have recognized that whenever I am participating in anything that has Mi'kmaw relevance or Indigenous significance, for that matter, I am responsible for understanding the responsibility of participating in a culture that is not my own and I must take responsibility for my actions. Within the local Mi'kmaw community, I have learned that cultural appreciation includes the establishment of deep reciprocal relationships, territorial acknowledgements, respecting the significance of Mi'kmaw culture, traditions such as regalia and supporting Mi'kmaw social and political interests such as Walking with Our Sisters and Stop Alton Gas.

This one single question asked by Dr. English has remained with me and has had a profound effect on my academic integrity. Therefore, I surmise it is a decisive piece of evidence of intellectual growth which I believe prepares me for movement onto the dissertation portion of the PhD program.

In-Depth Knowledge Competency

I feel very fortunate to be working on a book proposal with Elder Ellen Hunt. Like Elder Joe, she has become a mentor and dear friend. As an Elder, she has taken on the responsibility of documenting local Mi'kmaw culture, history and language in an attempt to preserve Mi'kmaw knowledge, their way of life and their stories. Her years of research have given her a high degree of understanding of the rich Mi'kmaw history and culture that exists in Lunenburg County. Elder Ellen said to me that publishing all the oral and written documentation that she has collected is a lifelong dream of hers. It is something that she knows, and feels is important, and she is excited that we are finally doing something about it! We are keeping our fingers crossed that a publishing company will accept the proposal. Elder Ellen has said that we will keep making changes to the proposal and keep submitting it to different publishing companies until someone wants to publish the work!

The “Book Proposal” submission, that I co-created with Mi'kmaw Elder Ellen, is an artifact that illustrates evidence of an original and creative contribution to research that supports the decolonization of colonial narratives. This is accomplished by privileging Mi'kmaw ways of knowing, such as Indigenous storytelling and practicing Indigenous allyship as methods to co-create socially just narratives for the public realm. Writing a book with an Elder validates the practice and use of decolonization theory, relationship and participatory action methodology as well as a unique way to foster Indigenous allyship and unsettling settler ideology. This artifact is an example of the researcher's understanding of what it means to be an Indigenous ally and how this relationship can be practiced in a scholarly way to enact social change. I have discussed with both my PhD Supervisor and Elder Ellen the possibility of publishing a book as an innovative venue for the PhD dissertation.

The “Literature Review Related to Dissertation Interests” and “Annotated Bibliography” artifacts focus on my specific research topic and interest in decolonization. They also represent the place where my research began, which was my master's thesis, which then evolved into early stages for my doctoral studies.

The title of my master's thesis is *Creating Space for Historical Narratives Through Indigenous Storywork and Unsettling the Settler*. The goal of this project was to contribute to the decolonization of education by demonstrating how the practice of Archibald's (2008) Indigenous storywork principles can be used as a pedagogical tool. When I wrote the Literature Review and Annotated Bibliography as assignments, for the Focused Educational Studies PhD course, my research question had changed slightly. The new query that guided my research concerns asked: *“How can the practice of Indigenous storywork be used as a pedagogical tool to support the decolonization of education across all educational levels by unsettling the settler?”*

Then when I submitted a grant application to Social Sciences Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) this fall, I further tweaked this dissertation question again. Currently my new question asks: *“How can privileging the Mi'kmaw voice and practicing Indigenous allyship support the decolonization of colonial narratives?”*

When I look at how my research question continues to evolve, I can see that it is directly related to my never-ending learning experiences that help refine where my dissertation is headed. This is especially true as I begin to grasp what I have learned from the local Mi'kmaw community,

Elders, Mi'kmaw educators and friends who are Mi'kmaw. Examples of experiential based learning which have influenced my scholarly maturation include writing a book proposal with Elder Ellen, volunteering on the Mahone Bay Museum decolonizing committee, helping create an Indigenous garden at MSVU, teacher assisting with Dr. Sharpe, co-presenting at conferences with Elder Joe, and taking a Mi'kmaw language course, to name a few.

