

Reconciliation Through Co-Learning: A Dietetic Intern's Journey With the Two-Eyed Seeing Program

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Abstract

The Two-Eyed Seeing Program is a Mount Saint Vincent University-based program that partners with Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities and programs to promote, decolonize, and indigenize science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) through summer camps for Indigenous youth. In the summer of 2022, Megan Churchill, a settler, was the dietetic intern with the Two-Eyed Seeing Program. The commentary shares her experiences throughout the dietetic internship placement, including meeting with Elder Dr. Albert Marshall. Throughout Megan's dietetic internship placement, she noticed that Indigenous Knowledge and values are rarely incorporated into university STEM education; therefore, this commentary advocates for Indigenous studies and knowledge to be made mandatory in university settings.

Keywords: Dietetic Internship; Two-Eyed Seeing; Knowledge Sharing

Two-Eyed Seeing (Etuaptmumk) is a guiding principle for co-learning, co-creation, and communication, offered by Elders and academics from Unama'ki (Cape Breton, Nova Scotia) to Western scientists and partnering Indigenous Knowledge Keepers. The Two-Eyed Seeing Program is housed at Mount Saint Vincent University (MSVU) and includes partnerships with several communities and community-based programs in Nova Scotia or Mi'kma'ki, including Mi'kmaw Kina'matnewey, the Atlantic Indigenous Mentorship Network, the Maritime Museum of the Atlantic, and the Departments of Education in Pictou Landing First Nation, Acadia First Nation, and

Sipekne'katik First Nation. Rather than focusing on attainment gaps, the Two-Eyed Seeing Program focuses on community-based curriculum development, implementation, and evaluation. This includes community-based and community-led programming and active efforts to decolonize and indigenize STEM offerings in Mi'kma'ki. We co-develop, co-implement, and co-evaluate hands-on activities and events for Mi'kmaw youth across Mi'kma'ki, with the aim of supporting learning, through two eyes, for Indigenous and non-Indigenous learners. For more on our program, click [here](#).

This commentary explores the first author's experiences as a community-based

dietetic intern with the Two-Eyed Seeing Program, placed there through the Internship Education Program at MSVU's Department of Applied Human Nutrition. Starting with little previous knowledge of Indigenous world views, perspectives, and values, Megan Churchill, a non-Indigenous learner from Kijipuktuk (Halifax), will share details of and reflections on her journey and aim to continue this journey of unlearning and learning (to see). The commentary also serves to advocate for mandatory Indigenous studies at the university and practicum level in STEM (and health studies).

Background

In the summer of 2022 I had the privilege of interning with the Two-Eyed Seeing Program through the Internship Education Program at MSVU's Department of Applied Human Nutrition. The Two-Eyed Seeing Program develops, implements, and evaluates summer camps and events, aiming to promote, decolonize, and indigenize STEM education for Mi'kmaw youth across Mi'kma'ki (MSVU, n.d.). Indigenous people are continuously under-represented in STEM university programs and related occupations in Mi'kma'ki and across Turtle Island (North America; Canadian Millennium Scholarship Foundation, 2005; Statistics Canada, 2018). Many Indigenous people want to complete a post-secondary education (STEM-related or not); unfortunately, it is not always possible due to systemic racism, complicated by intersecting social and economic challenges and social determinants of health (Canadian Millennium Scholarship Foundation, 2005; Statistics Canada, 2018). Therefore, the Two-Eyed Seeing Program is working toward equity, diversity, inclusion, and accessibility in education by developing, implementing, and evaluating STEM outreach programs, a need clearly outlined in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's (TRC) Calls to Action and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People articles (TRC, 2015; United Nations General Assembly, 2007).

Overview of Two-Eyed Seeing

The Two-Eyed Seeing Program is guided by the principle of *Etuaptmumk* (Two-Eyed Seeing). Two-Eyed Seeing is a guiding principle coined by Mi'kmaw Elders Albert Marshall and Murdena Marshall and academic Dr. Cheryl Bartlett. Two-Eyed Seeing involves considering the world from two perspectives: an Indigenous perspective and a Western scientific perspective (Bartlett et al., 2012; MSVU, n.d.). Through this process, relationship building, co-learning, knowledge creation, cultural humility, and respect can transpire (Bartlett et al., 2012; MSVU, n.d.).

