Academic Allyship in Nursing: Deconstructing a successful community-academic collaboration

Jason Hickey
University of New Brunswick, jason.hickey@unb.ca

Mike Crawford
University of New Brunswick, mike.z.crawford@gmail.com

Patsy McKinney
Under One Sky Friendship Centre, patr.mck@gmail.com

Positioning Ourselves

Indigenous research methodologies often draw attention to the influence one's worldview has on the ways we experience and understand the world (Chilisa, 2012; Kovach, 2009; Wilson, 2008). Many non-Indigenous scholars similarly assert that we construct or co-create the world around us in a way that is informed by our personal history and cultural context (Charmaz, 2014). In order to be transparent and accountable, it is important for us to position or locate ourselves in relation to the claims and arguments we make (Absolon & Willett, 2004).

Our article is written primarily from the perspectives of the first and second authors (Jason and Mike), at the request of the third author (Patsy). All three of us met several times to discuss the content and identify areas for ongoing revision. When most of the writing was complete, Patsy shared her thoughts on the near-final draft. These were audio-recorded and transcribed with few edits. Patsy's contributions are italicized to indicate the change in voice and perspective.

We hope this article will provide insight to others in positions of power on how they can better support Indigenous organizations and communities.

Jason's Position

I am a white male from Newfoundland who has been living as a guest on the unceded and unsurrendered territory of the Wolastoqiyik (people of the beautiful and bountiful river), in Fredericton, NB, since 2017. Prior to moving here, I had the privilege of living, working, and travelling extensively overseas and throughout Canada. These experiences fostered a deep appreciation for the learning and insight that comes from living and working with people who have different world views from my own.

When I moved to Fredericton to begin a tenure track position in the nursing faculty at the University of New Brunswick, I was hoping to maintain a cross-cultural focus in my research program. I reached out to several multi-cultural and Indigenous organizations to inquire about opportunities for me to contribute to the work they were doing. I eventually connected with the Atlantic Director of the Urban Aboriginal Knowledge Network, who introduced me to Mi'Kmaw Elder Patsy McKinney at Monqonuwicik (Wolastoqey for 'The Rainbow Clan') Under One Sky Friendship Centre. I approached that initial conversation with Patsy thinking these three things:

- I am interested to learn about your organization and your community. But,

- I don't want to be a drain on your limited time and resources. However,

- I may have some knowledge or resources that you could draw upon if you would like.

In our case, this has turned into a mutually beneficial partnership spanning almost five years, and I am honoured that she considers me to be an ally.

My collaborations with Under One Sky and other Indigenous community partners led, through their collective support, to my being awarded an Indigenous Research Chair Nursing. The Chair has given me resources and flexibility to support community partners in ways that have been very rewarding but hard to quantify or qualify academically. I am fortunate to work in a nursing faculty that has been open-minded and supportive of this work.

Mike's Position

I come from a small town in Northern Alberta. As an English farming family, we lived alongside, but removed from, many Indigenous communities. I grew up hearing stereotypes and

epithets in one ear, while in the other I'd listen to my grandmother tell me stories about her grandmother, an Indigenous woman who, as far as I can tell, lost most of her culture, presumably to fit in. I do not consider myself as either settler or Indigenous; my approach to allyship with Under One Sky is informed by a philosophy of humanism and a body of experience with both colonizing and colonized peoples.

Over the years I have had the honour of working with and learning from several Elders of various communities across western Canada. These relationships opened a window into another culture, another worldview. They also pulled away the veil of ignorance I had to the long history of injustice and trauma, a legacy with fresh wounds. My journey did not end there. I share my life with a woman whose personal and cultural history is deeply impacted by injustice, oppression, and displacement. Experiences that I have felt first-hand when travelling overseas to visit her family.

It is from this perspective that I accepted the opportunity to relocate to the Maritimes to work with Under One Sky. I felt I understood the mission and the need. I come to this work to listen and to learn, and to lean in and make a difference in whatever capacity I can.

Patsy's Position

I am Mi'kmaq from Dalhousie, New Brunswick, and my family is connected to the Eel River Bar First Nation. I work as the Executive Director of Under One Sky Friendship Centre in Fredericton, NB, and sit on several national committees related to urban Indigenous health and wellbeing. I am the third generation of my family living off-reserve and that has come with a unique set of circumstances. Those circumstances have led to a passion for supporting Indigenous people when they leave their community and others, like me, who were never part of a reserve assimilated to specific plots of land within our region..

My grandmother (Margaret (Maggie) Palmater née Jerome) married a non-Indigenous man, and so she lost her status and had to move away from her reservation. If my Indigenous grandparent had been a male instead of a female, things would have unfolded very differently for our family because we would not have lost status. Despite the challenges, my grandmother was an amazing individual. Maggie was a midwife and a medicine woman, and she was a fluent Mi'kmaq speaker. But she would only speak her language in whispers, and she would swear us to secrecy and make us promise not to tell anyone.

I grew up in a generation where there was no language, no culture, no powwows. And there wasn't a single good thing about being an Indian. We never saw anything good about ourselves, and that had a big impact on me as an individual. The message in my house growing up was always, "better for you if nobody knows". And they said that with the best intentions and love in their hearts because of what they experienced.

