



Report on the Knowledge
of Aboriginal People and Topics
by First Year Students at Memorial

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30 June 2016

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Terms of Reference

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Summary (Abstract)

Report on the Knowledge of Aboriginal People and Topics by First Year Students at Memorial fulfills the obligation of the Awareness Project to report back to Memorial on the results of its 2013 survey of first-year university students. We have very clear results. We surveyed 2,368 students and had a 27.6% response rate and a 12.5% completion rate. We have carried out statistical and qualitative analysis of the results and these are reported in detail here. What the results tell us is that students know very little about Aboriginal people and topics coming into university but come with deeply reinforced prejudices. Yet many seem very willing to learn more and the university is well placed to fulfill that need. We have made recommendations to that end. This fall we will return to Memorial and survey first-year students again and fourth-year students for the first time. We hope that by conducting the survey through Welcome Week and in classes we will be able to secure more participants, be able to push the analysis further, and see the value that Memorial is adding.

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Introduction

In commissioning this study Memorial has taken an early and important first step in responding to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's calls to action on the education of all residents of Canada. Student Life, through the Aboriginal Resource Office, at Memorial approached the Awareness project in 2012 to measure the knowledge of incoming students at Memorial. Memorial covered 50% of the costs of the first-year survey and, through Sheila Freake, Manager of the Aboriginal Resource Office, the contacts, insight and guidance essential to making the project work. Memorial helped the Awareness Project develop its methodology and kept the project on its feet until SSHRC funding could be secured.

The Aboriginal Awareness project takes a critical look at how Canadians are educated about First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples. Conceived from a critical settler stance of support for decolonization of education, it responds to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's calls to action on the education of all residents of Canada. The project seeks to measure student knowledge of First Nations, Métis and Inuit cultures, histories, and topics across Canada (Newfoundland, Ontario, Saskatchewan, British Columbia, and Quebec) to provide a basis for educational and programming reform. We take a four-step approach to the challenging problem of reforming education in Canada:

- 1) We analyze provincial school curricula and texts from K-12 to understand what pre-university learning is mandated in each educational jurisdiction.
- 2) Working with specialists of Aboriginal cultures, histories, law and society, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal educators, administrators, and students, we develop a questionnaire including a test of student knowledge and a series of questions about students' education, attitudes and demographics for each educational jurisdiction.
- 3) Using this questionnaire, we survey all first-year students (proxy for K-12 learning) and three years later all fourth-year students from the same cohort at the same representative universities. Our aim is to measure what school and university students have learned against our test and curriculum and explore the obstacles to their learning.
- 4) We disseminate our research to First Nations, Métis and Inuit organizations, Ministries of Education, university administrations, scholarly venues, and the media to stimulate discussion and influence research and policy in educational institutions.

The first three steps have been completed in Newfoundland and Labrador and with this and subsequent press releases to communities we are fulfilling the fourth step. We begin by describing what we have discovered about the education available to most Newfoundland and Labrador students on First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples; then we will describe the process we followed in constructing the questionnaire and knowledge test for Memorial; then we will look at the questionnaire itself briefly; then we will describe the survey results, first quantitative, then qualitative. We will close with a discussion of the next step for the Awareness Project and our best advice to Memorial.

The K-12 Curriculum and Texts (contact first author for article submitted to *Race, Ethnicity and Education*)

As part of our analysis of the knowledge Memorial students have, we undertook an analysis of the K-12 curricular documents and textbooks in social studies K-8 and high school economics, politics, history geography, Newfoundland and Labrador studies and law. We know that these documents are not a perfect mirror of what is being taught, but they are certainly powerful indicators. We found that serious and reliable coverage of Aboriginal content and topics is thin, particularly in secondary education. We saw two shining lights in the curriculum/texts: the grade seven *Changing Your World: Investigating*

Empowerment (Sterling, 2005) text and the grade nine *Canadian Identity* (Fitton, 2011), although the latter became available to students too late to have any impact on the 2013 entering year at Memorial. In high school, we found that the best coverage was limited and concentrated in courses little taken by students (Aboriginal law – taken by at most 1.5% of students; history – taken by 23% of students) while serious misrepresentation and reinforcement of prejudice was present in the curricula and texts taken in Canadian geography (taken by 49% of students) and Newfoundland & Labrador Studies (taken by approximately 30% of students).

As a whole the curriculum suffers from critical silences and lack of context, problematic placement and associations, the intrusion of settler perspectives, deep contradiction over judgment about topics related to First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples, and inconsistency that together undermine any efforts at reform. For the most part, in high school courses, Indigenous content is either used as a light flavouring applied here and there or segregated, taking the Indigenous out of both place and time (Fabian 1983) and reinforcing the view of Canada and Newfoundland and Labrador as created by settlers, heirs of the great civilization of Europe that created ‘the modern capitalist world system, scientific thought and liberal democracy’ (Araújo and Rodrigues Maeso 2012). But perhaps most seriously the curriculum and texts reinforce important settler prejudices. It is simply shocking to find in the Canadian Geography text without nuance or reference to treaties the assertion that ‘Indians’ on reserves are non-tax paying (294) and that ‘tuition as well as travel and living expenses’ are provided for all ‘aboriginal students for the first four years of post-secondary education’ (297). This misrepresentation goes some way to explaining the powerful prejudices we found in the first-year Memorial students we surveyed, whom we might consider among the most interested and engaged by the topic because they not only responded to our survey but took the time to complete it.

Methodology

Co-Designing the Questionnaire

When we arrived in Newfoundland and Labrador, our hope was that the manager of the Aboriginal Resource Office, Sheila Freake, would help us make contact with knowledge holders with whom we would consult in the construction of the knowledge test. It was most important that they be involved in this process because, as settlers and non-Newfoundlanders, we could not define what knowledge about First Nations, Métis and Inuit people was important. We met with staff, students and professors on campus and with First Nations, Metis, and Inuit community leaders and educators both on and off campus and in communities from St John’s to Miawpukek, to Stephenville, to Corner Brook, to Happy Valley Goose Bay, to North West River, to Sheshatshiu, to Nain. We began with a draft survey, largely derived from our original Queen’s University pilot survey, and explored each question on the survey, discarding many, discovering new topics and crafting questions around them and then crafting and recrafting questions as aspects of questions or topics were challenged. As the consultations progressed and deepened, we came to realize that our effort was not just consultation but co-design: the final survey was the work of many minds and many different experiences. The meetings were not always easy primarily because in developing the questionnaire we were grappling with and addressing our own ignorance and decolonizing our own thinking. More than two years later, that is an ongoing process. They were also not easy because the topics we were talking about were of profound and personal importance to many involved and often the source of considerable personal pain. With Sheila Freake as our guide we learned how to listen and that we were enormously fortunate to have the opportunity to engage with such remarkable educators.

The Questionnaire

The Newfoundland and Labrador questionnaire addresses where students learned what they know, what they think of what they have learned, some social attitude questions and a series of demographic questions (e.g., age, gender, the education of their parents, the nature of their schooling, etc.) that allow us to undertake some demographic and geographic analysis. The test portion of the questionnaire has 40 questions with 4 sub-scales (i.e., governance, culture, geography, current events). Questions are also classified into 3 additional categories: topics included in the curriculum, historical questions, Newfoundland and Labrador specific content. 55% (22) of our questions were Canada-wide and 45% were specific to Newfoundland and Labrador.

