



EDUCATION EXCHANGE

NEWSLETTER



A Message from the Dean

In the **September 2025 issue** of the *Education Exchange*, I spoke of the work that we would be undertaking through this current academic year. All that work is ongoing at the time of writing this report, but the decision by the provincial government to reduce the length of initial teacher education programs in Ontario will dominate the work of the faculty over the coming months. While that

decision will, of necessity, dominate our workload, it will not prevent meaningful progress from being made on other important priorities.

Short-Term Priorities and Faculty Renewal

Over the coming months, the faculty will continue to move forward on both short- and long-term priorities, with the longer-term priorities taking us well into the 2030s and 2040s. In the short term, we will continue with the renovation of spaces in Thunder Bay's Bora Laskin Building. The Student Lounge, once described as a gulag by a visitor, has been renovated into an attractive multipurpose room for people across the faculty to enjoy. The next space to be redeveloped is the long-delayed *Kakina Nidinawe Maaganuk* (which translates to "all my relations" in Anishinaabemowin) space.

As we continue this work, we will also begin the process of appointing an Assistant Dean – Teaching and Learning, as Dr. Sonia Mastrangelo will be stepping down when her term finishes. Sonia has made a tremendous impact on the quality of teaching and learning in the faculty by pressing forward in developing the Collaborative Instructor Groups and work with Associate Teachers. On behalf of the faculty, thank you Sonia. We will also be looking to appoint an Assistant Dean – Research, a new position, which will be responsible for building on the research culture of the faculty.

Long-Term Planning and Growth

Speaking of longer-term priorities, the faculty has received permission to hire three new full-time faculty members. We are looking at one position in Orillia and two in Thunder Bay. The Orillia position will help with the expansion of the Keewatinase Indigenous Teacher Education Program in Orillia, while the Thunder Bay positions are necessary to enable succession planning at that campus. From being hired to being tenured is a journey of at least four years, meaning a person hired now will not be tenured until 2030. We hope to hire new faculty over the coming years, but much will depend on the impact of enrollment with the change to a 12-month program.

We are also close to finalizing our project to realign our administrative structure to better match our current and projected student enrollment. The main outcomes of this process will be geographical control of the programs based in both Orillia and Thunder Bay, and the centralization of faculty-wide services such as teacher candidate placement. We expect this change will be finalized in the summer and will set us up for the next 15-20 years.

The other long-term priority is the ongoing planning for a new academic building at University Avenue in Orillia. In a recent media statement, University President Dr. Gillian Siddall spoke about the commitment to the new building and the plan to house the faculty in the building. The university has already taken steps toward construction, recently closing a request for proposals to select an architect on April 8, a signal that the project is moving beyond the conceptual stage. Bringing this building to fruition would be a tremendous step forward.

So, there is much to look forward to over the short- and long-term as we build on the strengths of the faculty—even as we put in the difficult work of developing a new 12-month program to be ready for May 2027.

Regards,
Wayne Melville, Dean of Education



Alumni Profiles

Vicki Monague

Anishinaabemowin Educator, Activist, and Entrepreneur

Graduate of Anishinaabemowin Language Programming (Georgian College, 2018); Bachelor of Arts, Political Science (Lakehead, 2021); Master of Education for Change, specialization in Social Justice Education (Lakehead, 2023)

Vicki Monague is Pottawatomi-Ojibwe and an Anishinaabe Kwe from Beausoleil First Nation (Chimnissing/Christian Island) on the shores of Georgian Bay. Known by her spirit name Mzhakdo Kwe of the Wolf Clan, she is a traditional Oshkaabewisikwe, Anishinaabemowin speaker, water protector, and Lakehead University alumna, current student, and Contract Lecturer.

A committed water activist, Vicki was a lead organizer in the successful 2009 movement to stop a proposed landfill over the Alliston Aquifer at Site 41. Since 2011, she has advocated against nuclear waste in the Great Lakes region and led a 17-day, 822-kilometre Water Walk around Georgian Bay in 2013. A survivor of the Indian Day School system and from a family deeply impacted by the Indian Residential School system, her work—spanning community leadership, teaching, and entrepreneurship—is grounded in advancing Anishinaabe language, culture, and knowledge systems. A single mother of three, she is guided by a commitment to create transformation and a stronger future for her children, community, and the next generations. She shared the following:

“Because the Spirit Believes in You”

“My educational journey has not been a straight path. Educational struggle is part of this story.

I previously attended Athabasca University for Political Science in 2008 but did not succeed. At that time, trauma and self-destructive behaviours stemming from significant psychological harm impacted my ability to be a successful student.

Everything changed when I returned to school in 2016 to study the Ojibwe language at Georgian College. Language restored my identity.

I returned to school because of the late Edward Benton-Benai-iban, Grand Chief of the Three Fires Midewiwin Lodge. His promotion of language, culture, and education profoundly influenced me. Through language learning, I began to heal in a holistic way.

When I decided to return to school, I was on social assistance. My children and I were struggling financially. Our vehicle required thousands of dollars in repairs. Food insecurity was real, and the systemic scrutiny that accompanies social assistance was constant and heavy.

I applied to Georgian College and was accepted the next day. I had no funding and had to leave my home to live in Barrie. My mother and sister stayed with my children during my first semester.