But as I got older, I got more and more interested in learning about what happened to my grandmother and what happened to us as a people. I started to understand how important language is for us and how important it is for us to connect to our culture. That journey has ignited a passion to help my community heal.

I love dreaming. I just love dreaming. And I want things to be different for the next generation. Thinking about the potential for the next generation and feeling like I can do something to support that, is what keeps me going. I fill up with pride when I get to see these amazing young women who work for me find their passion and figure out what they are *really* [emphasis added] good at doing. When I think about my journey, it wasn't a single big thing that got me where I am.

It was multiple small things with critical people in 'y life who saw something in me that I didn't See myself. I want to be that place and that person for the next generation. I want to create a safe space where they can come and try some weird and funky stuff. For example, I just released one staff member from her regular position because she wants to create a new land-based program for our Centre. We don't know what that will look like, but she is passionate about being on the land and sharing that passion with others, so I know she will do something amazing. Making space for our youth to explore their passion is important, and I take that responsibility seriously. It's not just a job. It's more important than that, an ancestral responsibility to serve my people.

That's where I'm coming from, but to do that we need help. These big public institutions that provide education, labour, health, and social services to our people need to change so our young people have better opportunities. We can't do that alone, and I genuinely believe there are a lot of people out there who want to help. I know that because people often come to me and ask how they can help, but it's hard to know what to tell them. That's why I think this paper is important, so that I can help potential allies understand how to help us in a good way.

Introduction

Public health and social care systems in Canada are frequently racist and discriminatory towards Indigenous people (National Association of Friendship Centres, 2021). Progress towards the Truth and Reconciliation Calls to Action have been slow (Jewell & Mosby, 2021), despite widespread stated commitments. Unsurprisingly, many Indigenous people are reluctant to seek the care they need out of distrust or fear of harm (Phillips-Beck et al., 2020). This situation exacerbates existing health inequities and highlights the increasing need for substantial change.

In New Brunswick, there are 15 First Nation reserve communities where culturally informed programs and services address some of the gaps in the public system. There is also a small but dedicated group of grassroots organizations working outside of the reserve system to further support and empower Indigenous people in the province. In general, these communities and organizations are under-resourced and struggle to meet the needs of those they serve. Some, if not all, work far beyond their program mandates to provide critical out-of-scope services, after-hours care, and crisis support.

These communities and community organizations have a wealth of knowledge and consistently innovate to meet the unique needs of their clients. Many also acknowledge a lack of capacity to do everything they feel is needed. Some, but not all, Indigenous leaders in this region feel that support from allies is important.

[Patsy] *There's a great deal of hesitation and suspicion from Indigenous people because of our collective experience being told what to do and how to do it for so long. Some Indigenous leaders I know have chosen not to work with non-Indigenous people and organizations. But being an off-reserve organization, the reality is that we have no choice. So, I have had to straddle both worlds all my life. And we depend on allies as well as our own people.*

The purpose of this article is to provide an example of academic allyship with an urban Indigenous organization and consider some of the success factors that have supported this ongoing collaboration. The primary motivation for the article was that the third author, Patsy McKinney, said it needed to be written. She asked me (Jason Hicky (JH)) during an early morning telephone conversation, "Are you keeping track of all this work you guys are doing? You need to write this down so I can help other people understand how to help us".

In the following section we examine some of the literature on allyship to develop a frame of reference for the discussion section. In the discussion, we highlight seven factors we feel have led to a successful ongoing collaboration, which were identified through a deductive examination/deconstruction of our ongoing collaboration. They include

- Becoming better informed;
- Building a relationship and trust;
- Offering support freely;
- Leveraging and transferring resources;
- Stepping off the beaten path (to tenure);
- Staying critically self-aware; and
- Enjoying the work, immensely.

These factors are described within the context of an innovative project that aimed to bring Patsy's dream for an Indigenous healing centre (Awitgati) to life.

Background

Allyship

The Anti-Oppression Network (2011) defines allyship as "an active, consistent, and arduous practice of unlearning and re-evaluating, in which a person in a position of privilege and power seeks to operate in solidarity with a marginalized group". It requires "everyday action in all situations" (Carlson et al., 2020 p. 892) and "brings one into community" (Kahane (1998) as cited in Carlson et al., 2020) as a trusted member of the extended family. It includes a commitment to listening to and learning about the community or group you intend to support (Vowel, 2016) and attempting to recognize and unlearn one's own implicit bias and stereotypes (Edgoose et al., 2019).

Many of the available guides and resources position allyship as taking on the 'struggle' of groups less fortunate that your own (Lamont, 2019, 2021). This advice is meant to reinforce the level of commitment that is required: ongoing and long-term, rather than being based on convenience. However, others caution against a problems-oriented perspective and suggest that potential allies "reorient their approach from saving unfortunate people to working in solidarity and collective action" (Nixon, 2019, p. 11). Acting to save or solve the problems of those who are perceived as less fortunate reinforces inequity and continues to impose oppressive power structures.

