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Ubuntu Pedagogy of the Community: The relevance of Ubuntu and Elders in education

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*A village without the Elderly is like a well
without water*

~African proverb



INTRODUCTION

African Canadian Elders:

- Are vital to their community, passing down wisdom and historical knowledge.
- Enhance educational experiences with unique perspectives.
- Embody resilience, respect, and perseverance.



CONTEXT

African Nova Scotia (ANS) settlements date back over 400 years.

ANS constitute 2.3% of the NS population.

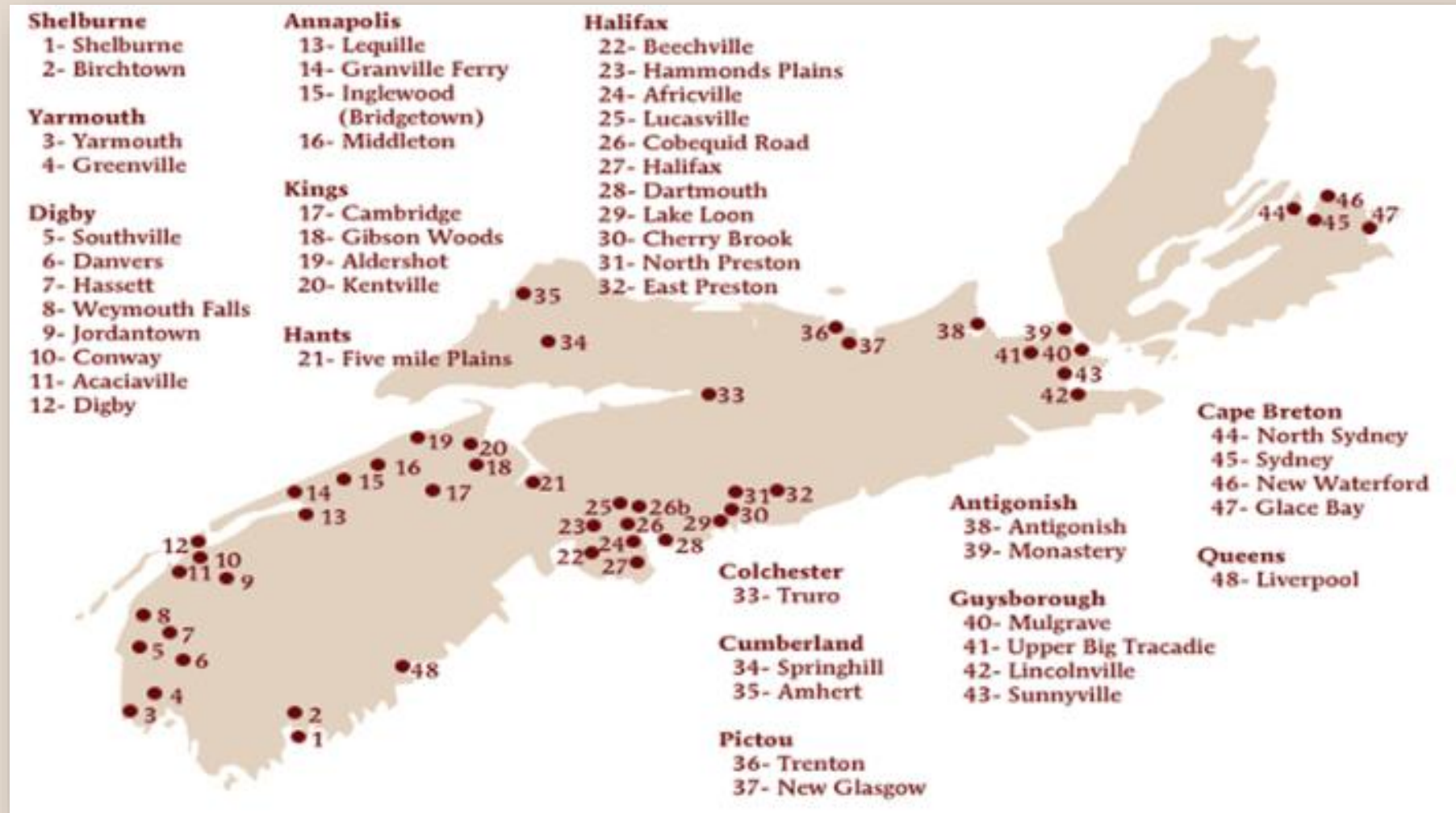
ANS make up about 44% of NS's racialized population— the largest racialized group in NS.