One winter night, after leaving my abnormal psychology class during a blizzard, I could not afford bus fare. I was carrying a heavy backpack filled with books and electronics, worried about tuition, double rent, and how I would feed my children. Walking down the street in the storm, I fell to my knees in despair. I felt defeated, wanting to quit and questioning why



all of this was happening.

In that darkness, I heard a voice say: “Because the Spirit believes in you.”

I stood up and kept walking.

That night I wrapped myself in blankets, feeling as though I had hypothermia. The next morning, I woke up to an Indspire scholarship email. It covered my tuition, allowed me to repair my vehicle, and enabled me to move home and commute to school. That moment taught me faith. I graduated with honours and then applied to Lakehead University.

Navigating Barriers and Finding Support

Being an Indigenous student in post-secondary education is difficult. Being a mature Indigenous student and single mother navigating systemic racism and layered forms of oppression is even more challenging. Many people do not fully understand the weight of these intersecting barriers.

Supportive staff, professors, and departments made a tremendous difference. Learning about child-targeted assimilation policies and colonial violence against Indigenous Peoples was both triggering and transformative. At times it produced deep anger. Yet it also brought clarity and healing. I came to understand that childhood trauma experienced within colonial systems of oppression and assimilation is not our fault. This helped me begin to release some of the self-blame, shame, and resentment I had carried for many years.

Several faculty members and staff were instrumental in my journey, including Denise Baxter, Chris Glover, Mercedes Jacko, and Dr. Paul Cormier. Dr. Zubairu Wai and Dr. Todd Stubbs were foundational to my academic development. Dr. Pamela Toulouse also encouraged me during my Master of Education. Because of her encouragement, I returned to complete my Master’s thesis and intend to apply for doctoral studies in 2028. Given the amount of failure I once experienced, I never imagined I would reach this point.

Education, Healing, and Giving Back

I never planned to pursue Education. I only knew that I needed to remain in school for my children and for transformation. Being a single mother meant working three

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times harder. There were periods when I worked four jobs while being a full-time student. My days often began at 5:30 a.m. and did not end until 10 or 11 p.m. It was exhausting, but worth every minute. Today my children are academically minded, confident, and grounded. That transformation alone made every sacrifice meaningful.

My healing journey also came through Anishinaabe *gikendaasowin* (knowledge). After nearly succumbing to addiction during a time of profound loss in my life, my healing began through ceremony, through my Uncle Hector Copegog,

Medwayoshi teachings, and the sweat lodge. It was there that I began walking on the Anishinaabe *Miikan* (road) again.

Since 2019, I have taught more than 1,300 students across various institutions using Anishinaabe pedagogy. I also had the honour of teaching at Algoma University in the Anishinaabemowin and Anishinaabe Studies programs—the same programs where my late Grand Chief once taught.

I did not plan this path. But I now understand that everything—the struggle, the healing, the language, and the education—were all part of the same journey.”

Ryan Magill

Grade 7/8 Teacher, McKenzie Public School, Lakehead Public Schools

Graduate of the Bachelor of Education program (2014)

“I am currently in my fourth year at McKenzie Public School. After spending six years in six different schools in Long-Term Occasional roles, it has been very meaningful to settle into one school community.

When I began my journey in education, I originally aspired to work as a high school teacher. However, I have found a passion for the lintermediate division, and currently teach Grade 7/8.

After graduating in 2014, I entered a highly competitive job market in Thunder Bay. I began my career at Dennis Franklin Cromarty High School, where I worked for two years as an occasional teacher and prime worker. That experience was both formative and deeply rewarding. It allowed me to build meaningful relationships while gaining invaluable classroom experience. During that time, I also supplied within the Superior-Greenstone District School Board.

In addition, I spent five years as a sessional lecturer at Confederation College, teaching in-person, online, and hybrid courses until 2020. Teaching adults provided great experience and strengthened my skills in online teaching—something that proved especially valuable during the pandemic.

Another significant chapter of my career was spent as a consultant and educator for Logics Academy, an umbrella company of Microsoft Canada. In this role, I provided professional development in Minecraft Education, STEM and coding. Over five years, I provided professional development to hundreds of teachers and administrators across Canada, and collaborated on the development of curriculum-aligned, game-based lessons that reflected provincial expectations. This work reinforced my belief that technology in education must be intentional, purposeful, and connected to measurable learning outcomes.

In my current classroom, I lean on coding, robotics, 3D Printing, Minecraft Education, engineering challenges, and interactive digital platforms. These are not add-ons, but integrated components of student learning. I am particularly passionate about helping students shift their mindset in mathematics and science by giving them opportunities to experiment, design, iterate, and reflect. When students see learning as active and relevant, engagement increases and achievement follows.



Leadership and Growth at Lakehead University

Thinking back on my time at Lakehead, a major highlight of my university experience was playing varsity hockey. Balancing athletics and academics (my undergraduate program was in Kinesiology) reinforced the importance of commitment and continuous growth. I was fortunate to have a number of friends from my undergraduate program join me for my year at the Faculty of Education, and I met a lot of great people who I now work with in Thunder Bay.

Teaching also runs in the family. My brother, Murray, is also an elementary teacher at École Elsie MacGill Public School.