Reflection of Experience

As a settler from Kijipuktuk with admittedly very little knowledge of Indigenous world views, perspectives, and values, I was thrilled to be chosen for this dietetic internship placement. Along with being excited, I was also very nervous, as I knew I had a lot of learning and un-learning to do, which was insight that I would gain from being guided by Two-Eyed Seeing. One of my most prominent learnings during the internship was about the importance of the land in relation to Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Two-Eyed Seeing. An important aspect of Indigenous epistemology is understanding that we gain knowledge from interactions with the land through our mind, body, and spirit (Roher et al., 2021). The following events showcase my learnings, the importance of the land, and how Indigenous Knowledge can be incorporated into curriculum.

At the beginning of my placement, I had the honour of sitting down with Elder Dr. Albert Marshall to exchange knowledge over a cup of tea. He kindly welcomed me with open arms and an open heart. We spent time discussing the guiding principle of Two-Eyed Seeing and the importance of the land for the growth of food. More specifically, we spoke about a food web adapted from Cullen-Unsworth et al. (2010) and Latimer et al. (2018) by both the Two-Eyed Seeing Program, and MSVU's Breakfast and Beyond Program. The food web highlights the complexity of food and how it relates to the land.

The warm welcome was consistent during all my interactions with collaborators of the Two-Eyed Seeing Program, all of whom were exceptionally generous with their time, including Mi'kmaw Kina'matnewey, Pictou Landing First Nation, Acadia First Nation, and Sipekne'katik First Nation.

During my internship placement we held various events, including a boat-building event organized in collaboration with the Maritime Museum of the Atlantic. Youth from Sipekne'katik First Nation and Acadia First Nation built Bevin's skiff boats aboard the CSS Acadia at the Maritime Museum of the Atlantic over a four-day overnight camp (Maritime Museum of the Atlantic, n.d.). The boats were then brought to Kejimikujik National Park on National Indigenous Peoples Day to be launched in Kejimikujik Lake. The day was filled with drop-in cultural activities for attendees including petroglyph tours, plant identification, learning about bees, and a *luskinikn* (cultural Mi'kmaw bread) station where attendees could cook the bread over a fire. It was eye-opening to have an event at Kejimikujik National Park; we were able to learn about medicines, water, and the meaning behind foods such as *luskinikn*. Another event was held for National Indigenous History Month at MSVU in collaboration with the Breakfast and Beyond Program (Breakfast and Beyond Program, n.d.). This event was a food demonstration of blueberry cornmeal muffins and a discussion about traditional and cultural foods. During this event, I facilitated a space for co-learning and discussion about what food means to people, Mi'kmaw values associated with food, and relationships with food. Feedback for this event was very positive, and the attendees indicated they were grateful to have space and opportunity to speak about these topics. Feedback also included a request for the Two-Eyed Seeing Program to implement the event in-community, and therefore the team will be travelling to each of our three partnering communities to implement an adaptation of the event in-person for youth.

My final activity as a dietetic intern with the Two-Eyed Seeing Program was a presentation for community members,

academics, and leadership team members. I presented a research project completed by myself and Mi'kmaw colleague Chelsey Purdy (past Two-Eyed Seeing Program Coordinator and member of Acadia First Nation), as well as a general overview of my dietetic internship placement. At the end of my presentation, we held a question period, where I was asked the following question: "How has your understanding of wellness, in terms of nutrition and health, changed since completing your dietetic internship placement with the Two-Eyed Seeing Program?" My answer was this: "During my nutrition undergraduate degree, it was taught that wellness is associated with food that you eat. For example, if you are eating fish, health and wellness comes from the nutrients that are in the fish, such as omega-3 fatty acids, protein, and vitamin D. However, I have learned that wellness is much more than the food you are eating. If we take the example of fish, the act of going to the lake or pond, catching the fish, filleting the fish, cooking the fish, and sharing the fish with the community is all part of wellness." The answer I gave was appreciated by all who attended the presentation and is best captured by an attendee's comment that they were "so happy to see the future of dietetics move in this direction." Now that I have completed my dietetic internship with the Two-Eyed Seeing Program, it is evident to me that nutrition and wellness is much more than the food and nutrients being consumed (Durie, 2004). However, nutrition degrees are very Westernized, and these perspectives are limited in teaching. I was in the fourth year of my nutrition degree, taking a medical nutrition therapy course, when I first heard a land acknowledgement incorporated into the course.