Essential to this learning process is that I practice Indigenous allyship, build genuine relationships and follow Wilson's (2008) notion of relational accountability. By taking an active approach in learning and privileging Mi'kmaw knowledge-based systems I am following Regan's (2010) views on decolonization of self in her work, *Unsettling the Settler Within: Indian Residential Schools, Truth Telling, and Reconciliation in Canada*. Regan (2010) suggests that decolonization and reconciliation will be successful only when settlers begin unsettling colonial ideology within themselves.

Research and Knowledge Competency

I believe the paper on "Ethical Responsibility and Considerations when Conducting Indigenous Research as a non-Indigenous Researcher", is an excellent choice as an artifact that demonstrates critical analysis of current research and methodological issues. This work scrutinizes how researchers, including myself, are held accountable to both the Mi'kmaw Ethics Watch as well as the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans. This work examines the depth of involvement of research that is needed from both an Indigenous and western perspective when conducting Indigenous research. This artifact shows the researchers' ability to critically analyze ethics principles from an Indigenous and western point of view and demonstrate the delicate balance that is needed to work within these different research realms. This paper investigates various ethical concerns such as a researcher's obligations, central features of ethical protocol, methodological points of intersection and departure and ethical challenges when working in both Indigenous and mainstream research.

In many ways the paper on ethics prepared me to be competent to defend the portfolio portion of the program. As a researcher with settler roots, thinking about how to approach ethics from an Indigenous and western perspective has helped me be more critical than ever about how to work with and among the Mi'kmaw. This work helped me further understand that in all aspects of this educational endeavour I am ethically bound to honouring and practicing Indigenous constructs such as Bartlett, Marshall and Marshall's (2012) Two-Eyed-Seeing, Wilson's (2008) Relational Accountability, Archibald's (2008) Indigenous Storywork and the Mi'kmaw understanding of Msit 'No Kmaq and Thinking Seven Generations Ahead. In many ways this paper helped me organize my many tangled scholarly thoughts into a coherent thought process that better supports my dissertation interests.

The introduction of "Conversational Mi'kmaw For Non-speakers: Level I" at MSVU was the first time that Mi'kmaw language was taught at MSVU. As an active participant in the class I had an opportunity to write a subjective writing piece that was an original and creative contribution to the MSVU Modern Language Department. As a result of this rich learning opportunity, I was able to draw countless connections to the importance of learning how to speak Mi'kmaw and the

Mi'kmaw language itself when conducting research with and among the Mi'kmaq. Therefore, I felt it was important to include this experience as an artifact.

As a settler, who practices Indigenous research with and among the Mi'kmaq, I feel that learning their language is integral to the whole research process. Ethically, I have a responsibility to honour how the Mi'kmaq interpret the world especially when it relates to research. Battiste (2016) argues that western research practices are very different from Indigenous world views. Battiste (2016) says this is in part because Eurocentric and Indigenous world views interact and understand their environment differently and therefore they have different realities.

Wilson (2008) defined the construct of relational accountability in order to help researchers better grasp the holistic relationship between all aspects of Indigenous ways of life and Indigenous research. Learning how to speak Mi'kmaq holds me accountable to the sacred relationships between Mi'kmaw language, knowledge-based systems, land as pedagogy, culture and its influence on research. Becoming actively involved in the Mi'kmaw language enabled me to practice and experience the holistic relationship that the Mi'kmaq have with research and is an example that demonstrates how Wilson' (2008) research paradigm can be put into practice.

Both the ethics and Mi'kmaw language artifacts exemplify Marie Battiste's (2016) notion of indigenizing the academy. In her work *Visioning a Mi'kmaw Humanities: Indigenizing the Academy*, Battiste (2016) inspires educators to privilege Indigenous world views in academic settings so that education is multi-disciplinary, socially just and supports the collective dignity of the Mi'kmaw Peoples. Indigenizing the academy across all levels of academia is the essence of my own research interests.

The artifact labelled "Scrutinizing the Colonial Legacy of Canadian residential Schools using Foucauldian Analysis (Introduction and Bibliography only)" is an illustration of my scholarly effort to use western educational theory to understand the colonial legacy of Canadian residential schools. The purpose of this paper was to use a Foucauldian (1995) theoretical framework to critically analyse the history, purpose, operation and supervision of the Canadian residential school system.