I am married and have two boys, Myles (3) and Max (1). Next year will be especially meaningful as Myles will be starting school with me at McKenzie.

For current Education students, my advice is to embrace innovation and be open to change. Seek mentors, welcome feedback, and be willing to take thoughtful risks in your teaching practice. The most impactful educators are those who remain curious, adaptable, and committed to continuous growth.”

Self-Regulation and its Role in our Mental Health and Well-Being

Dr. Sonia Mastrangelo

As part of Lakehead's President's Public Lecture Series, Dr. Sonia Mastrangelo (Education Professor, Orillia campus), explored the role of self-regulation in mental health and well-being. Drawing on the self-regulation framework developed by Dr. Stuart Shanker, she discussed how stress shapes behaviour, learning, and relationships—and how understanding it, and applying self-regulation strategies, can help people function more effectively in everyday life. The full talk is [available online](#).

Stress: it's a universal human experience. Everyone encounters stressors throughout life, and in today's world these pressures come from many directions. Sonia shared research published in 2026 that identifies six major stressors currently affecting Canadians:

- Financial stress, including from inflation and rising grocery prices
- Housing affordability
- Workplace challenges such as burnout and labour shortages
- Geopolitical tensions
- Environmental stress and climate anxiety
- Digital stress

The final category—digital stress—has grown significantly with the rise of social media and constant connectivity. “Forty-seven percent of Canadian adults are saying that social media actually harms them,” she noted. She pointed to the effects of digital comparison and the pressure to respond “on demand” to texts and email, which can interrupt attention and focus, disrupt sleep, and weaken social connections—ultimately increasing overall stress levels.

What Happens When We are Stressed?

In everyday terms, stress is often described as feeling pressured, anxious, or overwhelmed. From a neuroscientific perspective, however, it is a biological response that occurs when the brain perceives a threat. This leads to a stress response, where the brain releases chemicals such as adrenaline that sharpen the senses, increase heart rate, speed up breathing, and tense the muscles—preparing the body to react quickly.

While this response can be helpful in short bursts, challenges arise when the total stress load becomes too high and the body remains in this heightened state for extended periods.

“When we think about stress and what it can do to us, it can really wreak havoc on the brain,” she explained. For example, as stress accumulates, individuals may experience irritability, difficulty focusing and problem-solving, intrusive thoughts, and persistent worry.

High levels of stress can also lead to what she described as “stress behaviours.” These occur when the limbic system—the brain's emotional centre that controls the fight, flight, or freeze instinct—takes over. “The limbic system is not rational; it is emotional,” Sonia explains. In these moments, individuals have limited capacity to respond differently because their reactions, or stress behaviours, are automatic.

Stress behaviours are distinct from *misbehaviours*, where a person retains the ability to choose a different response because the prefrontal cortex remains engaged. For educators, understanding this distinction is important, as it can shift how we interpret and respond to student behaviour.

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Self-Regulation and Stress Strategies

A key take-away of the presentation was that while stress is unavoidable, perspective and self-regulation play a critical role in how it is experienced. How we interpret and respond to stress can shape everything from our ability to learn to the quality of our relationships.

“Ultimately, learning to recognize and regulate stress can improve not only academic success, but also relationships, resilience, and overall quality of life,” Sonia said.

Drawing on Dr. Stuart Shanker’s Self-Regulation framework, she outlined five practical steps for managing high levels of stress:

1. **Read and reframe the behaviour.** Consider whether the behaviour in question is a misbehaviour or a stress behaviour.
2. **Recognize the stressors.** Dr. Shanker’s framework identifies five domains of stress: biological, emotional, cognitive, social, and prosocial (i.e., managing the stress of others).
3. **Reduce the stress.** Engage in strategies such as going for a walk, exercising, meditating, spending time with pets, singing with others, or having meaningful social interactions, all of which are known to boost oxytocin and reduce stress.
4. **Reflect.** Build awareness of personal stress patterns and coping strategies.
5. **Respond.** Practice habits that restore energy and build resilience.

Self-regulation develops over time through both biology and environment, beginning with early co-regulation between children and their caregivers. Having supportive relationships are essential throughout life to help deal with stress, restore emotional balance and build resilience.

In learning environments, fostering a sense of safety is critical—students are better able to focus when they feel supported. Responding to stress behaviour with empathy, rather than simply telling a student to “calm down,” makes a meaningful difference.

Looking Ahead

Sonia is in the throes of conducting a study on stress and well-being for both undergraduate and graduate students from all faculties in Orillia. The work will be piloted in Thunder Bay by her doctoral student, Bruno Bilotta, as part of his dissertation work. The research involves students learning about well being through a series of modules and focus groups that provide practical strategies for managing stress, procrastination, and building healthy relationships. The goal is to help students better understand their stress responses and build self-regulation skills that support both their academic success and personal well-being.



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MAKE A
DIFFERENCE

May is Leave a Legacy Month

Anyone with assets should have a Will to:

- protect your family and your estate
- minimize taxes
- establish a legacy and safeguard future generations

A gift in your Will to Lakehead University can:

- **CHANGE LIVES**
- remove barriers to a post-secondary education
- sustain important programs and initiatives

**A GIFT IN YOUR WILL.
SOMETHING YOUR FUTURE
SELF WILL BE PROUD OF.**

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“The support I received through the estate of Florence Shuttleworth-Higgins has allowed me to focus more on my studies, bringing me closer to my career goals and dreams.”

