



# Mi'kmaw Inclusion at CBU: Assessment & Steps toward Indigenizing Psychology Curriculum

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Cape  
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## Background

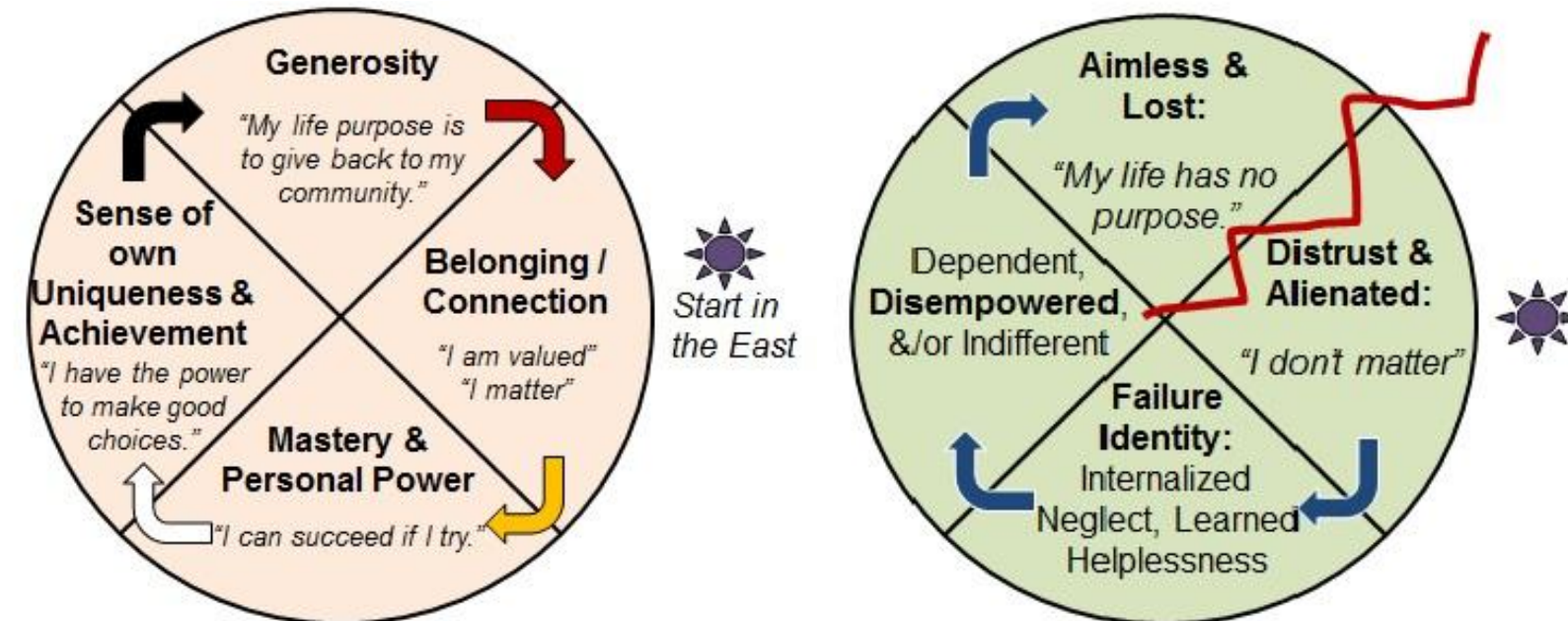
### ► Legacy of Residential Schools (1870's-1996)

- ❖ Attempted Cultural Genocide: "Kill the Indian to save the child"
- ❖ Trauma of children taken from their communities often by force
- ❖ Abuse, Neglect, Disease, & Inferior education: Most only get to grade 6 level, due to spending ½ days in "Domestic Training" (i.e., menial labour)
- ❖ End result: Intergenerational trauma & distrust for 'White Education'

### ► The Indian Act & Enfranchisement of Indigenous People

- ❖ Until 1960, Indigenous people were required to renounce their Indian Status (assimilate) if they wanted to attend university

