

Summary Report

Atlantic Indigenous Mentorship Network Kausattumi Grants Program, 2022-2023

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*Child school readiness from a Mi'kmaw (L'nu) worldview****Description of Research***

Question: The two-part question that will center my research is: What is child school readiness from a Mi'kmaw perspective and are assessments in the early years, like the EDI, culturally appropriate for gathering data on developmental outcomes in Mi'kmaw populations? The primary purpose of this study will be to determine how Mi'kmaw Elders, parents, and educators define Mi'kmaw children's readiness for school. A secondary purpose is exploring how the Mi'kmaq description compares with Western-based Early Development Instrument³ domains meant to represent school readiness, such as social competence, emotional maturity, and language and cognitive development. From an Etuaptmumk/Two-Eyed Seeing perspective it is important to acknowledge both a Western lens and an Indigenous lens in this research, but it is evident that the Mi'kmaw perspective is absent in the assessments and in discussions of development in early childhood. The purpose of this research is not to say that the EDI does not play a role or have some value, but rather, that there is an obvious absence of Mi'kmaw ways of knowing and being in the public school system, especially from an assessment lens.

To gather this information and assess the EDI this work will also take into consideration:

1. Child school readiness training and education of early childhood educators in the public/provincially run system in Nova Scotia.
2. Insight into how community Mi'kmaw Kina'matnewey (MK) schools are assessing children in early childhood.

Context: Mi'kmaq communities want their children's strengths to be recognized and want them to be successful academically. The consistent message in educational settings is that Mi'kmaw children have demonstrated gaps in their standardized readiness for school scores in comparison to non-Mi'kmaw children, yet there has been little conversation regarding potential inaccuracies in how their readiness is being evaluated. There is a need for strengths-based perceptions of Mi'kmaw children upon the entrance to school. Assessments in the early years of schooling have a direct and lasting impact on the outcome of an individual's achievement in school, whether positive or negative. As an example, the Early Development Instrument³ is currently used in Nova Scotia in the public school system and assesses all primary aged children in their first year of schooling. Nova Scotia has published data demonstrating that Indigenous children score lower

in all five developmental domains in comparison to non-Indigenous children⁴. The EDI has yet to be tested for cultural relevancy in Mi'kmaq populations. While testing for validity and reliability are important aspects in the implementation of psychometric assessments like the EDI, there are other considerations to be made when working with Indigenous populations to ensure that assessments like the EDI are gathering “valid and meaningful knowledge” and whether, or not “it is clearly linked to the children’s and families’ wellbeing according to local cultural norms and values”⁴. **This study will be the first in Nova Scotia to apply an Indigenous lens on common instruments like the EDI and could inform changes to the ways in which Mi'kmaw children are assessed.** The aim of this study is to identify Mi'kmaq community member perspectives related to child school readiness and determine if they align with current Western derived way of evaluating Mi'kmaq children. This study will provide community-based evidence that responds to the needs of Mi'kmaw children and their communities.

Methodology and Methods: This study will use Etuaptmumk/ Two-Eyed Seeing (TES), placing importance on Indigenous ways of knowing and acknowledging that Westernized assessments are not always of benefit when assessing populations other than the dominant culture¹. Methods such as Storywork⁷ will be prioritized through conversation sessions and will be analyzed using Thematic Analysis for common themes and interpretations of the data². Elder, educator, parent and community interviews (through story telling) will be conducted to determine common themes, definitions, and perspectives of school readiness, as they relate to the Mi'kmaq. With the concept of interrelatedness and relationality at the center of Storywork methodology, this method will engage Mi'kmaq communities to explore the experiences of children in their early years of schooling through Mi'kmaw ways of knowing and being. To date, the insight into Indigenous children’s early years experiences in school is deficit focused. Indigenous Storywork combines traditional Indigenous methods of storytelling and applies them to education to signify “that our stories and storytelling were to be taken seriously” and that they had a rightful place in academia⁷. The methods will engage community in every aspect, including the oversight of Elders in the development of the project, engaging community members in data interpretation, and engaging in knowledge mobilization. There will be three phases for this research project:

Phase 1: The primary objective will be to define healthy development and school readiness as it pertains to the Mi'kmaq. Conversation sessions with Mi'kmaw parents, educators, and Elders will be the method of data collection and analyzed through storywork and thematic analysis. A circle

will be held for a group discussion after individual storywork sessions. **Phase 2:** The objective will be to describe the Western derived mechanisms and outcomes used to evaluate children's development and readiness for school (EDI) using a description of EDI outcomes and compare them to the themes garnered from the storywork sessions. **Phase 3:** Knowledge sharing and integration of the results from Phase 1 and 2 to identify recommendations for community and schools to move ahead with appropriate interventions.

Research Outcomes

My hope for this research project is that it improves the experiences of Mi'kmaw children in their early years of schooling and changes the narrative from one that is deficit based to one that is rooted in strength. The inclusion of L'nu worldviews will broaden the understanding of what it is to know and learn as a Mi'kmaw child. Perhaps this study could help to inform community-led changes to assessments used in the early years of school, either structurally, or how they are conceptualized and interpreted.