The inspiration for this work came when I was required to read *Discipline and Punish, The Birth Place of the Prison* by Michel Foucault (1995) for the PhD Contemporary Educational Theory GEDU 9003 course. When reading this text, I immediately began to draw parallels to the institution of residential schools in Canada and its similarities to Foucault's (1995) understanding of the function of a prison. As I further grasped Foucault's (1995) work, it became foundational to my understanding of how the Canadian colonial mindset is a structure of power used to secure land and resources. This is further connected to the erasure and or assimilation of Indigenous Peoples living in the settler state of Canada. This particular work of Foucault (1995) made clearer how the intersections between hegemonic structures, institutional mentality, dominant discourses and knowledge production are used to suppress certain narratives in order to support a Eurocentric sociopolitical society. When it came time to decide on a final paper for this course it made sense to use Foucault's (1995) contemporary educational theory to help decolonize my Eurocentric knowledge about residential schools.

I also must confess I sometimes find Foucauldian (1995) theory difficult to understand. None the less, by following the chapter outlines in *Discipline and Punish, The Birth Place of the Prison*, I had a road map and way to help organize my thoughts about the parallels I was discovering between the operation of residential schools and how hegemonic structures are set up with the intention of assimilation and control and subjectification of Indigenous Peoples.

It is very important to mention that I wrote this paper to help me better grasp the colonial historical legacy of Canadian residential schools which the Truth and Reconciliation Calls to Action (Government of Canada, 2015) has mandated that all non-Indigenous Canadians must do. Regan (2010) states that decolonization of settler ideology requires settlers to learn about, and be uncomfortable with, the legacy of Canadian residential schools and the devastating impacts on the original peoples of what is now Canada.

I do think it is important to include this work as an artifact because it demonstrates a creative way that I explored how an educational philosophy and theory (Foucault) can be used for contemporary educational research debates and dialogues on the topic of Canadian residential schools. As a result of using Foucault (1995) to understand the relationship between colonial dominant discourse and residential schools, I feel I have become familiar with contemporary educational theory within Canadian and international contexts.

I only included the Introduction and Bibliography from this research paper as I never intended this work to be for the public. As well, in consultation with my PhD Supervisor, we decided not to include the entire paper as it is quite lengthy and wanted to be sensitive to the overall amount of material to read in the portfolio.

Professional and Collegial Competency

This is my second year applying to the Social Sciences Humanities Research Council (SSHRC). “The Program of Study and Curriculum Vitae” portion of the 2018 SSHRC grant application is an example of a proposal for funding to a recognized granting council and therefore has been included as an artifact in my portfolio. Like my research question that has evolved over the past year, this year’s application is different from last year’s submission. It is another example of how my dissertation interests are constantly, developing and taking shape which is a result of serious academic growth. The Curriculum Vitae (CV) portion of this artifact demonstrates the professional and collegial competency portfolio area. Upon viewing my CV, it can be observed that I have had an opportunity to present at conferences locally, regionally, nationally and internationally. This academic setting has provided me with rich opportunities for dialogue and discussion with other scholars who have similar research interests as mine. This is especially true when co-presenting with Elder Joe. When reviewing my CV, it is easy to get a sense of my active professional engagement in a variety of contexts such as education, work and volunteer experience and different conference proceedings.

The artifact called “Mahone Bay Settlers Museum Narrative Piece” discusses my recent involvement with the Mahone Bay Museum and demonstrates evidence of significant contribution to a community-based organization. This reflection is also a potential article for a journal submission. As well, the Call for Paper Proposal that I submitted to the 2019 National

CASAE conference in Vancouver on this topic was accepted. The title of the presentation and paper is *Privileging the Mi'kmaw Voice and Practicing Indigenous Allyship in Supporting the Decolonization of Local Museum Practices*. This artifact is an example of how I am using my research interests and academic competency in a participatory community setting to support decolonization and indigenization of education.

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 the 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. Dr. Sharpe and I have discussed that the work I am doing with the local Mi'kmaw community and Mahone Bay Museum has the potential to turn into my PhD dissertation. This is an example of professional and collegial competence that is a unique venue for publication that connects the essence of my overall research interests.