Participants

In terms of response rate and performance, the Memorial survey was not what we had hoped for and we should think carefully about this as we plan for the 2017 exit survey. Nevertheless, the results are interesting and revealing. The survey went out to 2,368 students with 653 responses, but only 310 completed the test¹ and 295 completed to the last question. That gives us a response rate for Memorial of 27.6% and a completion rate of 12.5%. The sample size for the statistical analysis presented below will vary, as we included all participants who responded to the questions of interest and/or completed the test. Furthermore, it is possible that our sample may be biased as the students who took the time to respond to our questions out of their own time (not class time) might be more interested in Aboriginal topics than most. However, we do not *know* that, as we have not yet carried out comparative analysis with in-class delivery.

Of the students who completed the last question, 95 of the student respondents were male (32%) and 200 were female (68%). There were no differences in how males and females performed on the test, $t(293) = 1.01, p = .31$. Age was not associated with test performance, $r = .03, p = .63$. The majority of students were in the first year of their university degree (99%) and born in or after 1993 (93%). Students born before 1993 did not differ in their test performance compared to students born during or after 1993, $t(293) = 0.23, p = .82$.

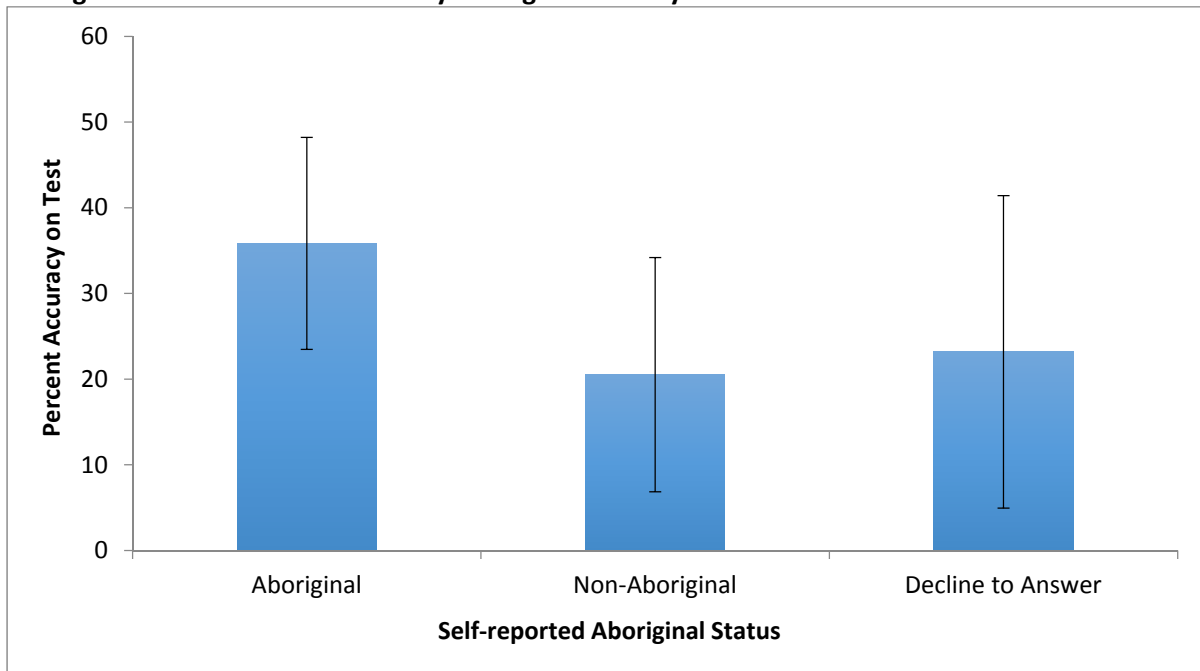
Quantitative Results

Overall Performance on Test

The average score on the test was 22.18% ($SD = 14.44\%$, range = 1.25% to 62.25%). Students were asked to self-identify. Aboriginal students ($n = 28, M = 35.85, SD = 12.73$) performed significantly better on the test than non-Aboriginal students ($n = 252, M = 20.52, SD = 13.67$), $t(278) = 5.67, p < .001$. Students who declined to answer whether they identified as Aboriginal ($n = 18, M = 23.18, SD = 18.23$) were excluded from further analyses investigating differences among Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students. See figure 1 for a visual depiction of these results.

¹The test was considered not completed if the participant did not answer one of the last five questions on the test. This criterion was used to avoid excluding participants who declined to answer some questions.

Figure 1. Performance on test by Aboriginal identity



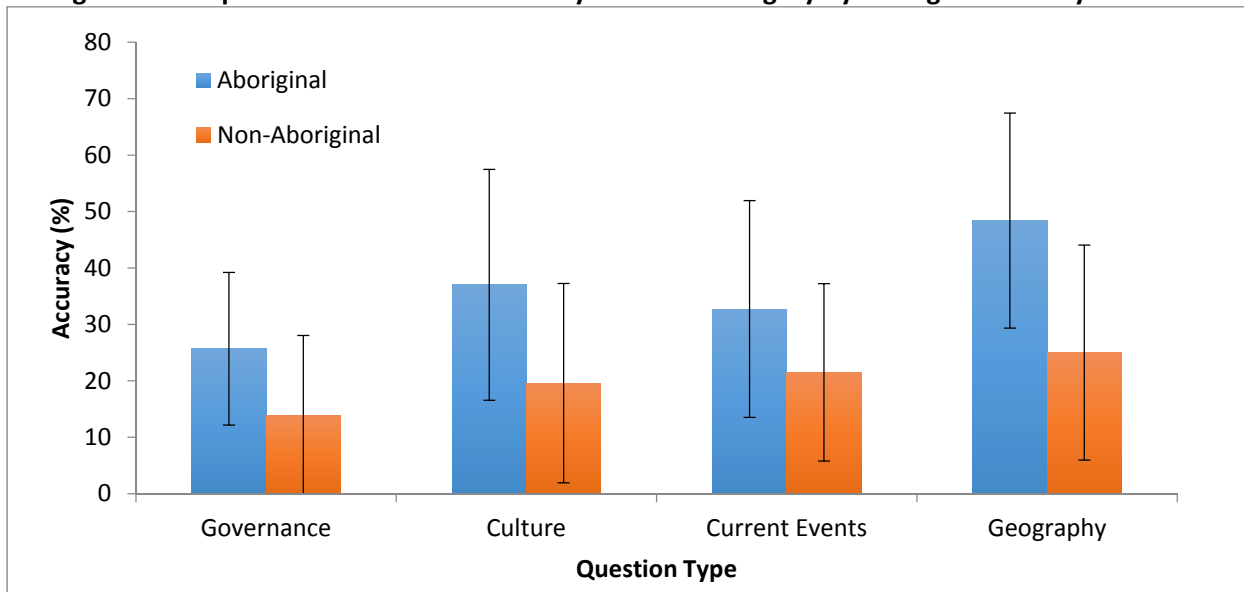
We assessed normality of the distributions by examining a frequency distribution histogram, and the test scores appeared to be relatively normally distributed, with a floor effect (i.e., more students are in the lower half of the distribution than in the upper half). If this were a typical university test, designed to reflect what the students have been taught in any given course, these scores would make us look carefully at the test instrument; however, this test was co-designed with Aboriginal educators to reflect the knowledge they deem students *should* know. The test is not intended to reflect what has been taught to these students. Nevertheless, incoming grades are a good predictor of performance on our test for Canadian students, $R^2 = .03$, $F(1, 263) = 9.00$, $p = .003$. Participants' test score increased .29% with every 1% increase in incoming grades, suggesting that general quality of education matters.

