

Introduction to the Special Issue: Proceedings from the 2018 Atlantic Education Graduate Student Conference

Adrian M. Downey

An Elder who had opened the meeting spoke quietly from a corner of the room. “If we have been researched to death,” he said, “maybe it’s time we started researching ourselves back to life.” (Castellano, 2004, p. 98)

The 7th annual Atlantic Education Graduate Student Conference (AEGSC) took place on Saturday, June 23, 2018 on the University of New Brunswick’s (UNB) Fredericton campus. UNB Fredericton is located on the unceded and unpurchased territory of the Wolastoqiyik people, who are members of the Wabanaki confederacy, which includes the Mi’kmaq, the Passamaquoddy, the Penobscot, and the Abenaki. As graduate students living and studying on traditional Wabanaki lands, we are obligated to work toward building and maintaining sustainable relationships with those lands and their ancestral and modern-day stewards. As my AEGSC co-chair, Amelia Thorpe, wrote in last year’s proceedings, “we are grateful for the opportunity to study on the traditional lands of Wolastoqiyik and recognize that all attendees at the AEGSC benefit from the Wolastoqi stewardship of the land” (Thorpe, 2018, p. i).

The AEGSC is intended as a space for graduate students in education from the various institutions of higher learning in Atlantic Canada to come together and share their research,

thinking, questions, and experiences. It is a unique space within the academic landscape of Atlantic Canada, a rare opportunity for serious engagement in the issues affecting education in the East by those who study them most closely and who are most directly touched by them. The conference further aims to build research communities and connections among graduate students within the Atlantic region and beyond.

The theme of the 2018 conference was “Learning and Sharing into this Place: The Wabanaki Confederacy.” This theme responds to the growing trend in social sciences research of including considerations of place within the scope of one’s analysis (see Tuck & McKenzie, 2015). Indeed, the consideration of place in research is quickly becoming an undeniable ethical imperative. With the new materialist consideration of matter as agentic (St. Pierre, Jackson, & Mazzei, 2016), the harsh ecological realities of climate change and the necessity of addressing them through education (Hensley, 2011; Ihnatovych, 2018; Young, 2018), and the re-emerging, millennium-old Indigenous understandings of place which were systematically erased through settler colonialism (George, this volume; Pictou, 2017; Tuck & Mckenzie, 2015) all contributing to the current intellectual landscape of education research, understanding the “placed-ness” of our research seems the most pressing concern of the present moment.

Our Indigenous brothers and sisters are the ones rightfully leading the conversation around how we ought to understand the places we, and our research, inhabit. For the 2018 conference, we could think of no one better suited to delivering the keynote address than Dr. Sherri Pictou. Dr. Pictou, an assistant professor in the Women’s Studies department at Mount Saint Vincent University, is quickly becoming a leading voice in the conversation around Indigenous research in Atlantic Canada. Her keynote address was titled “Decolonizing Treaty Relations in Research”

and elaborated the ways in which the Peace and Friendship Treaties can continue to guide Indigenous research. On behalf of the whole AEGSC community, I would like to sincerely thank Dr. Pictou for her excellent keynote address. Wela'lin!

The 2018 conference included presentations from graduate students studying in all four Atlantic provinces. The articles collected in the special issue comprise selected proceedings from the 2018 conference. Although this year there are only six articles in the proceedings, the quality of those articles is exceptional, and they serve as sound representations of the diverse work showcased at the conference.

The proceedings begin with Chris George's article, "Exploring Wabanaki Concepts of Holism and Longhouse Knowledges," which opens in an exposition of the ways in which settler colonialism has historically, and continues to, manifest itself in the lands of the Wabanaki. George goes on to recount the work he has done in decolonizing his own way of viewing the world toward the articulation of his emerging, holistic, Indigenous research framework, as well as the institutional and structural barriers to that work. Ultimately concerned that with "how [his] PhD research could support community-based efforts to exercise Wabanaki treaty rights to re-occupy Indigenous lands and waterways and protect them from further destruction" (George, this volume, p. 10), George's article serves as a perfect opening to this special issue.

The second article in the proceedings, "Transformation and Renewal: A Sharing Circle of Co-Researchers" by Jenny Rowett, Nancy Harn, and Stel Raven, flows seamlessly from George's conversation of personal decolonization and Indigenous research. Ultimately serving as a rigorous example of asserting Indigenous presence in spaces, such as research, that have traditionally marginalized Indigenous voices, this contribution

centers the lived experiences and stories of Indigenous people. The article also provides one example of the ethical role of settler researchers in Indigenous research context—creating, holding, and honoring spaces for Indigenous voice.