MARINDA TRAN, Bachelor of Arts, Recipient of the Florence Higgins Music Scholarship



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Faculty News

Taliah Lalande Receives Lakehead Leader Award for Community Engagement

Creating a sense of belonging has always been central to Master of Education student Taliah Lalande's purpose—and her impact has now been recognized with a 2025 Lakehead Leader Award for Community Engagement.

Currently pursuing a Master of Educational Studies, Taliah first came to Lakehead Orillia as an undergraduate in the Bachelor of Arts and Science program, where she specialized in interdisciplinary studies with a focus on geography.

"I love to travel, and the program allowed me to better understand the world around me," she says.

Adjusting to university life, however, was not easy. Moving from a small, close-knit community in Kitchener to a new city where she knew no one left Taliah feeling isolated. That experience motivated her to help ensure other students wouldn't feel the same way.

"Loneliness can have such a negative impact on mental health," she says. "I wanted students to feel connected, supported, and heard."

Taliah is known to be a familiar and uplifting presence across campus. Through her work with Lakehead Orillia Athletics, she has helped foster school spirit and student connection by supporting athletes, creating social media content, and attending events as a passionate cheerleader and photographer. She has been recognized by Lakehead's



Taliah at the final home game of the Lakehead Orillia 2024-25 soccer season.

Student Success Centre for her kindness, compassion, and dedication to others. She has also made an impact through her involvement with the Education Student Teacher Association – Orillia (ESTA-O), serving first as Operations Director and later as Vice-President. In those roles, she helped organize community-minded initiatives such as food drives for the Sharing Place Food Centre and the popular Crafts and Cocoa event, which brought students together while supporting charity and local student businesses. Looking ahead, Taliah hopes to continue creating supportive spaces where students feel safe, valued, and confident in themselves and their abilities.

Jessica Nelson Wins Award for Demonstrated Excellence as a French Second Language Teacher

Congratulations to BEd teacher candidate Jessica Nelson, recipient of the Ontario Modern Language Teachers' Association (OMLTA) Helen G. Mitchell Award.

Presented annually, this award recognizes one graduating student from each Faculty of Education in Ontario who best demonstrates the qualities of an outstanding French as a Second Language teacher.

Jessica was nominated by James Steele, Contract Lecturer in the Faculty of Education, in recognition of her exceptional performance in the BEd program, including the Curriculum & Instruction: French as a Second Language (I/S), Part 1 course. She was also recognized for her ability to apply effective second-language teaching methodologies that support student success during her practicum placements.

For Jessica, the award represents both a personal milestone and the beginning of her professional journey.

"Winning the Helen G. Mitchell Award is an incredible honour. As a graduate of the French Immersion program, my passion for the French language has been a part of my life since the beginning of my education and has continued to grow throughout my studies. This recognition is especially meaningful to me as I begin my journey into the teaching profession. I look forward to bringing and sharing that passion in my future classroom, helping my students develop a genuine appreciation for the language and culture. This is a responsibility I am proud to carry forward," Jessica says.

Jessica attended the OMLTA award ceremony in Toronto in March and will graduate in June.

Congratulations, Jessica!



Jessica (left) holds her award alongside James Steele, Contract Lecturer.

Guided by the Stars: Vicki Monague Presents the Anishinaabe Celestial Sphere at Research and Innovation Week

As part of Lakehead University's Research and Innovation Week in February, Anishinaabe scholar, Contract Lecturer, and MEd graduate Vicki Monague (profiled on pages 2-3) delivered an impactful presentation on Anishinaabe star knowledge and her work on the Anishinaabe Celestial Sphere project.

Vicki explains that for Anishinaabe peoples, the stars and constellations carry an entire system of knowledge. They connect people to ancestors and the spirit world, while also serving as a calendar, navigation system, and guide for seasonal activities, ceremonies, and storytelling.

"As Anishinaabe people, we love the stars," she said. "But the night sky isn't just about constellations. It's a living system of knowledge that guides all of our relationships with the natural world."

The Anishinaabe Celestial Sphere Project

Developed at McMaster University, the Anishinaabe Celestial Sphere program began with a meta-analysis examining the written record of Anishinaabe star knowledge. From that research emerged an Ojibwe star knowledge show presented in a portable planetarium (pictured above right), where students can explore the night sky while learning about Indigenous star knowledge.

The program brings together Anishinaabe *gikendaasowin* (knowledge) and Western astronomy through a "two-eyed seeing" approach, while aligning with Ontario's Grades 4–12 science and technology curriculum expectations.

Part of Vicki's work involves updating the Stellarium software to include Anishinaabe planetary names and constellations. These include clan constellations such as *Makwa* (the bear, which includes stars from the Big Dipper) and *Maang* (the Loon, which includes the North Star).

Anishinaabe Natural Law Written in the Stars

"Anishinaabe people are sky beings," Vicki explains. "Our creation story tells us that we came from the sky."