Performance on Test by Question Type:

We coded the test section into four mutually exclusive categories: governance (12 items), culture (9 items), current events (8 items) and geographic (9 items). Questions were also coded into three non-exclusive categories: historical content (11 items), content specific to Newfoundland and Labrador (18 items), and topics covered in the Newfoundland and Labrador elementary and/or high school curriculum (16 items).

We conducted a mixed model ANOVA to investigate difference in performance among governance, culture, current events and geographic topics between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students. There was a significant Aboriginal identity by topic interaction, $F(3, 276) = 5.16$, $p = .002$, partial $\eta^2 = .05$, suggesting that performance of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students differed across categories on the test. Both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students performed best on questions assessing geographical knowledge ($M = 44.83\%$, $SD = 20.49\%$), followed by culture, current events and governance, however, Aboriginal students had more variability in performance between each category compared to non-Aboriginal students. See figure 2 for test performance in each category by Aboriginal identity.

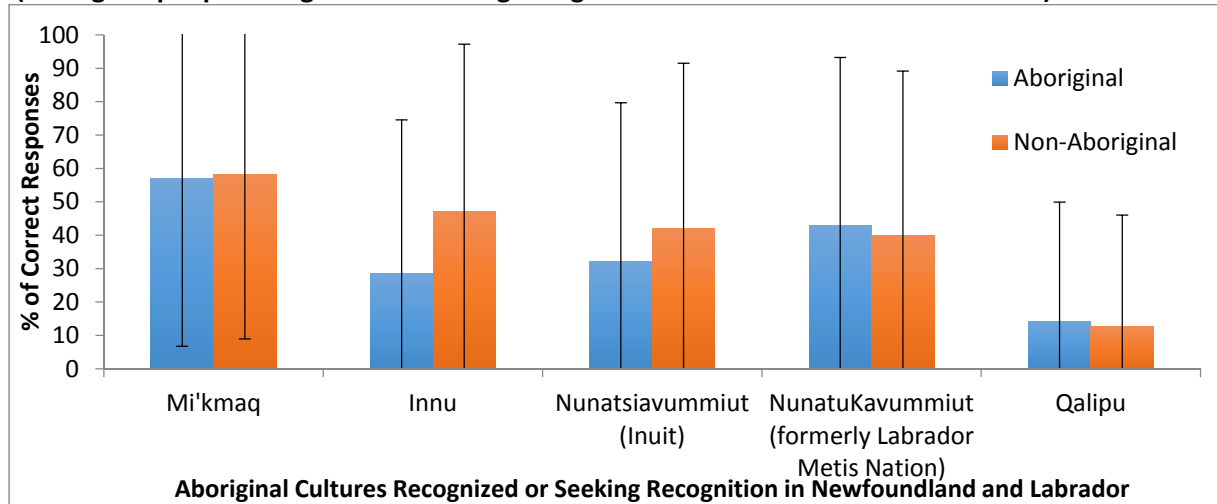
Figure 2. Test performance in each mutually exclusive category by Aboriginal identity



Geography. Overall Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students responded relatively well to geographic questions, defined as student awareness of Aboriginal presence. Yet the results on the awareness of the existence of Aboriginal people in Newfoundland and Labrador are fundamentally disappointing given its fundamental importance (and its presence on the curriculum (see below). Only 57.70% of students consider the Mi'kmaq amongst the Aboriginal cultures recognized or seeking recognition in Newfoundland and Labrador today and fewer than 50% recognized the existence of any other of the Aboriginal peoples of Newfoundland and Labrador (43.50% recognized the Innu, 41.00% recognized the Nunatsiavummiut peoples, 40.00% recognized the NunatuKavummiut and 12.90% recognized the Qalipu).

Although figure 3 would suggest that there are differences in the knowledge Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students have of Aboriginal people recognized or seeking recognition in Newfoundland and Labrador, in fact the apparently better performance by non-Aboriginal people on this question is not statistically significant. Accuracy on this item by Aboriginal identity can be found in figure 3.

**Figure 3. Student performance on question 26
(Aboriginal people recognized or seeking recognition in Newfoundland and Labrador)**



With respect to the other geographic questions, students performed best on the impact of relocation (41.61% of students answered correctly), followed by questions on the name of people on the reserve located closest to Memorial University (32.90%), the name of the reserve located closest to Memorial University (24.60%), locating Aboriginal communities on a map (24.43%), the full extent of Mi'kmaq territory according to the Peace and Friendship Treaty of 1752 (23.20%), the ancestry of NunatuKavummiut (14.94%), the percentage of First Nations people who live off reserve (11.97%) and the Aboriginal groups who objected to the Athabasca tar sands (10.71%).

Current Events. Students performed relatively poorly on questions about current events, including the Prime Minister's apology in 2008 (19.81%), the Churchill and Muskrat Falls developments (13.87%), the Qalipu (12.58%), Idle No More (11.33%), Land Claim agreements (10.13%), and whether the Aboriginal population in Canada is increasing or decreasing (8.47%). Students performed well on a question asking about the impact of treaties (43.83%).

Student responses to the question about whether Aboriginal population is on the rise or in decline are particularly worthy of note. Only 8.47% of students were aware that the Aboriginal population of Canada is increasing. The majority of students (56%) reported that it is a population in decline. This is an important finding and entirely consistent with our Queen's and Ontario results where students also appear to subscribe fully to the vanishing Indian myth. This sense of Indigenous people vanishing comes from many sources, including abiding 19th century ideology, well-meaning concern for Indigenous cultural survival, perhaps a general sense of ecological decline in which Indigenous people tend to be clumped, and a more troubling sense of cultural superiority combined with a survival of the fittest mentality, all reinforced in the curriculum. More on this in our analysis of the text responses to the questionnaire.

Students were also asked to indicate what kind of educational assistance Aboriginal students received. Aboriginal educators and students warned us of a prevailing misconception that all Aboriginal people receive free post-secondary education. In fact, only status First Nations and Inuit students are eligible for such support and most do not receive funding as the money available is insufficient to meet student needs either on a per student basis or in terms of the costs of education. We asked the students what

kind of educational assistance all Aboriginal people in Canada receive. One of our possible answers was “universal free post-secondary education” and the correct answer was none of the answers is correct as all Aboriginal students do not receive “some community-governed assistance for post-secondary education.” To protect the instrument, the answers to this survey were provided to the students one month after the survey closed. But due to the clear concern with this myth amongst our survey co-designers, we decided to provide the correct answer to the question immediately after the students answered the survey. With the technology then available, students were able to change their answer after receiving the correct response. Even so 39% of respondents failed to get the right answer. We think these results suggest three things; there is a sense of Aboriginal rights as privilege especially with regard to education (more evidence of this in the textual responses) rather than as based in treaty and constitutional obligations; that the school system is supporting and promoting that prejudice;² and that because students appear to strongly believe what they are taught in school, education at all levels has an important role to play in addressing prejudice, misinformation and general unawareness about Aboriginal people.

