

Summary Report

Atlantic Indigenous Mentorship Network Kausattumi Grants Program, 2019-2020
LEAH CARRIER, PHD (NURSING)

The impact of cultural connectedness on mental wellness in Indigenous children and youth

Description of Research

Indigenous nurses have unique approaches to nursing that influence the way that they care for Indigenous patients, families, and communities. A study by Bourque-Bearskin and colleagues (2016) determined that Indigenous nurses draw on inherited Indigenous knowledge when providing care to Indigenous peoples, despite historical and systemic barriers to applying this knowledge. A key finding from this study is that the participant identities as Indigenous people were integral to their nursing practice (Bourque-Bearskin et al., 2016). Given this knowledge, it follows that Indigenous identity and ways of knowing would be instrumental in how Indigenous students engage with nursing education and foundational to the process by which they become Indigenous nurses. However, little research has been done to date that examines the experiences of Indigenous nurses in the context of nursing education, particularly in Mi'kma'ki.

I am coming to this work as a mixed-race *Niitsítapi* (Blackfoot) and settler Canadian registered nurse and doctoral student at Dalhousie University in Kijipuktuk, Mi'kmaki. My Indigenous roots and kinship ties are in Piikani First Nation (Canada) and Blackfeet Nation (United States), but I've lived in Mi'kmaki for the last 14 years while working and attending post-secondary education. I recognize the role of place and land on learning and as such, my understanding of Indigenous philosophies and ways of knowing are influenced by my upbringing as a mixed-race *Niitsítapi* woman and my learning as a guest in Mi'kmaki for later part of my life.

Understanding the experiences of Indigenous students in nursing education is critical, especially as schools of nursing move to better engage with Indigenous communities, undertake decolonization initiatives, and improve the recruitment, retention of, and successful completion of Indigenous nursing students. As a profession, nursing has been complicit in the historical and present colonial processes that continue to harm Indigenous communities and it is imperative that nurses address this history and truth of nursing's involvement before actions to reconciliation can be implemented (Canadian Association of Schools of Nursing [CASN], 2020; Symenuk et al., 2020). Released in 2015, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) specifically names the nursing profession in its Calls to Action. In response, the Canadian Association of Schools of Nursing (CASN) created a framework that outlines strategies for

nursing to address the recommendations from the TRC in nursing education. The framework outlines three key directions for initiatives, which are foundation strategies supporting reconciliation, strategies focused on the recruitment and retention of Indigenous students, and strategies that target the curriculum and pedagogy of nursing program (CASN, 2020). In order for these initiatives to be fully realized, it is important to prioritize the voices of Indigenous students and nurses and to learn from their experiences in nursing education.

The purpose of this research is to use a Two-eyed Seeing approach and Indigenous Storywork to provide Indigenous nurses an opportunity to describe the degree to which their nursing education embodied Indigenous health nursing. Through the use of story, we will explore how Indigenous identity and ways of knowing are drawn upon by Indigenous nurses in their processes of becoming an Indigenous nurse.

Research Questions

What are the experiences of Indigenous nurses in nursing education? What are the facilitators and barriers to the success of Indigenous learners in nursing programs? How do Indigenous learners draw upon Indigenous ways of knowing in their nursing education and nursing professional roles? How does one's worldview and ways of knowing as an Indigenous person and nursing philosophy come together (what is the process of becoming an Indigenous nurse)?

Theoretical and Methodological Framework

This project is guided by Indigenous ways of knowing and will use a Two-eyed Seeing approach as coined by Elders Albert and Murdena Marshall (Bartlett, Marshall, & Marshall, 2012). A Two-eyed Seeing approach emphasizes co-learning and uses knowledge from both Western and Indigenous knowledge systems to address the complex health issues experienced by Indigenous peoples (Bartlett, Marshall, & Marshall, 2012). This research will use qualitative Indigenous Storywork methodology which was developed by Dr. Jo-ann Archibald from Sto:lo Nation. Indigenous Storywork is a decolonizing methodology that focuses on active engagement and meaning making, describing how knowledge is created and transferred (Archibald, 2008; Archibald et al., 2019). Indigenous Storywork refers to the way storytelling expresses identity and culture, but also serves as a tool for education, healing, and as a historical record (Archibald, 2008; Archibald et al., 2019). Through Indigenous Storywork, my aim as a researcher and knowledge seeker is to learn, understand, and honour the lived stories, strengths, and capacities of Indigenous nurses in the context of nursing education.

Research Outcomes

This research project aims to explore the experiences of Indigenous nurses in the context of nursing education, which has the potential to determine how the unique strengths of Indigenous nurses are being facilitated by nursing education, or how nursing education can change to be a more supportive environment for the training and development of Indigenous nurses. The results have the potential to enhance the educational experiences of Indigenous nurses as well as to increase the recruitment and retention of Indigenous nurses.

