WTA'TUKWAQANM—HERSTORY

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[1] *Note*. Crow elements supplied by Canva.

Abstract

In Wta'tukwaqanm[2], meaning her story, I explore the tension between Western, Eurocentric education systems and Indigenous pedagogy through Indigenous autoethnography. Privileging the role of storytelling as a means of intergenerational knowledge transmission, Wta'tukwaqanm presents a collection of reflective writing that weaves through a circle of seven interconnected elements of learning—spirituality, identity, land, people, language, story, and relationships. Each element draws inspiration from the "Mi'kmaq Creation Story[3]," told by Mi'kmaw Elder Stephen Augustine, as it is interpreted and retold through the perspective of Crow. Crow flies into the data presented within the seven chapters of this thesis and helps me to decolonize my thinking by drawing connections between Mi'kmaw values held in the seven levels of creation and the fundamental elements of learning.

In response to the dominant discourse of Western, Eurocentric education, the seven chapters presented in Wta'tukwaqanm provide a model of learning that, while tied to the core of my own identity, can also support the non-assimilative coexistence of differing worldviews. Learning framed in the interconnected aspects of self, and what it means to be human in relation to all of creation, offers an alternative model of learning rooted in relationships and responsibilities.

[2] Wta'tukwaqanm n., his/her story (Francis-Smith orthography)
[3] See Nova Scotia Curriculum (n.d.) for the Mi'kmaq Creation Story (as told by Stephen Augustine).

General Summary

Wta'tukwaqanm (herstory) is the story of how I have come to understand the concept of learning. It is not based on the Western literature I have read or the Eurocentric education I have received. Rather, my understanding of what it means to learn is wrapped in the stories of my family and community. On a journey towards decolonizing my thinking about education, I have discovered that there are seven elements of learning. These elements can help all learners answer what the Honourable Murray Sinclair described as the "great questions of life" that we must raise and educate our children to answer:

> Where do I come from?
>
> Where am I going?
>
> Why am I here?
>
> Who am I? (Sinclair, 2024, p. 2)

In order to answer these questions for myself, Wta'tukwaqanm starts at the beginning, with the seven levels of Creation.

Wela'lioq (Thank you; you have done me good)

Each story, each teaching, each conversation has shaped me;

each moment on the Land has taught me that

everything in connected.

Wela'lioq,

Dr. Sylvia Moore and Dr. Dorothy Vaandering for nurturing my learning spirit;

The Ancestors, the Elders, and the Knowledge Keepers who have helped me to understand;

The Land defenders and the Water protectors who safeguard our Mother;

Reid and Oliver, my greatest gifts who inspire me every single day—I write for you;

My partner, Ralph, for all of your support;

My parents, Andy and Louise, for everything you've taught me;

My siblings: Terri, Alan, and Annette, for keeping our stories alive;

Aunt Debbie, Aunt Rhoda, and Uncle Butch, for helping me to fill in the blanks;

Huda, Saeeda, and Samantha, for sharing parts of your herstories with me—together, we create community;

and

Crow, for helping me find my voice.


Dedication
"Your very first skirt... Makes my heart full of joy. I wish I had the privilege to do that when I was younger but I didn't... It doesn't matter; you're making it and that counts too."
In loving memory of nkij (my mother), Sarah Louise.
We did this together

Contents

List of Figures

Pjila'si (Welcome)

I am L'nu (Mi'kmaw) with mixed settler (Irish, English, French) ancestry. I am a mother, daughter, granddaughter, partner, aunt, and cousin. I am a teacher and a learner who likes to create art and tell stories. I come to the act of research with all parts of myself and with a great responsibility to share in a good way. The journey towards decolonizing my thinking about education, as it is presented here, is not singularly located within myself. It is tied to the earth walks of my ancestors whose footprints guide me and who I honour in this work. You will hear their voices echoing through mine in the stories I have shared.

I live in Ktaqmkuk, meaning land across the water (from Cape Breton), known as Newfoundland in English. Ktaqmkuk is part of the larger Mi'kma'ki which includes seven traditional districts of Mi'kmaw territory travelled by Lnu'k since time immemorial. You won't find Ktaqmkuk on a Canadian map and that is by design. Instead, you'll find the island of New-found-land, a geographical destination only as new as the settler-colonial perspective from which this English place name originates. The fact that few people know the island to be Ktaqmkuk speaks to the imbalance of knowledge systems cultivated by government agendas and reinforced in every system, including education.

Cultural inequity is manifest in educational theory, policy, curriculum, and practice and results in perpetuating the loss of Indigenous traditional knowledges and languages. Wta'tukwaqanm (herstory), represents a conscious effort to privilege the parts of myself that have experienced systemic silence so that my children may be able to understand and embrace who they are. This story is equally shared to urge educational theorists, policy makers, curriculum developers, and practitioners toward decolonizing education because Indigenous students deserve to see themselves within their educational experiences and non-Indigenous

students deserve to understand the Indigenous worldviews tied to the lands on which they live, learn, and grow.

Introduction

Background

Prior to colonization, Indigenous peoples preserved complex languages, histories, mythologies, epistemologies, and ontologies through intergenerational knowledge transmission. However, colonization and forced assimilation resulted in cultural loss that continues to be felt by First Nations people, Inuit, and Métis today. Canada's residential school system played a paramount role in the genocide that followed colonization. Residential schools were "created for the purpose of separating Aboriginal children from their families, in order to minimize and weaken family ties and cultural linkages, and to indoctrinate children into a new culture—the culture of the legally dominant Euro-Christian Canadian society, led by Canada's first prime minister, Sir John A. Macdonald" (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015, p. v). Residential schools were in existence for well over a century, with the opening of the first residential school in 1831 and the closing of the last residential school in 1996. In many cases, successive generations of children from the same communities and families had to endure the experience of residential school while the truth remained largely hidden from Canada's history and from mainstream society (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015, p. v).

Through the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, survivors of the system were finally able to find the strength, courage, and support to bring their experiences to light and several thousand court cases began the process of unveiling this Country's dark truth in the largest class-action lawsuit in Canada's history (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015, p. v). The unveiling of the truth continues today as the non-Indigenous Canadian population grows increasingly aware of Canada's atrocities against Indigenous peoples.

Education that supports reconciliation requires understanding the true history of Canada, its relationship with Indigenous peoples, and the colonial foundations upon which every provincial and territorial education system rests. The Honourable Murray Sinclair, Anishinaabe senator and lawyer who served as chief commissioner of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, said

> Getting to the truth was hard, but getting to reconciliation will be harder. It requires that the paternalistic and racist foundations of the residential school system be rejected as the basis for an ongoing relationship. Reconciliation requires that a new vision, based on a commitment to mutual respect, be developed. It also requires an understanding that the most harmful impacts of residential schools have been the loss of pride and self-respect of Aboriginal people, and the lack of respect that non-Aboriginal people have been raised to have for their Aboriginal neighbours. Reconciliation is not an Aboriginal problem; it is a Canadian one. Virtually all aspects of Canadian society may need to be reconsidered. (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015, p. vi)

There can be no meaningful discussion about the future of education without understanding and seeking to decolonize the colonial frameworks upon which all current Canadian governmental systems rest.

Working towards reconciliation requires becoming critically aware of the mechanisms of "cognitive imperialism" that continue to permeate education systems (Battiste, 2019, 22:00). Western knowledges and languages continue to dominate educational policy, curricula, and practice. This amounts to the perpetuation of assimilatory practices that entrench systemic barriers in education systems for Indigenous students. It is imperative to decentralize the dominant Western discourse that has had a stronghold on all facets of teaching and learning by

amplifying Indigenous voices that were not, historically, permitted to enter the realm of academic research to define public education.

Contextualizing the gaps

The disparity in high school graduation rates for Indigenous students compared to non-Indigenous students is well documented by Canada's statistical agency. Data from the 2016 Census revealed that, among Indigenous youth aged 20 to 24, 70% had completed high school compared to 91% of non-Indigenous youth (Anderson, 2021, para. 22). The figure was 47.0% for Inuit, 64.0% for First Nations youth, and 82.7% for Métis (Anderson, 2021, para. 22). A variety of socio-economic and geographic variables have been studied to account for the alarming gaps in educational outcomes for Indigenous students. However, the intersection between educational outcomes and intergenerational experiences of colonial policies, forced assimilation, and genocide perpetrated by the very system Indigenous students are academically measured against, is rarely documented in government research or understood by the non-Indigenous Canadian population. Education statistics told without this context are "damaging to everyone's estimation of Aboriginal peoples – but not to their estimation of the government or the society itself, which have created them" (Battiste, 1998, p. 15).

During the largest class-action lawsuit in the history of Canada, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada "spent six years travelling to all parts of Canada to hear from the Aboriginal people who had been taken from their families as children, forcibly if necessary, and placed for much of their childhoods in residential schools" (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015, p.v). The Commission heard from more than 6,000 witnesses, most of whom survived the experience of living in the schools as students where they experienced physical, sexual, and emotional abuse (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of

Canada, 2015, p.v). Many children never came home. Speaking on the stories shared by survivors, the Honourable Murray Sinclair said,

> I thought that I had a pretty good idea of what to expect…But the stories from the survivors proved to be horrendous. One of the most common stories that we heard were from survivors who talked about the children who died in the schools and whose deaths they witnessed (Blum, 2021, para. 13).

In 2009, during the collection of survivor testimonies, the Commission urgently requested financial support from the conservative government to locate the burial sites of the missing children who attended residential schools. The proposal was deemed to be outside of the Commission's scope of work and was, therefore, denied (Dangerfield, 2021, para.3). *Canada's Residential Schools: Missing Children and Unmarked Burials* states that the Commission "identified 3,200 deaths on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Register of Confirmed Deaths of Named Residential School Students and the Register of Confirmed Deaths of Unnamed Residential School Students" (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2015, p. 1). The actual number of missing children is expected to be much higher than the Commission's records indicate.

In 2021, twelve years after the Commission's request to Canada to support locating these children was denied, Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc First Nation confirmed 215 children buried at the former Kamloops residential school and broke national silence. To date, the unmarked graves of more than 2,000 children have been recovered at the sites of former residential schools in Canada, a count that continues to rise with each new investigation (Luo, 2024, para.1).

Residential schools were one of the many tactics employed by Canada to effect absorption and cultural erasure. In 1920, just before changing the *Indian Act* to force Indigenous children to attend residential schools, Duncan Campbell Scott announced

> I want to get rid of the Indian problem…Our object is to continue until there is not a single Indian in Canada that has not been absorbed into the body politic, and there is no Indian question, and no Indian department, that is the whole object of this Bill. (McDougall, 2008, para. 24)

The dominant Canadian discourse, evidenced in Duncan's words, permeated systems of education, child welfare, law, health, and environment, effecting irreparable loss. These systems continue to enact inequitable policy and practice, maintaining a colonial agenda that inherently disadvantages Indigenous peoples.

One need to look no further than the alarming statistics on Indigenous children in foster care to see that the sixties scoop did not end but, rather, shapeshifted. According to the 2021 Census, "Indigenous children accounted for 53.8% of all children in foster care, while nationally, Indigenous children accounted for 7.7% of all children 14 years of age or younger" (Statistics Canada, 2022, para. 52). These statistics remains essentially unchanged from five years earlier (Statistics Canada, 2022, para. 52).

The violence, racism, sexism, homophobia, and transphobia against Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people has not passed either. Rather, it is

> embedded in everyday life – whether this is through interpersonal forms of violence, through institutions like the health care system and the justice system, or in laws, policies and structures of Canadian society. The National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered

> Indigenous Women and Girls finds that this amounts to genocide. (“Reclaiming Power and Place,” 2019, p. 4)

Canada’s colonial legacy continues to impact the lived experiences of Indigenous peoples and perpetuate harms through complex intergenerational traumas. Mi’kmaw scholar, Marie Battiste, cautions that, even if “we, or our parents, have not been part of the racist, colonial agenda, we can say now that, if we don’t do anything, or change anything, that we are part of that” (2017, 1:17:29).

Education does not exist in a silo; it exists as an instructive fiber that weaves itself through intersecting systems and fundamentally shapes Canadian society and mainstream thought. School represents the place where children and youth spend most of their days. It is a place of knowledge and value transfer. However, when Western worldview dominates educational policy, curricula, and practice, Indigenous students walk into an institution that inherently disadvantages them while depriving non-Indigenous students of the opportunity to see the world through their Indigenous peers’ lens. In turn, truths continue to be masked enabling misconceptions and racism to cycle onwards. What we teach matters. How we teach matters. Who we teach matters. Why we teach matters.

When Indigenous identity is subtracted from the educational experience, students begin to wonder what purpose education truly serves. Battiste explains,

> When we look at all of the Indigenous people across Canada, from the east coast to the west to the north to the south, we find that all these similarities of experiences in colonization, marginalization, powerlessness, racism, violence and cultural imperialism have followed Indigenous people. And so those kinds of things have . . . contributed to nihilism. Nihilism is meaninglessness, and a lot of our youth today, after getting an

> education, or even as they go through education, get this feeling of meaninglessness. There's nothing in this for me, I'm not connected to it and, as a result, many of them leave early. (2017, 0:33:5)

It is unfair to speculate about educational gaps without contextualizing these gaps within the dominant Western framework that inherently disadvantages Indigenous students by failing to equitably nurture their knowledges, histories, and languages.

The 1972 "Indian Control of Indian Education Policy Paper" highlighted the following policy recommendation:

> Indian children must have the opportunity to learn their language, history and culture in the classroom. Curricula will have to be revised in federal and provincial/territorial schools to recognize the contributions which the Indian people have made to Canadian history and life. (National Indian Brotherhood / Assembly of First Nations, p. 28)

Fifty-two years later, we have yet to fulfill this recommendation. Fifty-two years later, it is still as relevant as it was in 1972, with the only difference being the measure of loss that has compounded by inaction over the course of fifty-two years.

Sinclair (2011) said that both Indigenous and non-Indigenous children were taught, for seven generations, that Indigenous lives were not as good as non-Indigenous lives (0:38). They were taught that their languages and cultures were irrelevant and that their ancestors were uncivilized and needed to assimilate to a Eurocentric way of living (Sinclair, 2011, 0:50). When I think about the next seven generations, I choose to remain hopeful that I am living within a moment in time that will shift the course of education towards reconciliation. In the words of Murray Sinclair, "It was the educational system that has contributed to this problem in this

country and it is the educational system, we believe, is going to help us get away from this" (2011, 1:25).

What does that work look like? Battiste explains, "Aboriginal scholars and educators are beginning to think about how to decolonize Canadian education. They have begun to make the seemingly impossible dream of the equality of Aboriginal languages and knowledge a nourishing educational reality and a hallmark of the next century" (1998, p. 17). This work involves thinking about the ways in which education can contribute "to getting kids connected, connected to their learning spirit, connected to themselves, connected to their communities, their families" (Battiste, 2017, 0:35:10). Cree scholar, Herman Michell, envisions the future of education as a time in which, "People will come to know who we are. People will know how we think and why we think the way that we do. It's about finding our voice and sharing those perspectives that are really important" (Saskatchewan Teachers Federation, 2021, 28:00). It is my hope that Wta'tukwaqanm contributes to the growing body of work that will make the dream of equality a reality.

Study

A wise woman once told me that graduate work becomes much easier when it is connected to your life. The moment those words were received, suddenly all of the professional spaces I have ever found myself in made perfect sense. My presence within this academic space intersects with my presence in all spaces I have ever occupied because my presence here lives within the core of who I am. I bring who I have been, and who I am becoming, to this work including the intergenerational experiences that have informed my earth walk, and the desire to use my voice for change. Like all places and spaces that I find myself in, I am engaged in this work to honour my ancestors whose voices were silenced by systemic, intergenerational racism

and oppression. I am also here for my sons, Reid (Flying Owl) and Oliver (Bright Light), and for the seven generations to come. School is big part of every child's life so it is my hope that education will strengthen their sense of identity rather than compromising or weakening it. It is equally my hope that non-Indigenous children will come to understand their Indigenous peers as equals in creating and sharing knowledge, language, values, traditions, dreams, and hopes for the future.

Wta'tukwaqanm comes from a fire within my soul, fueled by the cultural inequities propagated by past and existing education systems grown out of colonization and framed by dominant Western thought. It is a fire fueled by government policies of forced assimilation and genocide that have created losses we could never even fully comprehend – not only for Indigenous peoples but for all of humanity and for Mother Earth which we collectively occupy and must also seek to reconcile with. It is a fire that grows stronger as my eyes open to the unfathomable reality that colonization, in all of its horrors, continues today.

Academia is one of many spaces that should encourage learners to critically question all facets of society including the education systems that govern learning. Only then can we begin to unveil the recipients of systemic privilege and disadvantage perpetuated by this very system. Academia should foster dialogue about what education is understood to be, what it can be, and how we can approach systems-change work together, in a good way. I believe that education is at the helm, navigating the course of humanity. It, thereby, plays a critical role in mending our relationships with each other, with Mother Earth, and with all of our relations. Thankfully, education happens everywhere – it happens in schools, at the dinner table, in community, on the land, and in the workplace. Wherever education takes place, therein, lies an opportunity.

The collection of narratives that comprise this Indigenous autoethnography are shared in relation to all of this burgeoning potentiality for education to foster a brighter tomorrow for all. These narratives are not shared without reluctance, fear, or insecurity. I rely heavily on Crow's help because this approach leaves me vulnerable as I expose the depths of my assimilated self as it exists in unreconciled conflict with my intersectional Indigenous-settler-female identity.

Using Indigenous autoethnography as the research vehicle to explore my thinking requires deep reflection, relationality, spirituality, and reflexivity. Yet, decolonizing self-work remains an imperative step on my journey. For this reason, I attempt to peel back the socio-historical layers of my cultural consciousness. The path is not linear but, rather, cyclical weaving past and present experiences through a spiral of seven interrelated chapters that build upon my thinking about education. In turn, I reveal my intergenerational journey wrapped in my personal hopes and dreams for change. Through Crow, I learn how to privilege my Mi'kmaw lens in thinking about education so that I might breathe life into an alternative vision of learning rooted in the oldest living knowledge of this island.

Research Question

What is a model of education that could support the non-assimilative coexistence of differing worldviews?

Literature Review

The following literature review is broken into three sections – past, present, and future. These sections are intended to illuminate the settler-colonial history that has shaped the landscape of public education in Newfoundland and Labrador, the present realities of a system challenged with decolonization and indigenization, and recommendations for moving from policy to practice.

Currently, the Newfoundland and Labrador provincial education system continues to operate within a Western model, largely unchanged since the inception of public education in this province. A replacement that supports the non-assimilative coexistence of differing worldviews will be necessary for truly inclusive, equitable, and socially just education for all students.

Ktaqmkuk

Past

Acknowledging that past harms reverberate into present realities.

