

Kwe/Halu/Greetings/Bonjour. I am honoured to be invited to speak to you today on unceded Algonkian territories.

I am a Mi'kmaw educator, a member of Potlotek First Nations, with 28 years in teacher education at the University of Saskatchewan, having taught courses in First Nations Metis and Inuit education, antiracist and decolonizing education. I am currently a Special Advisor to Cape Breton University's Vice President Academic Provost and to the dean of Unama'ki College on Decolonizing the Academy.

For a period of my career starting in 2005, I also was the co-director of one of five nationally funded but a short-lived projects of the Canadian Council on Learning, the Aboriginal Learning Knowledge Centre at the University of Saskatchewan. One of our tasks was to review graduation rates across the country and identify ways to improve them. We found from extensive literature reviews that the ways success was then being defined illustrated mostly deficits of Indigenous students, what they lacked not what they had or aspired to have.

This realization led us to generate community workshops with First Nations, Metis and Inuit communities to identify what success meant to them. This led to the creation of three FNMI holistic learning models that illustrated how communities defined success and its processes. Success for each of the 3 Indigenous groups meant that learning was holistic, life-long, experiential, communally-activated, grounded in language and cultures of the communities, from their land, involving their spiritual relational worldviews and growing roles and responsibilities in those places with their ecology, and included the diverse knowledge systems of both Indigenous peoples and Euro-western Canadians.

Today, like it was then, Indigenous Peoples have not changed in their aspirations for how their own ways of knowing, languages, cultural and traditions can and should be sustained. The UN Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples now affirms those as rights in Canada and as potential unrealized opportunities in and through education, whether public, federal or post-secondary. Indeed the constitutional affirmation of aboriginal and treaty rights leads us to decolonization in Canada and to reach for trans-systemic education, meaning across diverse knowledge systems, with Indigenous and Canadian conventional education.

Defined in a recent 2021 report *Igniting Change: Final Report and Recommendations of the Advisory Committee of the Federation for the Humanities and Social Sciences*, of which I am an author, decolonization is

[quote]...a necessary and ongoing process of unlearning, uncovering, and transforming legacies of colonialism, as well as utilizing the educational and knowledge systems available to relearn and rebuild the social, cultural, and linguistic foundations that were lost, or eroded through colonialism. Decolonization also requires making space, balancing, generating and enabling diverse knowledge systems to thrive in the academy as well as in and through educational and knowledge transmitting places for Indigenous

Peoples, the formerly colonized or continuing colonized nations, peoples, and cultural knowledge systems [end quote] (Smith, Golfman, Battiste, et al., 2021)

Education must be more than legislated provincial topics and skills, or discipline specific areas in universities, with sprinkling of Indigenous content. Schools need the funding, resources, and FNMI self-determining right to extend lifelong learning community activated opportunities, based on and grounded in Indigenous knowledges and braided with conventional learning. At present these are limited to special projects, such as inquiry based learning and land-based learning that are outside of the current programs. As well, students with special needs need to find success with their skill sets in other kinds of learning and young parents who have not had the opportunity to continue their education need to find more advanced learning opportunities to nourish their success and their own goals through learning in and through Indigenous knowledges. What I have come to know from elders is passing on what we know is an act of love. Decolonizing education then for me is the act of love that generates my passion, my research, my teachings and my activism. Wela'lin. Na-kuur-miik. Thank you. Merci.