### ► Sense of Belonging predicates Achievement (Dr. Martin Brokenleg's Lakota model of education & child development):



### ► Cultural Safety (Ramsen, 1990)

- ❖ The extent to which members of a minority group feel "safe" (i.e., can trust that members of their group will be treated with respect & understanding) in different contexts, such as hospitals, universities, etc.
- ❖ Alternative to **Cultural Sensitivity** (which focuses on measured attitudes of Privileged groups toward minorities)

### ► When CBU's Mi'kmaw College Institute became **Unama'ki College** in April 2010, it published a report called "Leaping Ahead" with the following data on Mi'kmaq students at CBU:

Status/year	2000	2004	2008
Enrolled	67	97	272
Graduated	33	30	15

## My background

### ► Born & raised near **Vancouver, BC** (Coast Salish territory) in Euro-Canadian & American family

### ► **York University in Toronto, ON:** PhD student & Community researcher for 'Understanding the Strengths of Indigenous Communities' project with 7 First Nations (incl. Wagmatcook)

- Indigenous steering committee gave permission for my PhD study PROVIDED I remember "to turn around & help pull First Nations people up" behind me in return

### ► **First Academic Position working @ Algoma University in Baawaating / Sault Ste Marie, ON:**

- Mandate that ALL teaching in every discipline must cover the history of Shingwauk Residential School & Anishinaabe culture

- Challenged me to seek out work of Indigenous psychologists, traditional teachings, & FN examples

- Community-based Research Group doing contracts for North Shore Tribal Council → Led me to Anishinaabe Elders who often laughed at mention of Psychology:

"I failed Intro Psychology! That course made no sense to me! It took me years to realize that it was because it was a study of white people by white people."

- Challenged me to question assumptions of my discipline & find teaching strategies to make it more culturally-inclusive

## 2010/11 CBU Needs Assessment

### ► OBJECTIVE

- ❖ Explore a diversity of perspectives on the experiences of Mi'kmaw students at CBU, including graduation rates
- ❖ Invite & share suggestions for improvement

### ► METHOD

- ❖ Interviews with 7 Staff/Faculty at Unama'ki College
- ❖ Focus groups with 11 Mi'kmaw CBU students

### ❖ Questions:

- What comes to mind when you think about the experiences of Mi'kmaw students at CBU?
- What challenges do Mi'kmaw students face in trying to complete their education at CBU?
- What services/supports are currently in place at CBU for Mi'kmaw students? How well do they meet the students' needs?
- What improvements (if any) should be made?