The artifact called "CBC: Ideas from the Trenches Series Submission" is a piece I sent into the CBC to be considered in their series with PhD students called "Ideas from the Trenches. This work describes what inspired my PhD interests, my area of study, the focus of the PhD and why I think it would appeal to a national audience. I also outlined a few of the key theorists, authors and concepts that my PhD work explores and challenges. The scholarly article that I submitted to the CBC, for a radio series, is an example of professional and collegial investment in my work and shows a genuine interest to share what I am learning with the public.

Teaching and Instructional Competency

The "Teaching Assistant Reflection" is a Reflective Narrative on the assistant teaching position I did with Dr. Sharpe last year for of an undergraduate/graduate Indigenous curriculum course that he was teaching. Included in this artifact is an Annotated Bibliography that I created as a resource for the class to use. My responsibility as an educational leader included teaching, mentoring and advising students from the perspective of a Mi'kmaw Indigenous ally educator. Therefore, this artifact shows personal and intellectual growth in understanding the role and responsibility I have, as a non-Indigenous educator and decolonizing and indigenizing education in Mi'kma'ki.

The *Grow Old Along with Me: The Meaning of Dogs in Seniors' Lives Companionship* project was truly an amazing study that I had the pleasure of working on. The principal researcher for this research project was Dr. Ardra Cole. She hired me and three other graduate students to work collaboratively to try and understand/describe the relationship between canines and their human senior companions. I come from a long family tradition of dog lovers, dog trainers, dog behaviour experts, countless canine companions and senior family members whose dog (s) are a significant part of their lives. Therefore, it came as no surprise that I easily connected with the

deep bond that exists between dogs and older adults and understood the importance of this research project.

The five different public displays of our research exhibit enabled individuals to acquire an awareness and better understand the inherent value of interspecies relationships and the significance of the dog/human relationship. By showcasing our work in this unique way as Arts-based instruction, the public were able to grasp the special bond between older owners and their dogs. When it came time to choose artifacts for the PhD portfolio it was obvious I would include this research and experience.

However, I had a number of conundrums when considering how to include this “Phenomenological Study on Canine Companionship” in the portfolio. At first glance, someone might question how studying older adults and their canine companions is related to my interests in decolonization and Mi’kmaw ways of knowing and how does it contribute to and reflect my doctoral intellectual progress and learning? Further, how can this research experience help advance and contribute to my dissertation question that asks: *“How can privileging the Mi’kmaw voice and practicing Indigenous allyship support the decolonization of colonial narratives?”* The easiest way to reflect on these questions is to walk through some of my recent scholarly revelations that connect this research endeavour with my own research interests.

Vowel’s (2016) work has influenced my ability to find clarity where my doctoral studies are headed. Vowel (2016) has the beautiful ability to use storytelling, conversation, document analysis and hard data to get her points across. Vowel (2016) weaves these components into a critical coherent narrative to teach Canadians (especially settlers) about their dominant colonial history from an Indigenous lens. From Vowel’s (2016) work, I have gained a sense of my settler privilege and its relationship to violence against Indigenous peoples. Vowel’s (2016) book has validated my doctoral work, the need to practice Indigenous allyship, build and restore present day relationships that inform Indigenous-Canadian relations in an effort to co-create socially narratives together.

An example of a lesser known piece of Canada’s history that Vowel (2016) poignantly describes was the horrific atrocity that happened to the *qimmiit* (Inuit sled dog) that occurred in the Qikiqtani (Baffin) region. Known by the Inuit as the *qimmiijaqtauniq* or mass dog slaughter, Vowel (2016, p.193) states that the RCMP denied that the killing of qimmiit was an intentional, organized extermination and claimed that the qimmiit “were killed for the sake of public health.”

The first time I had heard about the dog slaughter was during, *The Massey Lecture Series: Finding A Path Forward*, at the Halifax Library this fall. The feature author was Tanya Talaga (2017) whose work, *Seven Fallen Feathers: Racism, Death, and Hard Truths in a Northern City* was the recent recipient of the 2018 RBC Taylor Prize. I was immediately dumbstruck by what Talaga (2017) was telling us and still find it incomprehensible that an estimated 20,000 dogs or more were killed over a 20-year period by the RCMP.