Denominational School System

The denominational school system in Newfoundland and Labrador began in 1727 with Anglican Reverend Henry Jones' opening the first school in Bonavista through the support of The Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Lands (Collins, 2012, p. 1). This school was modeled after schools established by "the Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge, of which the SPG was an offshoot" (Collins, 2012, p.3). Religion was central, informing educational "philosophy, curriculum and methodologies, as well as, the responsibilities and qualifications of teachers" (Collins, 2012, p.3). The opening of the first school marked the beginning of an education system that would last until 1998 and would allow

churches to take responsibility for building and operating schools throughout the communities that dotted the island's coastline and cut through its interior. The role of the church in Newfoundland and Labrador education would become "unlike other English-Canadian provinces, where Protestant schools eventually became public and nondenominational" (Bergman, 1995, para. 3). In fact, "nowhere else in Canada, with the possible exception of Quebec, did the churches enjoy such expansive control of education." ("Canada's Human Rights History," 2024, para. 1).

Two centuries later, when Newfoundland joined Canada in 1949, schools were under the control of six religious denominations (Roman Catholic, Anglican, United Church, Presbyterian, Salvation Army, and Seventh-day Adventist), each having constitutional protection under the Terms of Union (Bergman, 1995, para. 3). Term 17 stated that "the Legislature will not have authority to make laws prejudicially affecting any right or privilege with respect to denominational schools, common (amalgamated) schools, or denominational colleges" ("Terms of Union," 1948, p. 9). In 1987, a constitutional amendment added the Pentecostal Assemblies of Newfoundland as a class with denominational education rights under the Term and four separate denominational school systems were established (Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, 1997, para. 2).

These systems governed 27 school boards operating approximately 550 schools with a total student population of about 140,000 (Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, 1997, para. 3). There was no non-denominational system, thus, all decisions pertaining to education including school locations, board members, and teacher certification criteria were made by the denominations (Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, 1997, para. 3). For Mi'kmaw students, the education delivered in these denominational schools played a key role in advancing

the settler-colonial agenda of assimilation by reinforcing the dominant Euro-Christian values and erasing Indigenous voices from pages of Newfoundland history.

Eurocentrism was at the core of the denominational school system which embedded church into the framework of education. Robinson explains, “the overarching project to assimilate involved transformative ideas about education, a sedentary agricultural economy and the imposition of beliefs and values that detracted from traditional teachings and socialization processes” (2014, p. 386). In the paternalistic mission to assimilate Mi’kmaq who “were considered ‘savage/uncivilized,’” denominational schools extracted Mi’kmaw culture, language, history, and spirituality from education through shame and omission and replaced them with Western worldview and Euro-Christian values (Robinson, 2014, p. 386). Robinson explains that “for the Newfoundland Mi’kmaq, the imposition of British colonial rule radically altered most aspects of their being. . . . In time, isolation and increased pressure to assimilate resulted in the loss of many aspects of traditional lifeways, including social organization, cultural practices, the use of traditional language and, in many cases, their very identity as Mi’kmaw peoples” (Robinson, 2014, p. 386). The denominational school system was a settler-colonial tool used to assimilate Newfoundland Mi’kmaq.

Educational theory, policy, curricula, and practice were framed in Eurocentrism and the historical narratives that dominated the study of Newfoundland and its inhabitants perpetuated the cycle of privilege and oppression that began with colonization. Ralph explains, “settler-colonial histories were a prominent genre in the nineteenth century, and as colonial nations built public education systems, the need to tell national histories led settler elites to craft Eurocentric narratives that justified colonial violence and erased Indigenous peoples who contested emerging

settler society's claims to their land" (Ralph, 2022, p. 53). Early textbooks would help solidify the settler-colonial narrative in Newfoundland and Labrador by silencing Indigenous voices.

A prominent example is Rev. Moses Harvey's *Text-book of Newfoundland History: For the Use of Schools and Academies*, first published in 1885 and embraced by the denominational superintendents who used them in denominational schools to teach a settler-colonial narrative of Newfoundland (Ralph, 2022, p. 0. 45). Harvey's textbook painted colonization in a heroic light that cast churches as partners in nation building, "giving rich insight into the texture of an emerging settler nationalism in nineteenth-century Newfoundland and its place within Newfoundland's denominational school system" (Ralph, 2022, p. 45). Harvey's history "tells the story of Newfoundland as an island moulded by male colonial heroes and settlers" (Ralph, 2022, p. 52). Harvey's heroes, prominent white men who spearheaded European colonialism, included Christopher Columbus, Amerigo Vespucci, Sebastian Cabot, Jacques Cartier, Sir Humphrey Gilbert, and Lord Baltimore (Ralph, 2022, p. 52).

In Harvey's settler-colonial history, the island of Newfoundland was said to be discovered by Cabot who found that it was "inhabited by a savage tribe of Red Indians, who lived by hunting and fishing [and] called themselves Bethucks or Boeothics" (Harvey, 1890, p. 21). Harvey alleges that "another tribe of Indians, from Nova Scotia, called Micmacs. attacked them, and had the advantage of knowing the use of fire-arms [and] slowly but surely the unhappy tribe wasted away, and at length disappeared from the face of the earth" (Harvey, 1890, p. 26). According to Harvey, Mi'kmaq were "violent invaders who contributed to the demise of the Beothuk," a myth that delegitimized and stigmatized Newfoundland Mi'kmaq as participants in the settler-colonial genocide of the Beothuk (Ralph, 2022, P. 65). The mercenary myth, asserting that Mi'kmaq were not Indigenous to the island of Newfoundland and that they were brought

from Nova Scotia to exterminate the Beothuk, was taught in the Newfoundland denominational school system well into the 1970s and persisted without challenge until recently. Rowe (1977), Upton (1977), and Pastore (1978) have refuted this myth, yet, it continues to exist among the population who have been educated to believe it was true (Tulk, 2008, P. 11). As a result, Mi'kmaq have been perceived as violent mercenaries and their credibility has been undermined when asserting themselves as Indigenous to Newfoundland (Tulk, 2008, p. 11).

Hanrahan explains that, “Mi’kmaq oral history says that the Mi’kmaq were in Newfoundland when the Europeans first arrived” which is recorded in various accounts that “contradict the myth that the Mi’kmaq were brought from Nova Scotia to exterminate the Beothuck” (2003, p. 220). According to Mi’kmaw oral history, Mi’kmaq presence on the island has been recorded since the 1400s, if not earlier (Hanrahan, 2003, p. 221). Bartels and Janzen assert that “the Micmac people of Cape Breton Island have an ancient history of seasonal contact with southwestern Newfoundland” which became permanent by the nineteenth century with settlements in Conne River and Bay St. George (1990, p. 86).

Mi’kmaq had good relations with the Beothuk. In fact, “no solid evidence of a Mi’kmaq campaign of violence against the Beothuck has ever been discovered” (Hanrahan, 2003, p. 220). On the contrary, “the Beothuck and Mi’kmaq respected each other’s hunting and fishing grounds” and often helped one another (Hanrahan, 2003, p. 221). Speck notes the story of John Paul, a Micmac-Montagnais of Badger's Brook, whose grandparents came upon a Beothuk canoe with a small child inside. They had nothing to eat “so he put some meat in for a present and paddled on” and pulled ashore to watch the family discover their present (1922, p. 51). Speck also writes about Louis John’s “grandfather’s father [who] was employed by the English to guide them to Red Indian lake to try to capture some Red Indians. When he found a Red Indians’ camp

he would tell the poor folk to run . . . 'The Micmacs never molested the Red Indians,' declared Louis John" (Speck, 1922, p. 54).

Reflecting on Mi'kmaq representation in Newfoundland history, Mi'kmaw Elder Calvin White explains,

> for at least 100 or so years, the ships didn't come ashore except to put a flake on a beach. But when people started settling . . . they had to be taught how to live here. . . . We taught you how to survive on this land and it's become a part of Newfoundland culture but why don't we talk about that? Why can't that layer be added to the whole story? It's like there's a decolonizing or there's an unlearning, then a relearning, or new learning of what actually happened . . . marrying the stories together to be a true representation of what happened . . . it's going to take some time . . . it requires the big piece that was missing in all of those years and is still missing today . . . the teachings in the classroom. There was never any history about our people in the classroom. From kindergarten to university, there was never any information on who we were. We were denied correct information . . . it was so derogatory and so false that it was shaming. You know, there was one line, and I think was either grade four or grade four grade five [social studies], and all they said was that the Micmac were brought here to kill the Beothuk—period. That was the end of it. . . . In the early 70s, when we organized, one of the very first things we took on was to challenge academics and historians alike to find evidence to substantiate that myth and that's what it was—a myth. . . . Still, today, there's nobody up to this point in time that has been able to produce evidence to show that that actually happened (CBC NL, 2024, 25:01–27:32).

The 1970s marked an important moment in the Mi'kmaq fight for federal and provincial recognition and included challenging the settler-colonial narrative that permeated the education system.

The fight for Indigenous rights also aligned with the declaration of 1968 as the International Year of Human Rights by UNESCO. This declaration prompted the formation of new human rights associations throughout Canada and The Newfoundland and Labrador Human Rights Association (NLHRA) emerged out of this initiative. The NLHRA, founded in 1968, resulted in the following recommendations to the provincial government:

1. establishing a permanent human rights association with a $7,500 grant until it becomes independently funded
2. establishing a human rights commission to conduct research, education, and conciliation activities
3. introducing a human rights code and amend the Minimum Wage Act to eliminate differential pay between men and women
4. establishing an ombudsman's office with broad powers to include schools, universities, municipal councils, and boards
5. taking the initiative to have the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights entrenched in the Canadian Constitution
6. undertaking research to reassess the rights of minorities in Newfoundland, particularly in the case of Inuit and Indians
7. reviewing the prison system based on recommendations of the John Howard Society and expanding the scope of the legal aid system

8. reassessing the viability of the denominational school system, which currently discriminates against non-Christians. Human rights (Clément, 2008, p.179)

NLHRA's eight recommendations grew out of community insights on rights issues facing Newfoundland in the late 1960s, one of the only provinces that lacked comprehensive human rights legislation at that time (Clément, 2008, p. 180).

While the recommendations were largely ignored, the NLHRA's work did shine light on various human rights issues, including specific concerns around the denominational school system and Indigenous rights. From its inception, the NLHRA was a consistent critic of the denominational school system. The NLHRA "opposed the church monopoly of education, seeing it as a violation of religious freedom" ("Canada's Human Rights," para. 3). The Charter of Rights and Freedoms was used to eliminate religious practices in Ontario public schools, however, "the situation in Newfoundland was complicated by the provision of Term 17, which constitutionally protected the province's denominational education system" (Clément, 2008, p. 187).

In 1972, when Judy Norman was refused her teaching certificate by failing to state her denominational affiliation, the debate over the value of a church-based education system intensified (Clément, 2008, p. 177). However, it was not until 1997 when a second referendum was held under Premier Brian Tobin to revise Term 17, that a fully secular public school system was achieved ("Canada's Human Rights," 2024, para. 4). The 1998–1999 school year marked clear change in the outward framing of public education as secular. However, the Euro-Christian values and settler-colonial narratives that had been baked into the foundation of Newfoundland and Labrador education for centuries, remained deeply entrenched in curricula, pedagogy, and practice.

The journey away from silence, oppression, shame, and loss towards pride, liberation, reclamation, and equality continues today as Mi'kmaw teachers, students, Elders, Knowledge Keepers, and community members work to claim space in education. Our current non-denominational public education system should not be misinterpreted as equal or neutral. Harmful false narratives persist as historical truths. Western-centric frames of reference continue to inform policy, curricula, and practice. Decolonizing and indigenizing the system remains imperative in working towards social justice for our Mi'kmaw students who attend these institutions and for fostering truth and understanding among their non-Indigenous peers.

Residential Schools

Five residential schools opened in Newfoundland and Labrador during the early 1900s (Procter, 2020, p. 5). Two were founded by missionaries of the Moravian Church and the other three were established by the International Grenfell Association (Procter, 2020, p. 3). Four schools were located in the Labrador communities of Cartwright, Makkovik, Nain, and Northwest River and one was located in St. Anthony, Newfoundland (Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada, 2019, para. 1). Although these institutions were not operated or funded under the Indian Act, they reflected the same motives as the federally operated residential schools, to advance Canada's larger scheme of colonization by assimilating Indigenous children into the dominant Euro-Christian society by separating them from the influence of their families and communities (Procter, 2020, p. 4–5). Procter explains that the Moravians, Catholics, and the IGA

> all relied on a sense of cultural superiority to justify their actions. Cultural differences between European and Indigenous societies became a focal point in their efforts. . . . missionaries attempted to transform and 'improve' Inuit and Innu societies by

> Christianising and civilizing them, using education as a key tool. They used day schools and boarding schools to isolate children from their families and tried to instill their own cultural values in their students. (2020, p. 27)

However, the colonial project proved more difficult than anticipated as “Inuit and Innu cultural practices, governance, and ways of teaching children were firmly established” (Procter, 2020, p. 27). Missionaries had underestimated the resiliency of Indigenous peoples.

Confederation formalized the role of the Moravian Mission and the International Grenfell Association in the operation of these schools. Confederation also formalized Canada’s role in providing funding to the province “to be used for the educational needs of Indigenous students in Labrador” (Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada, 2019, para. 2). However, this period was also marked by the fight for self-determination. Procter explains that, “from the 1950s onward, as Inuit and Innu communities found themselves increasingly alienated from the schooling system, Indigenous leaders demanded more say in their children’s education” (Procter, 2020, p. 407). Family and community opposition to the education imposed on their children continued to mount, leading to the doors of the last residential school closing in 1980 (Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada, 2019, para. 3). However, an apology for the sexual and physical abuse, neglect, language loss, and cultural loss experienced by children at these residential schools did not come until 37 years later.

Thousands of children attended Newfoundland and Labrador residential schools, but they were left out of Stephen Harper’s national apology and the reconciliation process that began in 2008 (Procter, 2024, para. 3). The Conservative government of Canada, at the time, argued that it was not accountable because the residential schools opened prior to Newfoundland and Labrador joining Canada and were not run by the Canadian federal government itself (Quinn, 2020, para

12). As a result of this decision, Indigenous students who attended the residential schools in Newfoundland and Labrador were excluded from the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement (IRSSA) which included the following five elements to address the legacy of Indian Residential Schools:

- a Common Experience Payment (CEP) for all eligible former students of Indian Residential Schools
- an Independent Assessment Process (IAP) for claims of sexual or serious physical abuse
- measures to support healing such as the Indian Residential Schools Resolution Health Support Program and an endowment to the Aboriginal Healing Foundation
- commemorative activities
- the establishment of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) (Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada, 2021, para. 3)

In response, hundreds of former students filed five class action lawsuits against the Government of Canada and other parties in the Supreme Court of Newfoundland and Labrador in 2007 and 2008 (Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada, 2019, para. 1).

The trial began on September 28, 2015 and "former students had to testify about their experiences – something that no other residential school survivor was forced to do in the other Canadian class-action lawsuits" (Procter, 2020, p. 3). In February 2016, the federal government assumed responsibility and the parties agreed to an adjournment which led to the negotiation of an out-of-court settlement (Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada, 2019, para. 5). The terms of the settlement included a lump sum payment of $50 million to residential school survivors and funding for the Innu Nation, Nunatsiavut Government, and NunatuKavut

Community Council and former residential school students toward healing and commemoration initiatives (Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada, 2019, para. 7).

On November 24, 2017, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau arrived in Happy Valley-Goose Bay to formally apologize to the former students of the five boarding schools in Labrador and St. Anthony, Newfoundland (Procter, 2020, p. 2). In his apology, Trudeau acknowledged that

> many were sorely neglected, not properly fed, clothed, or housed. Others suffered physical, psychological, and sexual abuse. All were deprived of the love and care of their families, of their parents, and of their communities. These are the hard truths that are part of Canada's history. These are the hard truths we must confront as a society. ("CBC News," 2017, 0:00–0:48)

The apology marked a long-awaited, important step on the path to healing. Six years later, Premier Andrew Furey delivered apologies on behalf of the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to Nunatsiavut Government and NunatuKavut Community Council Inuit residential schools survivors and family members. In his speech, Premier Furey stated,

> As a government and as a people, I hold firm the conviction that we collectively have a responsibility to understand the sad history of residential schools. Only when we do that can we begin to advance Reconciliation – we have to learn, we have to say sorry, and we have to commit to do better. (Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, 2023, para. 6)

The path towards meaningful change will require concerted effort from the provincial government. Much work is still required to record, document, safeguard, and share the truth of Newfoundland and Labrador's education systems, Indigenous student experiences within those systems, and sources of ongoing harms. In a message of hope, the Honourable Murray Sinclair, chief commissioner of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC), said

“Education is what got us into this mess and education is key to getting us out of it.” (NCTR, 2024, para. 3). However, this work will not be easy, requiring both individual and collective investment in decolonizing education systems, policies, curricula, and practices, so that healing can begin.

Terms of Union of Newfoundland with Canada

The 1949 Terms of Union between Newfoundland and Canada excluded any mention of Indigenous peoples in Newfoundland and Labrador. Hanrahan states that “this deviated from standard practice when a jurisdiction joined the Canadian federation and First Nations people were registered, reserves created, and programs and services delivered” (2003, p. 209). As a result, the Indian Act was not applied in Newfoundland and Labrador which meant that the Mi’kmaq and the Innu were not eligible for programs and services available to other First Nations throughout Canada (Hanrahan, 2003, p. 209). Furthermore, they lacked recognition as previously sovereign nations because they did not exist according to the Terms of Union (Hanrahan, 2003, p. 209). The omission of Mi’kmaq in Newfoundland and Innu and Inuit in Labrador was a deliberate attempt at forced assimilation whereby “the federal Crown would avoid making treaties and exercising its constitutional obligations and responsibilities through the Indian Act to protect Aboriginal Peoples and their lands” (Wetzel, 1999, p. 25). Federal officials theorized that, by removing federal recognition and protection, “the assimilation of Mi'kmaq and Labrador Aboriginal Peoples would take place at a more rapid pace, as compared to those First Nations protected by the Indian Act in all other areas of Canada” (Wetzel, 1999, 25). In many ways, they were right.

Wetzel explains, that the federal policy to not apply the Indian Act in Newfoundland and Labrador, and to permit the province to exercise legislative and administrative authority over

Indian affairs, "was a Cabinet policy that was made to appear to be consistent with the negotiation of the Terms of Union, but which was actually in conflict with federal constitutional obligations under s. 91(24) of the *B. N. A. Act*, 1949" (1999, p. 26). This policy was unconstitutional and "in 1977 became a violation of s. 5 of the *Canadian Human Rights Act*, and in 1985 became a violation of s. 15 of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*" (Wetzel, 1999, pp. 26–27). The implications of this policy were far reaching, impacting the Indigenous groups' fight for recognition, self-determination, acknowledgement of harms, and cultural reclamation.