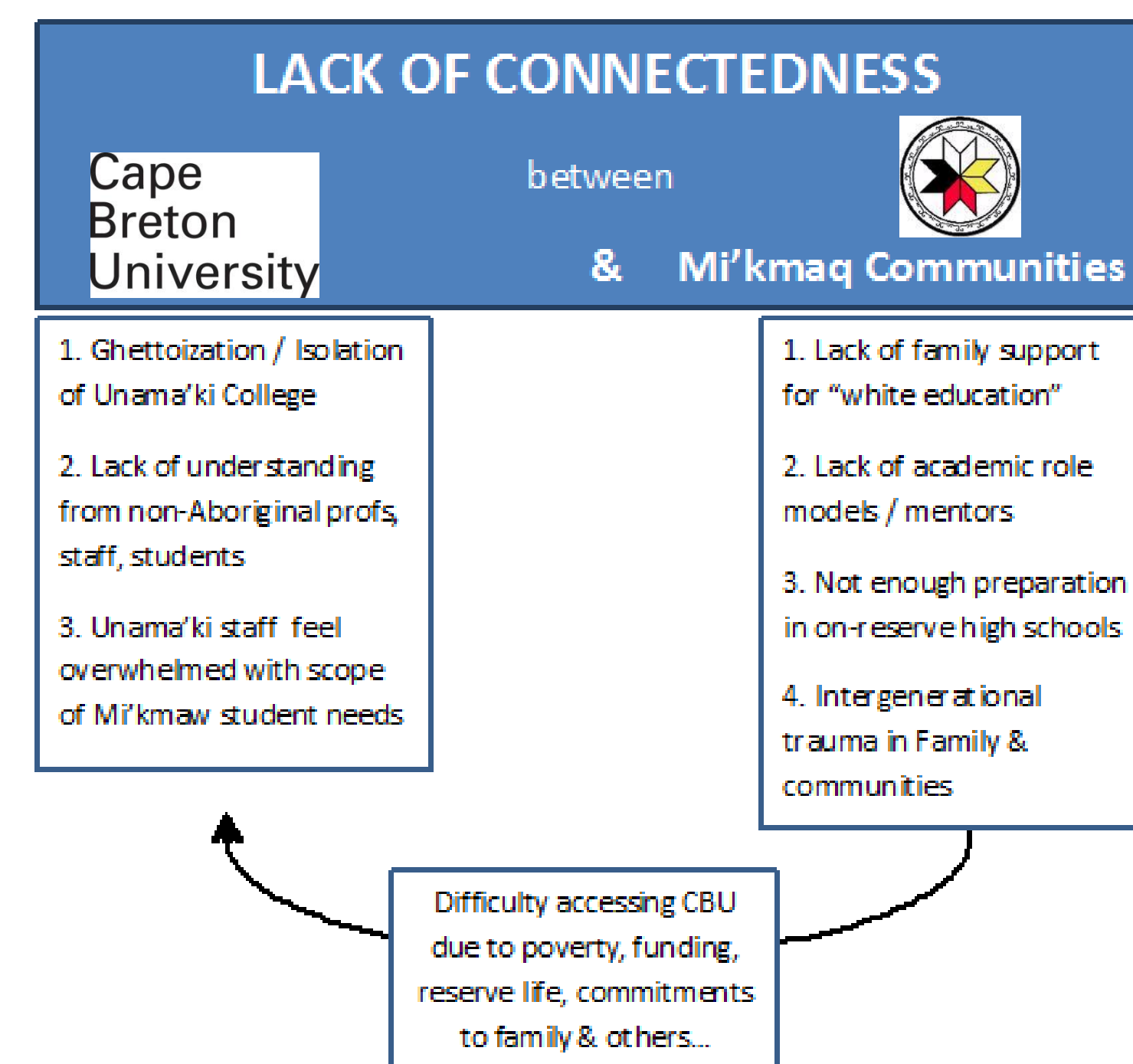
### ► RESULTS of grounded theory analysis

#### ❖ Theme 1: Essential Role of Unama'ki College / MCI: Creates Refuge/Belonging for Mi'kmaw students at CBU

"I'd probably be alone eating in the bathroom, lost without MCI."

"If there was no MCI, most of these people wouldn't even come to school."

#### ❖ Theme 2: Lack of Connectedness



"I feel like we're shoved in a corner. We're hidden.

You have to go so far in the back of the college to find where we are." (Student)

"Can we start to see [...] indication of aspects of Aboriginal people throughout the university, & not just once again to that one physical location called Unama'ki College? What kind of message does it send when we ghettoize our Indigenous cultures to one physical spot?" (Staff/Faculty)

"The social baggage is enormous. In a group like this, you're seeing this in every 4 out of 5 [Mi'kmaw students] at least." (Staff/Faculty)

#### ❖ Theme 3: Many Ideas for Improvement!

- Cultural training for CBU staff/faculty so they better understand reality of Mi'kmaq students, incl. ESL challenges
- Increase Mi'kmaq presence/visibility on-campus (e.g., artwork, Elders, Mi'kmaq language on signs)
- Improve & expand Support Services (e.g., Mi'kmaq tutors/mentors, stress reduction workshops, Ombudsperson, more Unama'ki staff)
- Improved Community Outreach from CBU (e.g., academic advising, career counselling, high school tours of campus, increase diversity of in-community courses, etc.)

