

Moved by Northern First Nations Geographies: Land- and Place-Based Learning to Combat Anti-Colonial Bias in Medical Students

2023 Northern BC Research and Quality Conference. *Looking to the Future: Health in the North*

November 08, 2023

Sarah de Leeuw, Viviane Josewski,
Nicole Cross, Julie Morrison, Katriona
Auerbach, Margo Greenwood





(picture with permission)



First Nations Community Education Program (FNCEP)

Unique partnership between
FNHA, NMP, HARC and NHA

An experiential, humanities-
informed Indigenous cultural
immersion program for 1st and 2nd
year undergraduate medical
students

Host communities: Northern,
rural, and remote First Nations
communities in BC



Transforming the Hearts & Minds of Future Physicians

- Experiential and Place-Based Learning
- Critical Self-Reflexivity
- Humanities-Informed Pedagogies



Transformative Learning



FNCEP Goals

Enhance future doctors' capacity for enacting cultural safety, anti-racism and cultural humility toward northern First Nations people and communities

Improve First Nation's accessibility to high-quality primary health care services

Arts-based and Narrative Reflections

What comes to my mind when I think of First Nations communities? And how am I feeling about visiting a community next week?

How has my perception about First Nations communities changed through this program? And what have I learned that I envision taking with me throughout my career as a medical professional?



What am I feeling now that I am here?

Videos *PROSE*

Photography *Music*

Poetry

Paintings

Results

- 82 student placements
- Approximately 15 different hosting communities
- Knowledge Dissemination Products: Approximately 17



Pre-Program Reflections

The First Steps

What may I offer you?
Word and action fall short
of my own accord
As I try and give direction
To the ebbing current of Love
When did we forget that it was not a
destination,
but a path?
When did we lay down foundations,
believing in our entitlement?
Guide me
For I want to begin my journey anew
I was not given the skills
to navigate beyond my own comfort
So, accept me as lost
I cannot undo the settlements
That raised me
But I promise to leave them behind to pursue
you

“To be honest, I feel slightly nervous about visiting a First Nations community next week, but I also feel excited”

”... I am afraid that I will inadvertently offend people ... I am afraid that I will be awkward ... I’m also afraid of being judged for who I am including my identity as a white settle. On the other hand, I have hopeful anticipation ... to break down barriers and connect with people more readily than I otherwise might be able to.”

“My education, and the stories told in society, have me picturing First Nations communities as places of immense grief and pain. Of loss, poverty, and addiction.”