There are at least 48 historical ANS communities

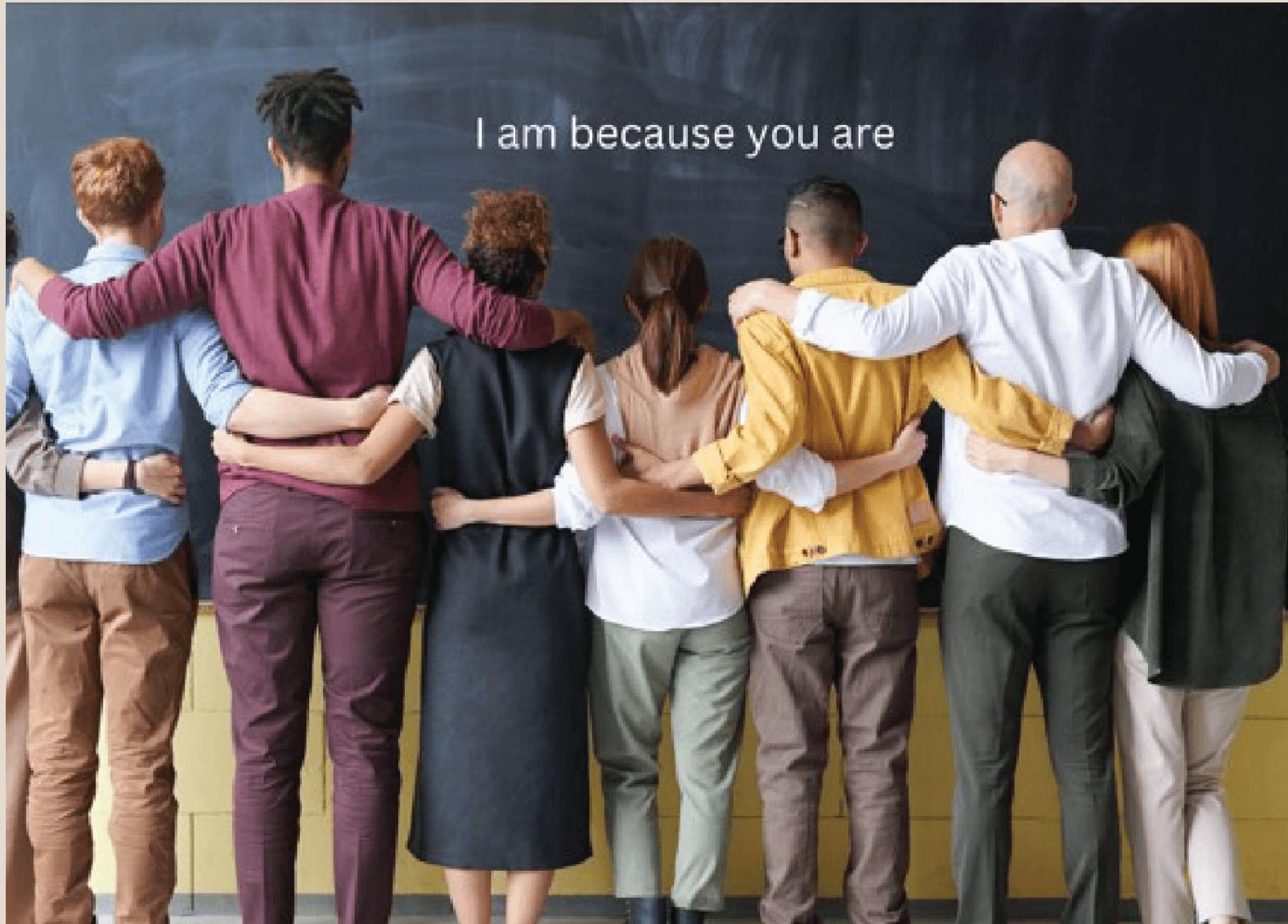
(ANSA, 2024)



