

## Flipping the Narrative: An On-line Module of Indigenous Life for Nursing Students

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### Abstract

*This article outlines an online facilitated module which provides nursing student with a beginning understanding of health and the ways in which social, economic and cultural determinants of health shape communities and individual's beliefs attitudes and experiences. It helps the students to gain knowledge and understanding that they will need to provide culturally safe care to Indigenous people. The online module is designed to increase knowledge, enhance self-awareness through the use of a video guided tour of the Mushuau Innu people of Northern Labrador. This interactive journey includes an examination of the culture of nomadic people on their journey into colonization. The students hear firsthand accounts from the Mushuau Innu people of the affects this journey has had on their culture, language, and health. The students see through a time line of historical events what lead to social disparities and inequities. They examine cultural stereotyping and its consequences as well as the long-term effects of colonization. Students participate in on-line discussions, and self-reflection as part of their learning.*

**Keywords:** *Indigenous, Truth & reconciliation, Online learning, Nursing education*

### 1. Introduction

In late 2015, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) released a report that was the culmination of a lengthy investigation into the way in which Canada's First People have been treated by the European settlers and the legacy of residential schools, colonialization, and discrimination [1]. From this report 94 Calls to Action were delineated highlighting ways in which Canada could respond to the findings in the report. For our purposes, number 57 asks that all federal, provincial, territorial, and municipal governments provide education [to public servants] on the history of Aboriginal peoples through intercultural competency, anti-racism, conflict resolution, and human rights [1]. This article describes the efforts of nursing faculty to prepare nursing students to be culturally safe practitioners by using an innovative teaching tool that highlights the voices of the Mushuau Innu people.

The University of New Brunswick (UNB), Canada's oldest English language university, has responded to the TRC Call to Action by working to indigenize and decolonize the programs, policies, spaces, and services offered on both the Fredericton and Saint John campuses [2]. To that end, the authors are involved in guiding nursing students to gain a better, more robust understanding of the effects that colonization, residential schools, the 60's sweep, and discrimination have had on Aboriginal people. The Faculty of Nursing at UNB

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has been very intentional in including elements of cultural diversity and Aboriginal health and the need to better understand Aboriginal experiences in order to provide the best and most culturally respectful and appropriate care. In the third year of the program nursing students take Community and Population Health, a theory class which is paired with a community clinical practicum. The purpose of the theory course is to focus on the role of the nurse in community and public health nursing, using the population health framework. The course addresses principles of community assessment and development, program planning, and other strategies that are supported through a population health perspective, with particular emphasis on populations, and social, political and economic determinants of health. Nursing students are expected to develop an understanding of the role and scope of practice of the community health nurse. Based on the principles Primary Health Care, Caring, and Social Justice UNB's Faculty of Nursing has built course outcomes that focus on five core components: Knowledge and its Application, Communication, Critical Thinking/Skills of Analysis, Professional Identity, and Social Justice/Effective Citizenship. Throughout the course outcomes numerous references can be found that guide students to demonstrate skills that include cultural competence along with a deeper understanding of the role that the determinants of health play in the lives of vulnerable populations. Our goal with the on-line learning modules was to 'flip the narrative', giving voice to the Mushuau Innu people to tell their own story, in a way that demonstrates respect for the lived experience and for the people. The Innu people preserve their history through traditional storytelling [3], flipping the narrative allows the experts, the Innu people, to teach the nursing students while respecting the storytelling tradition.

## **2. The assignment**

The Canadian Indigenous Nurses Association "stressed the need for a culturally safe curriculum due to the lasting impacts of colonization, historical and current government policies, the residential school system, the sixties scoop and intergenerational trauma" [3].

The choice to use a self-paced on-line learning module using clips of CBC documentaries [4] was to allow the story to be told in the voices of the Mushuau Innu people themselves and to address this very issue of a culturally safe curriculum. The Mushuau Innu people were some of the last indigenous people in Canada to settle into a community setting which spans from 1939- 2002 and sees the people relocated three times to three different communities. The video series takes the students on a journey from a nomadic way of life to colonization. It provides the students with the beginning understanding of health and the ways in which social, economic and cultural determinants of health shapes the community and individuals' beliefs, attitudes and experiences.

Storytelling within the indigenous community is a tool used for centuries by indigenous people to teach each other and their children about culture, values, beliefs, and customs. The storytelling method used in this module allowed the voice of the Mushuau Innu people to be heard in telling their own story and in their own words. The assignment's intended outcomes were to bring depth and critical thinking to the conversation about the effects of colonization and intergenerational trauma. In the module, students are required to watch a series of video clips and then reflect on and answer a series of facilitated guided questions related to culture, Indigenous determinants of health, role of government policies, public health issues and the role of the community/ public health nurse to name a few.

The modules create an opportunity for students to journey with the Mushuau Innu people of Labrador from the early 1900's to present day. The module uses video clips from the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) Archives [4]. It takes the students through a

journey of a once nomadic tribe to settlement in the early 30's and 60's. The people talk about what the experience of being resettled from the land and into community was like and the effect that loss of their lifestyle had on their culture. The Innu people provide a frank discussion about the problems that have plagued them since their move into Davis Inlet and again as they resettled into Natuashish [4]. The students learn of the effects of colonization and intergenerational trauma experienced by the Mushuau people and how the affects continue today within the community.