Bagone-giizhig, the seven-star cluster known in Western astronomy as The Pleiades (or Seven Sisters) and sometimes described as the "hole in the sky," represents an opening between the Earth and star world, reminding Anishinaabe people of their celestial origins.

Indigenous star knowledge also carries practical teachings that connect to Anishinaabe natural law, guiding people to live in respectful relationship with the land, water, animals, and one another, as well as informing ceremonial practices. For example, the constellation often called the "sweat lodge" in Anishinaabe star knowledge (known in Western astronomy as the Corona Borealis) forms a circular pattern that reflects the structure of a sweat lodge. Its seven stars, visible at certain times of the year, are associated with the Seven Grandfather Teachings and serve as a reminder of the responsibilities and protocols involved in holding a sweat lodge ceremony.

There is a deep history and continuity to these teachings, Vicki explains: "People have been here for thousands of years, and our star teachings are older and longer than any established religion or mythology upon the earth."



Publication of *Holding HIV: Poems of HOPE* Amplifies Voices Through Art and HIV Cure Research

Holding HIV: Poems of HOPE is a newly published poetry collection featuring the voices of 27 San Francisco community members living with, or affected by, HIV.

Authored by Dr. Pauline Sameshima (Professor, Faculty of Education), Emily Turner (Master of Education student), and Dazié Grego-Sykes (California-based poet, performer, and multidisciplinary artist), the collection places lived experience at the centre of HIV cure research. The book stands as a testament to survival, legacy, and shared hope for a future beyond HIV.

The poems draw inspiration from the words, reflections, and artistic responses of focus group participants and members of the HOPE (HIV Obstruction by Programmed



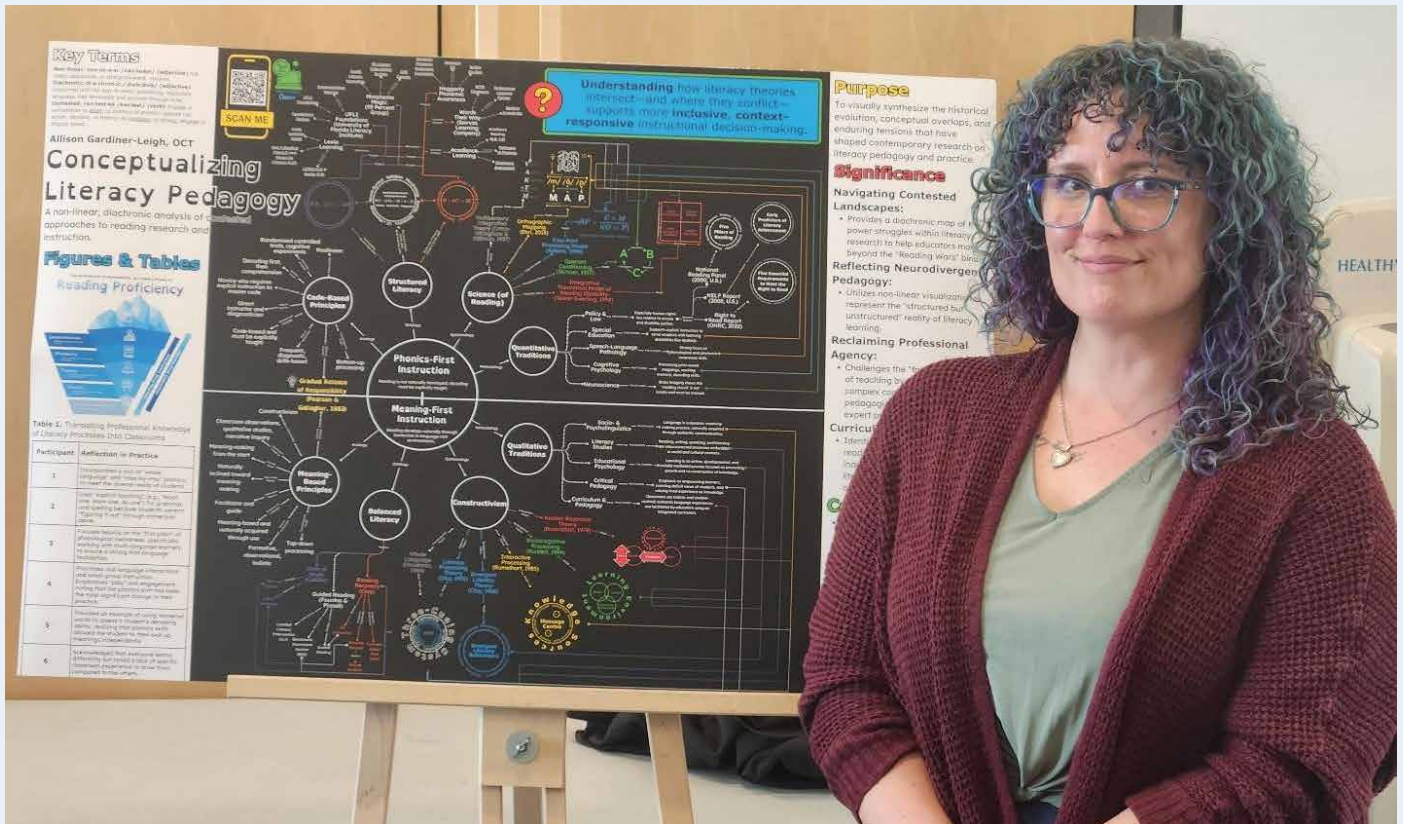
Epigenetics) Community Arts Integrated Research program. Participants were invited to sculpt clay "holders" in response to the Block-Lock-Stop strategy—an epigenetic approach aimed at permanently inactivating HIV. During the creative process, they reflected on two guiding questions: "What excites you about an HIV cure?" and "What are your fears regarding an HIV cure?"