MAP OF AFRICAN NOVA SCOTIAN COMMUNITIES



CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK



Ubuntu

A philosophy of unity and purpose where our actions demonstrate a recognition and understanding that we are all connected.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Qualitative design:

- focus group interviews
- online one-to-one interviews
- DBDLI Community Data Collectors

Participants:

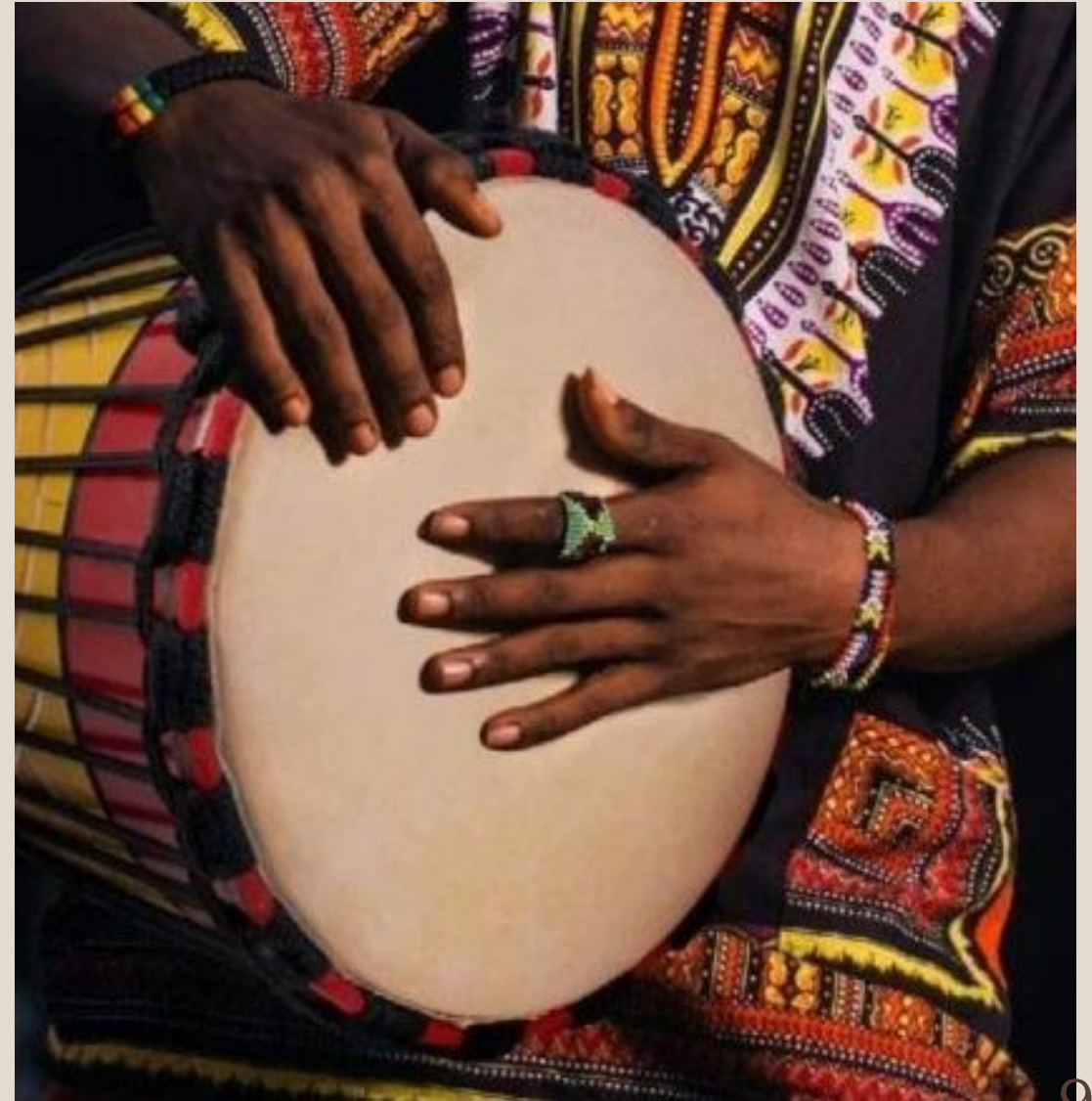
- 45 African Nova Scotians
- 20 community Elders
 - 10 professional educators
 - 15 young students (15 -18 yrs)

