

Summary Report

Atlantic Indigenous mentorship Network Kausattumi Grants Program, 2022-2023

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*Honoring Mi'kmaw ways of knowing and being in a Francophone school system***Description of Research**

Purpose of the research: The provincial school system of Nova Scotia is responsible for ensuring that Mi'kmaw and Indigenous students are given an equitable educational experience by working toward eliminating the systemic barriers of western dominant exclusive approaches. There are several umbrellas under which the provincial system is responsible for this equity, including the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, the Nova Scotia Treaty Education Memorandum of Understanding, and the Inclusive Education Policy.

One of the strategies to address the systemic barriers of western approaches to education is the Nova Scotia Treaty Education Framework which explores four key questions:

1. Who are the Mi'kmaw historically and today?
2. What are the Treaties and why are they important?
3. What happened to the treaty relationship?
4. What are we doing to reconcile our shared history to ensure justice and equity?

«We are all Treaty People», therefore we have a collective responsibility to ensure that Mi'kmaw and Indigenous students are valued in the provincial education system. To attain this, much work needs to be done, including breaking down the eurocentric barriers perpetuated by the «curriculum gatekeepers», making room for professional and personal development of all employees of the Department of Education, the Regional Centres for Education (RCE), and the *Conseil scolaire acadien provincial (CSAP)*, and ensuring that community has a key role in shaping the changes needed. It is imperative to include community in order to make real and authentic changes instead of continuing with the additive effect. Mi'kmaw ways of knowing have to be more than just a hint of flavour, but should make the main dish, seeing that they have existed since time immemorial and have always been inherently inclusive; a task that 21 century education is struggling to make right.

Objectives: With all of the hierarchies, complexities and bureaucratic red tape engrained in education, how do we make room for authentic treaty education to benefit not only Mi'kmaw and Indigenous students, but all students? The role of the Mi'kmaw Education Coordinator (MEC) is new in the provincial education system since 2019 and was created through the

advocacy of the Council of Mi'kmaw Education (CME) to address the systemic barriers that Mi'kmaw and Indigenous students face. Since the role is provincial, there is one MEC per RCE and one for CSAP. This role is key in implementing the Treaty Education Framework. Each region has differences in the way that they approach this. The first schools of the CSAP were only established in 1996.

This being the result of a long history of advocacy for the rights of the Francophone community to live and learn in their language of origin, French. There is admission criterion that requires caregivers to have Francophone background, meaning that many Mi'kmaw and Indigenous students would not qualify to attend CSAP schools because the majority of our peoples were assimilated to the English colonial language. Yet, Mi'kmaw and Acadian people have a historical relationship of alliance. This relationship between settler colonialism and Indigenous peoples is unique, yet the English colonial language reinforces barriers to incorporating authentic Treaty Education at the CSAP. For the Mi'kmaw and Indigenous students who do attend our schools, it is imperative to develop a framework which will honour both the Mi'kmaw and Acadian ways of knowing and being and realities in order to find authentic Treaty Education strategies. To honour both ways is to honour *etuaptmumk*, a holistic Mi'kmaw guiding principle practiced since time immemorial.

Research setting and context: The research setting is the public education system and Mi'kma'ki.

Relationship to the research: I am the Mi'kmaw Education Coordinator for the CSAP, a Mi'kmaw woman, and the mother of a Mi'kmaw student in the Provincial system. As the first person in my family to graduate high school, I am pursuing this doctorate for my family, Mi'kma'ki, and for *msit no'kmaq*. I have a vested interest in pursuing this research in order to help me work more efficiently, but mostly, I want the research to contribute to authentic reconciliation efforts so that Mi'kmaw and Indigenous students can see themselves in the provincial education system and have sovereignty, agency, confidence and determination in their learning journey.

Methodology: Using *etuaptmumk* as a guiding principle, I will draw on Indigenous research methodologies, letting Creator guide me through research process with underlying principles of respect, responsibility, reciprocity, and relationship, honoring Mi'kma'ki and *L'nu* sovereignty. Indigenous methodologies are much more than qualitative research methods that acknowledge

subjectivity. Indigenous methodologies, as Stan Wilson describes, are more like Indigegogies, where heart, mind, spirit, and communal identity drive the intent and the process of the research. My whole life experience leading up to this point will contribute to my understanding of, and the way that this research will take place.

Research Methods: Sharing circles will be held when possible, within the three different regions of the CSAP (North, South and Metro) as well as individual interviews in order to honour both Mi'kmaw, and Acadian ways of knowing and being. Participants will be chosen based on their own interest in, knowledge, and desire in contributing to authentic reconciliation for the overall health and well-being of Mi'kmaw and Indigenous students, and all Treaty People. I would like to have a mix of Mi'kmaw Education Coordinators, administrative staff and teachers at CSAP, Elders and community members of Mi'kma'ki, and members of the Acadian community share their stories.