In a review published in the February 2026 issue of *The Walleye* magazine, co-author Emily Turner described the collaborative creative process:

"We'd pore over the transcripts from those focus groups ... and we'd play with different wording. [The poetry emerged from] all this mixing

of our interpretations and our understanding of what the participants were vocalizing."

The conversations were transformed into poetry enfolding multiple themes and emotions. One reviewer described the collection as "a tapestry of words woven together by emotion, fear, hope, loss, love, grief, and resilience—the experiences of a generation."



Master of Education Student Allie Gardiner-Leigh Maps the Complexity of Literacy Pedagogy

Master of Education student Allie Gardiner-Leigh presented a research poster titled *Conceptualizing Literacy Pedagogy: A Non-linear, Diachronic Analysis of Contested Approaches to Reading Research and Instruction* during the University's Research and Innovation Week in February.

Her poster features a detailed concept map ([view the map here](#)) exploring how two primary approaches to literacy—phonics-first and meaning-first—have evolved over time, and how they continue to shape teacher practice and professional autonomy. The two approaches have often been pitted against each other in the so-called “Reading Wars,” but Allie stresses that they are, in fact, interconnected traditions.

“I created the map to show how the different literacy theories behind the debates have actually intersected over time,” she says. “What emerges isn't really two opposing camps... but rather a complex network of overlapping traditions.”

Moving Beyond the Binary

Allie's poster places phonics-first and meaning-first instruction at its centre, then expands outward to highlight the research traditions, theoretical frameworks, and policy influences connected to each.

Phonics-first approaches to reading draw heavily from quantitative research traditions such as cognitive psychology, neuroscience, and speech-language pathology, emphasizing explicit instruction in decoding skills and foundational

literacy processes. Meaning-first approaches, on the other hand, are grounded in qualitative and interpretive traditions, including constructivism, socio-cultural literacy studies, and critical pedagogy. These perspectives frame reading as a socially situated act of meaning-making between the reader, the text, and the broader context.

Allie emphasizes that the approaches can, and often do, work in tandem.

“One of the key insights from this map is that many of these theories are not inherently contradictory. Interactive processing models, for example, recognize that reading involves both bottom-up decoding processes and top-down meaning construction, simultaneously.”

Centering Teacher Voices

Allie interviewed six educators, including classroom teachers, a teacher librarian, and special education professionals, as part of her research in the MEd program. The educators shared reflections on how their knowledge of literacy theory translated into their practice, particularly amid shifting policy expectations. Allie emphasized the importance of including teachers' diverse perspectives in these conversations, noting that educators have been inequitably represented in recent policy recommendations.

“In conducting my research, I was curious—do teachers feel they have flexibility in literacy pedagogy?” she asked.

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She examined how documents such as the Ontario Human Rights Commission's *Right to Read* report and the revised Ontario provincial Language curriculum influence teachers' sense of professional autonomy, and how their beliefs shape instructional decision-making. She notes that while structured programming plays an important role, providing highly scripted resources can lead teachers to rely on these programs, rather than improving their professional understanding of how children learn to read.

Personal and Professional Motivations

Allie's interest in literacy pedagogy is rooted in both personal experience and professional concern. "I have always loved to read, and I want to make sure every child has the opportunity to develop that love as well," she says. Her experiences with individuals who

have struggled with literacy—including family members and former students—have shaped her commitment to inclusive, responsive teaching practices, particularly for neurodivergent learners.

Today, Allie advocates for a more collaborative approach to literacy education: one that values multiple approaches, supports teacher agency, and encourages meaningful dialogue between all interested parties during policy development. Drawing on a framework of adversarial collaboration, she emphasizes the importance of bringing differing viewpoints together, rather than reinforcing divisions.

"The field of literacy pedagogy depends on both evidence and professional judgment to best support learners. It's more important to do right by the kids than it is to ... die on a hill."

Allie is preparing to continue this work in her upcoming PhD studies, which will begin in July.

Anishinaabemowin Phrases and Language Revitalization

Anishinaabemowin Boodawe means lighting the fire (*boodawe*) to keep the Ojibwe language (*Anishinaabemowin*) alive—and language revitalization is at the heart of the work of the Anishinaabemowin Boodawe Committee, an educational group in partnership with Red Rock Indian Band, Kinoomaadziwin Education Body, Superior Greenstone District School Board, Superior North Catholic

District School Board, the Ministry of Education, and the faculty's Keewatinase (Department of Indigenous Education).

Below are some of the committee's recent "Anishinaabemowin Phrases of the Week." For information on events and language revitalization initiatives happening in schools, please see their [Facebook page](#).