Similar to Vowel (2016), Talaga (2017) gets across to her audience the profound relationships that existed between the Inuit, their dogs, their culture, their way of life and the land. Talaga (2017) says that the Inuit and their communities who lost their sled dogs, because of the dog

slaughter, lost their traditional way of life. Talaga (2017) says that this is because of the interconnectedness that the Inuit and their qimmiit had with hunting and deep connections to the land.

Vowel (2016, p.195) reveals how the *qimmiijaqtauniq* was tied to the geopolitical interests of the Canadian government to secure sovereignty in the remote northern regions of Canada during the Cold War era as well as resource extraction prospects. Vowel (2016) demonstrates how the Inuit were forced to move to permanent settlements without consent. Following the results of an Inuit investigation called *The Qikiqtani Truth Commission* (QTC) report, Vowel (2016, p. 195) exposes how the *qimmiijaqtauniq* “disrupted the relationship between the Inuit and qimmiit” which “forced the Inuit to remain in permanent settlements without the possibility of ever returning to their traditional way of life.”

Vowel (2016) observes, that since the QTC report honoured Inuit ways of knowing, storytelling was used to describe the relationship and immense importance of the *qimmiit* with virtually every aspect of Inuit culture. Vowel (2016) portrays the chronicles told by the Inuit that describe the significant relationships between themselves and their beloved dogs. Vowel (2016) notes that the qimmiit were so essential to the Inuit in every conceivable way that it is difficult for many people to understand. Consequently, Vowel (2016) argues that since the qimmiit were so paramount to the Inuit, the *qimmiijaqtauniq* has resulted in devastating harm to their communities and has changed their lives forever.

For many reasons, this tragic loss of the qimmiit and the Inuit’s way of life has remained with me. To begin with, this is another example of how the Canadian dominant narrative ignores and attempts to erase the perspective of Indigenous Peoples, in this case the Inuit of Qikiqtani. As Vowel (2016) puts it, when Canadian officials authorized the RCMP to kill the dogs then effectively no (settler) laws were broken so the narrative became justified and accepted by non-Indigenous Peoples. What is staggering to realize is that neither the Canadian government or legal authorities considered the importance of the dog from the Inuit perspective and the devastating impacts that the slaughter caused to their way of life.

The story about the *qimmiijaqtauniq* is an example of Regan’s (2010) assertion that if reconciliation is ever going to occur then settlers must learn and honour the difficult counter narratives of their colonial history from an Indigenous point of view. When this narrative is told from an Inuit worldview an unsavoury picture is painted of Canadian history and replaced with a socially just version. This story is an example of how Regan (2010) proposes settlers can take responsibility for decolonization of themselves and their country. Regan (2010) suggests that it is not enough for settlers to just learn about their colonial history and its legacy, if significant political and social change is ever going to happen in Canada. Regan (2010) states that words must be accompanied by action. This action speaks directly to Bishop’s (2006) understanding of what it means to practice Indigenous allyship in her work *Becoming an ally: Breaking the Cycle of Oppression in People*. This is the essence of my research interest to genuinely learn about my colonial history from a Mi’kmaw point of view and then find various ways to disseminate these counter narratives to the public for transformational learning.

When I learned about the death of the Inuit's beloved qimmiit, I could not help but draw connections to the study our team had recently completed, with Dr. Cole, on the importance of canines and the lives of older adults. The Inuit and their qimmiit are another example of the deep dog/human relationship that occurs and exemplifies that humans see their dogs as more than just pets and companions. Like the seniors we interviewed, the Inuit have a respect and reverence for the interconnected synergy that exists between themselves and their dogs and is understood to be fundamental to their overall wellbeing. I wondered when the Inuit told their stories, about their relationship with their qimmiit, would similar predominate themes that immerged in our research also be present? Or were our English descriptions of Beloved Attachment, Unconditional Love, Steadfast Friendship, and Joyful Responsibility, actually be rich enough in context, to adequately describe the holistic relationships that the Inuit shared with their qimmiit, culture and place?

