

IURN Conference 2023

Ubuntu: The educational role of Elders of African Heritage in schools

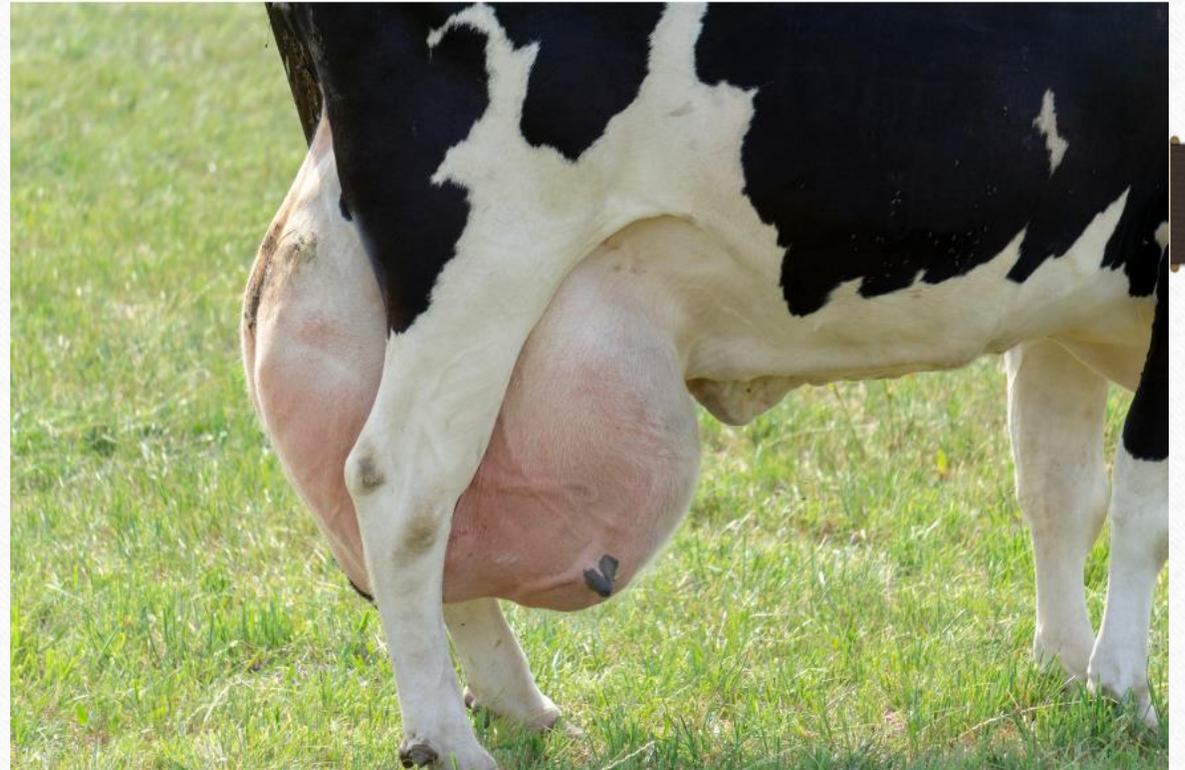
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An Elder's story



How can NS schools close the opportunities gap for African Canadian youth and all youth?

What contributions might Elders make in Nova Scotia schools?

Introduction and Background

African Nova Scotia (ANS) settlements date back over four hundred years ago.

ANS constitute 2.3% of the total Nova Scotian population. (ANSA, 2022)

ANS now make up about 44% of Nova Scotia's racialized population— the largest racialized group in NS.