Another concern with allyship, ironically, relates to its growing popularity. Erskine and Bilimoria (2019) use the term *performative allyship* to describe "well-meaning people with power and privilege [who] show interest in becoming an ally but do not engage in the ongoing emotional labor, self-reflection, continuous education, courage, commitment, and exchange of power inherent in true allyship" (p. 329). For example, the increasingly popular practice of "performing" on social media with bold statements in support of social movements to gain high numbers of likes and shares and to bring in new followers. This kind of self-promoting allyship in the absence of action is insulting and disingenuous and can also reinforce and perpetuate systems of oppression and discrimination (Sumerau et al., 2021).

Allyship is a complex, challenging, and important ideal. It is critical for those holding more power and privilege to engage in allyship carefully. If a potential ally is not willing or able to make a commitment and act, it may be better to find other ways to engage with issues of social justice.

However, there are others in positions of power and privilege who have a duty or ethical responsibility to address social inequity. Nurses are one such group of people.

Allyship in Nursing

Advancing social justice and reducing inequity are core components of the nursing profession. In my opinion (JH), this equates to an ethical responsibility to act in allyship with those in positions of less power and privilege. However, we are failing to meet this responsibility: "Far too many nurses remain stuck in denial and inaction, sustaining those systems of inequity rather than enacting their professional skill and authority toward doing their part to ensure fairness and justice for all" (Thorne, 2022, p. 1).

The Canadian Nurses Association (CNA) Code of Ethics (2017) states that, "Ethical nursing practice addresses broad aspects of social justice that are associated with health and well-being" (p. 18). However, the 16 actions the Code recommends in this domain relate almost exclusively to becoming more knowledgeable about issues of inequity and advocating for change. These suggested actions fall short and transfer responsibility for social justice to others.

Advocating and becoming knowledgeable without taking concrete action places the nursing profession in the realm of performative allyship. Coming back to the CNA Code of Ethics, advocacy is defined as "the act of supporting or recommending a cause or course of action, undertaken on behalf of persons or issues. It relates to the need to improve systems and societal structures to create greater equity and better health for all. Nurses endeavour, individually and collectively, to advocate for and work toward eliminating social inequities" (p. 5). The last five words in that definition are most important if nurses are to work in allyship and truly support social justice and reconciliation. Wolastoqey Elder Opolahsomuwehs has repeated the following advice during her presentations to faculty and students at my institution, and it succinctly summarizes our critique: "It's time to walk the walk".

As a profession, we are not fully meeting our obligations to effect change on issues of social justice. However, there seems to be a growing acknowledgement of this and emerging guidance on how to take action. For example, The Canadian Association for Schools of Nursing (CASN) released an Anti-Racism Statement in 2021 that clearly highlights the need for schools of nursing to take action (Canadian Association of Schools of Nursing, 2021). Another example is the creation of the Indigenous Research Chairs in Nursing program by the Canadian Nurses Foundation, Canadian Institutes for Health Research (CIHR), and other partners, with a directive to advance best and wise practices (CIHR, 2019). These and other initiatives will help the nursing profession become better allies to the people and communities we serve, and whose territories we occupy.

Academic Allyship

By using the term *academic allyship*, we are referring to allyship undertaken by those working in academic settings. It is helpful to examine academic allyship as being distinct for three reasons. First, we have access to a unique set of resources: our libraries contain information that many others are unable to access, our administrative and support departments hold a wide variety of expertise, our campuses are densely populated with highly educated people, and alumni and donor networks create a wide network of influence.

Second, Eurocentric values within colonial academic institutions promote an authoritative claim on knowledge that devalues systems of understanding the world that are not firmly rooted

in the scientific method. The ideas and opinions espoused by those within the academy are, unfortunately in our opinion, often seen by mainstream society as the most valid forms of knowledge (Mazzocchi, 2006; Rogers et al., 2019). This means academic ideas and opinions and the ways in which these are expressed can be powerful tools for change or, alternatively, resistance to change.

Third, academic institutions and researchers have a substantial history of doing significant harm to Indigenous people, often knowingly (MacDonald et al., 2014; Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2016). The Tri-council's ethical guidelines contain a chapter aimed at preventing researchers from doing such work. However, researchers and research institutions continue to mistreat Indigenous people for their own gain (Rhodes, 2021). Because of this context, it is important that academics and administrators are particularly cautious to avoid causing further harm.

Academic institutions across the country are increasingly making social justice a priority. We are all "very committed" to reconciliation, anti-racism, equity, etc., but change has been slow (Usher, 2021). Darbyshire (2022) highlights this context with brilliant sarcasm, "Great care must be employed to ensure that steps taken towards ending racism do not weaken any other long-established systems, processes or structures that the health and university sectors rely upon so heavily" (p. 1). Unfortunately, the visible and invisible colonial policies and "settler common sense" (Rifkin, 2013) under which many academics operate are some of the main reasons why inequity occurs and continues to exist. Indeed, Louie-Poon et al. (2022, p. 2) argues that nursing's "dominant white gaze" renders racist institutional policies invisible and that these policies are the "root cause" for inequities experienced by racialized populations. A true commitment by academic institutions to social justice would mean significantly altering institutional polies and practices in ways that are likely to seem contrary to settler common sense. In our experience, the degree of un-learning (i.e., becoming more aware and critical of implicit bias and assumptions) and relationship-building required from institutional administrators for this work to be successful is often overlooked.

