

Métis Responsibilities and Academic Expectations: At the Cross-Section of Identity and Research

Jennifer Markides | PhD

Vol. 1, Issue 1 (2023)

University of Calgary | Werklund School of Education & Faculty of Social Work

Abstract

As a Métis person working in the academy, I have responsibilities to my community and my employer. There are times when my Métis values are at odds with the system. This paper serves as an introduction to who I am as a scholar. I outline my priorities and share the philosophical underpinnings of my research. I name some of the challenges that come from navigating identity and expectation, and I celebrate the partnerships that sustain my spirit and ways of being in academia. As part of a strong Métis collective, I am able to focus my time on things that matter to our community. These initiatives nourish my energies and allow me to advance other university-specific requirements in the areas of research, teaching, and service. It is a careful road to navigate and unique to the experiences of Indigenous scholars who are expected to bring their indigeneity to the forefront of who they are in their work. While research faculty are expected devote their time 40% to research tasks, 40% to teaching, and 20% to service, Indigenous scholars might argue that our work is nearly 100% service if we are doing it right.

Introduction

As a Métis scholar, I am continually expected to bring my identity forward in my teaching and research. I have written about the ethical implications of *being* Indigenous in the academy and the responsibilities I have to my community, students, research participants, and more (2018a, 2018b, 2020, 2022). It goes beyond positionality. As Indigenous scholars, we put ourselves forward in our work (Absolon & Willett, 2005), and our research often reflects our commitments and values.

In my academic journey, there have been times when my cultural values have not aligned with the expectations of the academy. The notions of expertise and individual achievement are two examples of priorities that run counter to my understanding of learning and success. Becoming knowledgeable about a topic is a lifelong process that reflects humility at every stage,

and accomplishments are measured by their benefit to the community rather than self. These differences in orientation and beliefs make academic interviews, tenure and promotion packages, and competitive awards a challenge.

Fortunately, I am part of a strong Métis academic community working together to lift up our collective scholarship. In 2022, we organized a Métis-specific conference, *Mawachihitotaak (Let's Get Together) Métis Studies Symposium*, with over 2,000 participants. We have developed this journal, *Pawaatamihk: Journal of Métis Thinkers*, with our first issue published in fall 2023. And we are in the process of creating a Métis scholars' association. In publications, presentations, and community spaces, we are centring the work of Métis scholars, community members, artists, and poets. We are also developing a resource for educators, working with Canadian Scholars' Press to get the project under contract in the coming months.

Pawaatamihk's Circle of Editors and our extended scholarly relations are a supportive community that recognizes the limitations, constraints, and foibles of the existing systems. Through collaborations, visioning, and tenacity, we are making change where we can and creating opportunities and spaces to do the work we value most. I am grateful for the inspiration and accountability our Métis community affords.

Philosophical Underpinnings of My Research Program

In my growing program of research, I am committed to strengths-based, community-led projects that put the needs and interests of Indigenous communities first. I hold the holistic well-being of youth and the goals of Indigenous families and communities central to my research interests and agenda.

Indigenous holistic well-being education holds the potential to change the narratives and experiences of Indigenous and non-Indigenous youth in socially significant ways. Youth mental health and well-being continues to be the central focus of my research and publications. I am committed to excellence in the areas of research, teaching, and publication.

With relationship building and reciprocity at heart, I endeavour to engage in ethical research practices and enact Paulo Freire's conception of anti-oppressive pedagogy that seeks to raise consciousness leading to action. With this critical framing as a guiding theory, I understand research relationships to be long-term commitments. Initial research findings need to inform substantive change within the colonial systems. My current and future projects reflect my responsibility to the research partners and participants, beyond reporting their stories and insights to concrete planning and enactments toward programmatic, curricular, and structural transformation.

Current and Ongoing Community-Based Research Partnerships

Over the past four years, I have been working with the Peace Wapiti Public School Division (PWPSD) on a partnership project funded by the Pembina Pipeline Corporation. For the first year, our work was guided by the wisdom of Cree-Métis Elder Betty Letendre, Métis educator Rita Bouvier, and Métis scholar Dr. Yvonne Poitras Pratt. Our team acted as a sounding board for

the Indigenous Education lead within the division as she worked to grow the school division's capacities to support Indigenous youth. Over the second year, we developed a professional series for educators and administrators within the division. This was conducted remotely over the course of the school year, with an in-person land-based teaching component in the spring. Students from the division also participated in Lunch and Learn panel presentations with Indigenous scholars as part of a Werklund School of Education grant, "Bringing Indigenous Students to Campus." I organized these panels in response to a request for Indigenous students to "see themselves" as having many possibilities for life after high school. The Lunch and Learns and professional learning series for educators were two ways to build relationships and be of service to the school division over the time of the pandemic lockdowns. We have continued supporting the growing Indigenous Education Support Team in PWPSD and met with the First Nation's leadership associated with two schools in the division to begin talks about a potential research partnership that will serve the goals of their community.

