

Summary Report

Atlantic Indigenous Mentorship Network Kausattumi Grants Program, 2020-2021

[**KATHARINE GLOADE, PHD IN HEALTH**](#)

*Early childhood experiences in education from a Mi'kmaw perspective***Description of Research**

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. The Early Development Instrument¹ (EDI) 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 children². 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"³.

My proposed research study will aim to improve the understanding of the Mi'kmaw experience in the early years through an Indigenous research lens with both immediate and long-lasting impacts. This study will be the first in Nova Scotia to apply an Indigenous lens on the evaluation of the EDI and could inform changes to the ways in which Mi'kmaw children are assessed. This study will provide community-based evidence that responds to the needs of Mi'kmaw children and their communities. The study will use Two-Eyed Seeing/Etuaptmumk to educate and mobilize the knowledge on childhood development from a Mi'kmaw perspective⁴. There is a gap in shared knowledge relating to what the Mi'kmaq define as children's healthy development and readiness for school and what is occurring with how the education system is evaluating. My research question is two-fold in that it will first define what it means for a child to be ready for school from a Mi'kmaw perspective and subsequently determine if the current

methods of assessing school readiness address cultural aspects and Mi'kmaq children's strengths in terms of readiness. As a result of these questions the primary objective of my proposed project will be to identify indicators of Mi'kmaw children's healthy development and readiness for school. A secondary objective will be to critique current standards of assessment for development and their appropriateness for use in Mi'kmaw populations.

Research Outcomes

I successfully completed and received a 'high pass' on my comprehensive exams in June 2021. I feel very fortunate to have the guidance and experience of my PhD committee including Dr. Margot Latimer, John R. Sylliboy, Dr. Krista Ritchie and Dr. Jeannie Shoveller. I am currently working on my thesis proposal which I am aiming to have completed and approved by the end of Fall 2021 before moving into seeking ethics approval in 2022. I am preparing to disseminate and share the knowledge I gathered and produced from my comprehensive exams in two publications. My comprehensive exams were a deeply reflective process where I was challenged to examine my role as an Indigenous researcher and the ways in which I want to move forward: with respect, reciprocity, responsibility, and relevance. 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.

Knowledge Sharing

- Invited to present to the HLTH6000 Seminar class on November 24th, 2021, Dalhousie University
- Team member and collaborator with the CIHR funded Aboriginal Children's Hurt and Healing Initiative
- Lead instructor for "The Introduction to Cultural Safety in Healthcare for Indigenous Peoples" at Dalhousie University, Winter 2022
- Facilitator and Instructor for "The Introduction to Cultural Safety in Healthcare for Indigenous Peoples", Dalhousie University, Winter 2020/2021
- Delivered professional development for the staff of Cobéquid Educational Centre on Indigenous Health and Education in February 2021
- Invited to speak on a panel regarding Indigenous Research. 2020 Crossroads Interdisciplinary Health Research Conference, Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada. [Cancelled due to COVID-19].

Completed Project Deliverables

- Successful completion of Comprehensive Examinations (June, 2021)

Forthcoming Project Deliverables

- Finalize and present my thesis proposal for approval (Fall 2021)
- Prepare and submit ethics proposals to the Dalhousie Research Ethics Board and Mi'kmaw Ethics Watch (Winter 2022)
- Engage in the first stages of my research project (Spring/Summer 2022)
- Disseminate knowledge in two peer-reviewed publications (Winter 2022)

Activities Outside of Your Research

- Submitted a first author manuscript to the Canadian Journal of Native Studies for publication
 - Gloade, K. & Sylliboy, J.R. (Submitted). The importance of considering the cultural context when evaluating Mi'kmaq children's early years development outcomes. *Canadian Journal of Native Studies*.
- Invited speaker for the Dalhousie Truth and Reconciliation Speaker Series, hosted by the Indigenous Health in Medicine Team, September 27th, 2021
- Submitted a proposal to present at the Canadian Pain Society Symposium in May 2022
- Member of the inaugural Dalhousie BIPOC Graduate Student Advisory Committee
- Editor and member of the Healthy Populations Journal at Dalhousie University
- Co-Principal Investigator on the CIHR Project Grant submission (Fall 2021) – “Shifting the Narrative: Translating Indigenous Knowledge to Health Practice”

Future Plans

As I move forward with the required milestones of the PhD in Health, I want to continue to expand my research work by engaging in professional development sessions relating to Indigenous ways of knowing. I have been able to partake in a few online sessions this year, including one with Dr. Linda Tuhiwai Smith on Decolonizing Methods and Methodologies, and will continue to seek out opportunities such as this one. Engaging with other graduate students through the Atlantic-IMN Indigenous Graduate Student Network will continue to be a priority for me as it builds a feeling of community on both a personal and academic level. For my research project I will also be connecting with Mi'kmaw educators and community members to continue developing those relationships as I move forward to the research phase of my studies. I am particularly keen to develop relationships and partnerships with Mi'kmaw early childhood educators in both the public school system and Mi'kmaw Kina'matnewey schools.

References

1. 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>
2. 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>
3. 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>
4. 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>