

# Summary Report

Atlantic Indigenous Mentorship Network Kausattumi Grants Program, 2022-2023

STARLIT SIMON, PHD IN EDUCATION

*Exploring Two-Eyed Seeing (Etuaptmumk) through art production to facilitate healing with Mi'kmaq youth in digital and physical spaces.*

***Description of Research***

The purpose of the research is to use Etuaptmumk as a guiding principle to engage Indigenous youth in land-based art in physical spaces and facilitate discourse in digital spaces, and to determine if it nurtures healing and wellbeing. Will the combination of land-based art engagement combined with digital engagement (traditional and western) help to enhance healing and wellbeing amongst Indigenous youth? The community I intend to do this research with is my home community of Elsipogtog First Nation. The literacy I have with Mi'kmaw language I attribute to my family and community members and by having a strong sense of Mi'kmaw language knowledge, it was easier to build upon that, a cultural, ceremonial, and traditional art knowledge, because of how much our traditional ways of life tied into our language. These traditional knowledges were passed on to me by Elsipogtog Elders and community members and it is my duty and desire to partake in the spirit of reciprocity that is custom to Indigenous ways of being and bring this to Indigenous youth in my community as a potential means for them to find the healing that I received in these ways, and that they so deserve.

The objectives of my research are:

1. To measure whether the combination of land based and in person activities can contribute to creating and strengthening of the Traditional lens.
2. In what ways can we use digital spaces and the Western lens that youth are familiar with; and
3. To encourage and nurture self-awareness, strengthen cultural and community connection, and establish peer support and unity.

Perhaps this formula strengthens community/peer support and establishes a sense of health and wellbeing. The oppressive nature of the Indian Act has bred and threatens our communities by nurturing lateral violence, which is why strengthening community/peer support is vital for our communities to repair from the harms of the Indian Act, and starting with youth could be where that healing begins.

Through working with the land, I've naturally had to slow down my life, to match the energy of the land. As a result, my mind and body have been given the space and time to allow past traumas to surface to be dealt with properly. I have inadvertently found myself going through stages of healing. I also had glimpses of this with my students in my Mi'kmaw language class as well where many told me how much the on-the-land classes felt like a sigh of relief from all the heaviness and high stress expectations in their lives. The impact of healing that the land provides us has become clearer and clearer as I continue to nurture this magical relationship. In my Instagram, TikTok and Facebook posts, I often share language, a lesson, or a resource on how/what I am doing on the land. This tends to pique the

interest of people around Wapana'ki and can be a safe space for digital discourse. This has informed my desire to also include the Western (digital) lens in my research as well.

While I will be using PVR (participatory visual research) methods, I am also exploring the idea of creating my own methodology by using the method of harvesting porcupine quills as informing how I will harvest information. Through the act of harvesting porcupine quills, there is a process that occurs, where the physical act of harvesting then activates a meditative state that engages the mind to relax. As this continues, the spirit is activated, a sort of visceral experience occurs where ideas and epiphanies to deal with experiences that have been weighing on the spirit start to resolve, it is then that the emotional self has a release of something that has been pent up. In this way all quadrants of the self – the physical, mental, spiritual, emotional are engaged. By recognizing this, it has only further enhanced my belief of how important it is to have a relationship to the land and why land-based activities & art is so important. Given the painful history of Indigenous people and researchers extracting and not giving back to the community and to the peoples, this will be a way to show how harvesting porcupine quills is harvesting information, burying the carcass and being in ceremony with it is honouring the pain that could emerge from that harvesting, but then cleaning, sorting, and taking care of the quills, to then create art with them is how this process gives back to the people to the community and how art creation and land based art creation is what nurtures the wounds and establishes some element of healing and wellbeing. Perhaps the methodology itself then becomes the conduit to healing. While I am still workshopping some of this, I want to create something unique to me, my community and to this specific research that will feel intuitive, respectful, and reciprocal for everyone involved. Having the porcupine and the method of harvesting quills as a frame of visual reference could give participants and community members a better awareness and sense of what they are partaking in and how that research can look.