While all Indigenous groups in Newfoundland and Labrador experienced great loss as a result of this policy, the Newfoundland Mi'kmaq suffered "the most damage and disadvantage from this experiment in assimilation" (Wetzel, 1999, p. 26). Wetzel lists the following discriminatory actions taken against the Newfoundland Mi'kmaq by the Federal Government:

(a) Newfoundland is the only province in Canada where the Federal Government has not brought the Indian Act into force and applied it. . . . This decision is discriminatory and has denied federal services for the Newfoundland Mi'kmaq.

(b) When Prime Minister Pearson and his Cabinet insisted, in defiance of the legal opinions of its own justice officials, that the Government of Newfoundland had the constitutional authority to administer Indian affairs and signed a Federal-Provincial Agreement with the Government of Newfoundland to assist the province in doing so, the Federal Government discriminated against the Newfoundland Mi'kmaq. Federal officials knew that the Government of Newfoundland had not wanted the Federal Government to provide any services to the Newfoundland Mi'kmaq and also knew the Government of Newfoundland intended to leave the Newfoundland Mi'kmaq out of this Agreement. As a result, the

Newfoundland Mi'kmaq did not receive any of the minimal services this Agreement provided to the Innu and Inuit Peoples in Northern Labrador.

(c) When the Government of Canada made a decision to limit the application of the Indian Act to the establishment and registration of the Conne River Band in 1984, that decision itself was discriminatory in that it denied a federal service, recognition under the Indian Act, to the other Newfoundland Mi'kmaq.

(d) The manner in which the Government of Canada has treated the Newfoundland Mi'kmaq in relation to the disclosure and discussion of Canadian Indian policy as compared to disclosure and discussion of federal Indian policy with other First Nations in Canada is discriminatory and has deliberately prevented the Newfoundland Mi'kmaq from having the opportunity to reject the discriminatory federal Indian policy that has been imposed on them since 1949.

(e) The decision by the Federal Cabinet to attempt to extend the Indian Act to the Conne River Mi'kmaq, but not other Newfoundland Mi'kmaq is discriminatory and prevents the other Newfoundland Mi'kmaq from accessing national programs and services for Indian peoples registered under the Indian Act.

(f) The 1997 Order by the Governor in Council to "deem" the Innu of Sheshatshieu and Davis Inlet to be the same as Indians registered under the Indian Act and living on a reserve for the purpose of being eligible to receive the same federal programs and services as Indians on reserves receive is discriminatory since it has not also been extended to the several groups of Newfoundland Mi'kmaq on the Island of Newfoundland. (1999, p. 27 – 28)

It was not until 2007, with the Agreement in Principle between the Canadian Government and Federation of Newfoundland Indians, that Mi'kmaw peoples and their decedents were formally recognized as having been eligible for status under the Indian Act when the Terms of Union between Canada and the Dominion of Newfoundland was signed in 1949 (Robinson, 2014, p. 385). Four years later, on June 14th, 2011, Qalipu First Nation Band was formed (Qalipu First Nation, 2016).

Present

One day, this present will become the past. What legacy are we leaving behind for the next seven generations?

Provincial Education System

The Premier's Task Force on Improving Educational Outcomes (2017) marked an initial step in the prioritization of Indigenous education by the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador. The task force acknowledged that "many Indigenous students . . . attend provincially operated schools [and that] non-Indigenous students depend on the provincially authorized curriculum to inform them about Indigenous history and experiences" (Collins et al., 2017, p. 81). Noting that there is much work to be done in the area of Indigenous education, the document provided two recommendations, "firstly to improve the educational quality and outcomes for Indigenous students, and secondly to Indigenize curriculum to enhance non-Indigenous students' understanding of Indigenous knowledge, history, experiences, culture and practices" (Collins et al, 2017, p. 82).

Education Action Plan: The Way Forward (2018) built upon the task force recommendations with an education action plan that, when implemented, would result in:

- a framework for Indigenous education for the province;

- an Indigenous Local Course Policy;
- Memorial University actively recruiting and providing support for Indigenous teacher education candidates;
- Memorial University including appropriate knowledge and learning experiences in teacher education programs for teaching Indigenous students and teaching about Indigenous populations; and
- linguistic and cultural support services provided for K-12 Indigenous students who attend school away from their home communities. (Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, p. 12)

The *Education Action Plan Update* (2021) states that, to date, the implementation of the *Education Action Plan* has resulted in the development of a framework for Indigenous education, a new *Indigenous Local Course Policy*, and the infusion of appropriate knowledge and learning experiences in teacher education programs at the Faculty of Education for teaching Indigenous students and for teaching all students about Indigenous populations (Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, p. 7). The creation of an *Indigenous Education Framework* and an *Indigenous Local Course Policy* mark steps in the right direction. However, the amount of progress made on infusing Indigenous knowledges within provincial K-12 and post-secondary education systems remains negligible. While the report states that recommendation four has been addressed, the vast majority of courses at the Faculty of Education in Memorial University continue to privilege Western worldview with little inclusion of Indigenous histories and knowledges. In addition, the remaining two recommendations have yet to be addressed, leaving very little indication of tangible actions towards providing culturally appropriate content and supports for Indigenous students in both K-12 and post-secondary settings.

The *2020–2023 NLESD Strategic Plan* adds to the concern as it bears no indication of prioritizing Indigenous education or school community collaboration. Indigenous education is also absent in the *Government of Newfoundland and Labrador's 2023–2026 Strategic Plan: Education* which includes one K-12 goal to "**modernize** the K-12 system towards improved learning outcomes for students" (p. 10). Again, we see modernity and economic prospects at the forefront of the educational priorities. If these guiding documents are any indication of where Newfoundland and Labrador's appetite for, and understanding of, Indigenous education has led since 2017, the path forward may be much longer than initially anticipated.

On June 25, 2024, Honourable Krista Lynn Howell, Minister of Education, announced that the Newfoundland and Labrador Studies 2205 course, currently offered as an elective in the high school curriculum in the public education system, will become a graduation requirement for students who begin high school in September 2027 (Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, 2024, para 1). The release states, "In recent years, the Provincial Government has reflected on many critical moments in the province's history and created new ways to tell important stories of the past" listing Confederation 75 as promoting "pride of place and to strengthen Newfoundlanders and Labradorians' understanding of our place in the country and in the world" (Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, 2024, para. 2). However, while the 75th anniversary of Confederation may represent pride for the Provincial Government, it represents attempted erasure and for many Indigenous peoples in this province.

When asked how the celebration of the 75th anniversary of Confederation sits with him, Mi'kmaw Elder Calvin White stated, "I'm sad for the simple reason that I can't fully participate with friends and relatives . . . we still face the refusal and the denial and all of the things that took place in 1949, so, I feel as if I'm not yet fully a Canadian because of the way it's been dealt with"

(CBC NL, 2024, 1:54 – 2:28). For Ivan White, Indigenous Education Specialist, what's missing "is education . . . there's a huge knowledge gap about when we got here, how we got here, why we came, and I think that it's important to begin expressing that" (CBC NL, 2024, 2:33–2:52).

The review of Newfoundland and Labrador Studies 2205 content and curriculum might provide an opportunity to center Indigenous voices that have been silenced and misrepresented through the public education system. However, course curriculum dictated by the Provincial Government in consultation with Indigenous bands and governments will not be sufficient. Decolonial work requires engagement and equal partnership that privileges oral traditions and lived experiences as they are expressed by Indigenous community members. It requires privileging Indigenous voices in the telling of history to debunk the harmful myths, once and for all, that have dominated Newfoundland and Labrador history education for centuries. The add-and-stir approach will not work. Systemic change is required.

In the current reality of Newfoundland and Labrador public education, Mi'kmaw language, stories, traditions, and spirituality remain largely absent in the majority of schools that occupy space in Newfoundland's traditional Mi'kmaw territory. S'et A'newey Kina'matino'kuom (St. Anne's School) is one of the few exceptions. S'et A'newey Kina'matino'kuom is Miawpukek First Nation's K4-12 school which includes a daycare for children as young as two years old (Bird, 2021, para. 3). Situated on the only reserve land in Newfoundland, S'et A'newey Kina'matino'kuom enjoys measure of autonomy from the public education system and can, therefore, provide its students and early learners with culturally relevant curricula including Mi'kmaw language classes. Unfortunately, these opportunities are largely lost in the realm of public schools that occupy space on traditional Mi'kmaw territory,

including the 67 Mi'kmaw communities that are recognized as part of Qalipu First Nation (Gardiner, 2021, p. 44).

A memorandum of understanding signed between Qalipu First Nation, Indigenous Services Canada, and the Newfoundland and Labrador English School District to indigenize school curricula marked some promise for the road ahead (Qalipu First Nation, 2021, p.7). However, defining how this looks in each school requires continued efforts to prioritize community voices and to support mechanisms, including locally staffed Indigenous positions, that foster meaningful school-community relationships. Community engagement will become pivotal in shaping the path ahead if we are truly to endeavor to decolonize and indigenize education for our students.

Mi'kmaw students deserve to see themselves in their learning and non-Indigenous students deserve to understand the Indigenous history, language, and knowledge tied to the land on which they live, learn, and grow. These efforts must extend beyond the K-12 public education system, to include both early childhood education and teacher education programs, ensuring access to culturally appropriate curricula for teaching and learning at all levels. Furthermore, critically examining the knowledge held in one textbook, or one subject area, is a siloed approach. All levels must work together to decolonize the system and re-evaluate what knowledge we share and the mechanisms we use to share that knowledge.

Future

The future of our next seven generations will be shaped by the decisions we make in the present.

Transitioning from Policy to Practice

In the landscape of truth and reconciliation, how do we approach this dream of equality? How do we approach decolonizing and indigenizing education? What lies at the heart of

education as something we can all believe in? Indigenous Elders, scholars, educators, and community members throughout Canada are providing insight into these very questions. Based on community insights, the National Centre for Collaboration in Indigenous Education describes Indigenous education in the following ways:

- Indigenous education – as it exists from coast to coast to coast across Canada – is distinct and original to the lands from which expansive and dynamic bodies of knowledge have developed over millennia.
- Indigenous education is holistic in nature and recognizes life-long learning as central to human development in all aspects of living.
- Indigenous education occurs on the land and in classrooms for learners of all ages and all backgrounds.
- In this era of reconciliation, opportunities are increasing for all peoples – Indigenous and non-Indigenous – to learn about ways of seeing and being in the world that are different from a conventional worldview they were and are still being taught in school. (NCCIE, 2020, para. 2)

Indigenous education is a holistic approach to lifelong learning that is student-centered, community-informed, reflective, reflexive, relational, interconnected, spiritual, and situated in land. It is education for all students.

At its core, Indigenous education is about learning what it means to be human in relation to each other and to all things. Cree Elder Willie Ermine reminds us about the importance of spirituality, community, and humanity.

> Consider the community context, not the classroom context. It is good to arm teachers with lesson plans, but education is not just mental, academic. It is also spiritual . . . This

> is for non-Indigenous learners, too. It is for everyone. Non-Indigenous people were not "westernized" 10,000 years ago. This way of learning is the learning of humanity, not the 3 R's. Indigenous education is reminding them that they are human. Indigenous education teaches what it is to be a human. (Dockstator, 2022, p. 20)

Indigenous education is rooted in place and understood through community. It is embedded in language and transmitted intergenerationally. It is holistic and interconnected.

In Mi'kmaq, learning what it means to be human can be understood through the concept of msɨt no'kmaq (all my relations). Msɨt no'kmaq encompasses relationships with family, community, land, the spirit world, and all things. These relationships form the foundations of community-based, lifelong learning. Msɨt no'kmaq serves as a reminder of the importance of living in balance with all of creation. This is an important reminder for all students, Indigenous and non-Indigenous alike.

In *Listen to Our Voices: Policy Insights for Strengthening Education with Indigenous Education,* The National Centre for Collaboration in Indigenous Education presents 20 recommendations for transforming the future of education by respecting Indigenous knowledges and languages. Recommendation #1 cautions against centralized education systems by emphasizing the diversity among Indigenous peoples—First Nations people, Inuit, and Métis. It states:

> Policy solutions cannot be one-size-fits-all because communities' experiences, and those of their students, are unique and dependent on where they are. This holds true for First Nations, Inuit, and Métis across the country as well as whether students are in the city or on-reserve. . . . 'It's very important that we always remember that a pan-Indigenous approach to . . . transformative change in Indigenous education will never work. . . . just

> as my People in our communities bring knowledge from their spaces, their communities, their lands that are integral contributions to society, so do others. . . . When we move together as a collective, we do so respecting the autonomy of our Indigenous nations and places and communities as well.' (Dockstator, 2022, p. 23)

A decentralized approach to education that values local, community voices in determining appropriate policy, curricula, and practice is imperative for effectively and respectfully decolonizing and indigenizing education.

Recommendation 20 reiterates the importance of localizing our educational lens. It is important to know the traditional, ancestral, and treaty territories upon which each educational institution stands – the shared territory in which we collectively live, learn, and grow. One suggestion is to

> figure out whose trapline used to run through their, enquote, 'property', right? It's that family who will basically be evidence of whose territory you are in. It doesn't seem like organizations or school boards are really willing to do that work – to find out exactly whose trapline this was before. (Dockstator, 2022, p. 49)

Niskamij's (my grandfather's) trapline spanned Elmastukwek, from the Blomidon mountains to the Lewis Hills. It is on this traditional Mi'kmaw territory that I intend to conduct my research. This is the territory of my ancestors, children, and relations whose voices matter, and the government of Newfoundland and Labrador must hear them for any meaningful change to occur.

Hear Our Voices provides a comprehensive list of policy recommendations for the government of Newfoundland and Labrador under the themes of Culture, Health and Wellness, Justice, and Human Security. Under culture, the document states that the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador must immediately:

> 42. Publicly apologize for residential schools in Newfoundland and Labrador;
>
> 43. Publicly apologize for use of inaccurate information on Indigenous Peoples in the provincial curriculum and resources; [and]
>
> 44. Develop an Indigenous engagement process to replace the consultation process for Indigenous communities so that decisions are not made "for" Indigenous people but are made "with" Indigenous people. (Provincial Indigenous Women's Steering Committee, 2021, p. 20)

While the Premier Furey's apology marks a step towards addressing the immediate recommendations under *Hear Our Voices*, much work is left to be done to address the harms incurred through the education system and to develop an Indigenous engagement process whereby, there is nothing about us, without us.

Etuaptmumk (Two-eyed seeing)

Mi'kmaw Elder Albert Marshall's guiding principle of Etuaptmumk (two-eyed seeing) offers a vision of how differing worldviews "might coexist together in a non-assimilative, respectful manner" (Kovach, 2021, p. 190). Marshall describes Etuaptmumk as "learning to see from one eye with the *strengths* of Indigenous knowledges and ways of knowing, and from the other eye with the *strengths* of Western knowledges and ways of knowing, and to use both these eyes together, for the benefit of all" (Bartlett et al., 2012, p. 335). Marie Battistie explains that, at present, "the greatest needs are to continue to address racism and Eurocentrism in society and to offer what Elder Albert Marshall called Two Eyed Seeing: that is to normalize Indigenous knowledge in the curriculum so that both Indigenous and conventional perspectives and knowledges will be available – not just for Aboriginal peoples, who would be enriched by that effort, but for all peoples" (Battiste, 2010, p. 17).

Elder Albert Marshall suggests that, to do this work, we must each bring forth the best of our cultures, “and with those two best ways of knowing…[and] come forth together with our hearts open and our minds open, not just to hear, but to learn from other perspectives” (Marshall, 2021, 8:40). In turn, Indigenous peoples may become equal partners in determining the future of education. All students might then begin to see the world through both eyes. Etuaptmumk requires creating space for Indigenous voices to be heard, stories to be shared, languages to be learned, and funds of community knowledge to be respectfully included. This can only happen through mutual understanding as community and government enter a dialogic space with the intent of fostering equality in policy, curriculum, and practice to preserve Indigenous cultural, linguistic, and ecological knowledges for future generations.

I come to this research with a personal understanding of Etuaptmumk as a L’nu (Mi’kmaw) person with mixed settler ancestry. I have experienced the assimilative, destructive, and oppressive forces applied by Canadian systems that continue to privilege Western thought while denigrating Indigenous ways of knowing and being. I also understand the value of seeing through both eyes when we enter dialogic spaces bringing the best aspects of our knowledges to the table. Wta'tukwaqanm (herstory) is meant to find balance in my understanding of teaching and learning, as I wade through colonizing and decolonizing experiences, to unveil core values that have anchored my thinking, so that I might move forward in a good way.

Methodology

Indigenous Autoethnography

Autoethnography can be described as "an autobiographical genre of writing and research that displays multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural" (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 739). It is a self-reflexive methodology that compels the autoethnographer to gaze back and forth, "first through an ethnographic wide-angle lens, focusing outward on social and cultural aspects of their personal experience; then…inward, exposing a vulnerable self" (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 739). Autoethnographies "necessitate a centering of both the subject–object within a local and historical context" (Chawla & Atay, 2018, p. 4). It can, therefore, provide Indigenous researchers with space to articulate cultural experiences rooted in colonial histories.

Whitinui explains that Indigenous autoethnography, by definition, "asks us to consider epistemological perspectives equally and to draw together self (auto), ethno (nation), and graphy (writing)" (2014, p. 467). Indigenous autoethnography is about reclaiming Indigenous voice in the research agenda by allowing the Indigenous researcher to "consider their own level of connectedness to space, place, time, and culture as a way of (re)claiming, (re)storing, (re)writing, and (re)patriating" their lived realities (2014, p. 467). Indigenous autoethnography creates space for the sharing of Indigenous ways of knowing and being. Marie Battiste (2005) explains,

> intellectual activation of Indigenous knowledge today is an act of empowerment by Indigenous people. The task for Indigenous academics has been to affirm and activate the holistic paradigm of Indigenous knowledge to reveal the wealth and richness of Indigenous languages, worldviews, teachings, and experiences, all of which have been

> systematically excluded from contemporary educational institutions and from Eurocentric knowledge systems. (p.1)

Indigenous autoethnography is a resistance-discourse that supports the affirmation and activation of Indigenous knowledges by inspiring people to "take action toward a legitimate way of self-determining one's collective and cultural potential" (Whitinui, 2014, p. 481).

Epistemology

This research will be framed within an Indigenous research paradigm that takes a Mi'kmaw epistemic approach. Msɨt no'kmaq (all my relations) is the heartbeat of Mi'kmaw culture, representing the holistic, relational epistemology of our people. Msɨt no'kmaq honours the ancestors, the land, the sky, the water, and all things in a non-human-centric world. These relationships form the foundations of community-based, lifelong learning and serves as a reminder of our responsibilities. Netukulimk, which has no direct English translation, can be understood as a guiding principle that describes the importance of living in balance with all of creation so that we might leave the earth better off than when we arrived. Mi'kmaw Elder Albert Marshall describes netukulimk as using the gifts given by Creator in a good way "and always being very mindful that our actions should not and will not compromise the future generations of their abilities to sustain themselves" (Smith, 2022, para. 26). Msɨt no'kmaq connects relationships with responsibilities. In research, as in life, the two are inseparable.