## 2015/16 Inclusion Study

### ► OBJECTIVE

- ❖ Comparison with first study 5 years later: What has changed?
- ❖ Pilot-test Mi'kmaq Cultural Safety Measure: Is a questionnaire with Likert-scale items useful? Or is a qualitative approach best?

### ► METHOD

- ❖ 18 Mi'kmaw CBU students fill out Cultural Safety measure
- ❖ Focus group with 13 Mi'kmaw CBU students

### ► RESULTS

- ❖ Students appreciate being asked for feedback (either format)

#### ❖ Areas of Strength

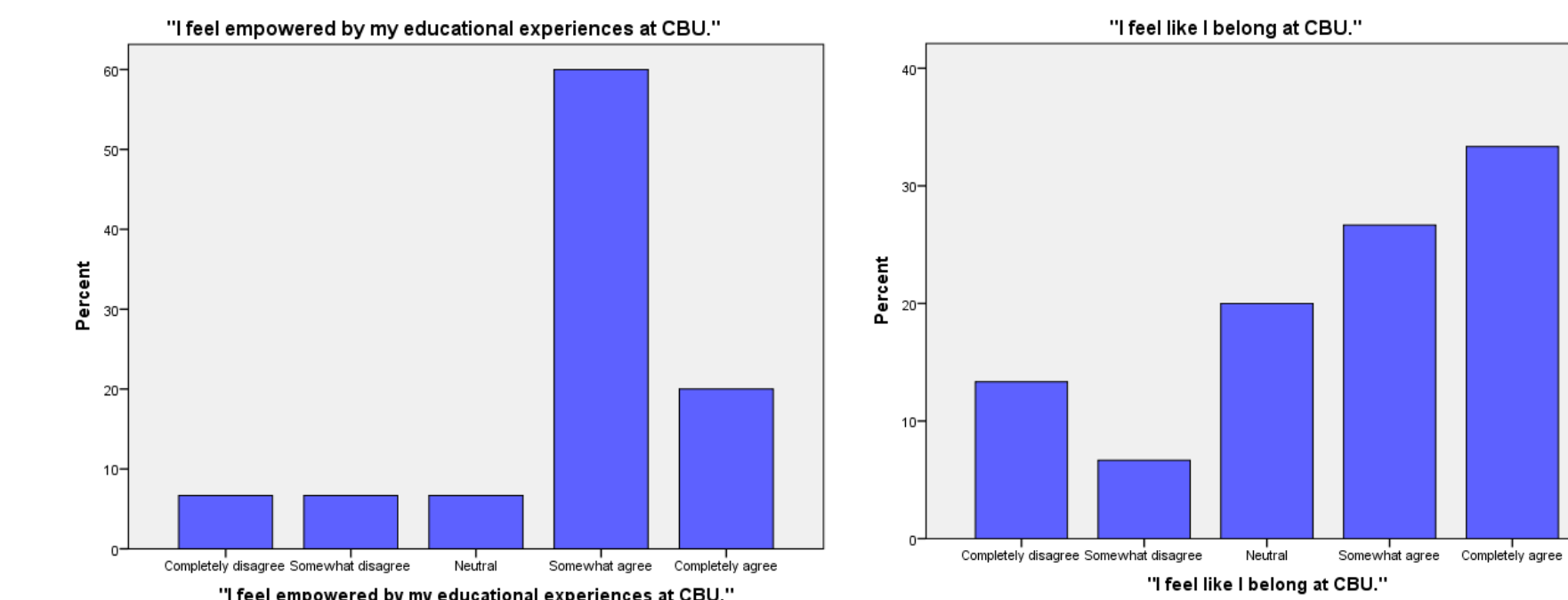
- Majority agree they feel empowered, belonging, comfortable, due to:

- Encouragement & Understanding from most of professors
- Family support / Staying close to family
- Elmitek bridging program
- Cultural diversity on-campus / International students

"The diversity of all the people? God sakes, I love international students!"