Culture. There was significant variability in how students responded to cultural questions. Students performed relatively well when asked about powwows (47.40%), teaching about the land (38.06%), and official Aboriginal languages in Newfoundland and Labrador (37.79%). In contrast, students performed poorly when asked about Aboriginal athletes (16.94%), Aboriginal musicians (15.48%), national Aboriginal organizations (10.39%), the Innu tea doll (9.74%), Aboriginal languages (8.74%) and Aboriginal artists (8.47%).

Governance. Both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students responded poorly to our questions about governance (the fundamental structures determining the quality of life of Aboriginal people): resettlement (31.49%), Aboriginal political figures in Newfoundland and Labrador (29.32%), Canada’s constitution (28.26%), Confederation agreement (24.92%), the Peace and Friendship Treaties (18.51%), the Indian Act (12.31%), the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (7.92%), the May 11, 2000 Nisga’s land claim settlement (7.82%), the 1985 amendment to the Indian Act (7.14%), land claims (6.15%), the Royal Proclamation of 1763 (5.19%) and the rights of mining companies (4.53%).

Historical. There was significant variability in how students responded to historical questions. Students performed well on items assessing knowledge of the impact of the Spanish influenza (43.87%), the effect of treaties (43.84%), the impact of relocation (41.61%), and residential schools (40.78%). Students performed poorly on items assessing Canada’s Constitution (28.26%), the 1949 Confederation Agreement (24.92%), the signing the Peace and Friendship Treaties (18.51%), the 1876 Indian Act (12.01%), the May 11, 2000 Nisga’s land claim settlement (8.22%), the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (7.92%) and the Royal Proclamation of 1763 (5.19%). We conducted an independent samples t-test to investigate performance on historical questions and also differences in performance on historical questions between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students. Aboriginal students ($M = 41.07$, $SD = 19.50$) performed significantly better on these questions than non-Aboriginal students ($M = 27.58$, $SD = 22.03$), $t(278) = 3.34$, $p = .001$.

² We have evidence for this in the text, *Contact Canada* (1996, 294). It is interesting to speculate, but probably impossible to determine, how this myth is being propagated in the classroom.

Newfoundland and Labrador Specific Content. A paired samples t-test was conducted to compare performance across Newfoundland and Labrador specific content and Canada-wide content. Overall, students performed significantly better on the Newfoundland and Labrador specific content ($M = 24.83$, $SD = 18.81$) compared to the Canada-wide content ($M = 20.20$, $SD = 13.89$), $t(309) = 5.44$, $p < .001$. A mixed-model ANOVA was conducted to compare performance on these questions in students who graduated from Newfoundland and Labrador or in another province. There was a significant interaction between question type (Newfoundland specific vs. Canada-wide) and where students graduated (Newfoundland and Labrador vs. other provinces), $F(1, 269) = 58.29$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .18$. Students who graduated from high school from Newfoundland and Labrador performed significantly better on Newfoundland and Labrador specific content ($M = 29.09$, $SD = 19.31$) compared to Canada-wide content ($M = 17.31$, $SD = 15.38$). In contrast, there was no difference in performance on Newfoundland and Labrador specific content ($M = 19.48$, $SD = 13.53$) compared to Canada-wide content ($M = 21.52$, $SD = 14.00$) for students who graduated high school from other provinces.

Curriculum. We coded each item based on whether it was covered in the Newfoundland and Labrador curriculum. Questions fell into three categories: covered in the core curriculum, may have been covered, and not covered in the curriculum. It should be emphasized that this determination is difficult as, for example, while the Innu tea doll *is* mentioned in the curriculum, it is referred to exclusively as a toy. Thus, the focus of the question, the tea doll's function in giving children manageable responsibility for group migration, is not captured in the curriculum. A within-subjects ANOVA was conducted and yielded significant results, $F(2, 618) = 233.29$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .43$. Students performed significantly better on topics covered in the curriculum ($M = 35.92$, $SD = 24.50$) compared to topics that may have been covered ($M = 17.34$, $SD = 18.31$, $p < .001$) or topics not on the curriculum ($M = 15.57$, $SD = 12.84$, $p < .001$). Students performed significantly better on topics that may have been covered in the curriculum compared to topics not covered in the curriculum ($p < .001$). See figure 4 for a visual depiction of these results and tables 1-3 for a chart indicating students' performance on each question by curriculum coverage.

Figure 4. Variation in student performance by curriculum coverage

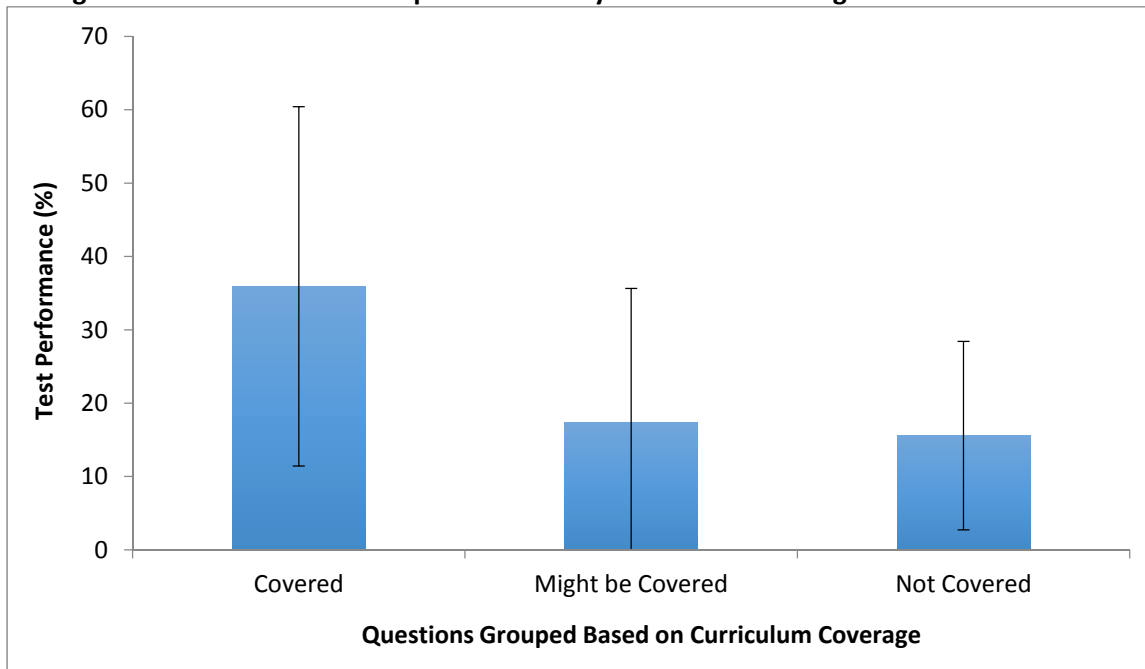


Table 1. Students' performance on questions covered in the curriculum

Question Content	% correct (n)
Identified the Mi'kmaq as recognized in Newfoundland and Labrador	57.7 (179)
The impact of the Spanish influenza on the Labrador Inuit population	43.9 (136)
Identified the Innu as recognized in Newfoundland and Labrador	43.5 (135)
What impact relocations had on the Innu, Inuit, Metis, and Mi'kmaq	41.6 (129)
Identified the Nunatsiavummiut (Inuit) as recognized in Newfoundland and Labrador	41 (127)
Identified the aim of the Federal Government in sending Aboriginal children to residential schools	40.8 (126)
How Aboriginal teachings about land differ from non-Aboriginal teachings	38.1 (118)
The current Aboriginal languages of Newfoundland and Labrador	37.8 (116)
The name of the people on the reserve closest to Memorial University campus	32.9 (102)