Kendall Kadtz’s article, “Safe Space in Education Abroad: Setting the Stage to Learn” is also concerned with creating spaces, particularly safe spaces for undergraduate students studying abroad. Whereas education abroad programs are emotionally charged experiences, especially for young students, Kadtz asserts the ethical necessity of attending to participants’ internal landscapes and interpersonal relationships through the notion of safe space. An ever-evolving term, Kadtz defines safe space as an “environment of trust that allows for personal and group transformation through open and honest dialogue” (this volume, p. 26) and does much to articulate the value of such spaces to the academic learning of students as well as to their emotional well-being.

Angela Tozer’s article “Smuggling-In: Disrupting Quality in Picture Books” examines and complicates notions of quality children’s literature—specifically, picture books. Situated in the context of her own lived and professional experiences, Tozer’s discussion links determinations of quality in children’s literature to the neoliberal standardization and commodification well documented in North American education systems. Her evocative style of writing, however, disrupts conventional notions of quality by dwelling within memories of learning to love reading and of being loved while reading—reminding us of Mem Fox’s (2008) words, “any books that children own and love are good books for them” (p. 135).

Candace Gallagher’s “The Beginnings of a Theoretical Framework: Weaving the Entanglements of My Thinking” is the final full-length article in these proceedings. In Gallagher’s

contribution, we are invited to slow down and witness the complex thinking and feeling involved in articulating a theoretical framework through the metaphorical, embodied, and emotionally charged act of weaving. Accompanied by beautiful images of her artistic creation, Gallagher's text carefully describes the intention behind each aspect of her weaving, ultimately positioning her as herself interwoven within a myriad of theoretical and relational entanglements.

Picking up the creative thread from Gallagher's work, my own contribution to the proceedings takes the form of a creative offering—a format new to this special issue which creates a space to display work that blends the academic and the artistic and which attempts to respond to the growing trend about any artistic ways of knowing in academia. My poetic offering entitled “Sleepless Nights and the Savage Mind” is framed as something of a response to Claude Levi-Strauss' notion of the savage mind and also wrestles with the sometimes uncomfortable process of artistic creation.

Toward closing the introduction to this special issue, there are a number of people who deserve recognition and thanks. First, I would like to extend my profound gratitude to all the presenters who took part in AEGSC 2018; your intellectual contributions represent the profound diversity of educational thought within Atlanta Canada. Second, the Faculty of Education at UNB, and particularly our faculty liaison Dr. Matt Rogers, deserves our thanks for both their financial support and for creating a space for this special issue to happen. Likewise, the Graduate Education Society should also be acknowledged for their financial support. Third, I would like to thank all those who reviewed submissions to the special issue. A special thanks should be extended to Kim McKay who served as the copy editor for proceedings. On behalf of myself and my co-chair Amelia Thorpe, to all those listed here and those whose names we have forgotten but whose contributions

nonetheless made the conference possible: woliwon, wela'lin, merci, thank you.

References

- Castellano, M. B. (2004). Ethics of Aboriginal research. *International Journal of Indigenous Health, 1(1)*, 98-114.
- Fox, M. (2008). *Reading magic: Why reading aloud to our children will change their lives forever*. New York, NY: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing Company.
- Hensley, N. (2011). *Curriculum studies gone wild: Bioregional education and the scholarship of sustainability*. New York, NY: Peter Lang.
- Ihnatovych, D. B. (2018). Listening to the Earth. In E. Hasebe-Ludt & C. Leggo (eds.), *Canadian Curriculum Studies: A Métissage of Inspiration/Imagination/Interconnection* (pp. 27-33). Toronto, ON: Canadian Scholars Press.
- Pictou, S. (2017). *Decolonizing Mi'kmaw memory of treaty, L'st'itkuk's learning with allies in struggle for food and lifeways* [doctoral dissertation]. Dalhousie University, Halifax, Nova Scotia.
- St. Pierre, E. A., Jackson, A. Y., & Mazzei, L. A. (2016). New empiricisms and new materialisms: Conditions for new inquiry. *Cultural Studies <-> Critical Methodologies, 16(2)*, 99-110.

- Thorpe, A. (2018). Introduction to the special issue: Proceedings from the 2017 Atlantic Education Graduate Student Conference. *Antistasis*, 8(1), i-iv.
- Tuck, E., & McKenzie, M. (2015). *Place in research: Theory, methodology, and methods*. New York; London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group.
- Young, K. (2018). The character of contemporary curriculum studies in Canada: A rumination on the ecological and metaphorical nature of language. In E. Hasebe-Ludt & C. Leggo (eds.), *Canadian Curriculum Studies: A Métissage of Inspiration/Imagination/ Interconnection* (pp. 78-84). Toronto, ON: Canadian Scholars Press.

Adrian M. Downey is a Mi'kmaw PhD candidate in the Faculty of Education at the University of New Brunswick. His interests are in curriculum theory, Indigenous knowledges, Mi'kmaw history, poetic inquiry, and arts-informed research. He holds a master's degree from Mount Saint Vincent University and undergraduate degrees from Bishop's University. He can be reached at Adowney3@umb.ca.