"They're better educated than most white people here!"

"Our cultures are very similar. The people from Saudi, they come from a tribal type of people and we're tribal too."



#### ❖ Areas for Improvement

- On-reserve High School doesn't prepare students for success at University: "It was a terrible transition."

"Most of the problems I've experienced was from not being educated in high school about what to expect coming here, from students, professors, or registering for what you want to do."

"We've been plagiarizing since middle school. We didn't know the difference. That's what they taught us!"

- Lack of accommodation for L'nu ESL needs

"It's hard for Lnu's to read a question & understand exactly what's being asked. I don't know what's being asked & I try to ask [the professor] to explain it better. And he says "I can't give you that kind of treatment." But the fact is: I just don't understand what the question is."

- Bad advice &/or Lack of help with Academic Advising

"I don't trust anyone here anymore besides that one lady in the Registrar's Office. You gotta watch where you're going to ask for advice."

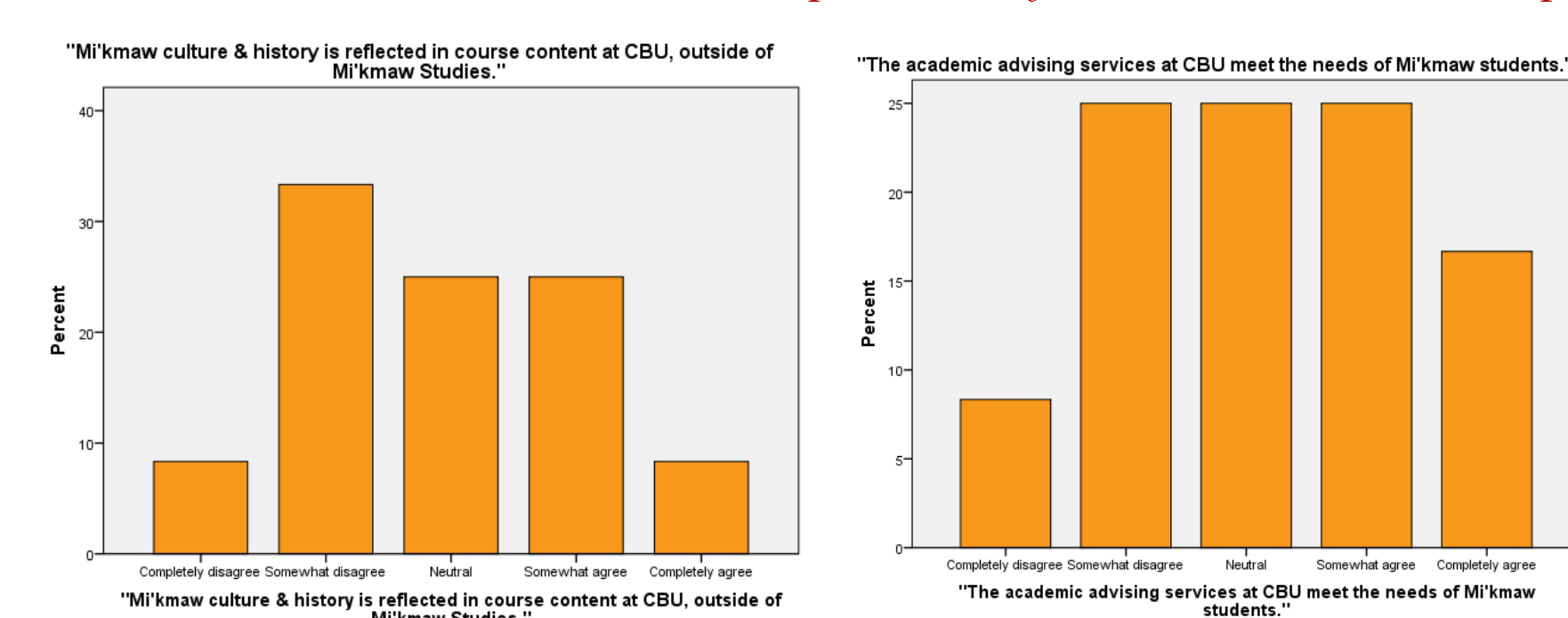
- When problems occur, most Mi'kmaw students don't advocate for themselves; The few who do describe CBU procedures as "like torture"