From this relationship, I was introduced to the Supervisor of Connectivity in the Fort Vermilion School Division (FVSD). We quickly moved to conversations about a research project involving two schools within the division—one that served Beaver First Nation and another that served Cree and Métis communities. I applied for a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) Insight Development Grant (IDG) in 2021. I was awarded two years of funding that coincided with my start date as an Assistant Professor in the Werklund School of Education and the Faculty of Social Work.

Partners from First Nation's and Métis leadership, PWPSD, and FVSD have informed, collaborated, and provided letters of support for our projects listed under the Indigenous pathway part of the Canada First Research Excellence Fund (CFREF), One Child Every Child proposal. Our tiny but mighty team of Indigenous scholars worked collaboratively to craft sections of the University of Calgary's proposal and presentation to the award committee. It was over a year of nearly weekly meetings and always pressing deadlines, but it was worth the effort and time as the scope of the grant had such huge potential to advance many scholars' programs of research across campus, ours included. Feedback on the application credited the strength and aims of the Indigenous pathway on the success of our awarded funding.

I have three projects under the CFREF award. These include research around a Walking Alongside You(th) program, Indigenous Language Revitalization, and the development of a Community-Based Research Hub at the University of Calgary. The Walking Alongside You(th) research program and Indigenous Language Revitalization programming and research are direct results of the partnership work with PWPSD and FVSD, with at least three more school divisions who have expressed interest in developing partnerships within the first year of the award.

The SSHRC-IDG-funded research found that students wanted to have their culture and language taught in the schools. With CFREF funds, we have shared the cost of hiring a Cree teacher and a Beaver teacher who will be starting in the fall. The funding is also supporting the hires of three community-based research coordinators who will work closely with the language and culture teachers, as well as organize research in schools for the Walking Alongside You(th) ongoing research program.

Objectives of these projects are as follows:

1. Building relationships with First Nations, Métis, and Inuit youth in high schools through role models and mentorship towards the goal of dreaming big.
2. Bridging pre-requisite coursework and providing opportunities for dual credit courses.
3. Exploring cohort models or mentorship programming to foster webs of relationships for students needing to leave their home communities.
4. Supporting youth financially, spiritually, emotionally, mentally, and physically.
5. Creating space and safety for community-specific healing practices, spiritual teachings, and inclusion of ceremony as part of educating the whole child.
6. Developing community-led programs and credit courses towards language revitalization and cultural resurgence (e.g., processing meat, drumming, storytelling, harvesting medicines).
7. Providing mechanisms for wrap-around supports for youth, families, and community members that utilize schools as community spaces (e.g., bringing services directly into communities and reducing barriers to access services of all varieties).
8. Creating opportunities for undergraduate and graduate students and post-doctoral scholars to learn alongside Indigenous scholars working with First Nations, Métis, and Inuit communities, building capacities in community-based and nation-driven research projects.
9. Providing networks and transdisciplinary teams to support community-driven research.
10. Documenting processes, developing educational presentations, and disseminating knowledge about ethical relationships, reciprocity, and responsibilities in research.

To date, I have presented the processes of working in community-based research at multiple national and international conferences. Moving forward with the partners has been the priority so that the youth see their suggestions, responses, and requests leading to action within the schools and communities.

Teaching

Teaching has been my passion for as long as I can remember. I value the opportunity to create meaningful educational experiences for students. I enjoy being creative and responsive to the needs and interests of individuals, and to the collective needs of the learning community. As an Indigenous Education instructor, I bring my passion, creativity, and care to my undergraduate and graduate teaching; my pedagogy reflects multiple ways of knowing and being. My journey as an Indigenous educator has driven me personally and professionally. I believe that Indigenous Education is a powerful opportunity and potential force to make change in our world. Like reconciliation, Indigenous Education is for everyone. The learning that occurs over a term or across a program can change pre-service and in-service teachers' lives forever. They bring new knowledge or increased knowledge into their teaching practice, schools, and communities that hold the potential to change narratives and promote healthy dialogue around issues of racism, systemic oppression, truth-telling, respect, and relationship building, to name a few.

