

Laidlaw Scholars Programme
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Cohort 2025
UNIVERSITY OF
TORONTO
LAIDLAW
SCHOLARS

Research Reflection

Summer 1

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does this view differ among
I. Peoples is beautiful

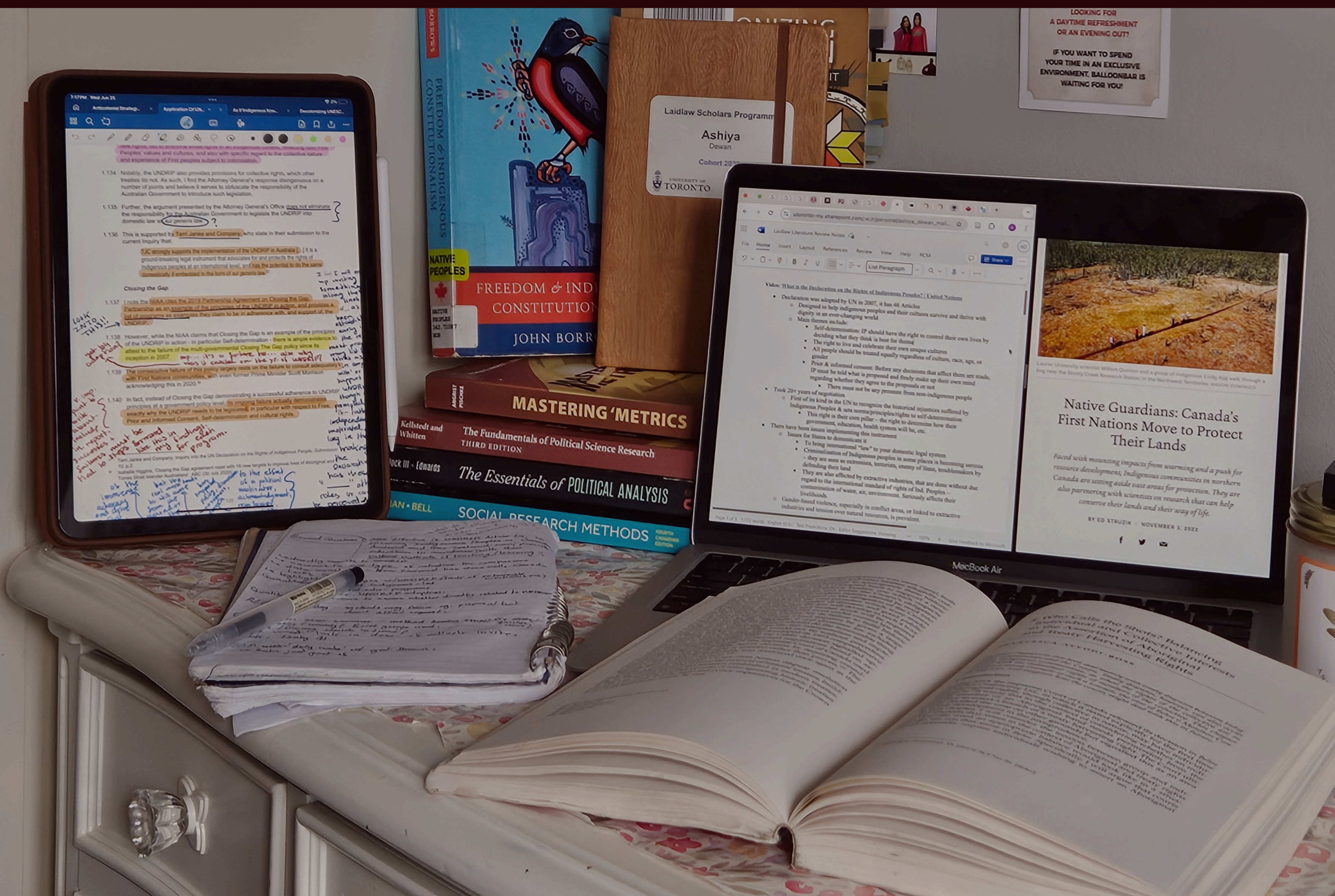
the learning process. They are spirit-visions, and spirits to emerge in each their lives, enabling them to find their traditions and ethos. Individual do not simply on cause and effect. Rather Ojibwa story holds that when pe leaving their loving world to cor until they receive nourishment fr their own gifts and capabilities its to be able to develop their s and transmitted teachings are e learn their purpose and actual

The history of education similar. Education has been u late Native North America take their rightful place in destroyed, but to be held b Aboriginal context. Cogni simulation, but wholesale of Aboriginal languages and world views of the p ated with Aboriginal stud many often do not see cultures, or world views own systems. This self-expectations for their groups have used sch mission; they impos inferior relations. B Canadian society's government, and so original peoples, an Education is a processes its cultu culture and educ the first colonial frames for comm legacies, as well institutions of

are public + need. Indig. school. wide public + need. Indig. school. to be a public + need. Indig. school. to be a public + need. Indig. school.