Allyship from within an academic institution requires reflection on our unequal share of resources, power, and an awareness of past harms. It also requires risk taking, and a willingness to upset or disrupt established structures, policies, processes, ideas and beliefs (Bucher, 2021). In my (JH) 10-year experience working in Canadian academic institutions, people are reluctant or unsure of how to do this. Our story in the following section of a successful academic-community partnership may provide some perspective.

Discussion

In this discussion, we start by briefly introducing a major community-driven project that Mike and Jason facilitated in partnership with Under One Sky and others. Then, we consider seven success factors that enabled this collaboration: *building a relationship and trust*; *becoming better informed*; *offering support freely*; *stepping off the beaten path (to tenure)*; *staying critically self-aware*; and *enjoying the work, immensely*. Our goal is to help potential allies understand the commitment and potential risks involved. This is rewarding work, but it also should not be undertaken without reflection on one's reasons for doing so and the capacity to commit.

Under One Sky's Awitgati Longhouse & Cultural Centre

Founded in 2004, Under One Sky (UOS) is a registered Indigenous not-for-profit organization based out of Fredericton. UOS is member of the National Association of Friendship Centres, and, as one of over 130 Centres and Provincial/Territorial Associations, forms part of the largest service delivery infrastructure for Indigenous people living in urban areas across Canada. It is the only Friendship Centre in New Brunswick and provides culturally informed programs and services in the areas of health and family support, education, cultural teachings, and community events. The demand for their services has grown quickly in the past several years but their programming is limited by space and sustainable funding. Due to these limitations, Patsy asked for our help to develop a vision and strategic plans for a new centre, which, through subsequent engagement and visioning became the Awitgati Longhouse & Cultural Centre project.

We started with an intention to explore potential funding opportunities and solidify what an ideal, "blue-sky" (i.e., the best possible outcome without consideration of constraints) vision might look like. The project very quickly gained momentum, and visioning sessions evolved into a strategic plan, which evolved into several studies, focus groups, and other tangible actions that culminated in the completion of schematic designs, budget, operating plans, and engineering specifications for a 21,000 sq ft net-zero community centre. Under One Sky's $18.6 million dollar funding request to Infrastructure Canada was recently approved and construction is set to begin in early 2023 (Infrastructure Canada, 2022).

Beyond the vision, plans and funding proposal, another substantial milestone was Under One Sky's acquisition of an entire downtown city block as the site for the new centre. This was achieved through supplementary funding applications, cold-calling neighbors to make offers, negotiating purchases, and making a formal request to the province for a vacant piece of land. In addition to the funding to build the Awitgati Longhouse & Cultural Centre, our work (in collaboration with many others) has resulted in Under One Sky receiving close to a million dollars in additional funding to purchase an adjacent residential property and an adjacent commercial property, and a gift of unused land from the Province of New Brunswick.

[Patsy] *If it had at all been left up to me, this project wouldn't have happened. First of all, I don't have the resources. I don't have the time. I don't have the expertise. And I'm just learning now, reading this, there was a lot more happening behind the scenes that I wasn't even aware of.*[1] *And I'm incredibly grateful for that. I didn't realize how much was happening behind the scenes until some of this got down on paper. Which is why I said, "I hope you guys are capturing this, because it's been a journey."*

The remainder of the discussion will focus on the key success factors for academic allyship in the context of this project, using some examples from our journey. It is not meant to be a roadmap or toolkit. Rather, it is a reflection on, and sharing of, the factors we feel were important for our work together. Patsy elaborates on this in the conclusion as a "taking apart" of our collaboration to figure out what has helped it to work so well.

---

[1] High-level decision-making and planning were done in collaboration with the entire project leadership team. However, the leadership team delegated more mundane decision making and some of the day-to-day legwork to Mike and Jason. There is more on this in the section on Staying Critically Self-aware.

Becoming Better Informed

One of the first directives in almost all the allyship toolkits is "do your homework" or "learn about the community with which you would like to work". Similarly, I've heard many of the Indigenous leaders I have worked with advise during presentations to read the TRC report, the entire thing, or similar advice. The prevailing advice is that being informed is always a critical first step.

However, when we first met with Patsy to explore areas for collaboration we were largely uninformed about Indigenous history and current issues. Our naïveté helped us approach that conversation with fewer preconceptions. If we had waited until we understood the history and culture, we may never have gotten to the point where we felt ready for that initial meeting. That said, it became clear very quickly that we needed to become better informed if we hoped to come alongside Under One Sky in a safe and respectful way.

In our case, we both had extensive experience working, living, and travelling in countries where people hold worldviews that are different to our own. This meant that while we were not familiar with the context of Indigenous Peoples in Canada, we did understand it takes time and open-mindedness to become better informed. When reviewing this paper, Patsy highlighted the difference between traveling and being a tourist by quoting a former teacher of hers: "Anything less than 6 weeks, you are a tourist".