Indigenous Knowledge and Higher Education

To become a dietitian, dietetic students or trainees must attend an accredited university program, complete a dietetic internship, and complete and pass a licensing exam. The goal of each dietetic internship placement is to obtain a "C" or "competent" rating on each of the associated competencies. Partnership for Dietetic Education and Practice has announced

more Indigenous dietetic competencies as part of the new Integrated Competencies for Dietetic Education and Practice (ICDEP), which have since come into effect (Partnership for Dietetic Education and Practice, n.d., 2020). The aim of this change is for dietetic interns to gain knowledge of Indigenous Knowledge and values, although it is unlikely that interns would be engaging with Indigenous groups and communities to gain independence related to these new competencies. Previously, it was not a requirement that dietetic curriculum include Indigenous Knowledge and perspectives; therefore, non-Indigenous dietetic interns would have little to no formal experience with Indigenous Knowledge unless an internship was completed with an Indigenous group (and very few of these groups have existing dietetic internship placements available). Perhaps because of the under-representation of Indigenous people in STEM fields, STEM programs are not challenged enough by Indigenous students, leaders, and communities to include Indigenous Knowledge in the curriculum. Examples of the updated competencies include practice within the context of Canadian diversity and practice in a manner that promotes cultural safety (Partnership for Dietetic Education and Practice, 2020). The competencies are vague; however, this is a small step in the right direction to decolonize practices. Data is limited on Indigenous students' experience as dietetic interns. However, my supervisor Dr. Shannan Grant and her colleagues are currently working on a Canadian Dietetic Research Foundation-funded project to "decolonize the profession."

Universities need to begin incorporating Indigenous Knowledge and values into their curriculum. Recently, the University of Prince Edward Island announced that they are now requiring students to take an Indigenous Studies course in order to graduate (Doria-Brown, 2022). This is a great initiation that the university has put forth; I believe that more universities should follow suit, and I hope to see that they do. We are all treaty people, and we can all learn about our shared history on Turtle Island together, and as settlers, we can be

conscious about learning about the land from Indigenous peoples and pay respect to their rights, knowledge, and values.

Conclusion

Based on my experience as a dietetic intern with the Two-Eyed Seeing Program, I believe that dietetic curriculum and internships should incorporate an aspect of Two-Eyed Seeing. To do this, department heads/leaders within dietetic governing bodies could work with local Indigenous leaders to build relationships and incorporate Indigenous Knowledge into dietetic education. This would work toward decolonizing dietetic practice and giving future dietitians the experience to work within Indigenous communities.

Now that my dietetic internship placement with the Two-Eyed Seeing Program has come to an end, I can hardly fathom the amount of knowledge I have gained over a four-month period. This is knowledge I would not have gained without the opportunity to complete a dietetic internship with the Two-Eyed Seeing Program. Collaborators, community members, and the leadership team spent countless hours exchanging knowledge with me, and I cannot thank them enough for their time. During my undergraduate degree, exposure to Mi'kmaw world views and values was very limited. However, through this internship I have learned that when you want to learn about Indigenous perspectives, world views, and values, if you reach out to an organization or community member with an open mind and open heart, people can be very willing to share knowledge. This knowledge and history cannot be lost, and as a group we need to work toward reconciliation and decolonizing our practices.

As I continue to complete my Master of Science degree, and my Dietetic Internship Program, I continue to read about and put into practise Two-Eye Seeing and Indigenous values. I am now working with the Two-Eyed Seeing Program as a part-time employee, and am working as a Writing Support Tutor with the MSVU Writing Centre in the Kina'masuti aqq Apogamasuti (Learning and Help) Indigenous

Student Centre on campus.

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