What resettlement involved	31.5 (97)
Why Aboriginal peoples of Newfoundland and Labrador were not recognized in the Confederation agreement	24.9 (77)
The reserve closest to Memorial University campus	24.6 (76)
Mapping locations of Aboriginal peoples in the province	24.4 (75)
Aboriginal musicians	15.5 (48)

Table 2. Students' performance on questions that may have been covered in the curriculum

Question Content	% correct (n)
Identified NunatuKavummiut (formerly Labrador Metis Nation) people as indigenous to Newfoundland and Labrador	40 (124)
Aboriginal rights in the Constitution	27.6 (85)
Mi'kmaq traditional territory	23.2 (71)
The 1876 Indian Act	12 (37)
The national organizations of Inuit, Innu, and Mi'kmaq	10.4 (32)
Aboriginal groups with outstanding land or status claims	10.1 (31)
The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples	8.1 (25)
Discrimination against First Nations and Metis women in the Indian Act	7.1 (22)
Land claim definition, number and frequency	6.1 (19)

Table 3. Students' performance on questions not covered in the curriculum

Question Content	% correct (n)
Powwow	47.4 (146) ³
Who is affected by treaties	43.8 (135)
Aboriginal political figures in Newfoundland and Labrador	29.3 (90) ⁴
The Prime Minister's Apology to Aboriginal peoples in 2008	19.8 (61)
Who signed the Peace and Friendship Treaties	18.5 (57)
Aboriginal athletes	16.9 (52)
Who are NunatuKavummiut	14.9 (46)
Aboriginal peoples' perspectives on the Churchill Falls and Muskrat Falls developments	13.9 (43)
Identified the Qalipu as being recognized in Newfoundland and Labrador	12.9 (40)
When the Qalipu were recognized as First Nation	12.6 (39)
The percentage of First Nations people who live off the reserve	12 (37)
Idle no more	11.3 (35)
The Aboriginal groups who object to the Athabasca tar sands developments	10.7 (33)
The Innu tea doll	9.7 (30)
The number of Aboriginal languages spoken in Canada	8.7 (27)
Aboriginal artists	8.5 (26)
The Aboriginal population increasing or decreasing	8.5 (26)
The Nisga'a land claim settlement	7.8 (24)
The legal precedents of the Royal Proclamation of 1763	5.2 (16)
Private mining companies	4.5 (14)

³ It is very likely that students know what a powwow is from popular culture. Thus its presence on the absent from the curriculum list probably makes the "not on the curriculum category" look better than it is.

⁴ With this question, students were given 4 choices of names of major political figures in Newfoundland and Labrador. One category named 6 Indigenous leaders, the rest had 6 non-Indigenous leaders each. This gave the students many possible clues. It is also likely that the students who could answer this question had learned this information from media and/or their families, once again making the "not on the curriculum category" look better than it is.

Where Students Learned what they Know

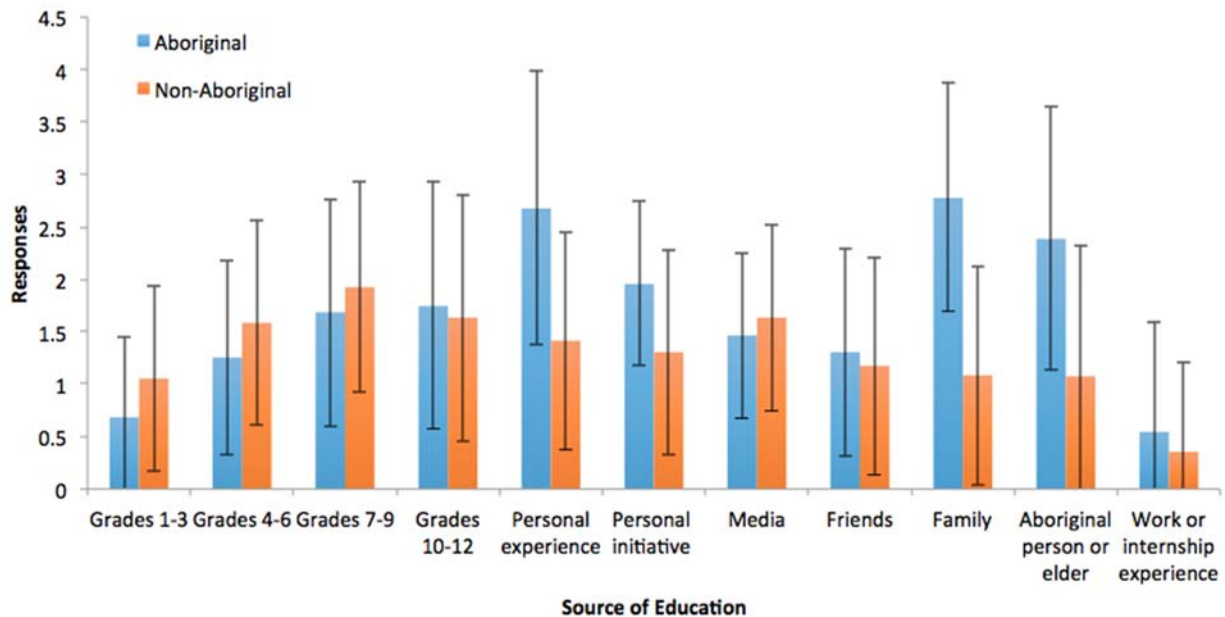
Our principal concern is with the education students are receiving about Aboriginal people and topics from all sources and at all levels. Education, of course, occurs both inside and outside the school, college or university settings. The media can play an important role in education. Self-education can also be very important. Family education is probably most profoundly important, though in the Queen’s pilot survey we found a negative correlation with knowledge and understanding. Where students learn about Aboriginal people and topics may also vary depending on whether students identify as Aboriginal themselves.

We asked the students how much they learned during four stages of their education: grades 1-3, grades 4-6, grades 7-9, grades 10-12, and university classes. Participants were also asked how much they learned from personal experiences, personal initiatives (e.g., learning by themselves), the media, friends, family, and work experience. Participants responded to each question on a five-point scale (0 = none, 1 = very little, 2 = some, 3 = quite a bit, 4 = most). Descriptive statistics on where students learned about Aboriginal peoples by Aboriginal status can be found in Table 4 and Figure 5.