Anishinaabemowin Boodawe Committee

Anishinaabemowin Phrase of the Week

Gaawiin anishaa indikidosii

● ● ●

"I'm not joking"




Anishinaabemowin Boodawe Committee

Anishinaabemowin Phrase of the Week

Giin igo

● ● ●

"Your choice"
"It's up to you"



Anishinaabemowin Boodawe Committee

Anishinaabemowin Phrase of the Week

Yaagwaa!

● ● ●

"excuse me"



Anishinaabemowin Boodawe Committee

Anishinaabemowin Phrase of the Week

Ginitaa-anishinaabem

● ● ●

"You speak the language well"



From Ontario to Aotearoa: Keewatinase Voices at the World Indigenous Peoples' Conference on Education

Across oceans, homelands, and traditional territories, more than 3,800 Indigenous Elders, scholars, educators, and leaders gathered for the week-long World Indigenous Peoples' Conference on Education (WIPCE) 2025 in November in Tāmaki Makaurau (Auckland), Aotearoa New Zealand.

Among them were Dr. Paul Cormier (Chair, Keewatinase Indigenous Education) and Dr. Doe O'Brien-Teengs (Postdoctoral Fellow), joining a global community committed to advancing education systems grounded in Indigenous knowledge, relationships, and cultural resurgence.

More than a conference, WIPCE is recognized as a global movement centered on Indigenous self-determination and educational transformation. Throughout the week participants engaged deeply with the histories shaping Indigenous education, confronted the challenges facing communities and reflected on the responsibility to make decisions that support the well-being of future generations.

Learning Through Storytelling

Dr. O'Brien-Teengs presentation, *Learning through Storytelling: Bearing Witness to Omushkego Women's Colonization and Resurgence in Northern Ontario*, drew on her dissertation research. Using storytelling methodologies, talking circles, and autoethnography, she centered the experiences of Omushkego women from the Hudson Bay Lowlands born between the 1930s and 1950s—including her mother and aunts. She also incorporated her own perspective as an intergenerational survivor of Residential Schools and ongoing colonization, to explore the resurgence that takes place through storytelling, language, land-based knowledge, and cultural practices such as beading.

Doe describes WIPCE as a deeply meaningful experience, not only in its formal programming but also for what unfolded in between sessions. Conversations, shared meals, and unexpected reunions provided sites of connection and renewal, underscoring the central role of relationships in Indigenous education.

"There was such a feeling of being in a safe place of Indigeneity that doesn't exist at other conferences," she said. "For example, at some point during every plenary session, someone in the crowd would stand up and start singing an honour song, and others would join in. It was really powerful."

She noted that for Indigenous scholars within institutions, feelings of isolation can be common, making gatherings like WIPCE especially significant.

"Everything that drags us down in the system, we were buoyed up," she said.



Above: Doe presented on the WIPCE main stage.

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Integrating Indigenous Knowledge

Dr. Paul Cormier contributed to two sessions at the conference. In the first session, titled *Aki Gakinoomaagewin [Teachings from the Earth] as Peace Education*, he explored how relationships with land, language, and culture shape identity and learning, and how reconnecting with Aki can address structural violence in education systems.

He also participated in a group presentation: *Family, Community, Healing – “From the Heart”: Systemic Design of Teacher Training Programs for the Health and Well-being of Indigenous Communities*. Presenting alongside representatives from Ontario school boards, regulatory bodies, and teacher education programs—including Anna-Marie Neilson of the Ontario College of Teachers and Shy-Anne Bartlett of the Superior Greenstone District School Board—the group

highlighted collaborative, culturally grounded approaches to transforming teacher education. Their discussion emphasized the strength of partnerships and the vital role of educational institutions in designing Indigenous teacher education programs.

“Meaningful educational change comes from integrating Indigenous ways of knowing into pedagogy and building relationships across all levels of the education system,” Paul says, adding that “we could never do the work we do without the incredible support we receive from Indigenous communities, but also school boards and government.”

He further notes that “privileging Indigenous ways of knowing in Keewatinase program design creates opportunities for connection and healing. Connecting students to the land through *Aki Gakinoomaagewin* provides space for the inclusion and practice of Indigenous ways of knowing.”

Dr. Meridith Lovell-Johnston Honoured with Community Builders Education Award

Dr. Meridith Lovell-Johnston (Associate Professor and Chair of Graduate Studies, Orillia) has received the 2026 **Orillia Matters** Community Builders Education Award, in recognition of her longstanding commitment to student success and her leadership in building pathways in education.

The annual award honours an individual who has significantly contributed to the advancement of education in the Orillia community.

Since joining Lakehead University in 2015, Meridith has consistently worked to empower students, helping them feel capable, confident, and equipped to succeed in their communities. With a research focus on literacy and language arts, she is dedicated to removing barriers and supporting learners at every stage of their academic journey.

“I have taught in classes where I had Grade 12 students who couldn’t read, and I was told that there was nothing we could do about that,” she said. “So, I make sure that I let my students know that, as teachers, there is definitely something we can do about that.”

Her approach to education emphasizes real-world learning, including partnerships with local school boards that place teacher candidates in classrooms. In one initiative, students conducted reading, writing, and math assessments with children in Grades 2–6, gaining hands-on experience while supporting schools.