Community

> *Then, as the numbers of the Micmac increased, their settlements were extended from the west coast to the southern coast and later into the interior. The first settlements were about St. George's Bay, Noywa'mkisk, "where the sand is blown up by the wind."* (Speck, 1922, p. 121)

This collection is set on the West Coast of Newfoundland, spanning from Noywa'mkisk/Nujio'qonik (St. George's Bay), where my Mi'kmaw ancestors came from, to Elmastukwek (Bay of Islands), where they eventually settled. Crow comes from Crow Gulch, a community that once existed just outside of Corner Brook, and one that several of my Mi'kmaw relatives lived in before it was razed. Throughout her journey, Crow flies into various locations on the West Coast to find answers to her question: Is everything connected? She travels to Sandy Point and La Poile to retrace her Mi'kmaw lineage. There she finds the stories of her great-great-grandmothers Emily and Louisa. She travels the rugged coastline of the northern peninsula, as far as St. Anthony, in search of the truth that sits between the lines of written history. These places become historical markers weaved into her growing understanding of who she is in relation to this land.

Data Collection

Story

To convey Indigenous perspective requires using Indigenous methods. Stories originate from Indigenous oral traditions and carry with them personal, cultural, and social meaning. Kovach explains that "both hearing story and sharing story are pivotal considerations within an Indigenous conceptual and methodological framework" (p. 156). Story is fluid, cyclical, and interconnected, weaving "together the multifold threads forming the tapestry of Indigenous culture" (Kovach, p. 156). In *Trickster Chases the Tale of Education*, Moore explains that "storytelling is a very powerful way to learn from each other and exchange and build knowledge…In the research story lines, we could weave the past and present, the school and the Mi'kmaw community, the Indigenous worldviews and the Western/Eurocentric worldview, and the celebrations and the challenges" (2017, p.154). Stories can shift between ideas and

timeframes, being unbound by linear concepts. While stories may seem to veer in many directions, common threads weave together a storyline that leads back to a key message, like the strands of a web tied to a common centre.

The storytelling tradition is an integral part of intergenerational knowledge transfer in Mi'kmaw culture. Storytelling breathes life into a way of knowing and being. It connects our epistemology, mythology, and ontology. Storytelling is flexible in nature and can be expressed through on a variety of genres and mediums. In this work, storytelling takes on various forms including short stories, poetry, journal entries, essays, and imagery. Each layer adds meaning to the whole, circling back to common themes and experiences with each consecutive chapter.

Storytelling also comes with responsibility. Each story is "bound to the personal character of the storyteller and nested in a sacred commitment" to speak from the heart and to speak the truth according to how they received it (Kovach, 2021, p. 161). They are part of the "social and historical fabric of the people" (Kovach, 2021, p. 161). A story is more than a tale; it is a reflection of both individual and collective history, knowledge, and identity. In the words of Thomas King, "the truth about stories is that's all we are" (2003, p.2).

Testimony

Testimonies "are not only the repository of forgotten memories of trauma; they also hold remnants of desire that are productive – of aspirations once articulated and spoken out loud, of needs that call out to be met, of demands that refuse to be reduced to a silent murmur." (Emberley, 2014, p. 2)

The collection of reflective writing, held within this work, functions as testimony. Recounting the past in this way requires immersing oneself in what lives in memory and in physical form. This led me on a journey through family memoirs, videos, historical

documentation, personal notes, pictures, conversations, and memorabilia to collect truths that deserve to be spoken. Stories shared by family members, for which I am deeply grateful, have been layered within this recounting of the past. Through reflection, I have come to terms with what these stories mean. Snapshots of this testimony speak to experiences of trauma, held in both individual and collective memory. However, within these snapshots, you will also find resiliency, hope, and a deep longing for change.

Imagery[4]

Memories are tied to images. Throughout this storytelling journey, I would often find myself in the woods, lost in thought, trying to make sense of it all. Suddenly, ideas would emerge to form a line of prose or poetry. These ideas would almost always come to me in the form of images. Sometimes, images appeared before me in the physical world, but they were also tied to something I had seen in the past, because these images were part of a network of memories. For me, the process of storytelling involved searching for the common threads of meaning that suspended these images within a web of interconnected memories and emerging thoughts.

It was sometimes hard to find the words to describe these images. Perhaps, that has something to do with me not knowing how to speak Mi'kmaw. So, I drew them. You will find a drawing opening each chapter. Some of these are tracings of Mi'kmaw petroglyphs or hieroglyphs that I felt represented that level of creation. I also inserted images. You will find a picture of my mother and one of the stories she wrote for my son, Reid. Stories cannot exist without images. Whether the images are in front of you, or form within your imagination, they

[4] All of the imagery included in this work was created by Sara Leah Darrigan using Canva.com. Some graphic designs include Canva elements developed by other graphic artists. Single element deigns are credited to the artist and designs containing multiple elements are noted as "elements supplied by Canva." All other elements were designed by the author.

are tied to the story being shared. When a story is pulled from identity, from testimony, it relies on images that exist within memory and memories are tied to relationships.

In the final chapter, you will find a depiction of the Seven Elements of Learning model broken down into its constituent parts. These concluding graphics illustrate new knowledge, that has emerged from analyzing the data contained within the body of this work. This new knowledge is tied to the oldest knowledge contained within the "Mi'kmaq Creation Story" and these graphics attempt to illustrate that relationship.

Analysis

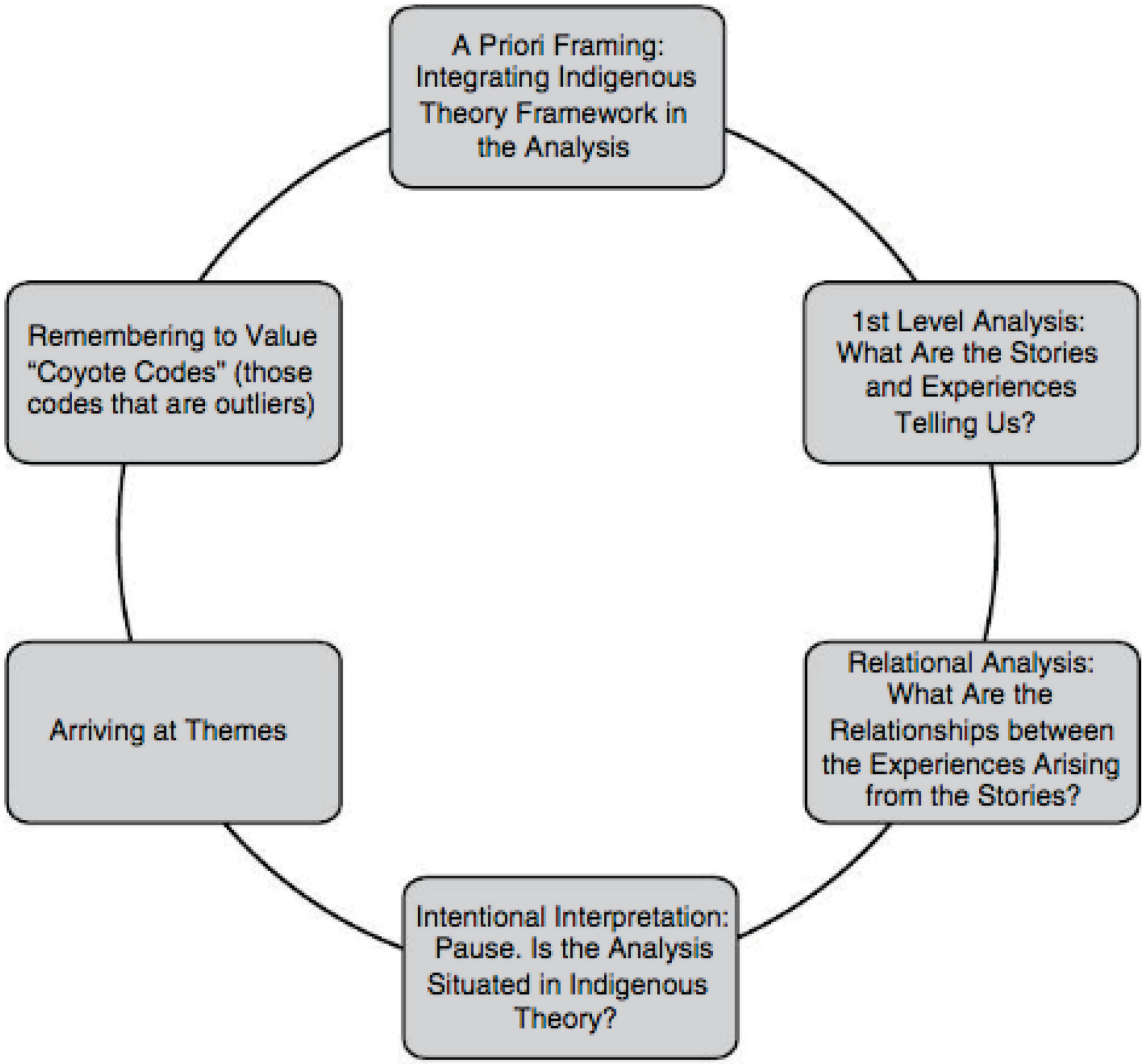
Finding meaning within Indigenous storytelling requires an analytical strategy that aligns with Indigenous methodologies and reflects Indigenous knowledges. Margaret Kovach's thematic analysis strategy most closely aligns with the process undertaken in this research (2021, pp. 208–209). Using this process, key touchstones are established and are called upon for the framing of the research. As stories are reviewed, with these touchstones in mind, meaning making begins and the relationships between stories are established.

Pausing to reflect is a necessary part of the analysis. Consider, "Am I thinking Indigenous?" (Kovach, 2021, p. 9). These reflective pauses may lead the researcher to land, ceremony, family, and Elders. Non-textual analysis may emerge from these reflections and may take the form of symbolism, sound, imagery, and metaphor. Themes arise from both textual and non-textual analysis as the interconnections become clearer and clearer. Some outliers, or "coyote codes," might also emerge and provide significant insight (Kovach, 2021, p. 209).

Kovach explains that, "If you are intentionally staying close to Indigenous theory, community guidance, and the personal and particular, the themes will have relevance to

Indigenous communities" (2021, p. 209). How these findings are presented should serve both your research and your community (Kovach, 2021, p. 209).

Figure 9.1: Thematic Analysis Strategy for Indigenous Methodologies



(Kovach, 2021, p. 208)

This is Wta'tukwaqanm (Herstory)[5]

[5] *Note*. Elements supplied by Canva

Preface

About the Title

Wta'tukwaqanm is a Mi'kmaw noun meaning his/her story. I chose this word to indicate how stories are passed down within families and communities, intergenerationally, to preserve traditional Indigenous knowledge. This work represents my story as it relates to stories I've been told. Wta'tukwaqanm is meant to juxtapose the English word history. English history, written predominantly by white men, historically dominated the discourse and privileged Western worldview as the only knowledge worth passing on. As a result, Indigenous voices were systemically silenced.

The harms of settler-colonial histories written about my own people have reverberated through the generations. The mercenary myth, for instance, persists because it was given life through the education system. It remains a truth in the minds of those who were educated to believe this myth without questioning its legitimacy. It also remains a source of trauma for Mi'kmaw students who, as a result of this myth, felt they had to hide or be ashamed of their identity.

Our perspectives, values, and traditional knowledges are held in our stories. They are passed down, intergenerationally, in both oral and written forms, to provide a detailed record of our experiences and interactions. In many ways, Wta'tukwaqanm (herstory*),* responds to the white male narrative that has dominated educational discourse for centuries. Wta'tukwaqanm claims space in the dialogue by placing my personal journey, toward decolonizing my thinking about education, on record.

Mi'kmaq Creation Story

Mi'kmaw Elder Stephen Augustine's telling of the "Mi'kmaq Creation Story" has brought inspiration and clarity to this work. His description of each level of creation has helped me to understand more about myself and what it means to learn. Augustine explains,

> I only share the spoken aspect of the Creation story in English. It would take a long time to give detailed examples, and support a deeper understanding of our traditional Mi'kmaq lifestyles and beliefs. But try to understand that these teachings are about a way of living, and experience that relates directly to all life, both seen and unseen. (Augustine, 2006, p. 2)

When I set out on this journey, I wondered if Mi'kmaw ways of knowing and being could provide an alternative to the existing Western model of public education. I also wondered if the fundamental elements of my own learning journey, which I would come to discover through my interpretation of the "Mi'kmaq Creation Story," could support the non-assimilative co-existence of differing worldviews. The path to answering these questions was not a linear one. I circled back to the "Mi'kmaq Creation Story" several times, finding new meaning with each reading. I'm certain there will always be new meaning to uncover. Yet, within the pages of this study, I feel I have found answers. The seven levels of creation have taught me that lifelong learning is both an individual and collective journey tied to the interconnected elements of spirituality, identity, land, people, language, story, and relations.

Note to reader: Please read Elder Stephen Augustine's telling of the "Mi'kmaq Creation story" to more fully understand the seven levels of creation as they relate to Seven Elements of Learning model:

- Diagram for Mi'kmaq Curriculum: https://shorturl.at/4mZFE

- The Mi'kmaq Creation Story (as told by Stephen Augustine): https://shorturl.at/VwaiS
- Mi'kmaq Creation Story: https://shorturl.at/SDOAz

Mi'kmaw Language

Mi'kmaw language, written in the Francis-Smith orthography,[6] is included throughout this work. I still have a long way to travel on my language learning journey, therefore, I have relied heavily on the Mi'kmaw Kina'matnewey Mi'kmaq lexicon resource (n.d.) for spelling and definitions.

I also drew inspiration from Mi'kmaw petroglyphs and hieroglyphs to create some of the graphic elements included in this work. You will find these images on select pages to indicate a connection between the petroglyph or hieroglyph and the story being told. All of the images contained within this work are intended to signal to the reader that there are layers of meaning at play.

[7]

[8]

[6] See Nova Scotia Archives (2024) for information on Mi'kmaq orthographies.
[7] See George Creed - Petroglyphs Nova Scotia Archives (1888) for tracing of stars and what may be interpreted as Culloo.
[8] See Nova Scotia Museum (pre-1500 A.D.) mylar tracing by R. H. Whitehead (1983) for petroglyph of the eight-pointed star.

9

10

11

There's a Little Trickster in Each of Us

Crow

The power of Crow as a trickster figure in storytelling first captured my attention in *Trickster Chases the Tale of Education* by Sylvia Moore. Crow's humor and keen disposition disrupted the narrative in wild and wonderful ways to challenge the reader's Eurocentric thinking as they followed along in Moore's journey. She explains,

> Crow mischievously challenged my Eurocentric thinking and challenged the academic rules that were guiding my writing efforts… I now realize that the process of decolonizing my mind was marked by ambiguity and confusion. Crow became my reminder that there was a way through the confusion and contradiction. It was through Crow, the trickster, that I reframed my perspective in order to change my thinking. (Moore, 2017, p.148–149).

[9] See George Creed – Petroglyphs Nova Scotia Archives (1888) for tracing of a plant.
[10] See George Creed – Petroglyphs Nova Scotia Archives (1888) for tracing of a Mi'kmaq peaked cap and a squared or top hat both decorated with feathers or twigs.
[11] See Gosse (2022) for image of L'nu'k hieroglyph.

I'm not sure if I found Crow or if she found me but, when I looked to the sky for clarity in the mixup of my own colonized thinking, in she flew and landed on the first page of Wta'tukwaqanm. Crow creates the link between the spirit world and my awakening in the first chapter, as I grow to understand what it means to learn.

Crow is not only a narrator and a main character in many of these stories, she is also my guide and safety-net. Her insight challenges my thinking. Her vulnerability dares me explore my own inner thoughts. Her bravery gives me the courage to speak hard truths. I found a crow's feather on the driveway as I wrote the seventh chapter. It was as if she left it for me to say, "See, I told you everything is connected! Congratulations, you finally finished our story."

Crow Gulch

I will always remember the moment I understood why it was called Crow Gulch. One day, as I was walking on the railbed, dozens of crows filled the sky overhead, darkening the light from the sun. From that moment onwards, I was more attuned to the strong presence of crows in the Gulch. From their loud collective caws, to the rustling of trees for their gatherings, to the canopy of black wings in flight. This must be where they nested, growing their families out of the Gulch. There is something metaphorical about that.

As a young girl, I remember my mother telling me stories about how she used to visit her Aunt Mary and Uncle Cliff Joyce in Crow Gulch, "a community that sat on the shore of the Bay of Islands, less than two kilometers west from downtown Corner Brook," and the site of an old slate quarry (Walbourne-Gough, 2019, p.1). Mi'kmaw poet Douglas Walbourne-Gough describes Crow Gulch:

> The gradient of the hill was severe, and there were large boulders throughout the site that outsized the homes. An operational CN railway line ran through the middle, and the

> community lacked such amenities as running water…Social divisions, particularly those of class and race, arose between the people of Corner Brook and the surrounding communities… Many of the families who settled here were of Indigenous ancestry. (2019, p.1)

The construction of Corner Brook's pulp-and-paper-mill in the 1920s brought the promise of well-paying jobs to folks who came to the area in search of work. However, for the community of Crow Gulch, the mill "laid the foundations for a stratified society, one in which Crow Gulch ended up at the very bottom" (Bird, 2019, para. 10).

After spending decades living in Crow Gulch, experiencing poverty and racism while parts of Corner Brook prospered, residents were forced to leave Crow Gulch as their community was razed stating in the 1960s (Bird, 2019, para. 5). Many moved into "Corner Brook's first large-scale social-housing project" (Walbourne-Gough, 2019, p.1). By the time I was old enough to visit family who returned to live in the area, Crow Gulch was gone and all that remained to mark the community was the railroad bed between Corner Brook and Curling. These days, when I walk the railroad bed, I think of my mother visiting her family and friends. I scan the woods to try to figure out where their houses stood. Sometimes, I adventure off the beaten path, through the woods, looking for remnants of a lost community to which my family belonged.

I called my aunt, who spent time in Crow Gulch with my mother, and my uncle who was born and raised there. She told me that her brother started his family there. I didn't know that my older cousins lived there too! My aunt would go in with my grandmother and, because the bank was so steep and slippery in the wintertime, they'd have to slide on their behinds down to his house in the Gulch.

She said the living conditions were very poor, with no electricity or running water, but that didn't really matter because they weren't used to those luxuries anyway. She said they were all one big happy family and they found happiness in the simple joys like swimming in the harbour or playing on the boulders. The sense of community that existed there might be difficult for the outside world to understand. It's not something you can buy with high paying jobs or modern conveniences. It comes from relationship.