Table 4. Means and standard deviations for questions assessing where students learned about Aboriginal peoples, separated by self-reported Aboriginal identity

	Aboriginal	Non-Aboriginal
	<i>M(SD)</i>	<i>M(SD)</i>
Personal experience	2.68 (1.31)	1.41 (1.04)
Personal initiative	1.96 (0.79)	1.30 (0.98)
Grades 1-3	0.68 (0.77)	1.05 (0.89)
Grades 4-6	1.25 (0.93)	1.58 (0.98)
Grades 7-9	1.68 (1.09)	1.93 (1.01)
Grades 10-12	1.75 (1.18)	1.63 (1.18)
School projects or field trips	1.43 (0.88)	1.54 (1.01)
University classes	0.39 (0.74)	0.32 (0.75)
University projects or field trips	0.21 (0.50)	0.16 (0.58)
Media	1.46 (0.79)	1.63 (0.89)
Friends	1.30 (0.99)	1.17 (1.04)
Family	2.78 (1.09)	1.08 (1.04)
Aboriginal person or elder	2.39 (1.26)	1.07 (1.26)
Work or internship experience	0.54 (1.04)	0.35 (0.85)

Figure 5. Where students learned about Aboriginal peoples by Aboriginal identity



A mixed model ANOVA was conducted to investigate differences in the source of learning about Aboriginal peoples by Aboriginal identity. There was a significant source by Aboriginal identity interaction, $F(13, 3445) = 13.06, p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .05$, meaning the pattern of results clearly differ for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students. Aboriginal students were more likely to learn about Aboriginal peoples from personal experience, personal initiative, family and an Aboriginal person or elder compared to non-Aboriginal people ($p < .001$).

Grades 1-6. As seen in Table 4 and Figure 5, participants reported learning “very little” from grades one to three. This result conforms to our sense of the curriculum: there is little coverage of Aboriginal topics in those grades (Godlewska et al., 2016). There is more coverage of Aboriginal topics in grades four and six though there are significant missed opportunities for powerful education in the textbooks associated with these grades. The grade four textbook is organized around the theme of exploration and perhaps because Aboriginal educators were involved in its composition, it has important strengths including an inclusive and respectful definition of exploration: “When we explore it means that we study a place or other people’s ideas and their ways of life” (Lebel, Carty, & Mercer, 2011, p18-19). The grade five text is a far less positive document as it sets the ground work for a number of settler prejudices: minimizing colonial violence, legitimating colonial land appropriation, and framing the Indigenous people of Newfoundland and Labrador as “settlers”. The grade six text, *Culture Quest. Exploring World Cultures* (Scully, 2006) also has strengths with cartography of Indigenous languages (pg. 244), and discussion of the impacts of energy exploitation on Indigenous peoples (98-99) amongst other important themes. Non-Aboriginal students feel they learned something important in these grades, while Aboriginal students were less impressed by what they learned. In fact, analysis of the grade four and six texts revealed many missed opportunities for deeper education (Godlewska et al., 2016).

Grades 7-9. Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students report that they learned more from the grade seven to nine courses compared to other years. Our analysis shows that the grade seven curricular documents

and textbook, *Changing Your World. Investigating Empowerment* (Sterling, 2005) are particularly fine as they do not whitewash, they integrate First Nations, Métis and Inuit content throughout the text, and they discuss conflicts that continue today with their consequences for First Nations, Métis and Inuit people. The emphasis of the grade seven text is, as the title suggests on Aboriginal rights and empowerment. As already mentioned, this is a stand-out textbook which will have given non-Aboriginal student information and a perspective unfamiliar to most of them. In that sense, it should be quite memorable for them. Unfortunately, this text was not reinforced by texts of a similar quality in any subsequent year for students who graduated in 2013. The grade eight textbook, *Voyage to Discovery. A History of Newfoundland and Labrador. 1800-present* (Macleod & Brown, 2005) is a badly outdated text which emphasizes problems without context or explanation. Coverage in the grade nine text that was available to these students is light and relative to the grade 7 text, superficial.

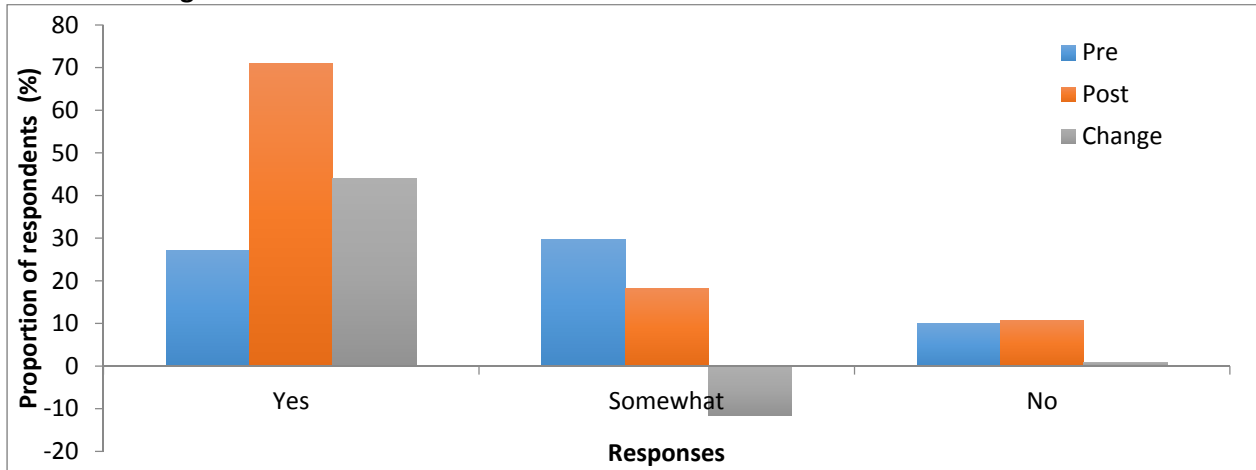
The grade seven to nine courses jumped out in other statistics. We found that students who considered they were well taught in grades 7-9 performed significantly better on the test ($r = .16, p = .005$). Test performance and how well students believed they were taught in the other grades were not significantly correlated ($p > .09$). This result suggest that students who believe they were taught better in grades 7-9 were more aware of issues and challenges faced by Aboriginal people, as indicated by a stronger performance on our test and also, given the results of our analysis of the curriculum and texts, that students know when they have been taught well.