There are 52 historical ANS communities

Historical Black Communities In Nova Scotia c. 1749



1. Shelburne
2. Birchtown
3. Yarmouth
4. Greenville
5. Hassett
6. Southville
7. Danvers
8. Weymouth Falls
9. Acadiaville
10. Jordantown
11. Digby
12. LeQuille
13. Granville Ferry
14. Inglewood (Bridetown)
15. Cambridge
16. Middleton
17. Gibson Woods
18. Aldorshot
19. Kentville
20. Three Miles Plains
21. Truro
22. Springhill
23. Amherst
24. Trenton
25. New Glasgow
26. Antigonish
27. Linconville
28. Sunnyville
29. Upper Big Tracadie
30. Mulgrave
31. Monastery
32. New Waterford
33. North Sydney
34. Sydney
35. Glace Bay
36. Sydney Mines
37. Halifax
38. Cobequid Road
39. Lucasville
40. Hammonds Plains
41. Africville
42. Beechville
43. Dartmouth
44. East Preston
45. North Preston
46. Cherry Brook
47. Lake Loon
48. Liverpool
49. Conway
50. Delaps Cove
51. Guysborough Rd.
52. Maroon Hill

- African Nova Scotia (ANS) learners and their communities face many educational challenges
- Achievement gap (Green, 1980; BLAC, 1994; Frank, 1998; Edwards, 1999; Winbush, 2008)
 - Alienation
 - Racial and cultural oppression
 - Inequities in the formal education (BLAC, 1994; Lee & Marshall, 2009; Parris & Brigham, 2010)

We examine the role of ANS Elders in schools as a way to shift the emphasis from teaching about local culture to teaching through the culture.

We believe Elders have a central role in educating children, youth, and communities.

Theoretical Framework

Ubuntu, an African Philosophy, translated as “I am because you are” locates identity development and meaning-making within a collective.

A community-based approach that draws on learning resources from within the local community, namely Elders from the African Nova Scotia (ANS) community.

Elders have a central role in the education of children and youth and in communities at large.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_w7V1h4soUk at 3:40

Research Methodology

Qualitative design:

- Face-to-face focus group interview with youth
- Due to the pandemic, researchers conducted the rest of the interviews one-to-one using Microsoft Teams

Participants:

45 African Nova Scotians

- 20 community Elders
- 10 professional educators
- 15 young students (15 to 18 years old)



Data Analysis & Findings

The Participants' Definitions of an Elder

“Elders were technically and generally people of an older age demographic

-elder participant

“An elder is someone that is looked upon in the community as someone who is mature and most probably someone who has had a lot of experience and is well respected.”

- elder participant

“Somebody that can give you guidance or advice about life. Somebody that you look to almost like a mentor.”

- youth participant

“An elder as someone who is knowledgeable about different subjects. ... age may not necessarily have something to do with it. ”

- educator participant



The Immediate Impact



"Instruction in youth is like engraving in stone"
~Berber, North Africa

Nobody is born wise
~African proverb



Data Analysis & Findings

Community-mindedness

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- The “I” will always be understood with reference to the “we”.
 - Elders can play roles in facilitating the success of ANS learners in educational systems
 - The absence of Africentric cultural values and ways of teaching and learning in the NS education system.
 - The ways to incorporate Elders’ knowledge into the schooling system

Data Analysis & Findings

Intergenerational Learning

- **Intergenerational learning:** Multifaceted involving embodied and symbolic practices connecting with community
- **Storytelling** was a commonly referred to practice.
- Elders should be more involved in education in a formal way and/or informal way than they are currently.
- There are benefits for both the Elders and the youth



Data Analysis & Findings

Barriers to communication



- Some of the youth expressed a sense that Elders underestimate how much they [the youth] know.

- Age bias and mutual distrust between the Elder and youth participants



Suggestions from participants

- Elders should be regularly in the classroom/schools
- have regular storytelling circles
- place value on knowledge generated in the community (Elders are our curriculum)
- develop written documents of their knowledge
- schools should include elders on school committees

Discussion of data

Explore ways to incorporate intergenerational learning opportunities, such as Elder's knowledge sharing in schools

Ubuntu belongs in the classroom (schooling must be guided by the principles of Ubuntu)



Discussion Questions

- What is your definitions of an elder?
- What have you learned from an elder?
- What gaps can an elder fill in post-secondary institutions?
- What challenges do you anticipate in having elders in the schools?
(e.g., defining an elder, rules/policies, compensation...)

Questions?



To go back and get it.