Seven Directions

Wta'tukwaqanm represents a collection of seven interconnected chapters rooted in the seven levels of creation within the "Mi'kmaq Creation Story," as told by Stephen Augustine. The seven chapters include spirituality (above), identity (center), land (below), people (East), language (South), story (West), and relations (North). Together, they represent the seven elements of learning.

Each chapter opens with Crow's observations of each level of creation from afar. Crow's observations signify my own growing understanding of the Mi'kmaw values held in our creation story and how I understand those values in relation to education. They are fundamental pieces of my understanding as it comes to shape a seven directions model of teaching and learning.

Next, Crow bravely flies into her own storyline in the second piece of writing within each chapter. This piece of writing documents Crow's own experiences and how they've impacted her understanding of education. Crow's stories provide a protective shield as I begin to unveil pieces of myself in the narration. They signify a gradual unveiling of the storyteller behind Crow.

In the third piece of writing, I reveal myself by shedding Crow's protective form. This third piece marks my growing bravery and sense of self. Crow's initial observations and experiences prepare me for this third piece of writing. Here, the chapter transitions from story to

testimony, as I attempt to candidly express collective experiences that have helped me understand myself and, therefore, how I understand both the levels of creation and the creation of knowledge. Unveiling myself as the author allows me to explore the complex intersections between Mi’kmaw values, community, language, lived experiences, and intergenerational knowledge transmission.

While Wta'tukwaqanm is presented chapter by chapter, the movement of Wta'tukwaqanm is cyclical and interconnected. I didn’t write each piece in order, nor do you have to read them in order. They can be read in any order and still reveal their interconnections. That said, the narrative does carry the element of growth, both chronologically and inwardly, from chapter to chapter as my reflections about education grew and evolved throughout the course of the seven chapters.

Chapter 1—Musikisk (Sky)

Crow was rarely at a loss for words, but when she turned her gaze towards the cosmos in the world beyond her wings, her chestnut eyes widened in awe of Musikisk (Sky), the love of Gisoolg (Creator), and the wonder of creation. Scanning the glowing network above, crow began to connect the dots of Ursa Major in the form of Muin (Bear) and the seven bird hunters. Crow wondered, "Are all things in creation connected this way? I will lay tobacco for Apuknajit and ask Grandmother Moon – she will know the answer!"

A Midwinter Story of Crow and Snowshoe Hare

Crow perched on the fencepost, watching the circle grow from the corner of her eye. As the smoke spiraled the little boy's body, scents of sage blended with moose soup sending a ripple of excitement through crow's feathers. "Apuknajit, the winter spirit, is near" Crow exclaimed, loud enough to alert the entire gulch. Snowshoe Hare heard Crow and wondered what she meant by Apuknajit. Although his family had lived on the island for many generations, Snowshoe Hare was not Indigenous and was unfamiliar with the language and meaning of this word.

"Crow, may I ask, what is Apuknajit? You see, I come from a long line of educators and I, myself, teach English and history at Saint Patter's Academy, just across the street. I like to consider myself pretty well read but I have never heard the word Apuknajit in all of my education."

"Well, do you know the word February?" Crow asked with wide eyes.

"Of course, I do!" laughed bespectacled Snowshoe Hare.

"Well, Apuknajit is not the same as February" Crow cleverly replied, proud of her witty response.

You see, Crow attended Saint Patter's Academy as a fledgling, speaking her mother tongue, but she was quickly taught that English and French were the two official languages and the only languages that would be permitted in school. So, Crow swallowed her words and kept them inside from that day onwards. Some words got lost in there, eaten up with shame, but Crow could still feel their meaning from within, especially during special times like Apuknajit. The irony of the conversation, as Crow was now being asked by a teacher to share the knowledge she was forced to keep inside, was almost too much for her to handle. But, in the spirit of winter, and the harsh days ahead for all living things on the island, Crow decided to share.

“Apuknajit is the time of the winter spirit. It begins on the first full moon of February, a time marked by preparations for the harshest winter days ahead in hopes that our community will stay fed, warm, and well during this time. Today we are gathering together for our winter feast. We will lay prayers over what is left of our meal and go into the woods to offer it to Esmut Apuknajit, Grandmother Moon.”

Lowering his non-prescription spectacles, bought in the Amazon, Snowshoe Hare gazed at the snow-covered tree line, which welcomed him in with a sense of home, and asked Crow, “May I come with you and offer a prayer to Grandmother Moon?”

“I would be happy to show you the way, but don’t wait up for me. I may stay a little longer to watch over the offering” smirked Crow with hungry eyes.

Sk-ite'kmujuawti (Spirits' Road / Milky Way)

I sang the Mi'kmaq Honour Song at the top of my lungs as the water washed over my body. I was preparing myself for the day ahead and my responsibility to accept her journey into the spirit world. In a moment of lucidity, Sk-ite'kmujuawti[12] (the spirits' road or milky way) made perfect sense. Each element of my first ribbon skirt, the one I made with my mother and would wear to say, "nmu'ltes" (I will see you) to her, made perfect sense. All of the dots connected like Muin and the seven bird hunters above. It was the acme of learning.

But let me start at the beginning. It was the fall of 2021 and I was beginning my master's degree. At home, I was working full time while raising my two children, Oliver and Reid, and caring for my mother, Louise, who had Multiple Myeloma. When I think back to that time, wondering how I would balance everything, I remember my mother's beautiful smile and reassuring eyes. I remember Sylvia's message that graduate work becomes easier when it is connected to your life. That message would guide me through the coming months, and years. I could feel both women's belief in me and this gave me courage. It made me brave.

I didn't do it for a promotion, for a piece of paper, or to add letters to my email signature. I did it because I believe education imprints the course of humanity. I believe that the education systems of my lifetime will impact the lived experiences of my children and the next seven generations to come. I wanted to make sure that I did my best to understand the inequities that compromise the moral integrity of education systems so that I could use my voice to advocate for necessary change. Most of the courses I would go on to take in my master's degree reaffirmed longstanding inequities instead of challenging them, leaving me exhausted from swimming against the current. However, my first course, Perspectives in Indigenous Education with Dr.

[12] See Michael (2019) for a description of sk-ite'kmujuawti (the milky way, the spirits' road, or the ghost's road).

Sylvia Moore was different. This course propelled me, even when I felt tired, with clear reminders of why I started this journey in the first place.

Perspectives in Indigenous Education marked the beginning of my master's degree and it was no coincidence. I think the ancestors led me there just as they led me to Sylvia three years earlier. You see, I had solidified this idea in my mind that my mother and I would do this course together; we would learn together. My enrollment in Sylvia's course would be *our* enrollment. No other course, no other educator, would have permitted us to embark on this journey together.

Deep down, part of me was trying to fulfil my mother's lifelong wish to go to university before time ran out. Growing up, she would always talk about how she would go to university when she turned 60 because tuition at Memorial University would be free. This program ended in 1996 when she was 47 years old.

My mother's love of learning was contagious. As a child, I remember being in awe of her perfect signature and how fast she could recite the alphabet backwards. I remember her confidence in stating that the longest word in the dictionary was antidisestablishmentarianism. As a youth, I remember her talking about the cod moratorium and the seal hunt; not fabricated news stories but lived experience. I remember my grandfather teaching her how to make snowshoes. We lived in a multigenerational home and I was learning too.

In those last months, as we entered academia, what I remember most are her expressions of gratitude for each sunrise and how she'd find joy in the bright color of a bird's breast. I remember her lovingly embrace the trees and then try to explain it so that she didn't feel silly. I remember how she'd enter the water, let it splash against her skin or cup it in her hands to bring around her shoulders as if in prayer, asking it to wash away her worries. I remember the joy she'd find in the garden, soil covered hands, comforted by Mother Earth. I once asked her what

she was doing out there, hands in the grass, and she told me she was giving it back to the earth, the earth would help take it from her, and I knew what she meant. I am reminded of Cree Elder Willie Ermine's words

> There are little holes in our being…We are incomplete until we fill those little holes with engaging with the land. A healer's art is to identify where those little holes are and where the needs are for different plants to be embodied in a person that needs to heal. (2019, 9:24)

I recently read that we came here as healers; it's just that some of us are still catching up to what we truly are (Estes, n.d.). I watched the land help to heal those little holes in her and, all the while, I was learning how to heal too.

My understanding of education is mixed up in all of these experiences and I carried them into my first grad course because they were part of me; they were part of my mother; they were part of us. As I write this, retrospectively, I guess a part of me always knew that my learning was tied to my mother. The knowledge and values she instilled in me were present in everything I did regardless of whether or not they fit the Eurocentric educational frame. Graduate work would be no different. My mother would help me understand how my graduate work related to my life. She would help me connect the dots.

It was a beautiful fall. The leaves lit the valley in shades of yellow, orange, and red. My sister came home to spend time with my mother and help out around the house. My mother was turning 72 years old and our family drew close. She was at the centre; tying us all together. That September marked the first National Day for Truth and Reconciliation and Sylvia shared a link with the class for the NCTR Survivor Stories & Panel Discussion. My mother, my aunt and I watched in the living room while my children busied about. As I listened to the stories of

survivors, I noticed the sadness in my mother's and aunt's faces. What were they thinking? What were they feeling? When the silence broke, they began to share and I understood Betty Ross' message that "it's so crucial to leave footprints for our future generations to read, to say, ah-ha! That's what happened" (NCTR, 2021).

Each decolonial reading filled gaps in my understanding while, simultaneously, unravelling colonial falsehoods that had been woven uncomfortably into my thinking. Marie Battiste puts words to this experience when she says,

> there's a notion of superiority and we need to rethink what those superiorities are and to rethink how we have come to know who we are and how we begin to judge others by those standards that were given to us at some points in our lives. (Battiste, 2017, 42:40)

What I was experiencing was a shift away from the "cognitive imperialism" that had taken up residence in my thinking, and a move towards decolonized thinking and "cognitive justice" (Battiste, 2017, 40:10). For the first time in my educational experience, words began bouncing off the pages and into my life. Those words followed me up mountains as my fingers touched bows with more gratitude and my footsteps felt the earth a little more consciously than before. Those words flowed off my tongue into conversations with my mother where they sparked stories in her that I had never heard before. I listened a little more closely. Those words spoke to me as a mother, a daughter, and a teacher. This was learning.

My mother and I had big plans for the final project. We would make our very first ribbon skirt – together! We drove to the local fabric store and, as she patiently waited for me in the car, I scanned the wide array of materials. The ribbons and appliques were easy to select. We had decided on ribbons in the colors of the medicine wheel and appliques that would be cut to the shapes of my sons' spirit names, Flying Owl and Bright Light. Their names came to my mother

through two separate visions she had in a place she described as somewhere between the spiritual and physical worlds. My eldest son, Flying Owl, has a special gift for seeing people's emotions, being intuitive to their emotional needs, and showing incredible empathy and compassion. My youngest son, Bright Light, has an insatiable gift of curiosity paired with a carefree, joyful nature that is simply magnetic. They embody their spirit names so that part of the design was easy – we would honour them. I sketched a rough design days earlier and, with my mother's help, we solidified a plan. I would apply the images and then bead a story around them. I had the beads, I had the appliques, but what about the fabric? At the time, I didn't know why I selected that fabric. It was not at all what I had in mind. I was looking for forget-me-not fabric, my mother's favorite flower. But this fabric looked like a sea of swirling silver flecks in the black abyss. It was strangely perfect. We headed home, anxious to begin.

The following weeks are a blur. My youngest son was in an accident and then, shortly after, my mother was admitted to the Intensive Care Unit. The ribbon skirt project fell out of sight. Or, at least I thought it did. When my mother regained some of her strength, and her hopes of getting out of the hospital before Christmas brightened, the ribbon skirt was high on her priority list. I remember her saying, "let's get this done!"

And then she was home. And we sewed.

I went into this thinking I'd learn how to sew, but the truth it is, I learned so much more than a skill. I will never find the words to articulate what I learned from her as we sat and sewed and beaded and talked. It is the kind of learning that moves you from the inside-out, gently guiding you toward fulfilling who you were always meant to be. I'm sure she had always seen who I was meant to be from the moment of my birth, in the same way I see my children. I was just beginning to understand it for myself.

And then she was gone.

And my heart, along with the love of learning it carried inside, hit a brick wall. It was all tied to her. How could it continue on?

As I sang the Mi'kmaq Honour Song at the top of my lungs, I suddenly understood why I chose that fabric. It represented her journey into the spirit world, the journey she had been preparing me for all along. It represented what she needed me to understand in this very moment. The sea of swirling silver flecks in the black abyss was Skɨte'kmujuawti [13](the spirits' road or milky way) and it was leading her back to her husband, her mother, her father, her sister, her brothers, to the ancestors. You see, she was still teaching me. Even in her physical absence, she was with me, a part of me. I would always carry her, the lessons she taught me, and the ones I have left to learn, inside of my heart.

It wasn't the course, as a set of readings and expectations, that created a space for me to experience these moments that I will carry forever. It was the many ways in which Sylvia encouraged each of us to simply use these suggestions and conversations to help inspire the individual learning journeys we each have to travel on, permitting our own learning spirits to guide us to where we needed to go. This was Indigenous education.

Chapter 2—Nisgam (Sun)

The sun lit up the sky. Blinded by its powerful rays, Crow turned her gaze towards the ground below. To her surprise, she saw the image of a familiar dark figure above the earth. Giddy with excitement, she began to swoop and spiral, trying to trick her copycat friend into faltering. Wings tired from the game, Crow gently descended to the ground, where her feet joined those of her shadow friend, and she realized that she had been toying with an image of herself all along as she journeyed between Grandfather Sun and Mother Earth.

A Siwkwewiku's Story

It was Siwkwewiku's, maple sugar month, and Grandfather Sun's presence was growing in Ktaqmkuk. Crow's black wings sparkled in Nisgam's rays, casting long shadows on the glistening snow as she glided over Elmastukwek. Just then, Crow spotted Snowshoe Hare frantically hopping in circles around Saint Patter's Academy. She swooped down to see what was wrong.

"Crow!' Snowshoe Hare exclaimed. "I am so relieved to see you!"

"What's wrong?" inquired Crow.

"You see, I was teaching history and we came to the year 1949, you know, confederation. We were reading the Terms of Union between Newfoundland and Canada and I became very confused. Thankfully, the lunch bell rang, and I was able to hop out of the classroom before my students had a chance to ask me any questions. The Terms of Union got me to thinking about what you told me in February."

"Apuknajit" Crow corrected.

"Yes, Apuknajit" Snowshoe Hare repeated, remembering that February and Apuknajit were not the same. "During Apuknajit, you told me that you are Mi'kmaq. How can this be true if the Terms of Union make no mention of Indigenous peoples? I hopped all around this building looking for an Indigenous Elder or Knowledge Keeper but couldn't find one person from the Mi'kmaw community on school premises and I didn't think it was appropriate to ask my Indigenous students. So, you came just in time!"

"Let me tell you a story," offered Crow. "My Mi'kmaw mother was born in 1949, the year this island and the big land became a province of Canada. Discrimination against our Indigenous communities was alive and strong and, yet, my mother did not exist in the eyes of the

provincial government or Canada. No Mi'kmaq, Innu or Inuit person did. But five Indian Residential schools existed. It's like a terrible riddle, all twisted in law and corruption."

"So, let me get this straight, the Terms of Union is based on a lie?"

"The histories that fill our textbooks, the policies that shape our society, and the laws that attempt to define our identities are not created by us. I suppose you can say that they present half of the story and effectively silence the *other* half. We are the *other*."

Crow wanted to advise Snowshoe Hare…

Do your research. Ask the right questions and you will find the answers. Travel the old railroad where Crow Gulch once stood and say kwe' to everyone you meet on the trail. Trace backwards to Sandy Point and visit the Ktaqmkuk Mi'kmaq Museum along the way. Go to the land outside the salmon river, bring tobacco, and ask to speak to an Elder. Listen to understand. Listen to learn. Nurture your relationships. Then travel north. You'll need ceremony before you go. There you'll find the five fallen feathers.

…but Crow realized that this advice was not for Snowshoe Hare, it was for herself.

The Politics of Identity

Grandmother rock said, "I saw Oetsigitpogooin (Mother Earth) gently envelop the weight of your great-great-grandmother's footsteps on this land. I felt the vibration as she cradled Emily in this soil. In the years that have passed, I have heard Emily's voice resound in the stories of your great-grandfather, your grandfather, and your mother and namesake, Sarah Louise, whose steps trace her footpaths." This is Elmastukwek, where the energies of Earth, moon and tide collide and ripple across Mi'kma'ki. This is home.

Identity is the definition of who you are. Each definition is individual but also connected to a collective. The fabric of one's identity is woven through language, story, and tradition. Identity is how we understand ourselves in the context of our lives, those who came before us, and those who will come after. It is the patchwork mosaic of our whole self, on a blanket proudly wrapped around our shoulders by our ancestors. Identity is our way of knowing and being and it is firmly situated in land.

But what happens when your identity is defined for you and not by you? What happens when each strand of your whole self is forcibly disassembled, replaced, and rewoven into the still image of a national flag stamped in the colors of colonialism? The more I decolonize my thinking, the more I come to understand the politics of identity.

I identify as L'nu (Mi'kmaw) with mixed settler (Irish, English, French) ancestry. In the eyes of the federal government, I am a 6(1), full status Indian. My status is the result of changes made to the Indian Act through Bill C-31. Prior to 1985, the term Indian was defined as

First. Any male person of Indian blood reputed to a particular band;

Secondly. Any child of such person;

Thirdly. Any woman who is or was lawfully married to such person:

("Indian Act," 1876)

In other words, my matriarchal Mi'kmaw lineage would have had no influence on my identity under Canada's earlier definition. I was born in 1985, the year the Indian Act was amended. Under Bill C-31, the gender discrimination that disadvantaged First Nations women was addressed by reinstating Indian Status to women who had lost it through marriage to a man without status. Among other changes, Bill C-31 "enabled all first-generation children of these marriages and individuals who had been enfranchised to regain their legal status" (The Canadian Encyclopedia, 2020). It was as though the Indian Act was suddenly bestowed upon me, not in a way that honours the traditions of a people but, rather, in a way that defines who can and who cannot seek federal recognition as a First Nation person.

The perplexities surrounding how federal definitions of Indigenous identity have affected my family predate my relationship with Canada. In fact, they predate Newfoundland's relationship with Canada. My Mi'kmaw ancestry extends Mi'kma'ki, from Unama'ki (Cape Breton), Nova Scotia to Nujio'qonik (Bay St. George), Newfoundland. Yet, in 1949, the year of my mother's birth, Indigenous peoples were omitted entirely from the Terms of Union between Newfoundland and Canada. According to the Premier Joey Smallwood, Father of Confederation, there were "no Indians here"(CBC NL, 2024, 0:40).

