

# Summary Report

Atlantic Indigenous Mentorship Network Kausattumi Grants Program, 2021-2022

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*Revitalizing Mi'kmaq ways of knowing and being through Land based education****Description of Research***

My research goal is to work with one Mi'kmaq community to develop a land-based education program rooted in Mi'kmaw language and culture and then explore the impact of such education on Mi'kmaw learners. The purpose of this study is to reverse the continuing legacy of colonization and decolonize science education through land-based pedagogical practices that are embedded in Mi'kmaw language and cultural knowledge.

Creating a model of land-based education rooted in Mi'kmaw language and culture is an inherently decolonizing action. This model of land-based education would allow Mi'kmaw students to connect back to their culture, thus reconnecting them to their language and deep cultural knowledge and worldview embedded in the language. Such a model of land-based education would promote the health and wellbeing of Mi'kmaw students as their learning would be rooted in their Mi'kmaw language and Mi'kmaw ways of knowing, being and doing. This in turn would strengthen the identity of Mi'kmaw students and lead to their academic success.

The specific objectives of this study are:

- a) Working with Mi'kmaw Elders and knowledge keepers who are Mi'kmaw language speakers to explore, excavate and record the deep Mi'kmaw cultural knowledge attached to land-based learning that ought to be passed down to Mi'kmaw children at the secondary level.
- b) Building upon the findings above, design modules that could be offered in a land-based program in one Mi'kmaw community that would engage Mi'kmaw youth in land-based science education in their community school.
- c) Pilot several models of the land-based program using Elders, knowledge keepers, community members in partnership with a Mi'kmaw speaking teacher.
- d) Observe the impact of the model on Mi'kmaw students': increased fluency in Mi'kmaw, positive sense of their Mi'kmaw identity, and overall academic success in science education and school performance.
- e) Share the research findings with other Mi'kmaw and Indigenous communities

**Research setting and context.** The setting of the research will be an MK high school located in Unama'ki (Cape Breton), Nova Scotia. The schools located in Mi'kmaq communities fall under the MK jurisdiction and these schools still follow the provincial curriculum, but several policies have been created and implemented to encompass Mi'kmaq values. I chose this area due to my kinship relationship with the Mi'kmaq communities of Unama'ki. This would foster my role as an insider within research. The school is expected to have a mix of fluent and non-fluent Mi'kmaq speaking students. The Land based education classes will be conducted in Mi'kmaq, and translations will be offered to students who have weak fluency.

My intention in selecting a school in Unama'ki is significant. Wilson (2008) reminds us as Indigenous researchers that the researcher needs to have an ontological relationship to the land in which they are conducting research. Ways of knowing are embedded in the land we are connected to. As the researcher, my relationship with my land is within Unama'ki. My relationship to the proposed research is that this would be my doctoral research for St. Francis Xavier University. However, I would be working with Mi'kmaw Elders, knowledge keepers, community members, and teachers in the community in which the study would take place.

**Methodology and research methods:** My research will be centered and guided by Indigenous epistemologies suggested by (McCor, Tuck, & Mackenzie, 2014; Smith, 2012). The context of this research will employ Mi'kmaq epistemologies identified as Msit Nokomaq which is translated to *All My Relations* (Augustine, 2016; Denny & Fanning, 2016). This framework will foster the relational aspect of all life forms of earth, the land, and the community. Decolonizing methodologies align with my research framework as I seek to address the colonial impacts of education, and to seek Indigenous futurity (Tuck & Yang, 2012). The following theories then encouraged me to select a methodology that would employ Indigenous and decolonizing philosophies.

Community based research will be employed to guide the methods in my potential study. Community based research as it aims for form relationships, community participation, and the importance of relevancy for the community members, and suggest the best strategies to improve conditions in the community (Moxley, Thompson, and Decaon, 2017). Community based research aligns with decolonizing methodologies as it addresses and fosters social and policy change (Chilsa, 2018). She identified a methodology called a transformative approach, which

engages in political, social, and personal transformations. To foster Mi'kmaq ways of knowing or epistemologies and cultural teachings as methodologies as suggested by Kovach (2018), I will employ *Netukulimk* (Kerry et al, 2011) which is a Mi'kmaq sovereign law that encompasses Mi'kmaw ways of life and spirituality through living in a sustainable way. *Netukulimk* is a learning principle that guides relations and is embedded with Mi'kmaq ways of knowing. I will employ *Netukulimk* as a guiding teaching principle for my methodology. This will also ensure the spiritual relations with the land is respected and honoured. It will ensure the well-being of the people, and all living things on earth (Kerry et al, 2016).

To employ community-based research, I will seek a Mi'kmaq community in Unama'ki (Cape Breton). I will present my potential research to the school community, Elders, school board and council members. Prior to each meeting, I will conduct opening ceremonies and provide an honorarium for each of the Elders to ensure reciprocity and respect is practiced. Focus groups will be conducted to seek input from the community, and to determine relevancy of the research, and what is best and needed for the community. Once this approval is completed, the researcher (myself) along with educators, Elders, knowledge keepers will begin to plan and implement a land-based education program. Once the program is in the developmental phases and lessons are created, the pilot program will begin. I will interview participants through conversation methods (Kovach, 2010). Data collection methods will be employed through conversation and open-ended questions to best align with storytelling methods. Elders and knowledge keepers will be asked to participate in the interpretation of the conversations.

### ***Research Outcomes***

I am currently still in the process of writing my portfolio, I am expected to conduct my research in the spring of 2023.

### ***Knowledge Sharing***

- I plan to share my findings once the data collection stages, and dissertation is completed.

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

- I am currently in my early stages of writing my research proposal. Once the proposal is completed, the project will be delivered. I expect late 2023 the program will be delivered.

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

- Part time instructor at Saint Francis Xavier University (St.Fx)

***Future Plans***

I am presenting my portfolio in December 2022, then I will engage in the proposal for my research, after I complete my proposal, I will begin the data collection phase for my study.