The most important skill I learned this summer was to ask for help when I need it.

It was a privilege for me to have an incredibly generous and supportive Research Advisor, Professor Paola Salardi, who was always honest about her concerns as well as her faith in me, and shared every piece of advice from the heart. With no precedents to follow on my research topic, independence was central this summer, from structuring it ground-up to building the courage to present the decision to narrow my topic confidently to advisors. The weekly Deep Dive sessions with a group from my cohort also became anchors, allowing the chance to talk about our struggles, share progress, and connect socially with peers who were going through the same things - after spending days poring over readings alone in my room. As someone who has only ever conducted qualitative research, I had always been intimidated by numbers and formulas, but I came to see how essential quantitative skills are in research, to effectively present findings and convey ideas. With immense help from friends, I learned to use Excel for the first time to create graphs and transform 40 pages of qualitative data into a clear, visual analysis. That catalyzed a drastic shift. Presenting my research quantitatively revealed patterns I never noticed in text alone. What felt impossible to me became one of the most meaningful parts of my project, thanks to the generosity and skill-sharing of my community. These experiences taught me that independence doesn't mean isolation, and that leadership is about building connections.





Attended my first Powwow - Champion of Champions festival at Six Nations of the Grand River (July 26, 2025)

Leadership is also proactivity - taking initiative before problems overwhelm you. For me, this meant scheduling biweekly meetings with my advisor and coming prepared with slideshow recaps and clear agendas. It also meant asking for advice without hesitating, from time management tips to simply making an academic research poster for the first time. Being aware that I am an immigrant citizen with the privileges and biases that come with being educated in a Eurocentric system, I knew I had to approach Indigenous education with humility and curiosity. Before the research period, I pursued Indigenous Awareness training and spent my first weeks immersed in works by Cree, Blackfoot, and Anishinaabe authors, who wrote beautifully about their unique ways of knowing. A common thread in these knowledge systems is their relationship to land, their understanding that all things are interconnected, and the importance of cultivating a “learning spirit” rooted in community and respect. That shaped how I approached my research: not just as a study of “initiatives,” but as an exploration of worldviews and the deeper meaning of Indigenous-led, culturally-grounded and land-based education. I came to understand that such education is not only a ‘right’ affirmed in the UN Declaration of Rights of Indigenous Peoples, but an immensely valuable resource and entity in itself.

For weeks I resisted narrowing down the scope of my research question, though deep down I knew I had taken on too much. When I finally made the decision to change my topic from a comparative study of Crown nations - Australia, Canada and New Zealand - to just Canadian provinces and territories, it initially felt like a disappointment, or a failure to complete what I had set out to do. I worried that I had fallen short of my original vision: to conduct a powerful, international comparison of post-colonial nations with similar Indigenous histories. I thought scaling back meant my work would lose significance, and I equated success to achieving exactly what I imagined.

By the last 1-2 weeks of the research period, it became clear that a tri-nation comparison was impossibly vast for six weeks of research. I was overwhelmed by a lack of concrete results, despite spending months poring over 100s of pages of literature. The differences between these countries, in their histories, contexts, and governance structures, were greater than I had assumed. With so many uncontrolled variables and shaky foundations, an attempt to compare them honestly would have been superficial, and a disservice to the complexity of each country. Meeting with my advisors helped me see that many researchers adjust their topics when they realize they aren't feasible. At first, I thought I had to push through to prove it to myself that I could handle my first real research project independently - that with enough effort and time management, I could make it work. Eventually, admitting my capabilities within the time frame to myself was a strength. I learned that when researching in the real world, progressing through multiple iterations and rerouting after dead ends is as normal as doing citations - you never know quite how much content you'll have to read or how much information is out there until you begin. While it may seem daunting to not be able to plan for everything, that's also the most enriching part of the journey.