Timeline:

- Proposal draft submitted by December 31, 2023
- Proposal defence by February 2024
- Ethics submission by May 2024
- Begin research June 2024 into summer and early Fall
- July 2025 dissertation complete (6-year program)

Research Outcomes

Treaty Education is a new phenomenon in the Nova Scotia Public Education System and is highly important and relevant in the context of the Truth and Reconciliation Commissions calls to action for education. Indigenous student support workers have been a part of the public school system for about a decade and because of the advocacy of the Council of Mi'kmaw Education, the Mi'kmaw Education role was created in 2018 to support Indigenous Student Support Workers in supporting Mi'kmaw and Indigenous students. This role evolved into a provincial leadership role in Treaty Education; MECs are responsible for implementing the Treaty Education in various facets that are very much centered on advocacy for Mi'kmaw ways of knowing and being in a system founded on colonial values. The role involves advocating for community voice and vision in strategic planning and decision making in curriculum and

evaluation processes, to being the symbol of grassroots community in schools with students, staff and school community.

As a Mi'kmaw Education Coordinator for the CSAP, my role is again unique in that I am not only doing all of the above to support the Treaty Education Framework, I am fighting to show that it is in Treaty Education that exceptions with the language of communication have to happen in order to have authentic and meaningful Treaty Education that will benefit Mi'kmaw and Indigenous students at the CSAP and also help to build the identity of all Francophone students, thereby reinforcing Mi'kmaw and Acadian historical alliances and community ties. With the research coming from community members of the CSAP and Mi'kma'ki, I hope to create a respectful framework for doing authentic Treaty Education work that honors the Francophone community and Mi'kma'ki that is unique to our realities. A framework of this nature will undoubtedly be able to be used in other Francophone contexts across Canada. What is not unique is that the majority of Indigenous peoples in what is now more commonly known as Canada have been assimilated into the English colonial language and because we are the First Peoples and that we have the language oppression in common with the Francophone school boards, it should be a unique exception to meet at that language of oppression to create bonds of understanding and empathy so that the Mi'kmaw and Indigenous students who attend our schools can have equitable and maybe even a richer access to Treaty Education in their nation's context.

Knowledge Sharing

- *Chronique optique* Mi'kmaw- Radio Canada: French weekly newscast since September 2021 on news and issues in Mi'kma'ki and Turtle Island
- Blanket Exercise Facilitator since 2021 - various schools and community events
- Professional development on Mi'kmaw Ways of Knowing and Being for CSAP staff since 2019
- Networking and making connections with CSAP community and Mi'kma'ki since 2019
- Active member of the Downie Wenjack Fund since 2021
- Mentor for Rivers to Success - Indspire, since September 2023
- North American Indigenous Games volunteer 2023 (radio announcements and cultural workshop facilitator for volunteers)
- Ongoing efforts to reclaim Mi'kmaw language and share it with others including family, community and CSAP (students, staff, memos, language initiatives, social media etc)
- Guest at Mount Saint Vincent University M. Ed Cohort Inclusive Education March 2023 with Dr. Laura Leslie.

Completed Project Deliverables

- Course work completed January 2022
- Portfolio completed November 2022

Forthcoming Project Deliverables

- Proposal draft in progress to be completed December 2023
- Ethics for Indigenous research methodologies and methods completed by May 2024
- Gather research participants May-August 2023
- Conduct research in the beginning of the 2024 school year
- Transcriptions and analysis December 2024-February 2025
- Writing findings March-June 2025
- Defend dissertation July 2025

Activities Outside of Your Research

- Drumming (hand drum) and learning Mi'kmaw songs
- Sewing and learning about how to make ribbon skirts
- Avid beader (earrings, medallions, lanyards)
- Reading Indigenous literature
- Being close to nature (gardening, growing traditional plants, taking care of my animals)
- Practicing self-care in response to intergenerational trauma
- Career as Mi'kmaw Education Coordinator

Future Plans

I began my journey in the PhD program in July 2019. To respect the 6-year program, I plan to take more time off work from now until July 2025 to finish my doctorate. I want to do this so that I can make my ancestors, including my mother, father and brother, proud. I want to work through the intergenerational trauma and post-traumatic stress that returns when I go back to my home community of Listuguj because my baby nephew is there and I want my daughter and I to be closer to see him grow up. That is, I would like to have the courage to move back home and stay in-community for a while so that I can put my education to use. My sister and I still plan on creating children's literature (I will write the content and she will illustrate). To honor *netukulimk* (in line with Indigenous methodologies and Mi'kmaw ways of knowing and being), I am building an indoor greenhouse for the winter months in order to have fresh greens (while this may not seem directly related, it is through *netukulimk* and honouring sustainability). Since my career is fulfilling at the CSAP, I do not intend on leaving it permanently as both my Mi'kmaw and Acadian heritages have a place to shine there. I will also allow myself to go where Creator leads me...the path that I have been on seems to have taken me to many interesting and fulfilling places and I will continue to let spirit guide me.