"A lot of them just walk away. Like they don't say nothing when somebody does something to them. Or they'll internalize it. They don't complain. We don't want to be labelled."

- Lack of Mi'kmaq content in courses

- Some negative stereotyping of Mi'kmaq students

"There's expectation of us not to do well. To drop out."



## Fall 2017 Aboriginal Psyc Course

### ► PSYC 2504: Aboriginal Psychology: Indigenous Mental Health & Healing

- Fusion of Psychology, Indigenous/Mi'kmaq Studies, & History

### ► 22 Students enrolled:

- ❖ 11 Mi'kmaw & 11 non-Indigenous
- ❖ Some with very little prior knowledge vs. Some with a lot of knowledge who 'co-taught' the course with me

### ► Evaluation:

- ❖ Weekly Thought Papers about readings
- ❖ L'nu Healing Project (2 parts)
- ❖ Indigenous Psychologist Project (4 parts)
- ❖ Participation

### ► What worked well?

- ❖ The textbook (personal, inclusive & accessible)
  - "I wish everyone in my community could read this book."
- ❖ Weekly Thought Papers on assigned readings:
  - Rewarded engaged reading & coming to class prepared
  - Safe way for students to discuss personal trauma
  - Opportunity to receive feedback on writing & improve
- ❖ Many students eager to participate in their first Sweat Lodge for the L'nu Healing Project
- ❖ Poster presentations of Indigenous Psychologist project
- ❖ Visits from Lawrence Wells, Michael R. Denny, Stephen Augustine, & Dana Mount: Brought new dimensions & insights

### ► Unexpected challenges

- ❖ Talking Circles in a small room packed with desks
- ❖ Finding a location for Elder to lead smudging ceremony
- ❖ Student confusion about Two-Eyed Seeing article: New approaches to knowledge/learning, vs. "Derailed" some students
- ❖ Low student attendance & Lack of attention/etiquette for Guest-Speakers (incl. Elders)
  - Asking students to create questions ahead of time was useful but not enough
- ❖ Student reluctance to ask for help with Literature Searching
- ❖ Two students waited until November before telling me that they couldn't afford the \$25 textbook

### ► Planned Improvements:

- ❖ Ease students into Two-Eyed Seeing (videos & discussion); Develop more examples & invite guest-speakers
- ❖ In-class activities (points) when Guest-Speakers visit (& discuss how to show respect beforehand)
- ❖ New website of library resources has been created for course, plus in-class demo by librarian
- ❖ Participation in visit to MRC will be required
- ❖ Extra copies of textbook in library & my office for borrowing
- ❖ More reading of Mi'kmaq authors / More L'nu content
- ❖ Examples of Indigenous people who influenced famous psychologists (e.g., Jung, Maslow, Erikson, Sherif, etc.)
- ❖ Seek out additional guest speakers

### ► Uncertainty navigating my role as a non-Indigenous professor: What is respectful & appropriate?

- ❖ Is it 'ethically questionable' for me to indigenize curriculum? Or does the spirit in which I work matter more?
- ❖ Discomfort with Psyc Dept colleagues calling me "the expert"; plus on-going challenge of discovering how to help/motivate them to insert Indigenous content into their courses
- ❖ Uncertainty in response to Mi'kmaw students saying my teaching is increasing their cultural knowledge & pride
- ❖ New insight into Elder identifying my gifts as healing & counselling: I can help students to become healers / counsellors