Themes related to the manifestations of Ubuntu

(thematic analysis of the transcripts was done using MAXQDA software and coding done separately by research team members, followed by in-depth discussion with the whole research team).

We share 3 top themes related to Elders in this presentation:

- Elders' leadership, wisdom & teachings: Ubuntu in African Nova Scotian Communities
- Standing on their shoulders: The role of Elders
- Learning at their feet: Elder knowledge



Theme 1: Elders' leadership, wisdom & teachings: Ubuntu in African Nova Scotian Communities



In the African Nova Scotia community, we have Elders who were quilt makers, so they passed that [skill] down. Elders who were basket makers; they passed that knowledge down to their children and their grandchildren, so it continues in the family. You have Elders who worked in the woods. They passed that down too. They have Elders who are singers. Yeah, the artists and that is passed down. A lot of them were activists, and some of that is passed on because they had to stand up for themselves. And of course, one of the big things for the Elders is they were very religious people. And that was passed down to their children and grandchildren.

Edith Clayton, basket maker

<https://images.app.goo.gl/xej6PsQWb42KRgYt5>

~Nassor (Elder)

Theme 2: Standing on their shoulders: The role of Elders

Elders are still involved in education, even if they are retired, ... and they try to be an encouragement to their children. Even though they don't have lots of money, most of these people put aside a small amount for the students. In most communities they give scholarships. It's nothing big, but it's a way of encouraging their children to go on for higher education. And they celebrate it when their children have done well too. It's not only celebrated in one community, but you would hear from one community to the next. So, I think that's an encouragement to young people to do better. ~ Nassor (Elder)



Theme 2 (con't)



I would say our Elders paved the way for many of us in education and knocking down barriers [with] their knowledge in terms of how to survive in a white world. Their ability to challenge systems and advocate knowing that there's going to be future generations behind them. I think that the ability of Elders in the community to come together to form groups or committees to create change. The knowledge that they were able to put together is the reason why we have opportunities that we have today.

~Asha (Educator)

Theme 3: Learning at their feet: Elder knowledge

I live with my grandmother ...and [she and] other Elders... carry history, and they pass a lot of stories down too. ... Elders' knowledge is a way to get information passed down from those who are older than them and have lived through the experiences that I, being in my 20s, have not lived through. As an Elder ... she would go through experiences that I probably would never have.

~ Femi (youth)



Theme 3: Learning at their feet: Elder knowledge

SB

Elders' knowledge is very relevant because ... I mean now it is being written but before a lot of it was oral. And so, that's why it was important because you want to hear from them. You want to sit at their feet and let them tell you about it... Elders' knowledge is, most of it, is an understanding of the past and how things used to be. The struggles that come true, and how they have gotten where they are... how they were able to thrive in spite of the challenges that they face. ~Nassor (Elder)



Under the baobab tree: Elders' Circle

- Monthly storytelling circles at Mount Saint Vincent University.
- Elders share knowledge and engage with students, staff & faculty.
- Fosters cultural preservation and educational enrichment.