[Patsy] And it's true, I didn't get that until I went to New Zealand for a leadership practicum. Once I was there, it was about the sixth week where I was beginning to become more aware of what was happening in New Zealand politically and socially and economically, because at first I was just gobsmacked about that beautiful country and all the beautiful things. But it was about the sixth week where I started noticing, "Oh, this is the reality here". And you don't notice it as a tourist. You need to be there living it. I lived in a community and saw first-hand some of the struggles that they had. If you just go by as a tourist and spend money, they're probably going to have a lot of smiles in their face. But if you actually go into their house and see their regular life, they might not be as happy as what you see on the surface. So that time is a significant piece of becoming better informed.

We are relatively open-minded and non-judgemental, and we understand the value in diverse opinions and perspectives. However, there is a risk in taking a naive approach, particularly if those taking it have not cross-cultural experiences beyond tourism. The risk is larger if a potential ally approaches a relationship thinking they have answers to others' problems. For these reasons, doing some background research and learning about the potential harms of helping are important.

We approached this by reading general reference materials (e.g., Knockwood, 2001; Vowel, 2016), landmark reports (e.g., Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015), and relevant community research and reports that were available from Under One Sky. Attending cultural gatherings and participating in ceremony that have been accessible have helped us learn and provided opportunities for us to meet and better understand community members. Our most substantial learning, particularly throughout the Awitgati project, has been done through listening.

We had the privilege of meeting with Wolastoqi and Mi'kmaq Elders and Knowledge Holders and the responsibility of transferring that knowledge onto paper so that Under One Sky could communicate their vision to others. This involved meetings and discussions with over 100

people in the space of six months and hundreds of pages of writing based on what we heard. We were much better informed at the end of this process.

As simple as it sounds, listening is also one of the most challenging things for an academic to do well. Academics and nurses alike are taught to challenge opinions and offer our own perspective or advice. That authoritative engagement and debate with colleagues is a fundamental aspect of life in academia. However, listening with an open mind, without critique, while acknowledging that in this context we will never be the expert has helped us better understand the worldviews and perspectives of community partners. This contributed to an effective collaboration that enabled us to create a strategic vision for this project we are all very proud of and building designs that reflect the voices and priorities of Under One Sky and the community they serve.

[Patsy] *And there's a lot of value for me as an individual person in feeling heard and having my ideas validated. Not just, "Oh, yeah. Whatever", kind of thing. And sometimes, I didn't even know you were listening, and then when you finally said, "Every time we talk, you talk about wanting to expand this place". And so you said, "Okay. That's next: we're going to work on this". That listening piece is a huge help for an organization like Under One Sky.*

Building a Relationship and Trust

The literature we reviewed earlier in this paper position allyship as a lifelong commitment. This long-term approach provides time and space to get to know each other and determine where collaborative opportunities exist. Or, alternatively, to decide that the relationship is not a good fit and part ways. We could not have showed up at Under One Sky and jumped into a project as complex as Awitgati without having already established strong, trusting relationships.

[Patsy] *Oftentimes there's not a lot of attention given to building that relationship. Because it's really, really important. And it's really important with anything that you're doing but, specifically, if it's non-Indigenous people trying to work with Indigenous people, there needs to be a relationship. And lots of potential allies want something quick, but quick isn't, necessarily, the way it's going to work.*

In general, the implicit biases and assumptions we all hold, often lead to judgements that our way of doing things is better. These judgements create a barrier to developing effective community relationships because they often cause us to unintentionally minimize/diminish community knowledge and expertise. Mike and I were able to overcome this barrier through ongoing critical self-reflection and consistently privileging community opinions and priorities above our own. Stated more simply, we reminded ourselves, "we do not have to be right or have the answers, we just have to listen and act on what we are hearing". In terms of building relationships, what Mike and I thought was right was irrelevant. Most important was that we demonstrated that we were paying attention to what *Patsy* thought was right.

We started doing this with smaller projects that grew in scope over the course of four years leading up to Awitgati. This approach, rather than diving straight into complex issues, has a higher chance for positive outcomes and provides more space and time for relationship-building. During our early conversations, we talked about community priorities and our own personal backgrounds, identified areas where we could provide support based on our strengths (e.g., obtaining a small grant to support an overnight family camping trip, helping revise articles of incorporation), and subsequently exploring other opportunities to help. As each project neared completion, we asked, "ok, what's next?"

The staff at Under One Sky were able to identify more areas where our skills and knowledge might be useful as they got to know us better. And they were increasingly comfortable asking us to help as we continued to follow through on the commitments we made and their trust in us grew. Each project we supported had discreet objectives, but the most important outcome was the gradual strengthening of our relationships with the staff and the community.

Offering Support Freely

Western society is largely transactional, where we generally expect something tangible (usually money) in return for goods or services offered. In an academic context, the compensation for the work we do is traditionally academic outputs (papers, grants, presentations, etc.). This academic currency provides job security and progression through the ranks. The transactional context of academia, combined with a long history of researchers exploiting Indigenous communities for their own gain, creates a substantial barrier to academic allyship.

Many of the initial conversations we have had with potential community partners come with a sense of suspicion or distrust. Sometimes it seems like there is an underlying question of "what do you *really* want?" One approach is to be upfront about the expectations placed on us as academics by explaining but not imposing those expectations on potential community partnerships. There are times when community support may lead to those forms of currency expected in academia. But these should never take away from the outcomes that the community has identified.