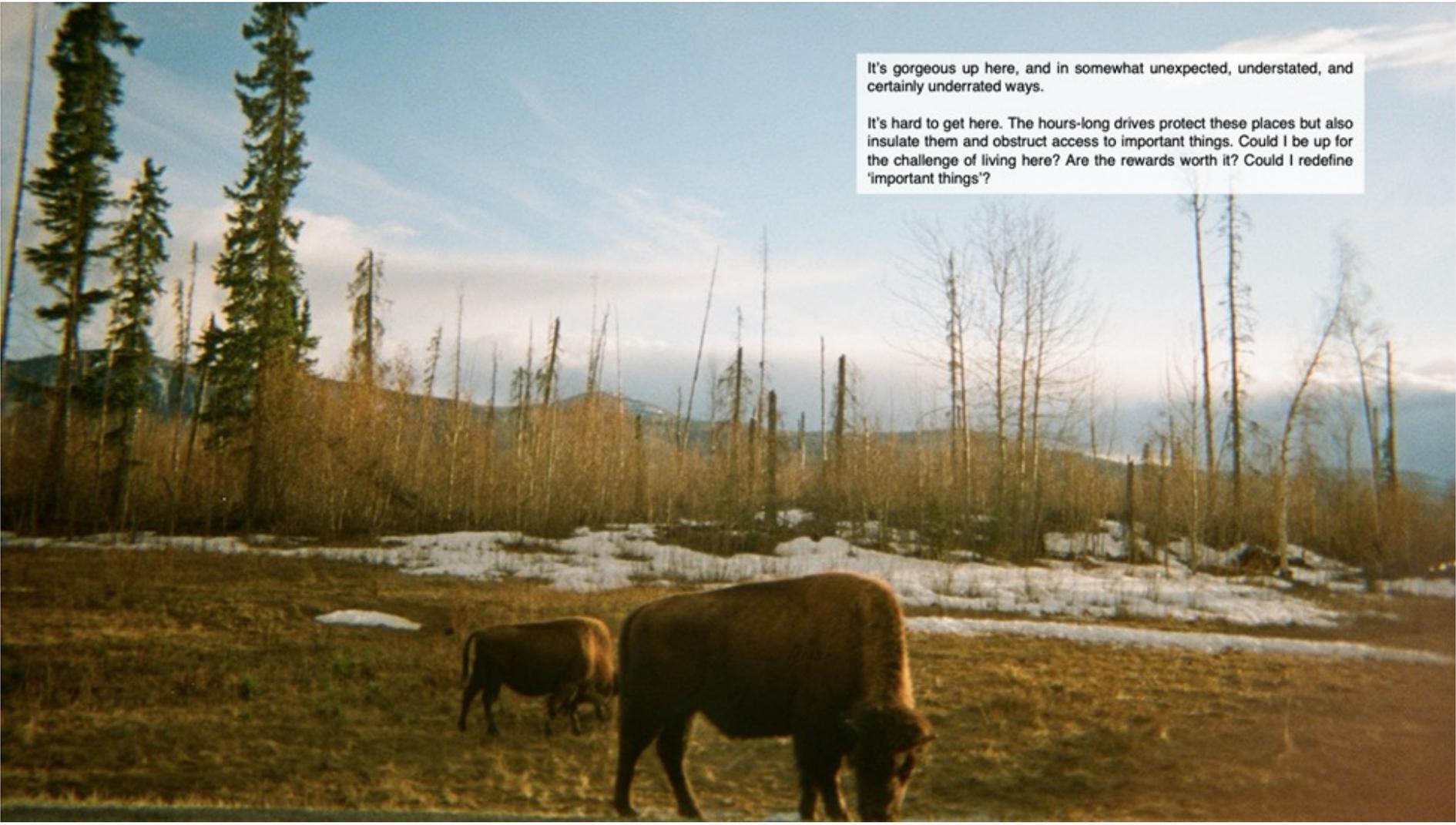
Mid-Program (In-Community) Reflections

Somehow, I was always hidden here
The lost son or forgotten
My mind and words were not my own
In my fullness was my fear
And I never thought you'd love me
Should i embrace the innate
And yet here I am
cleansed by mountain and spring
The chaff has burned away
The little that remains is brilliant
Beneath it all i was different
And i am as surprised as you

It is our last day in the community, Dennis, and I am sad to go. We spent the most time with you, playing crib, chatting, and hearing your stories. I am going to miss you. I am going to miss the community and pace of life. I am going to miss knocking on your door every morning and bringing you breakfast. I am going to miss your stories.

“Beyond learning about culture, spirituality, geography, and social topics in the area I spent time in, I feel that I made life-long friends who I will hopefully see again in the near future. These connections and teachings will last throughout my career and my life.”





It's gorgeous up here, and in somewhat unexpected, understated, and certainly underrated ways.

It's hard to get here. The hours-long drives protect these places but also insulate them and obstruct access to important things. Could I be up for the challenge of living here? Are the rewards worth it? Could I redefine 'important things'?

Culture. Appreciation. Appropriation.

We were invited to attend a walk honoring MMIWG2S+. I appreciated the invitation, it felt good to participate and show support and I would have felt out of place showing up alone. It was surprising to me how welcomed I felt, and it raised many questions and other feelings of discomfort. Folks circulated the crowd distributing buttons with slogans like “we will not be silenced” and moosehide patches. I pinned them with some reluctance on my jacket, feeling performative. Have I earned the right to wear this symbol? Have I done the work? Is it evident how much of an impostor I feel like in this space?

During the ceremony before the walk, a person walks around the circle with a bowl of smoldering smudge, fanning it with a feather. The fragrant smoke was irresistible, and I inhaled deeply whenever it drifted by. I wondered to myself: Can I participate? How do I participate? Is that welcomed? Does it matter? I mean, they’re offering, aren’t they? As they approach, our group opts out.

Earlier in the week Carla, a Lower Post community member, taught us to make Bannock. It’s a good, relatively easy recipe. Can I take that knowledge and make it on my own? What if I make it for someone else?

Before departure from Lower Post the women in our group are gifted beaded earrings. We talk about what it could mean to wear those, what what is appropriate or inappropriate around that.





Children who love here
Children who wish and dream here
Children are hope here

Post-Program reflections

“I learned about great resilience in the face of adversity, and the power of community and friendship. I hope to one day return to a community like this as a doctor in the future, as I feel I still have lots to learn.”



“After just a few days I have already been convinced that this is the place where I want to live and practice medicine. Through this experience I was able to meet so many amazing people who were welcoming and caring. These are connections that I know will last into my career and help me be a better health care provider for the community. It is exactly this connection that is missing from the current medical curriculum... And this obscures the message that Indigenous people want their health care providers to know. The message that things need to be done differently. This community immersion program offers a way to do things differently. “

“There were many signs and beacons of hope within the community that inspired me. The children we met were bounding with energy and overflowing with questions. Their goals and aspirations were limitless”



Conclusion

Indigenous land- and place-based ways of experiential teaching and learning combined with humanity-informed pedagogy that engages learners in critical and creative self-reflexivity offers a “refreshed approach” to anti-colonial bias training in medical education by educating both the “hearts and minds” of future physicians. Peoples and communities.

Thank you

Questions?

