



# Community as Teacher: Health professional students learn Cultural Safety from an Aboriginal community

*An interprofessional, experiential, and cultural immersion program for UBC students and a partnership of UBC Patient & Community Partnership for Education and Xyolhemeylh*

## 2006-2019

### Why is this program needed?

**Communications between** health care professionals and Aboriginal people have long been identified as contributors to poor health outcomes. Associations between history, time, and trust create some of these difficulties. When we asked Aboriginal people for a solution, they said health professionals should “come and spend time with us”. Cultural immersion for health professional students allows the Aboriginal community to become their teacher. (\*Towle et al 2006)

### Who is involved and what happens?

**Our partnership** with Fraser Valley Aboriginal Children and Family Services Society (Xyolhemeylh) since 2006 resulted in a unique educational model – a variation on community-based education. UBC students learn alongside Aboriginal youth at summer camps led by Elders, youth workers and cultural leaders. UBC students learn *cultural safety* and about developing culturally-appropriate relationships.

Camps are held on the Chehalis Indian Reserve and neighboring communities, in a Longhouse or outdoors and provide a learning environment unlike classrooms and clinics. Over 3 or 4 days students experience the lifestyles of the Stó:lō people and learn about themselves and First Nations.

At the Family camp traditional teachings about family and parenting skills are shared with Aboriginal families. The Youth camp for

12-19 year olds provides cultural teachings through traditional activities, sports and games. Two camps are coming-of-age celebrations held for boys (‘Warriors’) aged 10-16 and girls (‘Natural changes’) aged 10-16 to teach self-discipline, traditional responsibilities and customs.

UBC students attend in groups of up to 6. Their role is to learn through drumming, singing, canoeing, Longhouse ceremonies, talking with Elders and interacting with the youth. In exchange they help with chores and facilitate health-related discussions on topics chosen by the participants. Topics have included nutrition, body image, hygiene and sexual health, and a modification of our ‘Talk to Your Doc’ program, facilitated by medical students in BC high schools, to help adolescents develop independent and active relationships with health care providers.

### What is cultural safety?

Cultural safety is a concept from New Zealand nursing education that emphasizes self-awareness on the part of health professionals, to understand how their own culture (both personal and professional) affects practice. **Key features** of cultural safety are:

- awareness and respect for cultural differences
- self-reflection and analysis of power inequalities
- trust
- defined by the recipient/patient/client.

**2012 NATIONAL COMMUNITY SERVICE LEARNING AWARD**  
from the  
**J.W. McConnell Family Foundation** to recognize successful community initiatives supported by robust community service-learning programs

**VIDEO:** *Aboriginal Community as Teacher*

<https://health.ubc.ca/pcpe/projectsactivities/community-teacher-cultural-camps>

### Programs & Number of Students 2006-19

Dental Hygiene	5
Dentistry	7
Land and Food Systems / Dietetics	7
Medicine	81
Midwifery	11
Nursing	22
Occupational Therapy	13
Pharmacy	39
Physical Therapy	2
Psychology	9
Public Health	8
Social Work	16
Speech-Language Pathology	3
Other (Vocational Rehab, Science, Respiratory Therapy)	10
<b>Total</b>	<b>233</b>



**Patient & Community  
Partnership for Education**



**THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA  
UBC Health**

## What difference does it make?

**Student learning** of cultural awareness, sensitivity, and safety has been revealed through interviews and focus groups with many students, camp leaders, Elders and campers.

