

Summary Report

Atlantic Indigenous Mentorship Network Kausattumi Grants Program, 2021-2022
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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 Early Development Instrument (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. A secondary focus of this research will be to identify any chronic health conditions, like ear infections, that may interfere with a child's ability to learn.

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’kmaq 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’kmaq children and their communities.

Methodology and Methods: This study will use a Etuaptmunk/ Two-Eyed Seeing (TES) approach, placing importance on Indigenous ways of knowing while 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 conversational 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’kmaq 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’kmaq parents, educators, and Elders will be the method of data collection and analyzed through story work and thematic analysis. Elders, community health, and education leaders will

be consulted on conversation guides for these sessions. **Phase 2:** The objective will be to describe the Western derived mechanisms and outcomes used to evaluate Mi'kmaw children's healthy development and readiness for school (EDI) using a description of EDI outcomes for Mi'kmaw and non-Mi'kmaw children on each of the five domains from the EDI database. **Phase 3:** Triangulation 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.

Knowledge Sharing

- 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
- 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 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 (2020 or 2021?). [Cancelled due to COVID-19].

Completed Project Deliverables

- Successful completion of PhD Health course work (2020)
- Successful completion of Comprehensive Examinations (2021)
- Successful completion and approval of PhD Thesis Proposal (2022)

Forthcoming Project Deliverables

- Prepare and submit ethics proposals to the Dalhousie Research Ethics Board and Mi'kmaw Ethics Watch (Fall 2022)
- Engage in the first stages of my research project (Winter/Spring 2023)
- Disseminate knowledge in two peer-reviewed publications (Spring 2024)

Activities Outside of Your Research

- 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. (accepted). 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

The current academic year is moving at a rapid pace and with my ethics applications and subsequent research milestones on the horizon I am excited to embark on the next stages of this journey. My future plans will continue to include relationship building in First Nations communities, the educational systems and with other Indigenous students and colleagues. I really enjoy teaching and sharing knowledge, so I also have plans to engage in additional conferences and workshops through the remainder of 2022 and into 2023.

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.