An Elder's reflection on
participating in the Elders'
Circle (video of Frank
Symonds)



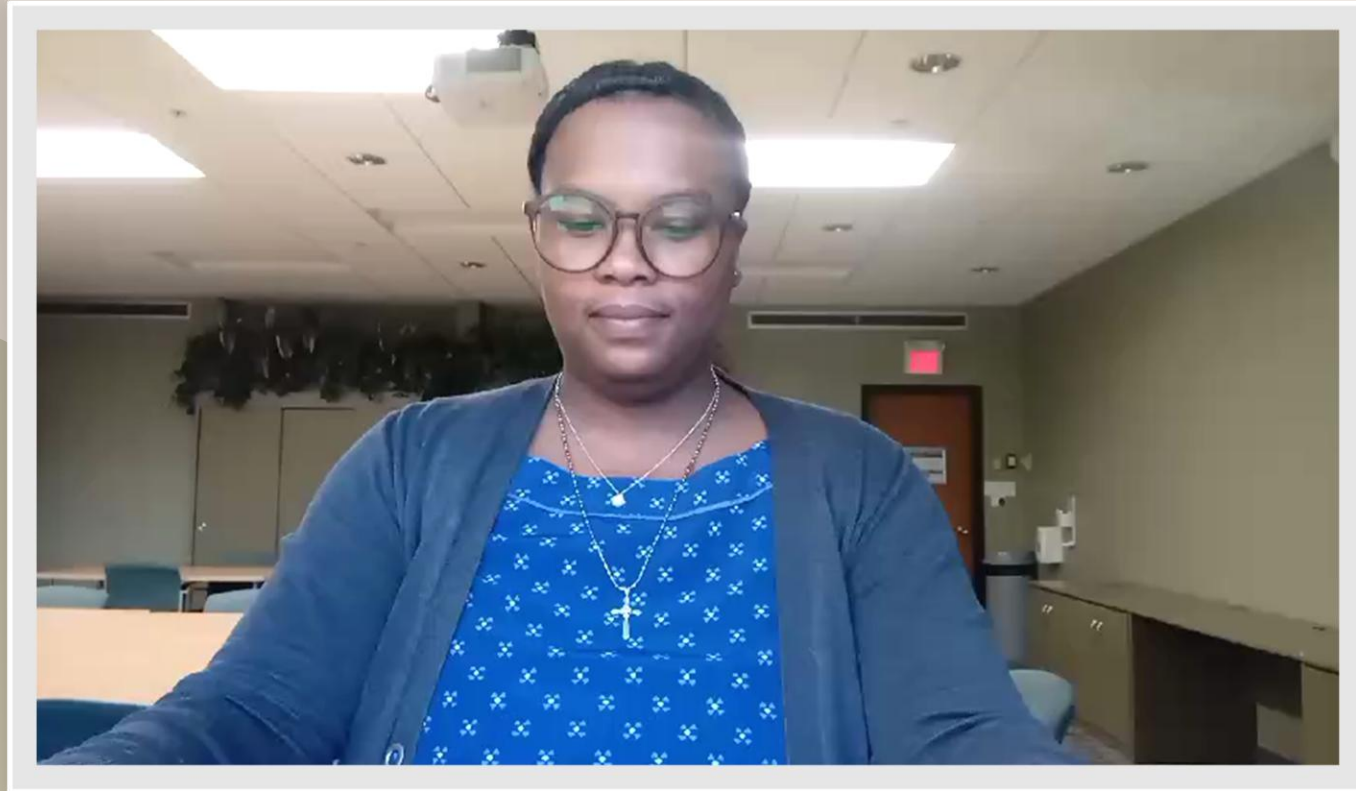
Attributes of Elders

Key attributes highlighted by participants.

- Respectability, wisdom, guidance, historical knowledge.
- Elders as educators, mentors, and community leaders.



Youth Reflection (video of Alexia Major)



DISCUSSION/CONCLUSION

In general, Elders in the African Canadian communities are considered:

- The connection between past, present, and future & between generations.
- The guardians & teachers of culture, traditions, and history.
- Central to the lifelong learning contexts including formal, nonformal & informal education.
- Reflective of the essence of Sankofa for a more enlightened and inclusive future.



Moving forward (Teachers' guides)



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Thank you