Aboriginal Students. Overwhelmingly Aboriginal students feel that they learn most from their family and their own experiences, followed by learning from an Aboriginal person or elder. Non-Aboriginal students felt that they learned more from school than from any of the other sources, though more did learn from an Aboriginal person or elder than from any of these other sources. Non-Aboriginal students were more impressed by what they learned from the media than were Aboriginal students. On the whole, Aboriginal students were more critical of what they were taught in school and what they learned from the media. What these findings suggest is that there are not many strong public venues from which Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students can learn about Aboriginal topics in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Student Attitudes

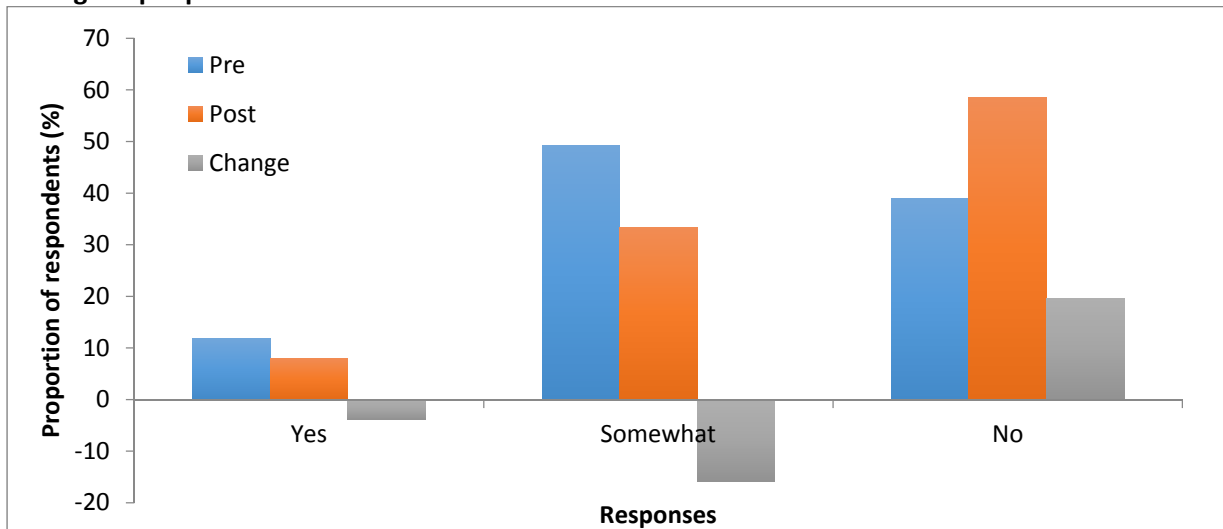
It is fair to say that our test was an educational tool for these students if only because it taught them that there was much they did not know. We asked them three questions before and after the test. Prior to taking the test, 27.1% ($n = 177$) of students believed they should be taught more about Aboriginal people and topics, 29.7% ($n = 194$) somewhat agreed with this statement, and 10% ($n = 65$) disagreed. After the test, 71% ($n = 211$) of students reported that they should have been taught more, 18.2% ($n = 54$) somewhat agreed with this statement, and 10.8% ($n = 32$) disagreed. An exact McNemar's test indicated that students were significantly more likely to believe they should have been taught more after taking the test ($p < .001$). See Figure 6 for a graph depicting students' perceptions of how well they were taught.

Figure 6. Pre and post-test comparison of responses to the question, “Do you think you should have been taught more?”



We also asked the students, “Do you feel informed about Aboriginal peoples?” Prior to taking the test, 11.8% ($n = 52$) of students believed they were informed about Aboriginal people and topics, 49.3% ($n = 217$) thought they were somewhat informed, and 38.9% ($n = 171$) did not feel informed. After the test, 8.0% ($n = 24$) of students believed they were informed about Aboriginal people and topics, 33.4% ($n = 100$) thought they were somewhat informed, and 58.5% ($n = 175$) did not feel informed. An exact McNemar’s test indicated that students felt significantly less informed after taking the test ($p < .001$). See Figure 7 for a graph depicting students’ perception of how well they were informed before and after the test

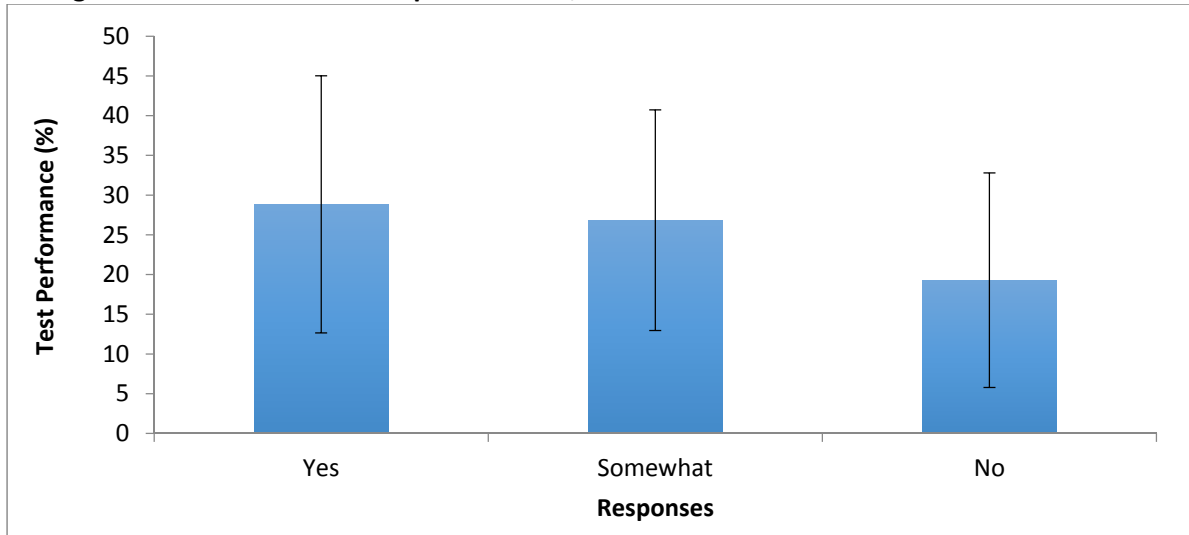
Figure 7. Pre and post-test comparison of responses to the question, “Do you feel informed about Aboriginal peoples?”



A one-way ANOVA was conducted to compare students’ perceptions of how well they were informed to test performance and yielded significant results, $F(2, 296) = 12.13, p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .08$. Students who felt informed ($M = 28.84, SD = 16.18$) or somewhat informed ($M = 26.84, SD = 13.89$) performed significantly better than students who did not feel informed ($M = 19.29, SD = 13.50; p < .002$). There were no differences between how students performed if they felt informed or somewhat informed. See

Figure 8 for a visual depiction of how well students performed on the test by how informed they felt.

Figure 8. Variation in student performance, if students feel informed



We asked the students what might be the cause of any limitation in their knowledge of Aboriginal peoples and topics in Canada. Exact McNemar's tests were conducted to compare responses before and after taking the test. Students were more likely to report inadequate coverage in their schooling and that they did not want to know after taking the test ($p < .02$). The percent increase in "Don't want to know" is disappointing and a good reminder of the risks of backlash. Students were significantly less likely to report that their knowledge was not limited after taking the test ($p < .001$). See Table 5 for the percentage of students who chose each response before and after taking the test.