The study completed by Miho Nagasawa, Kazutaka Mogi, Takefumi Kikusui (2009), *Attachment Between Humans and Dogs*, examines the psychological and social components of the dog/human relationship. Nagasawa et al. (2009, p.211) state that "Dogs have undoubtedly established a niche for themselves in human society, as companion animals that are closest to and the most loved by humans." Further, Nagasawa et al. (2009, p.211) affirm, that "Ever since the domestication of dogs was achieved, humans have developed a close/cooperative relationship with them." Both these statements by Nagasawa et al. (2009), speak to the immense dog/human bond that was found in our phenomenological study on seniors' and their dogs as well as the Inuit and their qimmiit. In fact, Vowel's (2016) account of the Inuit, the qimmiijaqtauniq and how this impacted the Inuit way of life, illustrates the profoundness of the interspecies relationship and its connections to something outside the human being.

Historically, both the Inuit and seniors share a commonality of being dehumanized and not being valued within Canadian society. Vowel (2016) has shown how the Inuit were forcibly relocated and then abandoned to remote northern parts of Canada and used as human flagpoles to assert territorial claims. When the Canadian government took this action, they placed little or no value on the interconnectedness between the Inuit cultural values, qimmiit, and their inherent relationships to their territory and land.

Like the Inuit, older adults are often viewed with less importance by Canadian societal structures and therefore dehumanized and devalued. In *Encyclopedia of Ageism*, authors Erdman Palmore, Lawrence Branch, Diane Harris (2016) give eye-opening examples of the negative impacts of discrimination against the elderly. Palmore et al.'s (2016) work, exposes the many faces of dehumanization of elder neglect and prejudice that is a result of world views that value youthfulness over being old.

What is interesting is the correlation that I drew between one of the purposes of the Inuit led report, known as the qimmiijaqtauniq (QTC), and our research on seniors and canines. Both studies honoured the voices of different Canadian citizens whose stories often go unnoticed and therefore are undervalued and seen as less important. By the QTC report privileging the Inuit world view and by our research honouring older adults' points of view, the profound relationship between humans and dogs and its narrative was given valuable consideration. Finally, the *Grow Old Along with Me: The Meaning of Dogs in Seniors' Lives* project and my doctoral interests

have allowed me to study what I am passionate about and allow me to be me and for that I am both humbled and ever grateful.

Final Thoughts

One of the purposes of the PhD program is to provide Nova Scotia-based educational leadership which promotes a climate of education-related research and advanced study to develop human resources in the Atlantic region. The intention behind this aim is to lead advanced research in educational studies in the province of Nova Scotia and across broader contexts. From the beginning, my masters and now doctoral endeavours are interested in enacting socially just educational initiatives throughout the unceded territory of the Mi'kmaq (Mi'kma'ki) which includes Nova Scotia. This research is directly linked to the Nova Scotia Treaty Education Initiative which is a partnership between Mi'kmaw educators, the Nova Scotia Department of Education, and other interested parties. It is a formal commitment, across all levels of education. Its purpose is to increase knowledge and understanding of treaties and the treaty relationships that exist as well as the roles these treaties played in the development of Atlantic Canada.

From an educational perspective, I believe this work supports conversation about shared treaty relationship among the Mi'kmaq and settlers and their collaboration for the future prosperity of the province. Ultimately, I hope to develop educational content and experiences that are mindful, ethical, and culturally relevant and that create space for a change in the mainstream consciousness of both Nova Scotians and all Canadians.

Finally, when I read Bishop's (2006) chapter called "Morality, Duty and Being True to Yourself" it became further affirmation for why I am pursuing a PhD. This new educational journey has allowed me to become closer to what Bishop (2006) coins as "my authentic self." Through my newest research interests, this sense of who I am has become heightened in maintaining that humans are indeed connected to something larger than themselves. This has been confirmed by Mi'kmaw ways of knowing such as Msit 'No kmaq which demonstrates the cooperative and respectful relationships between all life, as well as rocks, water, earth, air, fire and the cosmos. In conclusion, the portfolio narrative and artifacts serve as confirmation of my significant intellectual growth since entering the PhD program.