### ***Research Outcomes***

Thus far the research outcomes for my research project have been to familiarize myself more with land-based art forms and eco art. I have done this by partaking in local workshops that were three to six hours in length on basket making, clay sculpting, and fish skin leather. I have also travelled to Montreal to partake in a nine-day long workshop where I got to observe and partake in fleshing, stretching and smoking moose and deer hides as well as plucking and torching geese. Through these workshops, I have gained insight into the ways in which short- and long-term workshopping can be facilitated. Additionally, I've been able to see how urban settings make these workshops far more possible. This has helped me to recognize that the setting I wish to facilitate my research (in a rural First Nation community) may be very different, in terms of logistics, support, and community dynamics.

In the urban settings I have been a part of through Mawi'Art in Fredericton New Brunswick and the Buckskin Babes Hide Camp in Montreal, Quebec the participants all come from a range of different

First Nation communities. In these settings, what is not there is the shared community history. Within a close-knit rural community there can be a good and supportive shared history but where it has potential to become problematic is if the history is a shared problematic history where family or community divisions could hinder the willingness of participants to partake in workshops. I need to very much keep this in mind – the dynamics will be different when/if I do research within a rural First Nation community when compared to workshops that will be similar in structure, but that I partook in, in urban settings/spaces where the shared history (good or bad) does not exist.

Another observation I have had that is beneficial to my research, is the witnessing of the community that comes together, works together, and learns together through conversations that occur organically while partaking in the land based/eco-art workshops. Thus far Indigenous languages always end up being something that is shared in these spaces. Similarities, comparisons, pronunciations, root knowledge of words, etc. have been common in all of the spaces I have been able to partake in and it enriches the experience. Everyone gets excited to learn, even just small tidbits of language information. Where Indigenous languages have been targeted so severely through colonial methods, I think there is an excitement rooted in ancestral blood memory to share these lessons with one another, or perhaps for those with language anxiety to simply bask in and soak up the knowledge that comes from the excited chatter around our sacred languages. While I knew that language was going to organically come up within my research with Indigenous youth, I think these experiences have confirmed more concretely that language needs to be threaded throughout the lessons on the land, and while we create and discuss together as we share space.

My expected research outcomes in the coming year will be to understand what gaps and benefits there are around health and wellness needs for rural on-reserve Indigenous youth from the perspectives of community supports and program professionals.

### ***Knowledge Sharing***

- **Simon, S.** (In press). Title. In C. Burkholder, J. Schwab-Cartas & F. Aladejebi (Eds). *Facilitating visual socialities: Processes, complications, and ethical practices*. Springer. Experiential and Land Based Learning of Wapana'ki Language, Culture and Art and Worldviews - Piquing Interest and Accessibility through Digital Archiving.
- **Simon, S.** & Burkholder, C. (Accepted). Resilience and solidarity building on Instagram: Exploring art, activism, and participatory analysis with Indigenous peoples and 2SLGBTQ+ youth in the Wabanaki Confederacy. *Exploring the human story: Arts-based approaches to qualitative inquiry in educational studies*. Routledge.
- **Simon, S.** (2023) *Opinion: The Passive Contributions of Dehumanization*. Arts NB.
- <https://artsnb.ca/web/2023/02/opinion-the-passive-contributions-of-dehumanization/>
- **Simon, S.** (2023, April). "Resistance, Reciprocity, Relationality & Roadkill" *Artful Inquiry Research Group*. Montreal, Quebec.

