

Inspiring Students to Take Action to Promote Environments Supportive of Health

Community Health Nurses of Canada

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McGill

Environments Supportive of Health

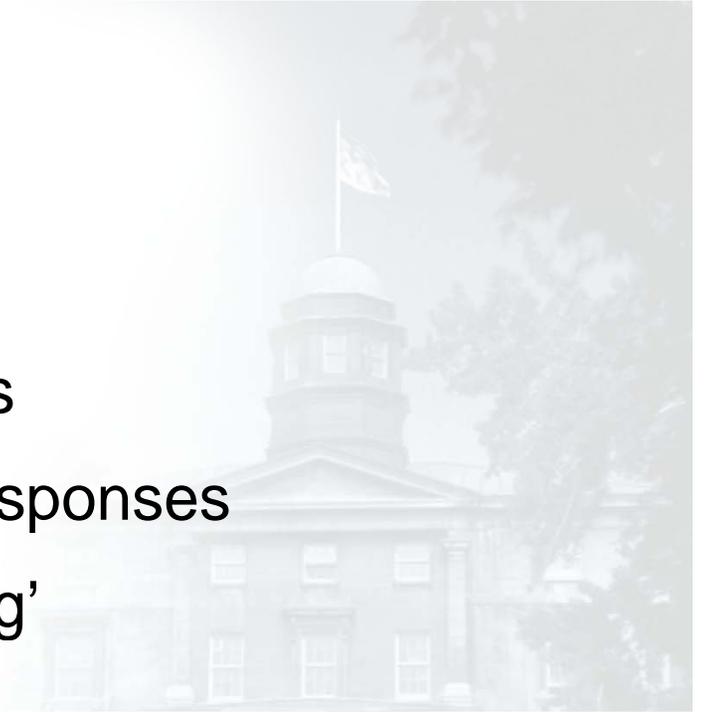
- **Issue:** Societal importance of environmental health versus integration into undergraduate curriculum.
- **The dilemmas:**
 - How to manage dual transitions
 - How to render environmental health (EH) ‘accessible’

Integration as the Goal

- Socio-ecological approach to health
- Unique context of CHN practice and settings
- Nurture assessment and action competencies
- Discovery as theme and process
- Interconnections: nature, health and QOL
- CHN process projects to promote capacity, leadership, citizenship

Challenges

- World view & professional practice lens
- ‘Status quo’ thinking and patterns of responses
- The complacency of ‘awareness-raising’
- Confidence in face of uncertainty
- Information and expertise?
- Environmentalism: limitation of ‘theory’ and ‘science’
- ‘Experience of nature’ fundamentally different



Strategies

- Define 'environment' to normalize relevance to CHN
- Use readily accessible information resources
- Create a thematic forum to inspire
- Partner outside of 'nursing'
- Create an *Environment and Health Assessment* module
- Develop assignments and evaluation rubrics that reward socio-eco action
- Leap of faith: risk taking for benefit of the community

Building the Foundation

- CNA environmental health resources
 - *Environmental Health and Nursing ppt (1 hour lecture)*
 - *Health, Environment and Nursing Video*
 - *The Environment and Health: An Introduction for Nurses*