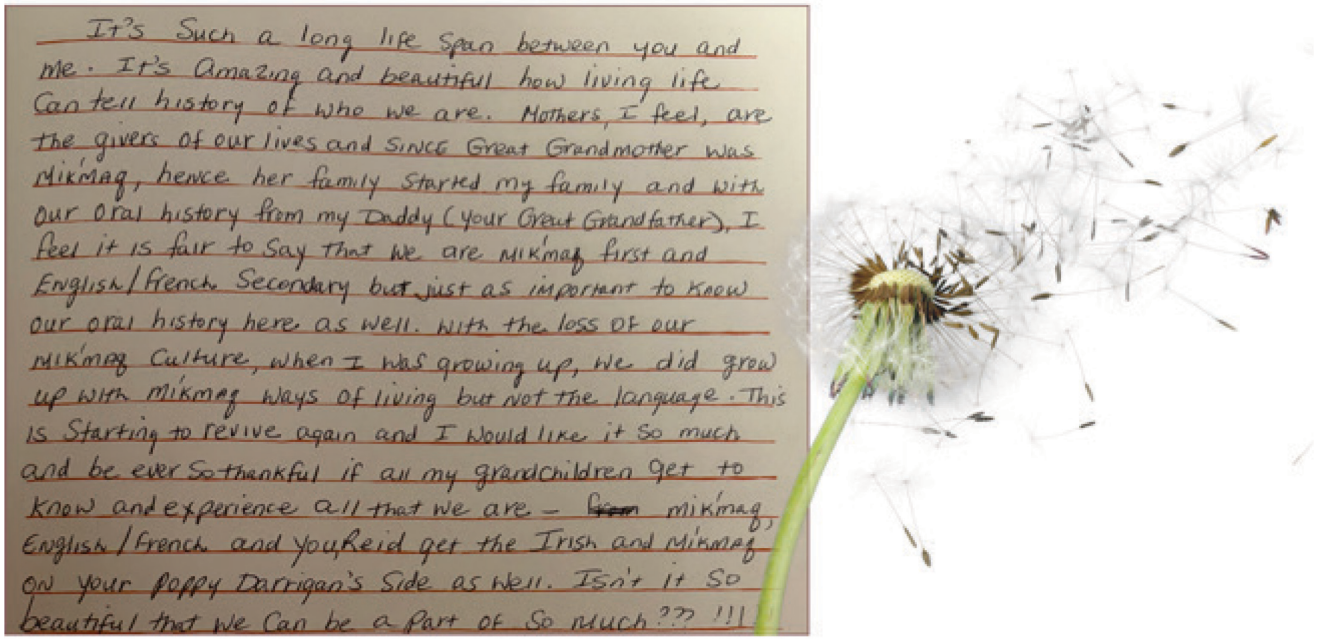
Newfoundland Mi'kmaq were well known as Sa'yewedjkik (the Ancients) by their relatives in Cape Breton (Hanrahan, 2003, p. 220). Oral history records Mi'kmaq presence on the island prior to colonization (Hanrahan, 2003, p. 221). It is also documented that Mi'kmaq had good relations with the Beothuk who were also Indigenous to this island. They respected each other's hunting and fishing grounds and helped each other despite the lies told about Mi'kmaq in

schoolbooks to disguise the truth about the genocide of the Beothuk at the hands of colonizers (Hanrahan, 2003, p. 220).

My ancestors were here despite the government's deliberate attempts to erase them from history. My Mi'kmaw mother, born into the unjust terms of confederacy, was here. The Indigenous students who attended the five Indian residential schools in Northwest River, Cartwright, Makkovik, Nain, and St. Anthony were also here. Newfoundland's confederation into Canada, as the tenth and final province, represents the denial of Indigenous people's existence within their traditional territory. The intergenerational impacts of this attempted erasure continues to reverberate through communities and schools today.

The Honourable Murray Sinclair said that there are four questions we must endeavour to answer in life: "Where do I come from? Where am I going? Why am I here? Who am I?" (CBC Radio, 2020, para. 11). These questions are inextricable from one another and are tied to a sense of identity, self-worth, and direction. For most of my life, the answers to these questions have wafted in and out of focus, as though I am peering through the smoke of burning sage. I turn to my mother's memoirs for clarity.

Her last entry to my son, Reid, was on September 30, 2016 (Orange Shirt Day) and it reads:



14

In a moment like this, when her children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren are feeling uncertain of where they came from, where they are going, why they are here, and who they are, her message will be here to gently whisper in their ears and remind them.

[14] *Note*. Dandelion element by ©[Billion Photos] via Canva.com

Chapter 3 – Oetsigitpogooin (Mother Earth)

Just then, crow heard a sound emanating from the land beneath her feet. She tilted her head and gently pressed her ear to the ground. It sounded like the steady beat of a drum echoing from deep within the womb of Oetsigitpogooin. As she listened to the sound, Crow began to feel the blood pumping through her veins as her pulse synced to keep time with the beat of Oetsigitpogooin. Her mind calmed, in tune with the life beneath, within and around her, and her spirit began to soar remembering where she had heard this beat before.

Nujio'qonik (Where the Sand Blows)

Crow's eyes narrow at the Culloo[15] contrails above as her heart pounds furiously in her chest. Caws in the Gulch say that birds of prey are flying in from the mainland to scope out economic opportunity in Nujio'qonik—where the sand blows. Apparently, these birds are very high on the pecking order because they have been given the green light by the island's highest flyers to do as they please when they arrive. The murder living near the isthmus say that the come-from-aways have their sights set on erecting shiny gargantuan propellers to power a green future. It will only cost six million pounds of dynamite and billions of dollars to blow the mountain tops off that stand in the way of such progress. Crow's feathers tremble at thought. The sound of explosions, the sawing of forests, and humming of heavy equipment drown out the beating of her own heart.

Cracking branches disrupt Crow's thoughts and draw her attention to the treeline. In the distance, she spots Tia'm (moose) moving gracefully through the thicket, wobbly calf nipping at her heals. It's Nipniku's (summer moon) and Tia'mu'j (calf) couldn't be any more than a few weeks old; a new life thriving in an old-growth forest, nibbling at its vegetation to get a taste for bows and bark. Below her, Sqolj (frog) sits statuesque, not daring hop in front of her clumsy hooves. The dandelions have taken seed and Crow considers that, from where Awo'kwejit (spider) sits, it must look like a snowstorm when the wind sends them in a fury over grass and rock.

Have they not considered all of this life?

Can't they see that every shade of green already exists here? Progress will only extract the green from this land for bills from the Royal Canadian Mint.

[15]See George Creed - Petroglyphs Nova Scotia Archives (1888) for tracing of what may be interpreted as Culloo.

Can’t they hear the beating of their hearts?

It is tied to hers – don’t they realize?

It is tuned to the waves crashing against this rugged shoreline,

the loon’s falsetto in the early morning,

stained in purple and blue hues of forget-me-nots that remind us of our own bloodlines

and our responsibilities to them and to her.

Nmpisun (Medicine)

¼ inch deep

6 inches apart

10-14 days for germination

We planted your sage today;

just two seeds to start – see how they take.

Followed your instructions to a tee,

smudged for good luck,

labelled the seeds O and R.

Can’t wait to see their little faces

when the green pokes through the soil!

Wela’lioq, Kiju’

Wskitqamu,

for leaving us this medicine.

Chapter 4—Lnu'k (People)

Crow's eyes sprung open before the break of dawn as three powerful lightning bolts hit the Earth, echoing roars throughout the valley. There Glooscap lay with his head in the direction of the rising sun, his feet facing the east and his arms outstretched to the north and the south. Crow intently watched as Glooscap rose to his feet and began walking about, giving thanks to Mother Earth and Grandfather Sun and paying his respects to each direction. Then, out of the corner of her eye, Crow spotted Kitpu (Eagle) gliding in from the east. As Kitpu swooped down, Crow's sharply tuned ears overheard Kitpu tell Glooscap that his family would soon be joining him to help him understand his place within Wskitqamu (Mother Earth). Opening his great wings, Kitpu took flight and ascended toward Grandfather Sun. Hand outstretched, Glooscap caught Kitpu's feather before it fell to Mother Earth. Crow wondered if the eagle feather was gift to remind Glooscap about the connection between all things in creation.

Welta'q (It Sounds Good)

The sound of a flute echoed through the thicket, tumbled down the rocky crag, and fell upon the ocean. Crow listened from her perch on the bent and twisted back of a tired tuckamore. Flute, wind, waves, and rock collided in a familiar harmony to her ears and she began to sing the Mi'kmaq Honour Song[16]:

"Kepmite'tmnej ta'n teli l'nuwulti'kw" (Let us greatly respect our being L'nu)

"Ni'kma'jtut mawita'nej" (My people let us gather)

"Kepmite'tmnej ta'n wettapeksulti'k" (Let us greatly respect our native roots)

"Ni'kma'jtut apoqnmatultinej" (My people let us help one another)

"Apoqnmatultinej ta'n Kisu'lkw teli ika'luksi'kw" (Let us help one another as Creator intended when he put us)

"wla wskitqamu" way-yah-hey-yoh (on the earth).

With each lyric, her voice grew and grew, calling the flock to water's edge. Their caws joined in unison:

"Way-yoh-way-hi-yah

Way-yoh-way-yoh-way-hi-yah

Way-yoh-way-hi-yah

Way-yoh-way-hi-yah

Way-yoh-way-hi-yah

Way-yoh-way-hi-yah

Way-yoh-way-hi-yah-hay-yoh…"

[16] See Mi'kmaw culture – Mi'kmaw songs (2016) for the Mi'kmaq Honour Song by George Paul.

In the woods, Tia’m (moose) stopped in her tracks to listen as Tia’mu’j (calf) fell clumsily into her legs. Sqolj (frog) gleefully croaked from the pond and Kwimu (loon) joined in falsetto. Awo’kwejit (spider) weaved the last thread of her web while Kopit (beaver) gnawed through the fibers of a tree for its lodge. And, all the while, Kitpu (eagle) glided in circles above, watching Mi'kumwesu[17] work his magic.

[17] See Pike (2021) for more information about Mi’kmaw trickster, Mi’kumwesu.

L'nu Arithmetic

Sitting in square classrooms

square desks in neat rows;

subjects sorted and packaged

curricula chosen —

for age

for gender

for color

for code.

Now, climb the bell curve, reach for the top,

but the truth is the tails pose a pointed end stop.

When identity is divided

by content and walls,

the interest decreases

the class average falls.

Take the square root of community out;

subtract my language

my tongue in my mouth.

Divide my worldview by two, subtract one,

then multiply the remainder by the sum

Wta'tukwaqanm—Herstory

of

your history

your language

your science

your stories

marked on your map of colonial glories.

As dandelion seeds rush in through the window,

scattering like beads and fall to the floor,

I remember the me of long, long ago…

I remember the me that spoke through the Crow.

In this square desk, square classroom, long halls,

my identity rises, it wells, it evolves.

It multiplies by language, by story, by art,

adds up to a mind, a body, a heart.

It’s the sum of community, encircled by Land,

wrapped in colourful cultural pride

that radiates outward and bursts through the side

of this classroom…

where the Ancestors enter,

from the East.

Chapter 5—lnui'site'waq (Language)

Grandmother was the first family member to arrive. Born from rock, Grandmother had been on Earth from time immemorial and had observed all things in creation – including Crow. Crow did not realize how much wisdom Grandmother held until she witnessed Grandmother sharing her knowledge with Glooscap. Grandmother taught Glooscap about the stars, the wind, the seasons, the tides, the plants, and the animals. Most importantly, Grandmother taught Glooscap how to live in relationship with all things. She called this msɨt no'kmaq. As Crow watched Glooscap learn and grow, she came to understand that language was a very important part of Glooscap's learning. Language shaped Glooscap's ways of knowing and being.

Ksika'q (If It Gets Lost)

Crow wanted to share a story here, but she forgot the way to say it.

"What were the words?"

She could feel them in her heart, but they had vanished from her tongue.

"What was the language?"

She struggled to recall.

What will she do if it *all* gets lost? How will she tell her stories?

A'papi'g (Ropes)

I remember being amazed at what he could do with rope.

His thick, brown hands

tying intricate fishing knots,

weaving snowshoes and stories

smoothly as awo’kwejit spins its silky web.

Papi’g (ba-bage) he’d say,

dropping the a’

and I thought it was English.

he was gone

when I learned it was Mi’kmaw.

I asked my mother,

“Do you remember Poppy using the word papi’g?”

“Yes, when he’d tie knots and sew nets”

leather, tendon, line.

“I learned in Mi’kmaw language class that it’s a Mi’kmaw word!”

It means ropes.

We hadn’t lost it all.

Small threads remained;

he tied them with his thick, brown hands

to help us mend.

Chapter 6—A’tukwaqn (Story)

Crow could taste the salt whip across her beak as she tightened the clasp of her curved talons into her perch to steady her swaying body. Strong easterly winds clapped the waves’ crests, sending sprays of foam spinning ashore in a whirlwind that gathered sand, rocks, wood, and feathers before resting upon a bed of sweetgrass. Glooscap’s nephew had arrived! Crow’s belly trembled with excitement… or was it hunger? She often mixed those two feelings up. As soon as the whitecapped waves calmed into a rolling blue blanket, she found herself venturing out in search of fish. Near the shoreline, Crow spotted Glooscap’s nephew raise a fish out of the water. Crow resisted her urge to take wing and, instead, patiently watched Glooscap guide his nephew in giving thanks to the fish for its life so they may have sustenance. Crow had learned the value of listening by watching Grandmother teach Glooscap. Crow’s heart filled with joy to see Glooscap now sharing his grandmother’s teachings with his nephew. Crow would do her part in this circle of teaching and learning and show her gratitude to the fish by making sure that no part would be left behind.

Forget-Me-Nots

The sun was high in the sky as Crow flew over the graveyard Down Below. Forget-me-nots dotted the green hills and valleys in shades of purple and blue. “They were her favorite flower,” remembered Crow as she swooped in for a closer look. “She’d ask my father and brother to play ‘Sweet Forget Me Not’ on Sunday morning and she’d show her grandchildren how to pick them for their mommas,” thought Crow. “Funny how forget-me-nots trigger the most poignant memories of her,” Crow considered, as she gently landed on the hillside. In the distance, Crow could see Snowshoe Hare sitting somberly by a stone.

“Hi, Snowshoe Hare,” said Crow. “What are you doing?”

“Well, I have just been sitting here, thinking about my colony of hares. I’ve been thinking about how my relatives first arrived here, in Ktaqmkuk, in the year of 1864. I think it will be important to tell my leverets this story and the stories you have shared with me about the original stewards of this land that we live and learn and grow in.”

“Telling the stories of who we are and where we’ve come from are important,” agreed Crow. “We all have roots,” she said, as her nose caught the scent of forget-me-nots in the gentle breeze that swept over the graveyard.

Three Generations

One of the things about losing someone is that you can't ask them anymore questions. You just have to hope that you've remembered enough details from the stories they told you to weave them into stories to tell your children and grandchildren. This is what I've learned—to become a good storyteller, you must first become a great listener.

"It's the old person test," my grandfather would say as he pinched the skin on the top of his hand and wait to see how long it would take for it to settle back into its resting position. He'd be ecstatic as the seconds passed and I'd just stare in wonder at his 87-year-old hands.

"It's the old person test," my mother would say as she pinched the skin on the top of her hand and wait to see how long it would take for it to settle back into its resting position. Her skin settled much faster than my grandfather's.

"It's the old person test," I say as I pinch the skin on the top of my hand and wait to see how long it will take for it to settle back into its resting position. My skin settles much faster than my mother's but has slowed, ever so slightly, over time. It's funny, now that I think about it, how we've marked two generations and how I mark my own time in relation to them.

The Mill

"When the mill started in Corner brook, daddy went in looking for a job. He met the man in there, the supervisor, and he asked him for a job, so he gave him a job. Daddy was pretty happy and so he started working at the mill. But then he started missing the fish, he started missing hunting in the woods – that's where his heart belonged. So, he left the mill and he went home and went hunting and fishing. It was really hard, so he went back the second time. He got

Wiff a job in the mill and Wiff stayed in the mill and retired from the mill. But daddy, after working a while in the mill, he got that same hunger, that same heart that he missed the water, he missed the fish, he missed the woods, the hunting, and he wanted to go back to it again. So, he left the mill and he went back home to go hunting and fishing again. It was hard work but he loved it. But it was really hard. So he said he would try it at the mill again. He went back to the mill again and he asked for his job back again and the Super that hired him before said,

'Georgie, this is your third time back here.' He said, 'I'll take you on again but if you leaves this time, you can't get back on here no more.'

Daddy said, 'alright.'

So, daddy worked for a while there and then, of course, his heart seemed to be with the fish, the water, the woods, the hunting and he just couldn't take the mill work. So, he left again and he came home and he fished and he hunted and that was his life – fishing and hunting and logging in the woods. That was his life and he never got back to the mill no more." —Louise

"Was he happier?"

"*He was very happy, daddy loved the woods, he loved hunting for food— for moose, for rabbits—trapping, berry picking, and camping out in his little lean-tos that he used to build. He loved all of that and his little boil-ups outside, you know, catching trout, in the woods. He loved fishing, loved being in the dory, going out and pulling in his fish, and feeding his family and having his fish for the winter. He fed other families besides. He always shared his food. He loved what he did and when it opened up for logging wood, he did go logging wood sometimes. Then he'd come home, but his passion was the woods, the water. That was his passion and that's what he always did. He lived to be 88 so he had a good life, worked hard, raised a big family of 10*

and never done without a bit of food…Sometimes he'd be gone in the woods and he'd come home late in the night. We'd have the door open and daddy would come in with moose meat on his sleigh. He'd tow it with his dogs. We'd get the frying pan out and the nice smell of moose frying in the pan. We would get up and have a little bit of moose meat and the juice and a piece of bread and it used to taste so good."

"Did you have a horse?"

"Yes, we had a horse too, for getting wood for the winter."

Sleigh Ride

"When I was a girl, I remember my daddy sometimes taking me on the sleigh to bring our wood for the stove. Our horse would tow the sleigh and us with the wood. This was in the wintertime. I have a picture in my mind now sitting on that long sleigh and daddy telling me to keep my feet on the runner so that my feet would not touch the snow on the ground. You could get your leg broken if you didn't have our feet up. I can still picture that horse too. I keep wondering if it was Frank or a horse before him – I'm not sure." – Louise

Caplin Run

"When capelin started to roll on the beach, we all went down to get some. We ate them fried fresh and we salted and dried some…Sadly, capelin don't roll on the beach anymore. Big boats are probably to blame for the small stock left and the fact that they don't get to roll because they're caught before they get to shore. Capelin need to come to shore to roll because that's how they spawn to have more capelin. For this reason, Reid, I guess you and the rest of my grandchildren may never get to experience this. I remember one year when some capelin rolled

in Little Port and we got some. I'm not sure if your momma would remember this but you can ask her. She was very young then." – Louise

I remember it vividly. It was something magical that I had never seen before and would never see again. It was dusk. My father held a bucket in one hand and a light in the other to draw them in. They were as spirited and generous as the salty ocean that propelled them ashore. I savor their taste with the memory.