- **Simon, S.** (2023, May). “Experiential and Land Based Learning of Wapana’ki Language, Culture, Art and Worldviews - Piquing Interest and Accessibility through Digital Archiving”, *CSSE*. Toronto Ontario.
- **Simon, S.** (2022). *Reciprocity, Resistance & Roadkill*. Atlantic Arts Symposium. Saint John, New Brunswick.
- The Gradosphere. (2023, February 7). *SGS Celebrates Graduate Student Winners of Federal Tri-Council Awards – Starlit Simon*. <https://blogs.unb.ca/graduatestudies/2023/02/sgs-celebrates-graduate-student-winners-of-federal-tri-council-awards---starlit-simon.php>

### ***Completed Project Deliverables***

- I partook in four eco-art workshops – carving/making our own paddles, clay pottery making, ash basket weaving, and salmon skin leather making, as well as one art/craft workshop in beading skills.
- Connecting with and being part of art workshops featuring eco-art allowed me to connect with Indigenous Elders and youth I did not previously know and to enhance connections with those I did.
- I attended three “crafternoons” where no facilitation was taking place, but community crafters gathered at MawiArts location to craft/create together and where lots of conversations occurred around sharing each other’s Indigenous languages, discussing current issues Indigenous people face, and sharing lots of laughs. Community building was had.
- To further enhance my connection to land based art making, I partook in a week long workshop in Montreal for an urban hide camp with the organization “Buckskin Babes” where I partook and observed lessons in how to break down, flesh, scrape, stretch and smoke a moose hide, make jewelry out of salmon bones, boil down moose hooves, soak and stretch deer hide, pluck and torch goose alongside Indigenous people from various nations.
- I partook in two conferences, in Montreal and Toronto, and have published two articles. One is still in press.
- I have been in four art exhibits this past year. This has been the first time I’ve ever been part of exhibits, and am learning what this experience is like, what it entails and is informing what this could potentially look like for the Indigenous youth I will working with on this research, where a component of it is to display in community their own eco art creations.
- I completed the first draft of first comprehensive exam on September 12<sup>th</sup>, 2023.

### ***Forthcoming Project Deliverables***

- Complete edits on first comprehensive exam.
- Complete second and third comprehensive exams.
- Work through ideas on how to create my own methodology using the porcupine quill and the harvesting of porcupines as my guide for how I facilitate research and inquiry with First Nations youth.
- Write and submit my PhD proposal.
- Submit to various ethic boards within UNB and Mi’kma’ki.
- Submit a proposal to the 41<sup>st</sup> International Visual Sociology Association Conference on Visual Accountability in Xalapa, Mexico.
- Submit an abstract to the Australian Journal of Indigenous Education with the hope of publishing a third article that will add to my final dissertation.

### ***Activities Outside of Your Research***

- **Simon, S.** (2023). [Multiple Art Pieces]. Napoigagnn. Sunbury Shores Arts and Nature Centre. Saint Andrews, New Brunswick.

- **Simon, S.** (2023). [Multiple Art Pieces]. Napoigagann. Andrew & Laura McCain Art Gallery. Florenceville, New Brunswick.
- **Simon, S.** (2023). Wabanaki Artist Collective, Cross Cultural Creation Residency.
- **Simon, S.** (2023). “*Samkwan*”. Water Day Art Exhibit. UNB Art Centre. Fredericton, New Brunswick.
- **Simon, S.** (2022). “*Ankweywitew Matues*”. Wayfinding Art Exhibit. Saint John Arts Centre, New Brunswick.
- **Simon, S.** (2023). *Arts NB Equinox Art Creation Award*.

### ***Future Plans***

I have almost completed the edits of my first comprehensive exam. Having a better understanding for how to organize my citations and sources for information after this first one I believe will make the rest of this degree much smoother. I’ve struggled with having a background in creative nonfiction and journalism and not having much understanding of the academic sourcing and citations and organizing information. It has been difficult, but I am seeing the growth and development of my understanding of doing academic research. In order to not abandon my creative side and not isolate myself too much with this work, I like to try and establish an even balance of time spent on the land and in community, enhancing my language, harvesting, land-based skills, and doing that in equal amounts of time if not more time than what I spend in front of a screen.

To align with what I think Etuaptmumk means for me and for Indigenous people I think it is important that I try to strengthen this lens. This lens will be what is most important when working on my research with participants (Indigenous youth).