See: http://www.cna-aiic.ca/CNA/issues/environment/default_e.aspx

EH Mini Forum: *Spirit, Voice, Action*

- **Inspiration: Spirit**

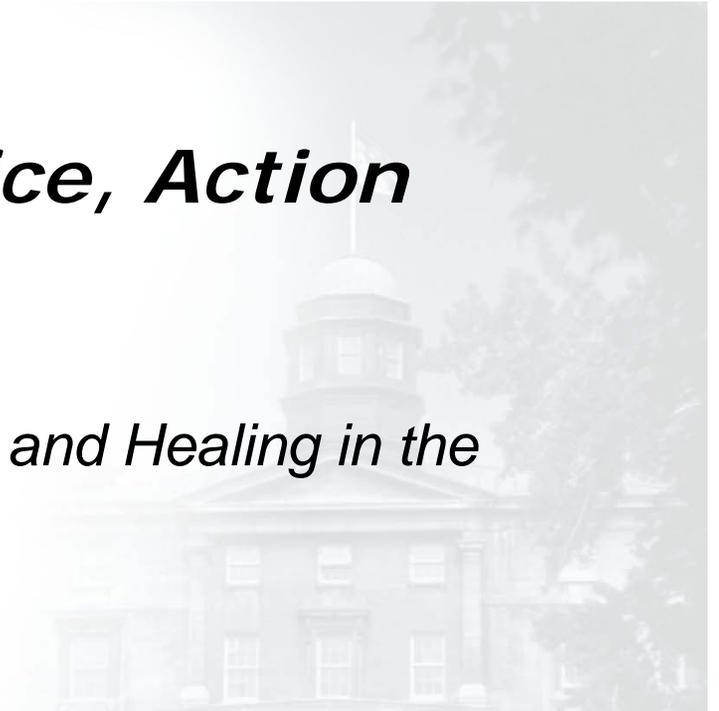
- *Integrating Health: Religion, Spirituality, and Healing in the Natural World*
- Transcendental model

- **Testimonial: Voice**

- Impact of weather change & social environment

- **Action exemplars**

- Local environmental activist



Environmental Stewardship

- Draw on innate sense of justice and altruism
 - Build on forum and transcendental model
 - Social Justice within curriculum (CNA SJ Gauge)
 - Conceptual and affective alignment with nursing
 - Explore concept of 'nature'
 - Lifespan approach
 - Emphasize intrinsic value in protecting and promoting environment

The *Environment and Health* Assessment Module

- Goal is to understand impact of social, physical and natural environments on actual/potential health of the community
 - Map out EHA process and tasks within reasonable timelines
 - Windshield Survey
 - Link to electronic resources, databases & literature
 - ‘Dialogue box’ to help students initiate partnership
 - *Progressive Inquiry* to elicit community perspective
 - Seek interactions, mechanisms and pathways
 - Identify priority environment issue for action

Windshield Survey

Social, natural and built environments

- Experience the community firsthand
- Shoe leather social/environmental epidemiology
- Collect data using all senses
- Generate hypotheses to guide direction for future actions
- Relate to Quality of Life
- Complementary activities: transportation and food security

CHN Process Projects

- Subsequent to EHA
- Mandate to take action to promote environments supportive of health
- Implemented in community settings within practicum course
- Partnerships with community based organizations



Results

- Outstanding Windshield Surveys
- Socio-ecological understanding of community priorities
- Increased number of CHN projects addressing physical, natural and social environments.
- Dissemination across health & community sectors
- Stimulated constructive conflict across all sectors
- Integration into curriculum processes and products

Spin-offs

- Increased leadership capacity
- Students embraced political action and advocacy
- New academic and community partnerships
- Academic and Professional competitions and conferences
- Forging professional and personal identity
- Extra-curricular environmental health initiatives
- Citizenship and democracy

What Worked

- ‘Normalize’ the Environmental Health Assessment as part of the CHN process
- Access to CNA resources meant more opportunity for innovation
- Multiple perspectives approach to key concepts
- Curriculum that valued and rewarded socio-eco action
- Partnerships in the community
- Socio-ecological discourse
- Endorsed the power of small steps

Key Points

- Position EH within nursing and citizenship
- Create a mandate for discovery and **action**
- Provide basic tools (e.g. the module)
- Seek partners & expertise outside of 'nursing'
- Reinforce/validate cross-curricular skill development
- Be vigilant: automatic thoughts and responses in self, others, professional literature...
- Promote 'experience' of nature in society

Questions?

- Thank you!



Acknowledgements

- McGill University School of Nursing class of 2010
- My environmental health mini forum constellation: Cory Labrecque, Esme Lanktree, Jenny Patton, Maureen Lafreniere and Susan Gardner
- Canadian Nurses Association environmental health resources
- Montreal area community based organizations including local Eco Quarters