Knowledge Sharing

Publications:

- **Carrier, L.,** Dame, J., & Lane, J. (2020). Two-Spirit identity and Indigenous conceptualizations of gender and sexuality: Implications for nursing practice. *Creative Nursing*, 26(2), 96-100.
- Paynter, M., Jefferies, K., & **Carrier, L.** (2020). Nurses for police and prison abolition/Infirmières pour l'abolition de la police et des prisons/Enfermeras para la abolición de la policía y las prisiones. *Public Health Nursing*, 37(4), 471-474.
- Dame, J., Oliffe, J., Hill, N., **Carrier, L.,** & Evans-Amalu, K. (2020). Sexual violence among men who have sex with men and Two-Spirit peoples: A scoping review. *The Canadian Journal of Human Sexuality*, 39(2). doi: 10.3138/cjhs.2020-0014
- Lane, J., **Carrier, L.,** Jefferies, K., & Yu, Z. (2019). Diverse representation in nursing leadership: Developing a shared position statement on allyship. *Creative Nursing*, 25(5).
- Yu, Z., Steenbeek, A., Biderman, M., Macdonald, M., **Carrier, L.,** & MacDonald, C. (2020). Characteristics of Indigenous healing strategies in Canada: A scoping review. *JBIS Evidence Synthesis*. Online publication ahead of print. doi: 10.11124/JBISRIR-D-19-00385

Presentations:

- **Carrier, L.** & Blinn, N. (September 2019). The experiences of Indigenous children and youth with cancer: A scoping review. World Indigenous Cancer Conference, Calgary, Canada
- **Carrier, L.** (November 2019). The impact of cultural connectedness on emotional pain and mental health in indigenous children and youth. Pain in Child Health Consortium Annual Conference. Montreal, Canada.
- ****Carrier, L.** (March 2020). The impact of cultural connectedness on the mental wellness of Indigenous children and youth: A project proposal. Crossroads Interdisciplinary Health Conference, Halifax, Canada
- **** Carrier, L.,** Gloade, K., Latimer, M., & Martin, D. (2020). Panel: Doing respectful research with Indigenous peoples. Crossroads Interdisciplinary Health Conference, Halifax, Canada
- **Carrier, L.** (March 2020). The impact of cultural connectedness on the mental wellness of Indigenous children and youth: Developing the project plan. BRIC-NS Seminar Series, Halifax, Canada

- **Carrier, L.** (June 2020). Guest Lecturer for Nursing 2710 (Population Health Nursing). Lecture Title: Diversity, Truth, and Reconciliation. [Presentation delivered virtually]
- **Carrier, L.** (October 2020). Guest Lecturer for Nursing 2710 (Population Health Nursing). Lecture Title: Diversity, Truth, and Reconciliation. [Presentation delivered virtually]
- **Carrier, L.,** Francis, J., Sylliboy., T., & Pennell, C. (October 2020). Panel: Orange Shirt Day – Learning about Residential Schools and Their Impact on Indigenous Communities. IWK Health Centre and Dalhousie University event. [Presentation delivered virtually]
- **Carrier, L.,** Hudson, H., Jefferies, K., & Paynter, M. (November 2020). Panel: Nurses for Police and Prison Abolition. Wellness Within Annual Conference. Halifax, Canada [Event held virtually].
- Latimer, M. & **Carrier, L.** (November 2020). Sussing out strategies to support Indigenous nursing students. Centre for Transformative Nursing and Health Research (CTNHR) Research Rounds. Halifax, Canada [Event held virtually]

*** Event cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic*

Completed Project Deliverables

- Completed doctoral level coursework on topics of Indigenous methodologies, knowledge translation, critical theories, and designing and validating measurement tools for health research
- Formed community advisory council to evaluate the project from a community lens and perspective

Forthcoming Project Deliverables

- Complete draft proposal for PhD project, present to community council and academic committee for evaluation
- Complete comprehensive examinations
- Submit ethics to Mi'kmaw Ethics Watch and Dalhousie University Research Ethics Board
- Environmental scan and curriculum review to understand contextual factors that can influence the experiences of Indigenous nurses in nursing education
- Complete data collection using Indigenous Storywork
- Data analysis and writing
- Submit and defend doctoral dissertation
- Knowledge translation activities to mobilize knowledge and share with stakeholders (ongoing throughout the process)

Activities Outside of Your Research

- Registered Nurse, Research Nurse – IWK Health Centre, Aboriginal Children's Hurt and Healing Initiative
- Co-President, Dalhousie Indigenous Health Interest Group (2019 – present)
- Co-Lead, Dalhousie School of Nursing Community of Indigenous Students in Nursing (CISN) (2018-present)
- Committee member – Dalhousie University School of Nursing Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Committee (2019-present)

- Subcommittee member: Curriculum review examining how nursing curriculum incorporates equity, diversity, and inclusion content in the classroom and clinical settings
- Subcommittee member: Creating a new equitable admissions policy for the School of Nursing
- Dalhousie Graduate Nursing Society – Diversity Representative (2019 – present)
- Trainee, Pain in Child Health Consortium (based at SickKids hospital in Toronto, ON)
- Trainee, Canadian Child Health Clinician Scientist Program

Future Plans

My passion for engaging in Indigenous health research is informed by my lived experiences as an Indigenous woman and member of the 2SLGBTQA+ community. Since being diagnosed with a chronic health condition in my youth, I've personally experienced systemic barriers that exist for Indigenous peoples in the health system, such as a lack of understanding about cultural context and its impact on holistic health outcomes. My lived experiences will enhance my academic skillset in preparing me to conduct patient and community-oriented research in the area of Indigenous health. My primary professional and academic goal in enrolling in the doctoral nursing program is to continue my development as an independent researcher conducting patient and community-oriented research, with the long-term goal of attaining an appointment as a tenure-track professor and community-based clinician scientist. My affiliation with my supervisors (Dr. Margot Latimer and Dr. Lisa Bourque-Bearskin), the ACHH Initiative, Dalhousie University, and the IWK Health Centre will be the first step towards achieving these goals and developing my leadership and research capabilities.

My personal goals include leveraging my position as an Indigenous scholar to give back to my own community and the Indigenous communities where I currently live. I want to be able to build capacity among young people in communities to get involved in the health professions and in health research. I have already taken steps towards accomplishing these goals through creating a student community for Indigenous students in nursing through working with youth in the health sciences camps hosted every summer.