Chapter 7—Msit no’kmaq (All my relations)

The clouds broke open to reveal an arc fill the sky with all the colors of creation. It was the most beautiful sight Crow had ever seen, like a gift from Kisu’lk, and it filled her heart with love and gratitude. With a blink, Crow felt a bead of water roll down her cheek, catching the drizzle and morning dew that had collected on her feathers, to gently land on a fallen leaf. There, cradling the droplet like a baby in their mother’s arms, Crow realized Glooscap’s kiju’ (mother) had arrived. She would teach Glooscap about all the colors of the world, how to nurture the special gifts of the children, how to respect the teachings of the Elders, and how to live in balance and harmony with all his relations. Like the droplet of emotion cradled in that leaf, she would teach him strength, understanding, and love.

Nitap (My friend)

Sunbird flew in through the rainbow. Her face was the color of forget-me-nots. In her beak, she carried an olive branch. Crow had never met a sunbird before. Crow had never tasted an olive.

“Pjila’si (welcome),” greeted Crow.

“Shukran lak (thank you),” replied Sunbird.

“What brings you here?” asked Crow.

“I was forced to flee my homeland. I travelled over the Mediterranean Sea and across the Atlantic Ocean to find refuge.” Eyes welling, she continued, “Many did not survive.” Growing into a full droplet, one tear travelled from the corner of her eye, down her long beak, to land on the olive leaf gripped in her claw. There, the droplet cradled back and forth like a mother rocking her baby. It reminded Crow of her own mother gently rocking her to sleep…

Then, suddenly, it fell to the ground. Shivering, Sunbird continued, “I was told to fly west to the diaspora where it is safe and where all living things are free and equal.”

Crow stooped in thought, “If only Sunbird knew the true wta'tukwaqanm (herstory).”

“Is this Canada?” asked Sunbird.

“This is Ktaqmkuk,” replied Crow.

“Is your asl أصل (root) from here?” asked Sunbird.

“Yes, my wettaqane’wasin (roots) are here,” replied Crow.

“Please accept this olive branch,” offered Sunbird with outstretched claw. “It represents my usool أصول (roots), our resilience, the link between past, present, and future."

“Wela’lin nitap (thank you, my friend),” replied Crow.

Crow and Sunbird would become great friends and, by listening with open hearts and open minds, they would learn about each other's herstories. They would teach each other strength, understanding, and love.

Ajipjusuti (Hope)

The true character of a society is revealed in how it treats its children.

—Nelson Mandela, September 27, 1997

Nuseirat, Deir al-Balah, Brij, all areas of central Gaza were bombed today.

Families run for their lives:

"We running quickly"

"They are bombing everywhere"

"Pray for us"

"We reached Dier al-Balah now"

"Allah saved us"

"I hold Dania"

"and Bayan had Zeina and Ali"

"and we escaped"

"through the local streets"

"The drones was shooting everywhere"

"The kids saw a lot of killed people on the streets"[18] – Abed Ali, June 8, 2024

As all human rights instruments and safeguards collapse before my very eyes, I bear witness.

[18] Abed Ali, Gaza, personal communication on June 8, 2024

Wta'tukwaqanm—Herstory

It has been 245[19] days + 76[20] years in Palestine.

Forced displacement, Apartheid, Genocide…

It has been 157[21] years + 370[22] years in Canada.

Forced displacement, Apartheid, Genocide…

And Mother Earth, wounded beyond repair.

In the Age of Information,

I have seen the unthinkable streamed in real time.

This is what colonization looks like in 2024,

when imperialism eclipses humanity.

Have we learned nothing?

Or are we edging the cusp of a reckoning?

While peripheral voices of humanity and reason are forcibly quelled by the machine,

muffled screams echo through centre streets

down classroom hallways,

[19] See Barghouti (2023) for information on Gaza, October 7, 2023. This poem was written on June 8, 2024. There are 245 days between October 7, 2023 and June 8, 2024.
[20] See United Nations (n.d.) for information on Palestine. Israel was created in1948. There are 76 years between 1948 and 2024.
[21] See Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (2015) for information on the formation of the Dominion of the Canada in 1867. There are 157 years between 1867 and 2024.
[22] See Baker (2003) for information on English explorer, Giovanni Caboto (John Cabot) who is credited to the discovery of Newfoundland in 1497. There are 370 years between 1867 and 1497.

bouncing off walls like watermelon seeds shaken from their core.

Your struggle is connected to my struggle,

Your liberation is connected to mine,

We are not free **until we are all free**.

When I look into the eyes of your children,

I see my own.

So, when nihilism tries to enter my *spirit*,

consume my *hope,*

Sunbird reminds me: **The darkest hour of the night is just before the dawn.**

Awia’sit (Travels in a circle)[23]

Crow rode the thermal, circling round and round, up and down, as the warm air cradled her small body. Her wings were tired from all of the flying. She had travelled the coastline, from Nujio’qonik to St. Anthony and back to Elmastukwek, searching for clues to answer the question she laid tobacco on months ago: Were all things in creation connected in this way? Are we all part of a story told in the sky, like Muin and the seven bird hunters, growing with each new moon?

Just then, Crow spotted a woman walking the railbed, the one remaining marker of Crow Gulch, a forgotten community. Perhaps she didn’t forget. Perhaps she knew this place. That is why she was here visiting.

Suddenly, Crow lost the thermal. Wings all a-flutter, she flapped about before slipping back into the circle. One solitary feather gently fell to the ground.

Crow watched as the woman stopped in her tracks and bent down to pick it up. She gripped the feather in her left hand, closest to her heart, holding it upright as she began to walk. As she edged the bend, Crow perked her ears to hear her say,

“Everything is connected.”

[23] *Note.* Crow silhouette element by ©[Rumah Kita] via Canva.com

Reflections on the journey

I started this journey not knowing where it would lead. I knew that a thesis meant adding new knowledge to the field of education, but I also knew that whatever I created would be in the spirit of giving back. What I didn't realize is that none of that would be possible without first understanding who I am and where I came from. Only then, could I more fully understand why I am here (what brings me to this work) and where I am going (what I am able to give back). In order to find answers to each of these fundamental questions, I would have to unravel the Eurocentric knots, embedded in my thinking from years of education, and rely on what I have learned from family, community, spirituality, and land. I would have to place trust in my own learning spirit by letting her lead the way. I had only ever done this once before and I wrote about it in the first chapter. This time, I would have to fully let go in order to find myself in education.

Throughout this journey, I have come to see Crow as my learning spirit. She comes from where I come from, she has been here all along, watching me learn and grow. Throughout this journey, she sheltered me in her wings when I needed an added layer of protection and she nudged me along when I needed a little push. She helped me to interpret, to draw connections and to find hope. Through her, I gained the courage to speak our shared story into existence. In turn, I learned who I am, where I came from, why I am here, and where I am going. The answers were always there, nestled in the intersections and interconnections of spirituality, identity land, people, language, stories, and relationships.

Herstory is but one story in the ocean of untold stories that envelop this island. It is my attempt to find the English words to break the Mi'kmaw silence I have carried within. Liberating my learning spirit from the constraints of traditional Western research taught me about

Indigenous methodology. Decolonizing my mind from the Eurocentric education that I received, from kindergarten to graduate school, created the space to allow me to better understand Indigenous ways of teaching and learning.

Through this process, I learned that the unique gifts each learning spirit brings to their earth walk is wrapped in a collective of experiences and relationships that make us whole. Parsing and prioritizing learning, according to Western socio-economic values, breaks the wholeness of a learner into its constituent parts, some deemed worth keeping and others requiring adaptation or deletion from the learning experience in order to fit the Western model. This practice, which we have become accustomed to since colonization and the advent of public education, runs counter to understanding who we are as humans. We are whole beings and we live in relation to each other, to the land, and to all things animate and inanimate. Public education systems fragmented this fundamental truth, almost to the point where it has become unrecognizable, and sometimes forgotten altogether.

When we begin to bring all of our pieces back together in our learning, adding in those that have been extracted and reclaiming those that have been assimilated, perhaps we can see the whole more clearly and remember this fundamental truth. Who you are, as a whole person, is tied to your ancestors, your family, your language, your stories, your land, and all of your relations. One piece does not fully make sense without the others. Everything is connected.

The following Seven Elements of Learning model grew out of the self-reflective journey I took in this work, towards decolonizing my thinking about education. Rooted in values held within the “Mi’kmaq Creation Story,” as it is told by Mi’kmaw Elder Stephen Augustine, this model explores learning as both an individual and collective earth walk tied to our relationships and our responsibilities.

Seven Elements of Learning[24]

The Mi'kmaq people have been gathering together around fires. And when we gather together, we hear the stories from our old people. And the stories talk about the importance and the meaning of the number 7. Life began with the number 7. (Augustine, "Mi'kmaq Creation Story," p.1)

[24]*Note*. People, fire and eagle elements of this design supplied by Canva

In his book, *Who We Are: Four Questions for a Life and a Nation,* the Honourable Murray Sinclair (2024) said that,

> In order for Indigenous societies to function properly, they must raise and educate children so that they can answer what Elders from all walks and cultures in the world call 'the great questions of life.' These questions are:
>
> Where do I come from?
>
> Where am I going?
>
> Why am I here?
>
> Who am I?
>
> Children need to know their personal story. We all need to know the stories of our parents and our grandparents, our direct and indirect ancestors, and our real and mythological villains and heroes. As part of that story, we also need to know about the story of the community of people to which we are attached—our collective story—all the way back to our place in the creation of this world. We all have a creation story, and we all need to know what it is. (p.2)

This is where the Seven Elements of Learning begins—with the "Mi'kmaq Creation Story." We must look all the way back to learn where we came from so that we may begin to understand who we are, why we are here, and where we are going. The "Mi'kmaq Creation Story" tells us that life began with the number seven.

Element 1: Spirituality

First, there was the Giver of Life, who made everything. (Augustine, "Mi'kmaq Creation Story," p. 1)

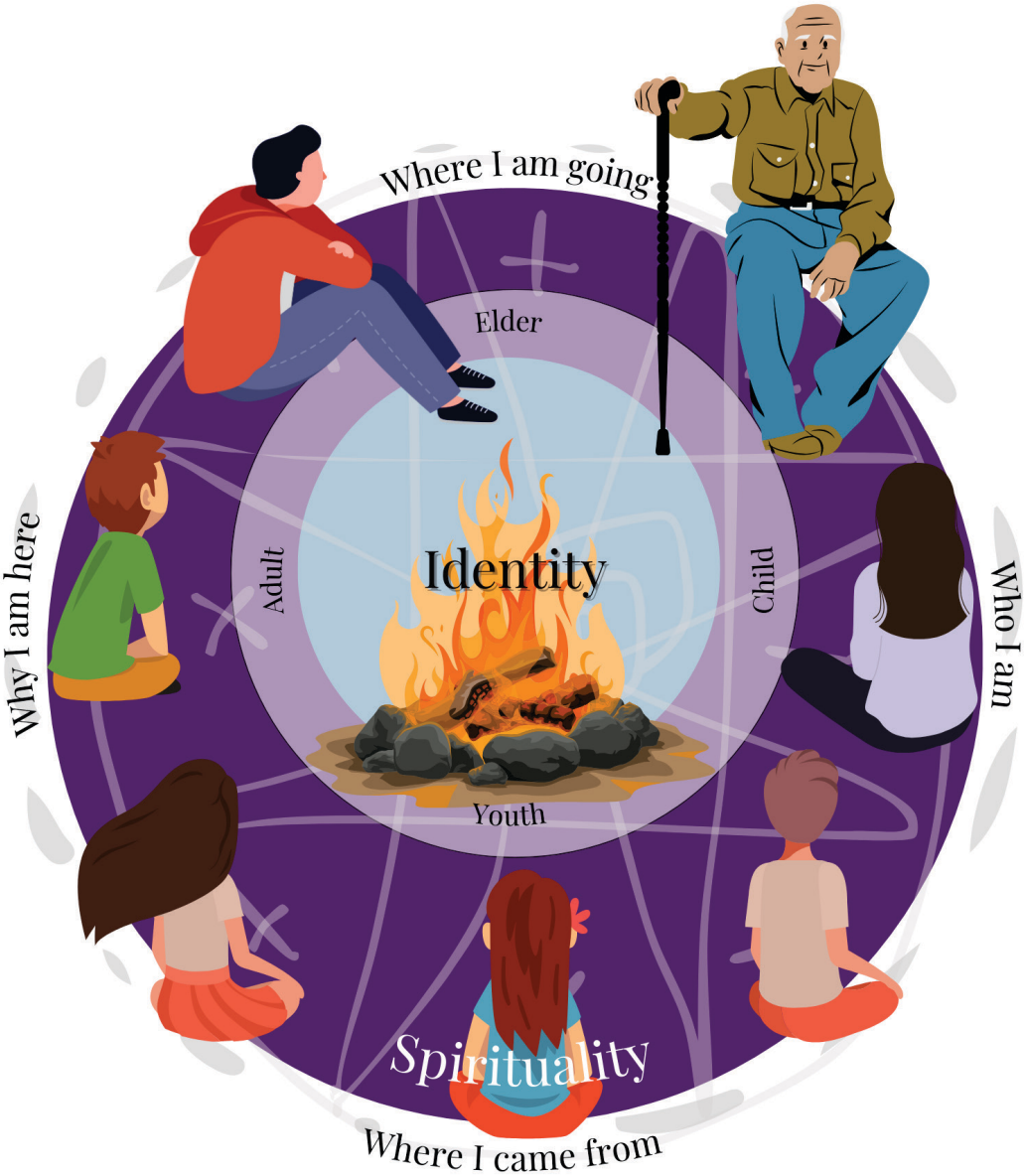
Figure 1.1: Element 1

Element one of the learning journey opens with Creator in the direction of the spirit world where all life begins. From this direction, the ancestors prepare us to enter our earth walk. As our spirits unite with body, mind, and emotions, it comes to the earth "with a purpose for being here and with specific gifts for fulfilling that purpose… it has a hunger and a thirst for learning" (Battiste, 2010, p.15). The nature of being human is to learn as we grow. Each step we take is part of a spiritual journey that connects us with the ancestors, the land, and all of creation. We do not come to this walk alone. Rather, we are guided by our ancestors and the learning spirit we hold within ourselves. We bring special gifts into the natural world to fulfil our learning spirit's purpose for being here. It is a purpose that is much greater than the self because it is connected to our role in the world and in our community and learning how to use our special gifts to give back.

Element 2: Identity

Then there was the sun, we call Nisgam, our Grandfather. And it's the sun that gives us our shadows, and it's important that we have shadows. And they are our spirits, it gives us our lifeblood." (Augustine, "Mi'kmaq Creation Story," p. 1)

Figure 1.2: Element 2

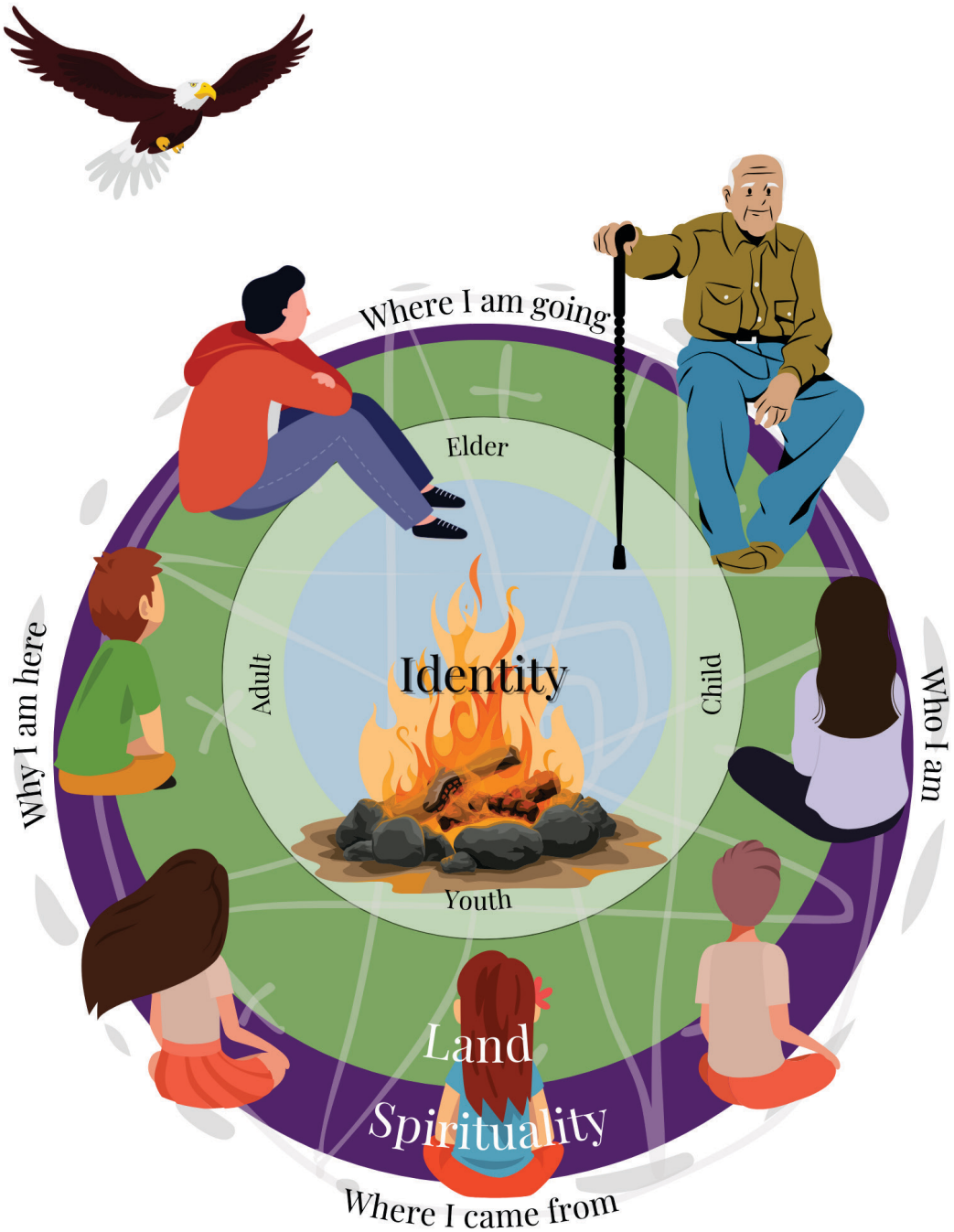


Element two links learning to identity. In the “Mi’kmaq Creation story,” our shadow is our spirit which connects us to our ancestors but also gives us a unique sense of self. Our shadow exists in that space between the sun’s rays and the earth’s surface where the body blocks the light’s direct path. This strangely familiar silhouette, traveling beside us, moves with an energy powered by our body’s natural relationship with the earth and the sun. In the absence of light, our shadow appears to remind us that we are here, on an earth walk, to fulfil our spirit’s purpose. Part of this purpose is understanding who we are as individuals who are tied to a collective. As we embark on this learning, it is important to always remember that we do not travel alone; our ancestors travel with us because they are part of who we are. Our earth walk is tied to theirs. If we pay close attention, we may receive their messages somewhere in the space between the sun and the earth, from an eagle circling overheard to a feather in the middle of our path, reminding us of who we are and who we are meant to become.