UBC students were grateful for first-hand encounters with Aboriginal culture. The experience challenged the ideas they had formed from health statistics, media and treating patients. They became aware of cultural differences, their own values, beliefs, biases and prejudice, and underlying reasons for distrust of health professionals. Some were inspired to choose a career focusing on

**Students:** "It was an excellent chance to understand the work Xyolhemeylh is doing to support families reconnecting with cultural teachings. It is important to understand, as practitioners, the connection for Indigenous peoples between culture, family, and health and how we can acknowledge and support this in our interactions with Indigenous patients and clients." [Social Work Student]

"It was so great to speak and spend time with Elders, youth, and adults from local Aboriginal communities. We were also afforded the opportunity to participate in several traditional activities and practices." [Nursing Student]

**Many thanks** to the Fraser Valley Aboriginal Children and Family Services Society (Xyolhemeylh) for welcoming UBC students to their camps. Special thanks to Natalie Brandon, Julia McCaffrey, Marilyn Collins, and Raven Little, who in their different roles have made it happen and given us their guidance and support.

We are especially grateful to the Elders, camp leaders and youth for teaching these future health care providers and to the students who took the opportunity to learn in the Aboriginal community.

The project *Doctor-Patient Communications in the Aboriginal Community: Development of Educational Programs* was supported via grants from the BC Ministry for Health via grants from the UBC Faculty of Medicine Special Populations Fund. We found that UBC students are an integral part of the summer camps and resonate well with the Aboriginal belief of being a life-long learner. The students' positive attitude towards learning fits well with their belief of continuously wanting to learn without asking for anything in return.

### Publications & Presentations

- Bain M. (2018). Community-university engagement: Case study of a Coast Salish Territory in British Columbia. *Engaged Scholar Journal*, 4(1): 123-141. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.15402/esj.v4i1.313>
- Bain, M. M. (2014). Community-university engagement : case study of a partnership on Coast Salish territory in British Columbia (T). University of British Columbia. Retrieved from <https://open.library.ubc.ca/cIRcle/collections/24/items/1.0165857> (Original work published 2014)
- Bain M. International service learning in Canada: Lessons from a university-indigenous partnership. Presentation at the International Association for Service-Learning and Community Engagement, Omaha, Nebraska 2013
- \*\*Kline C, Godolphin W, Chhina G, Towle A. (2013). Community as teacher model: Health profession students learn cultural safety from an Aboriginal community. *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning*; 20(1): 5-17.
- \*Towle A, Godolphin W, Alexander T. (2006). Doctor-patient communications in the Aboriginal community: Towards the development of educational programs. *Patient Education & Counseling*; 62: 340-346
- Features of this project have been presented at several international conferences. *Where's the Patient's Voice in Health Professional Education?* Vancouver 2005, *ICCH-AAPP* Chicago 2005, *CCPH* Toronto 2007, *AAMC-RIME* Boston 2009, *AMEE* Vienna 2011.

Aboriginal health. Long-term follow-up interviews showed students retain their learning and apply it to practice.

Community members who led the camps were struck by the reciprocity of students and their desire to learn. They appreciated the respectful way students engaged with Elders and the good role modeling and mentorship they provided the youth. They valued the opportunity to share their culture with future health care providers. Young camp leaders were especially interested in the information about health careers. (\*Kline et al 2013)

**Community:** "Earning is through learning and that is what the UBC students are doing. Learning is a life-long process and for the UBC students to give their time to always want to know more is very good." [Camp Elder]

"The UBC students all seem to want to be here, want to learn, and all want to know. I can't imagine not having the students being here because we're used to them being here." [Camp Parent]



**Our Community-University partnership:** The partnership is a model for teaching health care students what cultural safety means in practice. With a grant from UBC Centre for Community Engaged Learning we have developed novel approaches to evaluating experiential learning in the community to capture important attitudinal change and benefits to community through stories, gift giving, and knowledge exchange.

**Future:** We aim to maintain this partnership, to find ways to formally recognize, honor and give credit to the community and participants, and to continue developing the community-as-teacher model to include other community and patient groups.

**Register:** <https://meetingofexperts.org/programs-activities/aboriginal-summer-camps/>



**Curious about our logo?**

Designed for us by Sonny Assu, well-known artist, of the We Wai Kai First Nation (Cape Mudge). <http://sonnyassu.com/>