Offering support freely in this way, and with acceptance that our contributions may not result in any form of tangible personal or professional benefit, have been an important factor in the ongoing collaboration with Under One Sky. It means that Patsy can accept the support that we offer, without having taken on a debt to us, financially or otherwise. It also means that we can help to build capacity without taking resources away from the important programs and services that Under One Sky delivers.

[Patsy] *It doesn't always have to be for free, as long as I understand exactly what's expected from me from the beginning. That's hugely important. I like knowing where I stand. And I'm assuming everybody else likes that too. And so, I always feel more comfortable when that comes on the table right away, "Let's talk about what the expectations are, what do you need from me? And here's what I need from you". Rather than guessing. I don't like guessing. I don't. "Is this going to cost me? What am I going to get out of this?" That way we can both make a decision about whether or not it makes sense for us to work together.*

Leveraging and Transferring Resources

In our work on the Awitgati project, we went beyond freely offering support by leveraging and transferring tangible resources to Under One Sky. This was a personal and professional risk for us because those resources could have been directed towards the production of traditional academic outcomes. However, refusing to use these resources when we knew they would help would maintain the status quo of inequity. Academic allyship requires us to recognize the advantages and privileges we have and be willing to share those advantages with others, freely.

My (JH) position in academia means I have transferrable skills, access to resources, and privilege that I was able to mobilize for this project. My research experience was helpful in synthesizing past research and facilitating community engagement, for example. My academic

credentials were helpful in requesting meetings with government and private sector leaders. However, the most impactful resources I was able to provide were human and financial.

From January to August 2021, I worked on nothing aside from this project. I asked Mike to similarly direct all his time towards the project. Since then, the project has continued to occupy most of the Mike's time, and around 25% of mine. In addition to funding Mike's time, I also committed a significant amount (~$50,000) of my Research Chair funding to cover half of the professional fees required to prepare Under One Sky's feasibility study costs.

We took on the project as if Under One Sky was our own family. We were willing to transfer social capital, financial resources, and take personal and professional sacrifices to help them achieve their vision. Making the resources and privileges I hold as an academic freely available to support Under One Sky has arguably led to some of the most substantial outcomes of this project to date.

Stepping off the Beaten Path (to Tenure)

In academia, the standard approach to tenure and promotion is often developing expertise in an increasingly specialized area where you will be competitive for grants and eventually have the opportunity to make a significant contribution to knowledge in your area (National Institutes of Health, 2020). At my institution, I'm expected to achieve a "high level of academic competence and achievement in [my] area of expertise" (Association of University of New Brunswick Teachers, 2016, p. 75). These expectations have the potential to create a mindset that dictates that I can only help you in a way that fits easily within the structure of the institution where I am employed, because that is the only way I can meet my goals and targets. However, this mindset does not align well with effective allyship, which should be focused on priorities of the community, rather than personal outcomes like tenure and promotion.

Although we knew almost nothing about infrastructure at the time, we felt a responsibility to help in any way possible. Our mindset, which better aligns with academic allyship, was (and still is) that we will help with whatever you think is important in whatever way we can, and hopefully we can fit the outcomes into the structure of our institution, or, help the institution change to better acknowledge the important work you are leading.

In other words, academic allyship requires us to set our own priorities and program of research aside to make space for the priorities and needs of the community. Since these priorities consistently evolve in little or no relation to the priorities of an academic institution, it can be difficult to focus on a niche area in which to develop expertise. It also means being willing to step off the beaten path to engage in projects and work processes that are outside your academic comfort zone. It is important to reconcile with the possibility that this may create challenges in making progress towards tenure and promotion.

[Patsy] *There are people who will just sit and write a check, and that's important because you need the money to move projects forward. But then there are people who volunteer their time, and that's important as well, and they may not be any more deeply involved with that. But the real social justice starts when we are influencing and changing policy. So just think about the institution you work in, what needs to change up there. I think about our Indigenous friend who worked there and the personal struggles and racism she encountered because of the colonial mindset of many of her colleagues. That was painful to watch for me as a woman, to watch her struggle with all of that. And I didn't know how to help her. That is a very old, well-established*

institution. That's not going to change easily, but that's what has to change. The institutions have to change and they need more folks like you working in those institutions who understand what needs to happen to make things change and who are willing to be uncomfortable.

Staying Critically Self-Aware

There were times throughout the intensive six-month grant-writing period when we had to keep the project moving forward while the Indigenous leaders on our team were unable to participate. We felt this created a risk that the decisions we made were not aligned with the community's vision and values. Self-reflection was important in these situations.

Carlson (2020) identified self-reflection, focused on positionality and privilege, as an important tool for allies and activists. Throughout our work on Awitgati, the question we most often asked ourselves was, "Does this idea fit with the worldviews of the community or is this our own way of valuing things?" This question was paired with an acknowledgement that the community's worldviews should be privileged in all aspects of the project. However, even with over four years of close collaboration, this was not a simple process, and frequent check-ins with members of the project leadership team were necessary.