I feel a strong commitment to education in all its facets and am committed to supporting learning in academic and public spaces. As such, I regularly present on decolonization, reconciliation, and Indigenous Education. Audiences include youth (local and immigrant), undergraduate and graduate students, and educators working in the field. I also publish on the topic of working as an Indigenous educator in academic journals and public media.

I continue to teach in Indigenous Education in the Werklund School of Education. I have also developed and taught a course in the Faculty of Social Work, titled Intergenerational Trauma and Indigenous Pathways to Healing.

Writing and Publishing

I am fortunate to have had so many varied experiences and learning opportunities in my graduate program and into the start of my academic career. It has been a very well-rounded and informative journey. As a result of these engagements, I have grown professionally and made connections with academics in many locales. When it came time to form an editorial board for my Indigenous-focused book series, *Community Wisdom* with DIO Press, I had contact information and established relationships with Indigenous academics and allies from around the world. I am committed to mentoring graduate and emerging scholars in putting out calls and developing books to grow their publication records, while disseminating knowledge and privileging Indigenous scholarship.

After attending the *Rising Up: Graduate Students Conference on Indigenous Knowledge and Research in Indigenous Studies* in Winnipeg, Manitoba, in 2017, I realized that many Indigenous graduate students were reaching the end of their graduate studies without having shared or published their research along their academic journeys. While the quality of the presentations offered at the conference was high, the audiences were small. I was concerned that the work of these students needed to reach a wider audience. With this in mind, I formed a partnership with one of the conference organizers, Laura Forsythe. We have since collaborated on three co-edited collections of primarily graduate students' work: *Looking Back and Living Forward: Indigenous Research Rising Up* (2018); *Research Journeys in/to Multiple Ways of Knowing* (2019); and *Walking Together in Indigenous Research* (2021). Another forthcoming co-edited collection is titled *Around the Kitchen Table: Métis Aunties' Scholarship* for publication by University of Manitoba Press in spring 2024. We have a fifth co-edited collection featuring Métis scholarship scheduled for publication with Peter Lang in 2024. With these and two other co-edited collections, it has been an honour to work collaboratively to highlight the scholarship of so many emerging Indigenous scholars and non-Indigenous scholars who are working in Indigenous Education and research in good ways.

Service

I am engaged in academic service in Education, Social Work, Alberta Children's Hospital Research Institute, and University of Calgary-wide committees and program reviews; national and international associations and journal editorial boards; and advancement of Métis-specific scholarship through the creation of a conference and journal, and an association to come, as described above.

Service is an area that I hold dear. It reflects both my personal and professional commitments. Given my work is relational, all that I take up in service honours my responsibilities to others.

Biography

Jennifer Markides, PhD, is a member of the Métis Nation of Alberta, SSHRC Tier II Canada Research Chair in Indigenous Youth Well-Being and Education, and an Assistant Professor in the Werklund School of Education and the Faculty of Social Work at the University of Calgary. Critical pedagogy, arts creation, and ethical engagement are at the heart of her practices. Her community-based research partnerships focus on the goals, interests, needs, and holistic wellbeing of youth. Under the direction of Indigenous community leadership, she works alongside visionary educators to respond to the immediate goals and long-term visions of these specific First Nations and Métis communities. Together they create opportunities for Indigenous languages and cultural teachings to be centred in education.

References

- Absolon, K., & Willett, C. (2005). Putting ourselves forward: Location in Aboriginal research. In L. Brown & S. Strega (Eds.), *Research as resistance: Critical, Indigenous, and anti-oppressive approaches* (pp. 97–126). Canadian Scholar's Press.
- Markides, J. (2022). Examining the ethical implications and emotional entailments of teaching Indigenous Education: An Indigenous educator's self-study. In J. Kitchen, D. Tidwell, & L. Fitzgerald (Eds.), *Self-study and diversity, Volume 3* (pp. 103–121). Brill | Sense.
- Markides, J. (2020). Driving: The unseen responsibilities of a doctoral student, mother, and more. In A. Burns, & S.E. Eaton (Eds.), *Having it all: Women negotiating life in the academy* (pp. 131–145). Springer.
- Markides, J. (2018a). Being Indigenous in the Indigenous education classroom: A critical self-study of teaching in an impossible and imperative assignment. In E. Lyle (Ed.), *Fostering a relational pedagogy: Self-study as transformative praxis* (pp. 35–44). Brill | Sense.
- Markides, J. (2018b). Reconciling an ethical framework for living well in the world of research. In J. Markides, & L. Forsythe (Eds.), *Looking back and living forward: Indigenous research rising up* (pp. 291–299). Brill | Sense.