

## **An Invitation to Lakehead University's Ogimaawin Aboriginal Governance Council to Support an Aboriginal Education Research Proposal**

**April 6, 2013**

### **Introduction**

My name is Alexa Scully and I am undertaking a PhD in Aboriginal Education in the Faculty of Education under the supervision of Dr. Paul Berger. I am submitting my research proposal for your consideration today to comply with new research requirements at Lakehead University. The Tri-Council Policy Statement 2 permits urban organizations to serve as "community" for the purposes of community engagement if those organization have been created to enhance the welfare of the populations they serve (in this case, Aboriginal populations). In addition, the Lakehead University Research Ethics Board Researcher's Agreement requires that a plan be organized to ensure community engagement. For urban populations, that plan is to be developed with a representative group. I am asking Ogimaawin to be the representative group. I am therefore asking the Ogimaawin Aboriginal Governance Council to endorse this proposal in principle on the basis that you consider my research a valuable undertaking for Aboriginal Education at Lakehead University, across Canada and within Aboriginal communities. Your endorsement of this proposal in no way indicates an endorsement of the research results – these results will be my responsibility with the oversight of my supervisory committee. Because this is research involving human subjects, I will go through an approval process with the Lakehead University Research Ethics Board to make sure I am conducting the research with participants in an ethical manner. If you endorse my research, I will submit a semi-annual report to the O-AGC, providing updates as the research unfolds.

### **Purpose of the research**

The purpose of my research is to explore how place-based education<sup>i</sup> is used in Canadian teacher education to provide a more historically, culturally and territorially specific and accurate account of Aboriginal peoples in Canada, in pursuit of equitable and positive outcomes for Aboriginal learners; this pedagogy also seeks to transform the relations that non-Aboriginal Canadians have to the Aboriginal peoples and to the lands of Canada.<sup>ii</sup>

### **Research Question**

How is local, place-based education in Canadian teacher-education promoting cross-cultural understanding of the interrelated histories and shared communities and lands of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples in Canada?

## **Rationale**

I am a White, Celtic settler. I want to work as an ally with Aboriginal peoples in addressing historical and current injustices. I am a PhD student and a teacher-educator; I have taught 13 sections of the mandatory class in Aboriginal Education in the Lakehead Faculty of Education. As an educator of teachers, I have a responsibility and an opportunity to change the way that teachers and students learn from and about First Nations, Inuit and Métis people in the Ontario education systems. I see myself as in relationship with the peoples and the lands of Canada, as a citizen, as a Treaty partner, and as someone who is profoundly land-connected.

Canadian educational curricula and what is left out of curricula regarding Aboriginal history and peoples detrimentally affects both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal learners, contributing to a profound lack of understanding and acknowledgement of the interrelated history and current realities of Aboriginal peoples and communities in Canada.<sup>iii</sup> ‘Aboriginal Education’ in teacher education is a practice of both social and ecological justice – an opportunity for Canadian learners to be in right relation<sup>iv</sup> to the peoples and the lands of Canada. Respecting the diversity of Aboriginal peoples in the myriad of educational contexts – on-reserve, off-reserve, traditional, non-traditional, urban, rural, remote – demands approaches that are as dynamic and varied as the contexts themselves; place-based education is uniquely situated to address these complexities. In the classes that I teach, I require the pre-service teachers to research the treaty regions, traditional territories, local communities, and community supports available to their teaching close to our classroom and to their homeplaces. I also require the pre-service teachers to engage with the local Aboriginal community by attending some of the events that are offered here at LU – Elder’s Days at Aboriginal and Cultural Support Services, the Pow wow, Sweatlodge, Bannock Tuesdays, open houses at Dennis Franklin Cromarty School, the Fall Harvest, etc. These assignments have opened up great dialogue and learning, fostering the understanding that non-Aboriginal people are all already in relation with Aboriginal peoples and territories. Place-based education is relational, responsive, and respectful in its specificity.

It is widely reported that most non-Aboriginal Canadian teacher candidates lack knowledge of Aboriginal history – most notably the many sites of resistance to colonial oppression and assertions of Aboriginal sovereignty – and of contemporary communities and Aboriginal resurgence.<sup>v</sup> This lack of knowledge is then perpetuated in Canadian students<sup>vi</sup>, and is particularly harmful to Aboriginal learners. Increasingly, teacher education programs across Canada require instruction in Aboriginal Education. For example, the University of British Columbia has a required Aboriginal Education class for all Bachelor of Education students as of 2012; Lakehead has had a mandatory course since 2005. More Faculties of Education are also requiring further integration of Aboriginal perspectives into course content and

pedagogy to align with federal and provincial policies, such as the *Ontario First Nation, Métis and Inuit Policy Framework* (OME, 2007). As Faculties of Education respond to these policies, it is crucial that teacher educators learn how to do this work well. My research will contribute to a community of practice by sharing strategies and experiences, and by acknowledging successes and challenges facing teacher educators who are engaged in this work across Canada.

## Research Design and Methodology

The research begins with self-study, which is a form of narrative inquiry. Self-study requires that the researcher reflects on her own experience against the experiences of other practitioners in their field, and that the researcher ultimately commits to contributing to the community of practice.<sup>vii</sup>

I have conducted the first stage of a self-study of my practice as a teacher-educator in Aboriginal Education. The data I am using is from ongoing personal writing, themes from instructor evaluations and assignments, and anonymous informal feedback. Self-study calls for respect, relationality, humility and personal location; these characteristics are very attractive to me, and show the kinship of this methodology to Indigenous research methodologies.<sup>viii</sup>

The next stage of research will expand the scope of my initial self-study. I will conduct in-depth interviews with 15 Indigenous and non-Indigenous teacher-educators who teach mandatory or elective courses in Aboriginal Education, or who use a significant amount of Aboriginal content in their teacher education courses. Interviews will take approximately one hour. I will approach potential participants via a brief email to ask for their participation, or to recommend others who might be interested in participating (snowball selection). Data will be used to lay the groundwork for describing the shared experiences and themes of teaching Aboriginal Education in Canadian teacher-education. All of Canada is Indigenous territories; each instructor will be teaching in specific cultural and physical places. From my own experience and as evidenced in the literature, the physical location of the instruction in Aboriginal Education in teacher education, and the ways this is taken up, may have a significant impact on the learning and the growing awareness of the relationality of the learners.

## Notes

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<sup>i</sup> Place-based education is learning that is explicitly connected to the landscape, communities, economies, and histories local to the student. For further explanation of place-based education, see Gruenewald, 2003; Orr, 1992; Sobel, 2004

<sup>ii</sup> Battiste 1998, 2000; Battiste & Barman, 1995; den Heyer, 2009; Donald, 2009; Strong-Wilson, 2007

<sup>iii</sup> den Heyer, 2009; Donald, 2009; Godlewska, Moore & Bednasek, 2010; Kanu, 2005; Tupper & Cappello, 2008

<sup>iv</sup> 'Right relation' is a concept that I was taught by Anishinaabe-kwe Elder Edna Manitowabi. It is connected to the commonly-heard Anishinaabe phrase 'All my relations': as I understand it, it is an acknowledgment of mutual respect, reciprocity, accountability, and good intent.

<sup>v</sup> den Heyer, 2009; Kanu, 2005; St. Denis, 2007; Tompkins, 2002; Tupper & Capello, 2008

<sup>vi</sup> Schick & St. Denis, 2003

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