Many academics have substantial experience leading research and educational projects. It can seem normal to take on decision-making and step into an expert position, because this is what is often expected of us. It is also common to be critical of others' ideas and opinions while defending our own. However, academic allyship requires us to recognize the values and knowledge of the communities we support and place that knowledge in a privileged position. Critical self-reflection is necessary to ensure consistency in this approach, and outsiders need to recognize they may never fully understand the worldviews of community partners.

Enjoying the Work, Immensely

During a recent lunch meeting we had arranged to discuss this paper, Patsy asked us, "But, *why* are you doing all this?" She pointed out that the discussion above highlights the hard work and complexity but fails to address our motivation for, and the immense enjoyment of, what we have been doing. This enjoyment has been a key part of our success.

The Awitgati Longhouse & Cultural Centre project, and our collaboration with Under One Sky, has given us opportunities to gain practical skills and knowledge, grow our personal and professional networks, act on issues of social justice, contribute to innovative, creative and meaningful progress towards reconciliation, and put our own skills and knowledge towards what feels like very good use.

We both enjoy innovative projects, problem-solving, and having the opportunity to work outside-the-box. Patsy is a visionary leader, and the staff members all have unique perspectives and creative ideas. It is rare to be able to participate in the kind of projects these ideas generate, projects that have the potential to change lives in such a profound way.

Often, our work has immediate, observable impacts on people's lives. The translation of research and scholarship into practice is typically a slow process. The scholarly work we do in partnership with Under One Sky can sometimes be incorporated into practice or leveraged to increase capacity, immediately. Those tangible outcomes for the organization and the community make the hard work worthwhile.

The main reason though, is that the people at Under One Sky are incredible and incredibly caring. There is something very special about the organizational culture and the energy that everyone brings to work. They are a loving family and they have welcomed us into that family as close relatives. Their acknowledgement and gratitude for our work is a greater prize (in our opinion) than academic achievements. Our collaboration with those wonderful people has been the most personally (i.e., intrinsically) rewarding work that either of us has ever done.

Conclusion

We asked Patsy how she thought this final section should be framed. I (JH) provided an explanation of how a conclusion is typically written (e.g., summarize main points, restate core message, etc.). She immediately answered, in less than a congratulatory tone, "such an academic". We then decided to ignore the convention and provide our take-away message in Patsy's words and in her way:

We can't do it alone. We just can't. It's impossible. And it has to happen. Change has to happen, and it can't be just words. There has to be action. I get frustrated with the government when they say, "Well, the most important relationship we have is with Indigenous people." It doesn't show. It doesn't show. Or the T-shirt that says, "Every child matters." No they don't. Because if they did matter, so many of them wouldn't still be living in poverty. If they did matter, I would not have to fight to get funding for a Jordan's Principle Worker. If they did matter, they would all have clean drinking water. It's more than just a t-shirt and a quaint little saying. Every child should matter but they don't. And that's the part where we have to find a way, together, to connect the dots.

When I see something that works, or that I like, or that I might be able to model, I'm the kind of person who needs to take it apart. I need to know what all the pieces look like so I can duplicate them. So that's kind of how I'm looking at this. And I want to acknowledge the effort that went into writing this paper because this story needs to be told. I don't know what to say to people when they ask how they can be an ally. I tell them, "Be a Jason, Be a Mike". But how do you do that? Well, this is how.

References

Absolon, K., & Willett, C. (2004). Aboriginal Research: Berry Picking and Hunting in the 21st Century. *First Peoples Child & Family Review*, *1*(1), 5–17.

Anti-Oppression Network. (2011, December 10). Allyship. *THE ANTI-OPPRESSION NETWORK*. https://theantioppressionnetwork.com/allyship/

ASSOCIATION OF UNIVERSITY OF NEW BRUNSWICK TEACHERS. (2016). *13th Collective Agreement between UNB and AUNBT*. University of New Brunswick. https://www.aunbt.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/aunbtftca20162020.pdf

Bucher, J. (2021). Allyship Accountability in Academic Leadership: The Power and Responsibility in Privileged Roles. *ACAD for Academic Leaders*. https://acad.org/resource/allyship-accountability-in-academic-leadership-the-power-and-responsibility-in-privileged-roles/

Canadian Association of Schools of Nursing. (2021). *Canadian Association of Schools of Nursing Statement of Commitment Anti-Indigenous Racism*. Canadian Association of Schools of Nursing. https://www.casn.ca/2020/09/casn-anti-racism-statement/

Canadian Nurses Association. (2017). *Code of Ethics for Registered Nurses* (ISBN 978-1-55119-441-7; p. 60). Canadian Nurses Association. https://hl-prod-ca-oc-download.s3-ca-central-1.amazonaws.com/CNA/2f975e7e-4a40-45ca-863c-5ebf0a138d5e/UploadedImages/documents/Code_of_Ethics_2017_Edition_Secure_Interactive.pdf

Carlson, J., Leek, C., Casey, E., Tolman, R., & Allen, C. (2020). What's in a Name? A Synthesis of "Allyship" Elements from Academic and Activist Literature. *Journal of Family Violence*, *35*(8), 889–898. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10896-019-00073-z

Charmaz, K. (2014). *Constructing Grounded Theory* (Second). SAGE Publications Ltd.