Meridith has also played a key role in expanding access to Lakehead’s Master’s and PhD programs, opening doors for many first-generation post-secondary students.

Colleagues, in their nomination letters, describe her as a dedicated mentor and leader whose influence extends far beyond the classroom and into the community.

Meridith says she is honoured to receive the recognition and values the opportunity to make a difference in students’ lives.

Congratulations, Meridith!



Dr. Meridith Lovell-Johnston receives award from Orillia councillor Ralph Cipolla.

Dr. Christina van Barneveld Receives Ontario Arts Council Grant for Land-Based Mosaic Project

Dr. Christina van Barneveld (Associate Professor, Education) has been awarded a Northern Arts Grant from the Ontario Arts Council for her 2026 project, *Rooted Reflections: Mosaic Dialogues with Northern Land*.

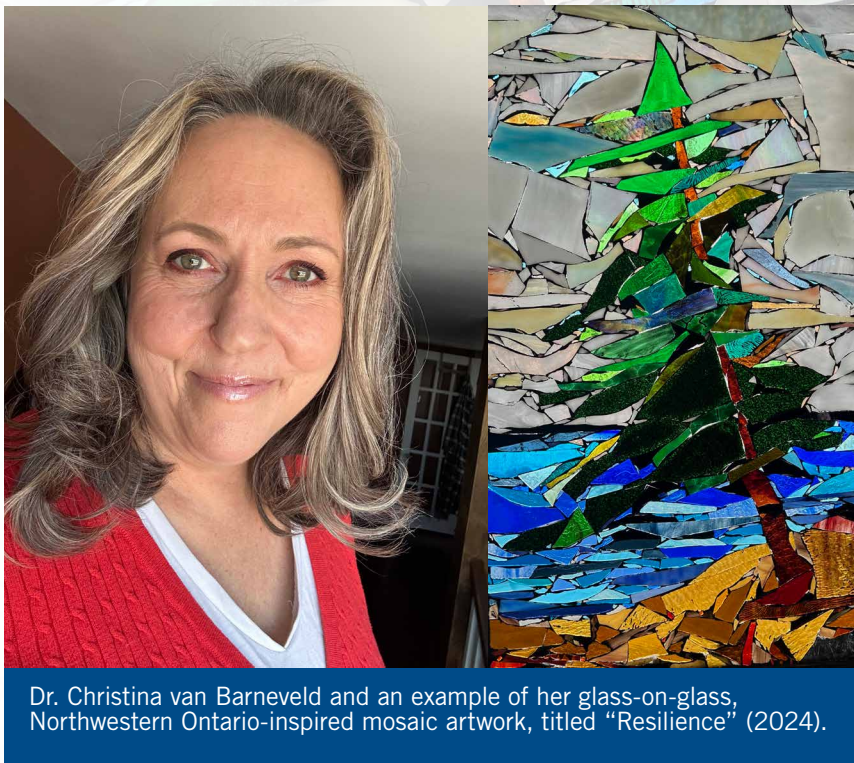
This artistic project is a series of 16 abstract fish mosaics that explore themes of migration, belonging, and identity through a Northern Ontario lens. Combining traditional glass mosaic techniques with nontraditional, responsibly sourced materials such as stone, birchbark, plant fibres, and organic materials, her work reflects a land-based artistic practice that is grounded in place and relationship.

Christina brings a deeply personal perspective to the project, examining what it means to live between cultures and how connections to land shape identity over time.

“As first-generation Canadian of Greek and Dutch heritage—born in Montreal and now living in Thunder Bay—I am drawn to the spaces between cultures and how we carry and reshape our sense of home,” she explains. “My approach reflects a commitment to ethical, land-based art-making and a deepening understanding of my relationship to people and place in the North.”

The fish motif in her artwork operates as a contested symbol of migration, resilience, survival, and spirituality across cultures, including Dutch (e.g., herring), Greek (e.g., tsipoura), and especially within Northern Ontario’s Indigenous and settler contexts (e.g., pickerel).

Rooted Reflections is grounded in a mentor/friendship-based approach through collaboration with First Nations colleague Dr. Paul Cormier (Chair, Keewatinase - Indigenous Education), a member of the Red Rock Indian Band who grew



Dr. Christina van Barneveld and an example of her glass-on-glass, Northwestern Ontario-inspired mosaic artwork, titled “Resilience” (2024).

up in Northern Ontario. A dialogic process, involving shared walks and reciprocal learning on the shores of Lake Superior, grounds her artwork in accountability to land and community.

Art, Reconciliation, and Community Dialogue

“This project is about making art as part of a journey of expanding relationality and accountability to people and places, and sharing that journey with others,” she says.

Public presentations and workshops displaying her artwork will invite critical reflection from diverse communities in Northern Ontario, prompting dialogue about the role of art in reconciliation, memory, and home. Using mosaics as a site of cultural negotiation and innovation, her project enacts a provocation: how might abstract, materially grounded art challenge assumptions about place, identity, and cultural continuity?

MPP for Thunder Bay-Superior North Lise Vaugeois also acknowledged the achievement: “Congratulations to Dr. Christina van Barneveld on receiving this well-deserved Ontario Arts Council grant. Her work shows the power of art rooted in land, community, and lived experience here in Northern Ontario. Congratulations Christina!”