

Conference Call for Paper - Proposal for 2018 Decolonizing Conference

Title: How can the Practice of Indigenous allyship support Socially Just Narratives Among the Mi'kmaq and Settlers?

Key Words: Relationship, Decolonization, Indigenous Storywork, Indigenous ally, Two-Eyed seeing

Question: How can Indigenous Storywork foster relationship building between the Mi'kmaq and settlers to support the co-creation of socially just historical narratives?

This paper presentation will demonstrate how Indigenous allyship can be used to open the door for non-Indigenous Peoples, mainly descendants of colonial settlers, to become allies with Indigenous Peoples by “restorying,” or retelling the historical narratives that have dominated the official view of the region’s history from an Indigenous perspective.

By gathering historical perspectives from local Elders, in combination with document analysis, this technique introduced decolonized space for the inclusion of the history and narrative of the L’nu or Mi’kmaw in Mi’kma’ki. This work serves as an example for other non-Indigenous Peoples on how to build relationships with Indigenous Peoples like the Mi’kmaq and demonstrates how settlers can support their local Indigenous community. This study provides a tool for educators interested in beginning the decolonizing process for themselves, their students, classrooms, school, community and so forth.

This study aligns with Indigenous scholar Marie Battiste’s (2016a, 2016b, 2016) work in an attempt to decolonize education, which recognizes and affirms the historical, cultural, and political diversity of Indigenous Canadians whose voices have not been heard. This research follows Elder Albert Marshall’s guiding principles known as “Two Eyes Seeing” for inter/trans/cross-cultural work. A key element, which respects Indigenous research methodology, is honouring Jo Ann Archibald’s (2008) Indigenous Storywork principles of respect, reverence, reciprocity, responsibility, holism, synergy, and interrelatedness.

By disrupting this colonial fabrication, a more balanced socially just story emerges and creates ethical understanding. Through Indigenous epistemology, truth and reconciliation become transformational approaches for liberation, emancipatory growth and insight for both the Mi’kmaw People and non-Indigenous Peoples living in Mi’kma’ki.

CIARS Decolonizing Conference 2018 - Summary of Conference Presentation

This was the second time that Elder Joe Michael “Elder Joe” and I had an opportunity to present at a conference together. This particular conference was held at the University of Toronto through the Centre for Integrative Anti-Racism Studies (CIARS) which is part of the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OSIE).

This was the 11th decolonizing conference that CIARS has held. The theme for this year’s conference was “Dialoguing and Living Well Together: Decolonization and Insurgent Voices”. The overall goal of the conference was to further understand what decolonization means by exploring the intersections of living well together, outside of White mythology (in Derrida’s terms) and the capitalist paradigm.

Speakers, presenters and audience members were asked to consider the following questions: How can we bring non-Western epistemologies to a terrain that has existed through a long-exercised White Mythology? What Indigenous experiences speak to the possibility of living well together in new futures? What additional dimensions of the above can be gleaned from the constant mobility of bodies, identities, subjectivities and relations?

Since Elder Joe and I had little time to prepare for the conference together, I created an initial draft power point presentation and rough outline without his input. The night before our presentation we reviewed what I had put together. Elder Joe gently suggested a number of changes to the presentation.

One of the changes that Elder Joe made was to share a little bit about himself with the audience, this included how his son, who is a lawyer, uses the principles of Two-Eyed Seeing (Etuaptmumk) created by Albert Marshall in 2004. This Indigenous research methodology is a type of Mi’kmaw epistemology that celebrates an integrative co-learning journey between Mi’kmaw Peoples ways of knowing and other world views. Elder Joe says by using Two-Eyed Seeing (Bartlett, Marshall, Marshall, 2012), his son is able to work effectively following Mi’kmaw practices, while working a Eurocentric world.

As we continued to go over our presentation, I could sense that Elder Joe was being polite and slightly hesitant about suggesting further changes. I said: “Joe you are in charge here! We can change whatever you want. This is not about me and what I think I know, this is about what you as an Elder feel is important for us to share at a conference on decolonization.” There was a long pause and then Elder Joe replied, “Are you sure about that?” Then in his humble and gentle way, Elder Joe explained that what I had created was different from what he would do. I think his words were something like: “It is too colonial!” So, we started over at the beginning. We walked through each slide, and either made a change or deleted the slide entirely and replaced it with something Elder Joe thought was better suited to portray knowledge from a Mi’kmaw world view.

As a researcher, who is trying to practice Indigenous allyship, it was important that I honour Elder Joe’s ability to share his knowledge and wisdom and use storytelling to teach lessons about what decolonization means from a Mi’kmaw perspective. The point of our presentation was to

decolonize how normal conference proceedings are done and place an Elder, not a PhD student, at the centre of the presentation. I understand my role as a researcher, working in an Indigenous realm, is to facilitate respectful ways that honour and privilege Mi'kmaw knowledge-based systems, culture and history. I believe that Elder Joe and I were able to accomplish this during our presentation proceedings.

We finished with a Talking Circle, which of course went overtime, but no one seemed to mind. Afterwards, many of the audience members lingered as they had further questions for Elder Joe. As a result of our presentation, new friendships instantly developed. A group of us decided to head out for dinner together and continue our discussion on decolonization, Indigenous allyship, using socially just stories as tools for reconciliation, and other various topics.

During this conference, I had the unique opportunity of spending four days with a Mi'kmaw Elder, which is an experience I will cherish forever. When I look back at the phenomenal experience that "Elder Joe" and I shared I really don't know where to begin. Our time together was filled with constant teachings and lessons from the moment we met at the airport until we returned home. I had the humble honour of spending an extended period of time with Elder Joe and witnessing his point of view while travelling to and attending the conference in Toronto.

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