Creating the Indigenous Renaissance

Education is recognized as both a human right in itself and an indispensable means of realizing other human rights and fundamental freedoms, the primary vehicle by which economically and socially marginalized peoples can lift themselves out of poverty and obtain the means to participate fully in their communities. Education is increasingly recognized as one of the best long-term financial investments that States can make. Education of Indigenous children contributes to both individual and community development, as well as to participation in society in its broadest sense. Education enables Indigenous children to exercise and enjoy economic, social and cultural rights, and strengthens their ability to exercise civil rights in order to influence political policy processes for improved protection of human rights. The implementation of Indigenous peoples' right to education is an essential means of achieving individual empowerment and self-determination. Education is also an important means for the enjoyment, maintenance and respect of Indigenous cultures, languages, traditions and traditional knowledge. . . .

UN, Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, 2009, pp. 4-5.

IDEAS DO NOT EXIST WITHOUT PEOPLE TO IMPLEMENT THEM. A postcolonial framework cannot be constructed unless Indigenous people renew and reconstruct the principles underlying their own world views, environments, languages, and forms of communication, and re-examine how all these elements combine to construct their humanity. My own reclamation began with my dis- of Mi'kmaw language in our community school in Potlotek. That experience and my subsequent publication, *Reclaiming Indigenous Voice and Vision* (Bathen, 2000), have been significant highlights of my career. Since then, there has been an emerging critical mass of Indigenous scholars, newly empowered through education, building their own visions, leadership, knowledge, and professionalization. Furthermore, the philosophical and activist agenda inspired by critical theory and anti-oppressive activism in areas such

as women's studies, postcolonial studies, cultural studies, queer theory, and decolonizing, and participatory and anti-oppressive methodologies have led to an ever-growing committed group of non-Indigenous allies who are providing additional critical frameworks for addressing issues of inequality, inequity, gaps in education among diverse groups, colonial conscientization, and hegemony in politics, organizations, and institutions, while acknowledging excellence through the proper valuing and respectful circulation of Indigenous knowledge across and beyond Eurocentric disciplines. Indigenous people are also moving beyond critiques to address the healing and wellness of themselves and their communities, to reshape their contexts and effect their situations, and to create reforms based on a complex arrangement of conscientization, resistance, and transformative action.

Collaborative Conscientization

The initial educational struggle for Indigenous educators, then, has been to sensitize the Eurocentric consciousness in general, and educators in particular, to the colonial and neo-colonial practices that continue to marginalize and racialize Indigenous students. This does not come easily to Eurocentrically educated Canadians, for it requires their unlearning as well — challenging their conscious and subconscious notions of meritocracy and superiority learned in life with sometimes well-intentioned but biased parents, grandparents, media, community, school texts and discussions and how privilege is constructed and maintained in a racist society. The second struggle is to convince them to acknowledge the unique knowledge and relationships that Indigenous people derive from place and from their homeland, which are central to their notions of humanity and science, and passed on in their own languages and ceremony. This is the emerging work of Indigenous scholars who have been part of the Indigenous renaissance. Once so convinced, the next tension is for all learners to learn it respectfully with Aboriginal people and without appropriating their new knowledge and experience for their own ends.

Since Indigenous peoples' search for change is still aspirational and inspirational, the conceptualization of the postcolonial has been in part a collaborative conscientization and in part an act of hope, a light in the darkness of educational failure. Yet, what are the social and cultural requirements for this dreamed about or idealized version of education? Moreover, what role do schools, universities, teachers, and faculties have in helping to effect that change? This now takes me to the epistemological current or theme.

In 1982, the inclusion of Aboriginal and treaty rights in the patriated Constitution was a product of collaborative conscientization in Canada. It established a new constitutional foundation for the right to education for Aborig-

Refocusing gave my research ten times more clarity and depth. Having grown up in Canada and being much more familiar with our jurisdictions and systems, I was able to develop a stringent inclusion and exclusion criteria that laid the basis for a successful comparative analysis. After years of history classes, living and learning on these lands, I was able to better understand the nuances of Indigenous history in Canada and how it has shaped current realities, while developing a sincere and passionate connection to my area of study that far transcended my expectation. Being honest about my limits and focusing on how I can do justice to the diverse subject of Indigenous education, ultimately left me prouder of my final work than I would have been by molding it into something I couldn't do to the best of my abilities. I learned that strength, resilience and humility go hand in hand. I am excited to put these experiences into practice throughout the remainder of the programme and in new, community-focused contexts next summer!