Chilisa, B. (2012). *Indigenous Research Methodologies*. SAGE Publications.

Canadian Institutes of Health Research. (2019). Indigenous initiatives and programs at CIHR. https://cihr-irsc.gc.ca/e/50339.html

Darbyshire, P. (2022). How to appear fully committed to doing nothing at all about structural and systemic racism: A modest proposal for health and higher education services. *Nursing Inquiry*, *29*(1), e12405. https://doi.org/10.1111/nin.12405

Edgoose, J. Y. C., Quiogue, M., & Sidhar, K. (2019). How to Identify, Understand, and Unlearn Implicit Bias in Patient Care. *Family Practice Management*, *26*(4), 29–33.

Erskine, S. E., & Bilimoria, D. (2019). White Allyship of Afro-Diasporic Women in the Workplace: A Transformative Strategy for Organizational Change. *Journal of Leadership & Organizational Studies*, *26*(3), 319–338. https://doi.org/10.1177/1548051819848993

Infrastructure Canada. (2022, July 14). *Government of Canada and Under One Sky announce funding to construct a new Indigenous health and social facility*. https://www.canada.ca/en/office-infrastructure/news/2022/07/government-of-canada-and-under-one-sky-announce-funding-to-construct-a-new-indigenous-health-and-social-facility.html

Jewell, E., & Mosby, I. (2021). *Calls to Action Accountability: A 2021 Status Update on Reconciliation* (p. 32). Yellowhead Institute. https://yellowheadinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/trc-2021-accountability-update-yellowhead-institute-special-report.pdf

Knockwood, I. (2001). *Out of the Depths: The Experiences of Mi'kmaw Children at the Indian Residential School in Shubenacadie, Nova Scotia* (Extended). Roseway Publishing.

Kovach, M. (2009). *Indigenous Methodologies: Characteristics, Conversations, and Contexts*. University of Toronto Press.

Lamont, A. (2019). *Indigenous Allyship Toolkit*. http://reseaumtlnetwork.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Ally_March.pdf

Lamont, A. (2021). *The Guide to Allyship*. https://guidetoallyship.com/

Louie-Poon, S., Hilario, C., Scott, S. D., & Olson, J. (2022). Toward a moral commitment: Exposing the covert mechanisms of racism in the nursing discipline. *Nursing Inquiry*, *29*(1), e12449. https://doi.org/10.1111/nin.12449

MacDonald, N. E., Stanwick, R., & Lynk, A. (2014). Canada's shameful history of nutrition research on residential school children: The need for strong medical ethics in Aboriginal health research. *Paediatrics & Child Health*, *19*(2), 64.

National Association of Friendship Centres. (2021). *Urban Indigenous Forum: Addressing Systemic Racism in Healthcare* (p. 10). National Association of Friendship Centres.

National Institutes of Health. (2020). *Writing a Winning Application—Find Your Niche*. https://www.niaid.nih.gov/grants-contracts/find-your-niche

Nixon, S. A. (2019). The coin model of privilege and critical allyship: Implications for health. *BMC Public Health*, *19*(1), 1637. https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-019-7884-9

Phillips-Beck, W., Eni, R., Lavoie, J. G., Avery Kinew, K., Kyoon Achan, G., & Katz, A. (2020). Confronting Racism within the Canadian Healthcare System: Systemic Exclusion of First Nations from Quality and Consistent Care. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, *17*(22), 8343. https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph17228343

Rhodes, B. (2021). Potential class-action lawsuit pits Indigenous community against Halifax researchers. *CBC News*. https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/nova-scotia/possible-class-action-indigenous-community-dal-researchers-1.6281122

Rifkin, M. (2013). Settler common sense. *Settler Colonial Studies*, *3*(3–04), 322–340. https://doi.org/10.1080/2201473X.2013.810702

Sumerau, J. E., Forbes, T. D., Grollman, E. A., & Mathers, L. A. B. (2021). Constructing Allyship and the Persistence of Inequality. *Social Problems*, *68*(2), 358–373. https://doi.org/10.1093/socpro/spaa003

Thorne, S. (2022). Moving beyond performative allyship. *Nursing Inquiry*, *29*(1), e12483. https://doi.org/10.1111/nin.12483

Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. (2015). *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action*. Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada.

http://www.trc.ca/websites/trcinstitution/File/2015/Findings/Calls_to_Action_English2.pdf

Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. (2016). *Canada's Residential Schools: The History, Part 2, 1939 to 2000* (Vol. 1). Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt19rm9wn

Usher, A. (2021). Truth and Reconciliation Updates. *Higher Education Strategy Associates*. https://higheredstrategy.com/truth-and-reconciliation-updates/

Vowel, C. (2016). *Indigenous Writes: A Guide to First Nations, Métis, and Inuit issues in Canada.* Highwater Press. https://www.amazon.ca/Indigenous-Writes-Nations-issues-Canada/dp/1553796802

Wilson, S. (2008). *Research is ceremony: Indigenous research methods*. Fernwood Publishing. https://epubs.scu.edu.au/gnibi_pubs/17