The on-line module assignment was designed to increase knowledge and enhance self-awareness through the use of a guided video tour. This interactive narrative journey includes an examination of the culture of nomadic people on their journey to colonization and beyond. Giving voice to the Innu people, the students hear firsthand accounts about the affects this journey has had on their culture, language, and health. The students see through a time line of historical events what has led to social disparities and inequalities in this community. They examine cultural stereotyping and its consequences and the long-term effects of colonization.

When the students complete the on-line journey, they are asked to participate in on-line discussion boards associated with each of the six videos. The students reflect on what they have seen and respond to questions in the discussion board. They post a comment/observation or answer a question and to respond to one post made by someone else. We hoped that giving students the opportunity to explore their thoughts with one another without instructor guidance would give them freedom to seek whatever knowledge they desired [5] positing that on-line learning approaches provided opportunities for students to engage in learning that was reinforced by self-reflection. We ask the students to become aware of their privilege and openly discuss this with classmates, ensuring that they are fully grounded in the ancestral history of the Mushuau people.

### **3. Evaluation**

In the process of developing the module for this online learning assignment, we discussed the need to find a way to evaluate the assignment, learning platform, and overall rating by the students. We developed an on-line survey that asked seven Likert scale, one yes/no, and one open-ended question. Of the Likert scale questions, two asked about the overall impression and value of knowledge shared. The other five Likert scale questions sought to gain an understanding of the use of online modules, containing videos and the use of a discussion board to enhance the students' learning. The evaluation survey was clearly marked as being voluntary, however 37 of 52 students completed it; a 71% return rate. We asked for the students' overall impression of the module. We combined the agree/strongly agree and the disagree/strongly disagree finding; seven percent indicated a negative response and 74% indicated a positive response, 16% remained neutral. The responses to the question of the modules enhancing the students' knowledge of Indigenous culture, 84% agreed, 7% disagreed, 8% remained neutral. When asked about the use of videos as a teaching tool 78% agreed, 8% disagreed, and 19% remained neutral. However, the discussion forum received ratings that were less dichotomous: 27% disagreed, 27% were neutral and 46% agreed to the benefit. Most students suggested that the length of time to complete the assignment was more than expected, with 46%, 27% felt neutral, and 27% indicated that the modules took less time than expected. Despite this, 56% recommended that the assignment be used again while 21% did not, and 24% were neutral. Fewer than half the respondents (48%) stated that marks should have been associated with the assignment while 24% said no and 27% remained neutral.

When asked if the assignment should remain a pass/fail the students who responded were split with 54% to 46% in favour.

Results of the quantitative portion of the evaluation informed us that while the majority of students found the modules to be informative and a good learning tool, they were too lengthy and should be associated with marks if that much time was to be committed to completing the assignment. We then provided space for the students to provide any comments that they felt would be helpful to the instructors for ongoing development of the learning module. The responses to this question were helpful in our effort to continue to improve the assignment. The students informed us of a few technical difficulties, like broken links, files that would not open and challenges with maneuvering around the modules. These issues were ones we could address immediately. Many students also suggested that having three longer videos rather than six shorter ones would have been preferable. Although 27% of the students indicated that the length of time to complete the assignment was as or below expected, we did not receive one statement from the students that made the same claims and many wrote that the assignment took too long. They also provided us feedback about the timing during the course, many stating that the assignment was due during a particularly busy week. There were however, some students who appreciated the flexibility and freedom to schedule their time as they wished, some choosing to complete the assignment early, leaving them time to complete other work and study for midterm exams.

*I like having an online module, especially where we have a midterm next week. Being able to complete the module early allows for more time to study, especially during a busy time in the semester. (Third year nursing student)*

We received much feedback indicating that the students felt that the material in the assignment was informative. A few students noted that learning about Indigenous culture as well as other cultures (Asian, Arabic, LGBTQ+) would be helpful. One troubling response centred on the students view that learning about the Mushuau people and the focus on Indigenous culture in the Nursing program, suggesting that more work is needed to sensitize students to the experiences of diverse vulnerable populations:

*I honestly felt that the module was a waste of time, ... I am also tired of learning about Indigenous culture. I understand culture is important for a nursing career, but the only culture that we ever discuss is Indigenous, and there is more to Canada than the indigenous culture. (Third year nursing student)*

#### **4. Lessons learned**

As a result of reflecting on the evaluations and feedback provided by the students, we made some structural changes to the videos, enhanced the instructions, and changed the discussion board. We realized that asking the entire class to participate in one discussion created some challenges for the students in trying to make new and additive posts. In this academic year, we arranged for the Discussion Board to be completed by students in their clinical groups of seven to eight students. We hope that this will give them more freedom and opportunity to make comments and to respond to each other in a more meaningful way. We will continue to seek input from the students about this assignment, using their feedback to polish this innovative way of delivering course content. Ash [6] stated that blended or hybrid learning was found to have greater outcomes than solely face-to-face or online instruction [6] E-learning approaches can help to augment and support diverse teaching styles addressing the learning needs of students. The flexibility of e-learning is effective in removing the barriers of time, space, and need to show up to class making it an effective approach to teaching [7]. The

modules are alive in that they change constantly in response to what is learned. The journey is never stagnant and neither is the video series, keeping them current with what is happening today; giving the students a glimpse of what the future might bring and to reflect where the community is today, as their journey continues. We believe that using a blended learning format creates opportunities for students with diverse learning styles, gives students a break from classroom learning and offers some flexibility for scheduling their valuable time.

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