Element 3: Land

And then, the third entity was the Earth, Ootsitgamoo. And upon the Earth, all life is given to us from our Mother Earth we call Oetsigitpogooin. (Augustine, "Mi'kmaq Creation Story," p. 1)

Figure 1.3: Element 3

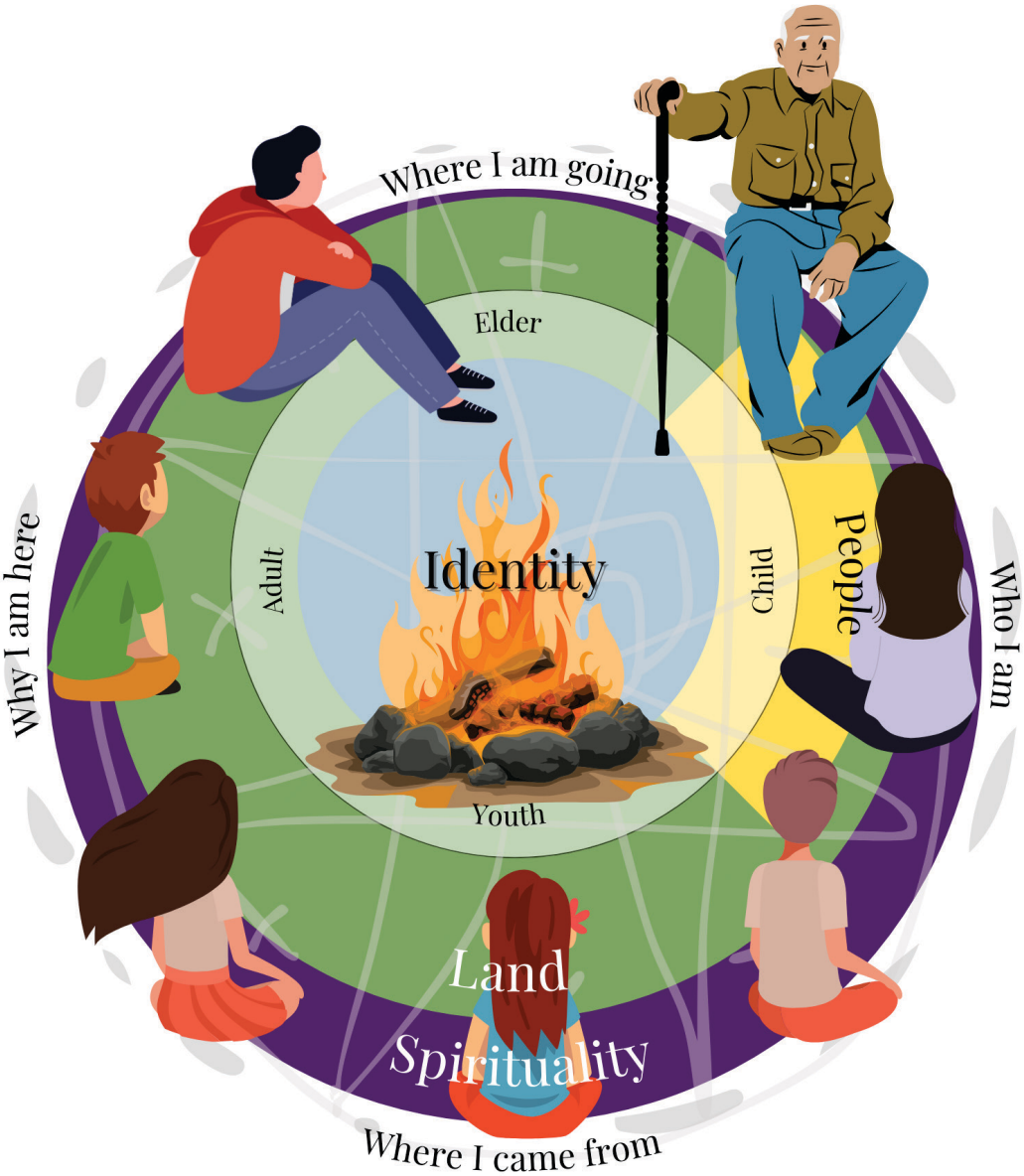


The third element links learning to the land which informs our identity and sustains our lives. The “Mi’kmaq Creation Story” teaches us that Mother Earth is the heartbeat of life. She is our food, our medicine, our culture, our spirituality, and our sense of self. She has always been our greatest teacher but, somewhere along the path to education, we stopped listening to her. Reconciling with each other is not enough. True reconciliation also requires reconciling with Mother Earth and positioning her, once again, as our teacher. Learning in relationship with her solidifies our understanding of the interconnections and interdependencies between all things that depend on her for their existence in a non-human-centric world: the plants, the swimmers, the flyers, the crawlers, the four-legged, and the two-legged creatures. These are all our relations. Our individual wellbeing is tied to the collective wellbeing of the natural world. Learning on the land, and from the land, reminds us of our responsibility to be stewards of the natural world. It reminds us to walk lightly upon Mother Earth and to always ensure we do our best to protect her for the health and wellbeing of the next seven generations. They will depend upon her for their existence when they enter their earth walks to discover their own learning spirit’s purpose.

Element 4: People

Not too long after everything was created, the Life-Giver caused a bolt of lightning to strike and hit the earth. It formed the shape of a person. The head was in the direction of the rising sun. And the arms were outstretched and the feet were in the direction of the setting sun. (Augustine, "Mi'kmaq Creation Story," p. 1)

Figure 1.4: Element 4

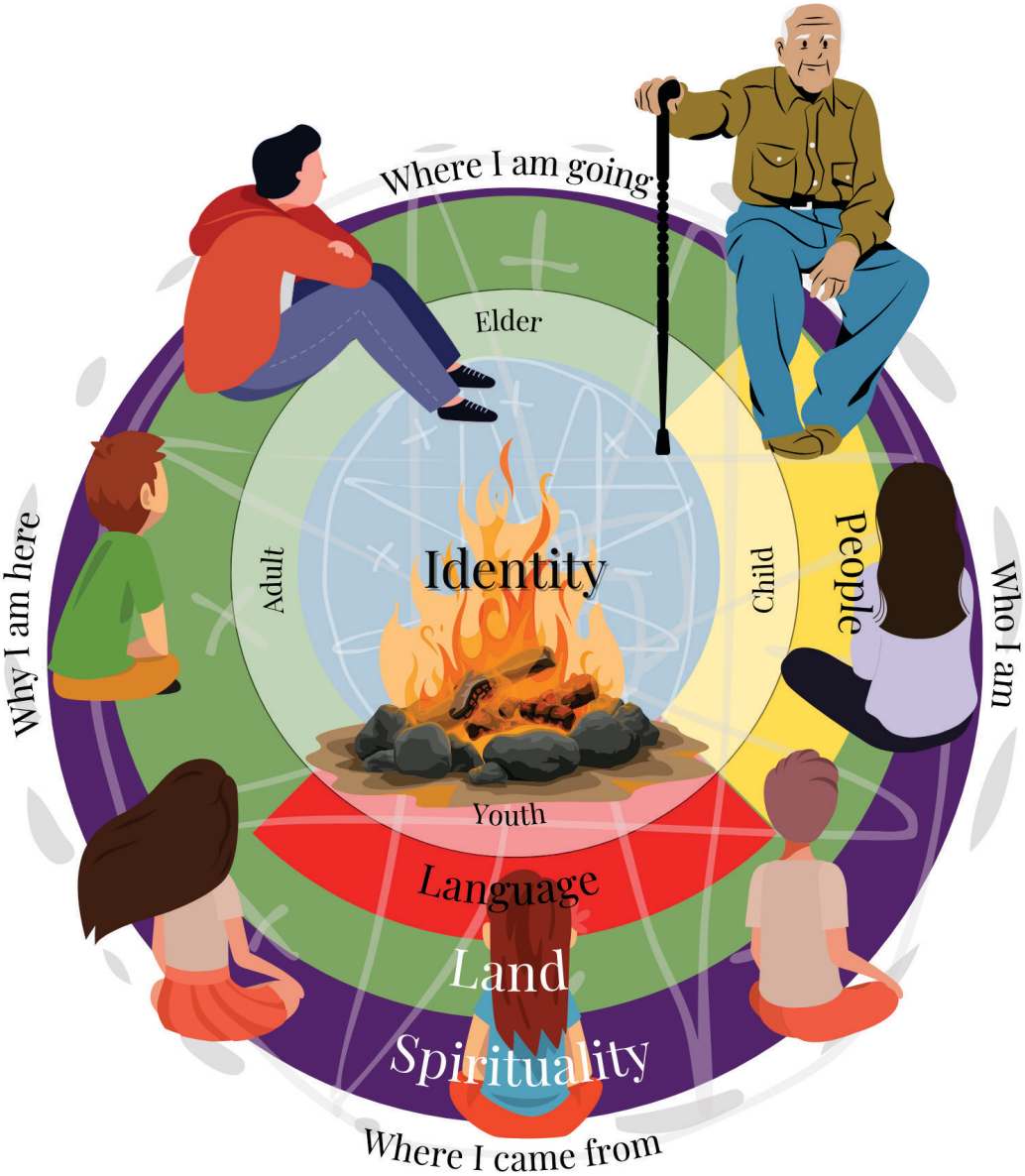


The fourth element of the learning journey links us to a community of people who share traditional ways of knowing and being. These are the people who help us learn where we came from, who we are, why we are here, and where we are going. Robert K. Thomas conceived that "language, sacred history, religion, and land" are the four interrelated and interdependent elements that comprise a peoplehood (Holm, Pearson, & Chavis, 2003, p. 12). A peoplehood includes "those who share a relationship in common with these elements and, within this shared relationship, describe their histories and origins, define their interactions with their environment, outline the timing and methods for their ceremonies, and structure their kinship networks" (Ellasante, 2021, p. 1511). A peoplehood brings us together as a community that provides us with a sense of belonging, nurtures our growth, and safeguards our shared cultural heritage for future generations. Learning is inextricable from who we are, as a people, who are meant to help one another realize the full potential of the special gifts we each bring to the world.

Element 5: Language

Next, Glooscap met his Grandmother who was born from a rock. She said, "I will teach you all there is to know about the animals, the birds, the plants, the trees and the fish. Then you will be able to gain your life from there." (Augustine, "Mi'kmaq Creation Story," p. 2)

Figure 1.5: Element 5



The fifth element links learning to language. Each language is tied to the land out of which it was born. Regardless of where the language travels, it has roots in a place – it has a home. The Mi'kmaw language is Indigenous to Mi'kma'ki (Mi'kmaw territory) and each word holds meaning connected to the lands and waters our people have travelled since time immemorial. The Mi'kmaw language carries the wisdom of our people that has been passed down from generation to generation. It unlocks the meaning of traditional teachings that inform our ways of knowing and being. One day, it will become our responsibility to pass these teachings down to the next generation to ensure the knowledge continues to live in the collective memory of our people.

When I read the "Mi'kmaq Creation Story" in English, I imagine hearing Glooscap's grandmother teaching him how to live, in relation to all of creation, using the Mi'kmaw language. Language is the vehicle through which our knowledge can be most accurately conveyed. With each new Mi'kmaw word I learn, I find deeper meaning in our teachings than the English language could ever convey. The preservation of language is not simply the preservation of a mode of communication; it is the preservation of cultural identity. If a language dies, knowledge dies with it. Knowledge is tied to language and language is, therefore, tied to learning.

Element 6: Story

Glooscap met his nephew, Netaoansom. He said, "I can run and help Grandmother and you. I have vision. With my eyes, I can see far away into the future. You will be able to be guided by my strength, my vision. And I also am gifted with the spirit to guide you." (Augustine, "Mi'kmaq Creation Story," p. 2)

Figure 1.6: Element 6

In the sixth level of creation, Glooscap's nephew joins his family with a vision of the future and the learning spirit to guide him in the direction of that vision. The "Mi'kmaq Creation Story" teaches us that moving toward a vision of the future, that honours all our relations, requires learning the stories of our people. Knowledge is held in our stories which help us to understand who we are and where we came from. Only then, can we determine why we are here and where we are going. Stories help us connect our own experiences to those of our family members who have journeyed here before us. Stories also ground our thinking in the cultural values and beliefs of our people. In the words of Thomas King, "the truth about stories is that that's all we are" (2003, p.2). They are wonderous but they can also be dangerous so "you have to be careful with the stories you tell. And you have to watch out for the stories that you are told" (King, 2003, pp. 13–14). The stories we hold, and the stories we are told, inevitably shape our learning journey. Historically, education has told us stories that have only served to confuse and misguide us. The sixth element of learning is a reminder that, to find the answers to the four fundamental questions of life, we must look to the stories of our family and our community. These stories hold our truths and can help us envision our path more clearly.

Element 7: Relationships

Then Glooscap's mother arrived. She said, "I bring life into this world. I bring all the colours of the blues of the skies and the yellows of the sun, to form together the greens of the grass and the forest. I bring the black of the night, the white of the snow, the red of the earth, the colour of the rainbow. And I bring strength and understanding for my children, that they will continue to survive and to live, and to understand one another and to share and rely on each other."

(Augustine, "Mi'kmaq Creation Story," pp. 2–3)

Figure 1.7: Element 7

The seventh element ties every element together, like the eight-pointed Mi’kmaw star at the center, connecting us to each other and to a deeper understanding of ourselves. In Mi’kmaq, learning what it means to be human, living in balance with all of creation, can be understood through the concept of msɨt no’kmaq (all my relations). Glooscap’s mother reminds us that, learning how to live in reciprocal relationship will not only shape the path of our own earth walk, but also the earth walks yet to come. Learning, then, is as much a collective endeavor as it is an individual experience. It is a journey we take in relationship with one another. The outcome of learning is not measured by individual gains and human-centric rewards, it is measured by what we learn through our relationships and what we collectively leave behind for the next generations as the ancestors in the spirit world prepare them for their earth walks yet to come.

Conclusion

And so one day, after they all ate and celebrated and were living their lives, the eagle came back. And he said: "I bring another message. The Great Spirit tells us that you and Grandmother have to leave this world, and you have to go to the land of the spirits. But you have to make sure that the fire does not go out. Instruct your mother and your nephew to look after that fire." (Augustine, "Mi'kmaq Creation Story," p. 3)

Like the fire, drawing us near in its glowing warmth, learning what it means to be human draws us closer to each other and to all of creation. The Seven Elements of Learning demonstrates that learning can occur in any place or space that adds meaning to an individual's sense of self and purpose. It is unbound by the walls of an educational institution. In fact, much learning takes place in community, with family, on the land, and in the water. The local environment informs learning that is holistic, reflective, experiential, spiritual, and relational. This learning nurtures the whole human—mind, body, and spirit, as they grow to understand who they are, where they came from, why they are here, and where they are going.

The Seven Elements of Learning model can be interpreted in several ways. It can be interpreted as moving clockwise, from east to north, to illustrate the physical growth from child to elder. It can also be interpreted as a continuous spiral to depict how knowledge deepens as the learner cycles through the interconnected elements over the course of a lifetime. Lastly, the model can also be understood as moving outwards like the concentric circles that sweep across the surface of the water when we toss a stone into it. The reach of an individual learning journey extends far beyond the self because learning is relational. In this way, each learning journey is connected to other learning journeys and each individual earth walk is connected to the earth walk we collectively share.

I set out on this journey in search of a model of education that could support the non-assimilative coexistence of differing worldviews. What I discovered, through a reflective journey into my own identity, was a model of learning rooted in relationships and responsibilities. I learned that, as we grow, the interconnected elements of spirituality, land, people, language, stories, and relationships grow deeper and wider, informing each step we take, until we leave our

earth walk to enter the spirit road back into the sky. The circles of learning we leave behind do not disappear; they reverberate into the next seven generations.

…And since our collective words are represented in the smoke, we blow our words in 7 sacred directions. In this way, the seven levels of creation are entrusted to hold onto our words. (Augustine, "Mi'kmaq Creation Story," p. 3)

Recommendations

Each individual is on a lifelong learning journey that does not begin when they step inside of a school and does not end when they receive their diploma. We are all, simultaneously, teachers and learners in relationship with each other and with all things. These relationships nurture internal growth that spirals outward, into the physical world. In many ways, public education operates on the reverse premise, whereby external expectations and rewards push learners towards a desired outcome. The questions become: Whose desired outcome? Who is at the center of the current model, making these decisions? In turn, whose best interests are met? When the learner takes a backseat to determining the path of their own learning journey, we fail to effectively support their internal growth. When families and communities are not included in determining what knowledge is worth sharing, intergenerationally, we fail to harness the power of education to heal relationships and to build trust. When we set grades, academic awards, and diplomas as the external rewards for achieving the goals of the system, we perpetuate cycles of exclusion and assimilation for those who struggle to fit the Eurocentric mould.

Reorienting the path of public education towards the non-assimilative coexistence of differing worldviews requires envisioning education differently, from an alternative lens. The Seven Elements of Learning model offers a depiction of my own learning journey, as I have

come to understand it, through the data presented in the seven chapters of this thesis. These chapters unveil the tensions that I have experienced within Eurocentric education systems that privilege a Western worldview. They also offer an alternative vision of learning, framed in seven core elements that have emerged out of this exploration—spirituality, identity, land, people, language, stories, and relationships. Grappling with the layered interconnections between these elements has helped me to recapture and reclaim the holistic nature of learning rooted in Mi'kmaw values, including the fundamental truth that we, as individuals, exist in relationship to each other and to all of creation. These relationships lie at the core of our shared sense of humanity as something we can all believe in. If we embrace these relationships, honouring all parts of ourselves and each other, in relation to all of creation, then the outcomes of education change. We abandon the logic of education as a system of inputs (students) and outputs (jobs) and we begin to center learning on the earth walk we collectively share, including the responsibilities we carry with us for the wellbeing of the next seven generations.

My grandmother used to count the crows:
1 for sorrow, 2 for joy, 3 for a girl, 4 for a boy, 5 for silver, 6 for gold,
7 for a story never told – Wta'tukwaqanm

Msɨt no'kmaq (all my relations),

Sara Leah

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Appendix

Figure 2: Seven Elements of Learning