Knowledge Sharing

- Indigenous Clinicians Gathering. September 30th-October 1st, 2023. Six Nations of the Grand River and Hamilton, Ontario.
- Gloade, K. "Adverse Childhood Experiences." 3 March 2023, Dalhousie University, Halifax, NS. Lecture.
- Gloade, K. & Pennell, C. (2023). *Culturally Safe Spaces*. Children's Intensive Services, IWK Health Centre, Halifax, NS. Guest Presentation.
- Panel speaker at the Canadian Pain Society Annual Scientific Meeting, May 2022 in Montreal, Quebec on the topic of "Shift the Narrative: Strengths-Based and Culturally Safe Considerations for Better Pain Care and Policy Related to Indigenous Peoples"
- Invited to present to the HLTH6000 Seminar class on November 24th, 2021, Dalhousie University
- Team member and collaborator with the Aboriginal Children's Hurt and Healing Initiative
- Lead Instructor for "The Introduction to Cultural Safety in Healthcare for Indigenous Peoples", Dalhousie University, Winter 2022 and 2023
- Delivered professional development for the staff of Cobequid Educational Centre on Indigenous Health and Education in February 2021
- Invited to speak on a panel regarding Indigenous Research. Crossroads Interdisciplinary Health Research Conference, Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada. [Cancelled due to COVID-19].

Completed Project Deliverables

- Successful completion of PhD Health course work (May 2020)

- Successful completion of Comprehensive Examinations (April 2021)
- Successful completion and approval of PhD Thesis Proposal (September 2022)
- Successful submission and approval from the IWK Research Ethics Board and Mi'kmaw Ethics Watch (February 2023)
- Began study recruitment in Spring 2023

Forthcoming Project Deliverables

- Engage in community interviews and Storywork (October – December 2023)
- Draft thesis (Spring 2024)
- Disseminate knowledge in one peer-reviewed publication (Summer 2024)

Activities Outside of Your Research

- Book review publication
 - Pride, R., Stilwell, C. & Gloade, K. (2023). Book Review: Fiddler Joe Marble plays to St. Anne: An Etuaptmumk/Two-eyed seeing pilgrimage by Elder John. R. Prosper and settler Dorothy A. Lander. *Healthy Populations Journal* 3(1). <https://doi.org/10.15273/hpj.v3i1.11672>
- Lead instructor for “The Introduction to Cultural Safety in Healthcare for Indigenous Peoples” at Dalhousie University 2022/2023
- Submitted a first author manuscript to the *Canadian Journal of Native Studies* for publication
 - Gloade, K. & Sylliboy, J.R. (2022). The importance of considering the cultural context when evaluating Mi'kmaq children's early years development outcomes. *Canadian Journal of Native Studies*. (Accepted for publication, date TBA)
- Guest speaker for the Dalhousie Truth and Reconciliation Speaker Series, hosted by the Indigenous Health in Medicine Team, September 27th, 2021
- Member of the inaugural Dalhousie BIPOC Graduate Student Advisory Committee
- Editorial member of the *Healthy Populations Journal* at Dalhousie University
- Co-Principal Investigator on the CIHR Project Grant submission (Fall 2021) – “To Know Better is to Do Better: Translating Indigenous Knowledge to Health Practice”

Future Plans

I have been actively recruiting and holding space for conversations related to this study. I hope to finish my conversation sessions and begin immersing in the discussion to uncover themes by the end of the fall semester. This work can serve to provide meaningful change in the ways in which we perceive and receive Mi'kmaq children in their early years of learning and I'm excited for the possibilities of what is to come. Alongside this work I will be teaching the “Introduction to Cultural Safety in Healthcare for Indigenous Peoples” at Dalhousie University in Winter 2024 and I hope to attend and participate in some conferences or workshops next spring including a conference on Trauma Informed Practices and Outdoor Learning.

References

1. Bartlett, C., Marshall, M., & Marshall, A. (2012). Two-Eyed Seeing and other lessons learned within a co-learning journey of bringing together indigenous and mainstream knowledges and ways of knowing. *Journal of Environmental Studies and Sciences*, 2(4). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13412-012-0086-8>
2. [Braun, V., & Clarke, V. \(2006\) Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3:2, 77-101, DOI: 10.1191/1478088706qp063oa](#)
3. Janus, Magdalena, & Offord, D. R. (2007). Development and psychometric properties of the Early Development Instrument (EDI): A measure of children's school readiness. *Canadian Journal of Behavioural Science*, 39(1). <https://doi.org/10.1037/cjbs2007001>
4. Nova Scotia Department of Education and Early Childhood Development. (2015). *Early development instrument results: Provincial summary reports*. Retrieved from <https://www.ednet.ns.ca/edi>
5. Sam, M. A. (2011). An Indigenous Knowledges Perspective on Valid Meaning Making: A Commentary on Research with the EDI and Aboriginal Communities. *Social Indicators Research*, 103(2). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11205-011-9848-z>
6. Clandinin, D.J. & Connelly, F.M. (2000). *Narrative inquiry: Experience and story in qualitative research*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, Inc.
7. Archibald, J. (2008). *Indigenous storywork: Educating the heart, mind, body and spirit*. Vancouver: UBC Press.