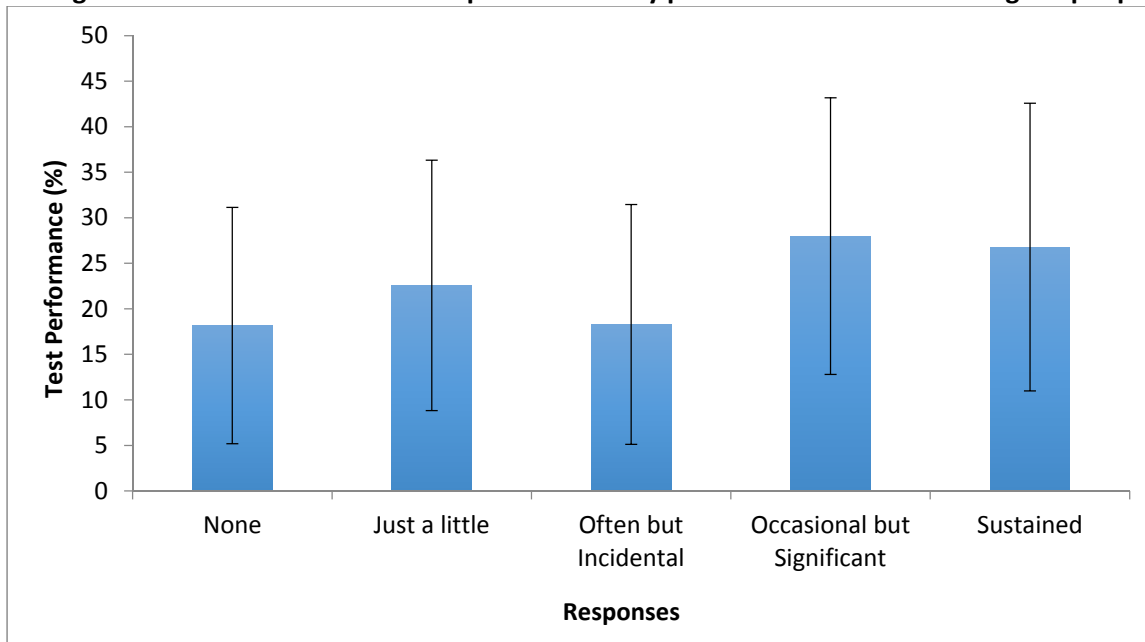
Table 5. Why students believed their knowledge was limited before and after taking the test

Responses	Pre	Post	Change
Inadequate coverage in school	59.4% (184)	65.6% (202)	6.2
Time and opportunity constraints	27.4% (85)	27.6% (85)	0.2
Other issues are more important	26.5% (82)	24.7% (76)	-1.8
Don't want to know	8.4% (26)	14% (43)	5.6
Aboriginal people need to take responsibility	9.0% (28)	6.8% (21)	-2.2
Knowledge is not limited	13.2% (41)	1.6% (5)	-11.6
Other	6.1% (19)	5.2% (16)	-0.9

We were interested in whether the quality of contact students had with Aboriginal people might make a difference in their performance on the test. Personal interaction with Aboriginal people did influence test performance, $F(4, 286) = 4.42, p = .002$, partial $\eta^2 = .06$. Students with no interaction with Aboriginal people ($M = 18.16, SD = 12.97$) performed significantly worse than students with occasional but significant ($M = 27.99, SD = 15.19$) or sustained engagement ($M = 26.78, SD = 15.79, p = .01$). There

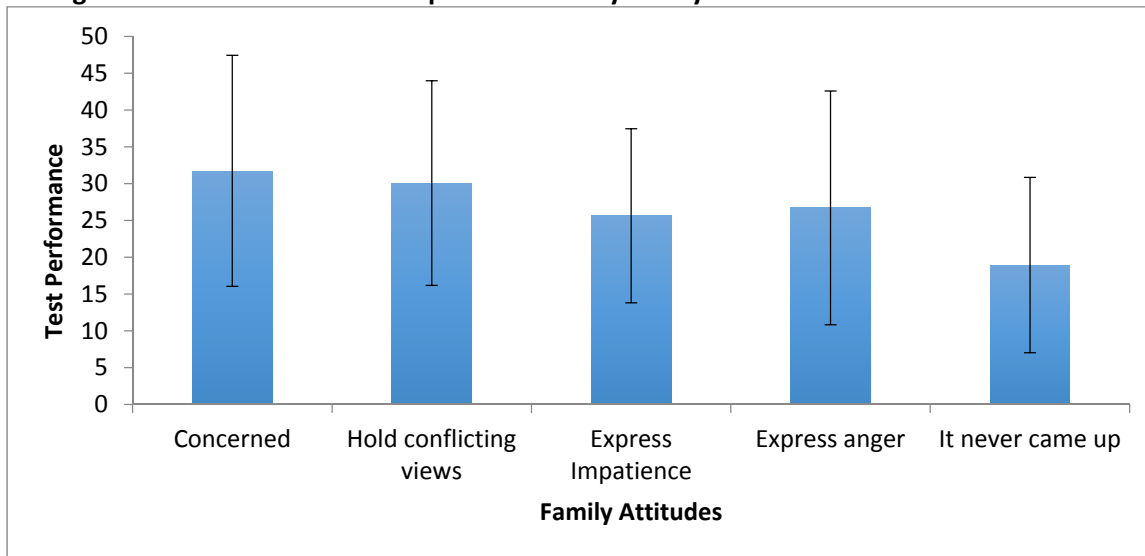
were no significant differences between any of the other groups taken individually (e.g those who indicated that they had no contact with Aboriginal people, a little contact ($M = 22.58$, $SD = 13.75$), often but incidental ($M = 18.29$, $SD = 13.17$), occasional or sustained contact).

Figure 9. Variation in student test performance by personal contact with Aboriginal people



Family attitudes. We asked students how their families felt about Aboriginal people in Canada. To respond, students could choose one or more of five set phrases: Are concerned over the conditions of life of Aboriginal people in Canada; Hold conflicting views over the conditions of life of Aboriginal people in Canada; Express impatience with Aboriginal people's inability to solve their problems; Express anger at the privileges accorded Aboriginal people; It just never came up as a topic of discussion. They could also say they don't know or decline to answer. Students were most likely to indicate that the topic never came up (42.5%, $n = 124$), followed by "family members expressed concern over the conditions of life of Aboriginal people in Canada" (16.4%, $n = 48$), "family members hold conflicting views" (13.4%, $n = 39$), then said family members express anger" (8.9%, $n = 26$) and finally, family members express impatience (6.5%, $n = 19$). So, overwhelmingly students encounter silence on the topic at home and while over 16% hear expressions of concern, and 28.8% receive more negative messages. A one-way ANOVA was conducted to investigate whether family attitudes influenced test performance. Indeed, test performance varied based on family attitudes, $F(5, 286) = 14.89$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .21$. Students who indicated that it never came up as a topic of discussion ($M = 18.94$, $SD = 11.91$) performed significantly more poorly than all other groups ($p < .05$). There were no other significant differences in students' performance on the test by family attitudes. See Figure10 for a visual depiction of student performance on the test by family attitudes.

Figure 10. Variation in student performance by family attitudes



We also asked about their family’s interest in Aboriginal peoples and cultures. Again, respondents were most likely to report that “it never came up as a topic of conversation” (32.5% $n = 94$), followed by some are interested and some are not (22.8%, $n = 66$), they are “mildly interested in Aboriginal peoples and cultures” (12.1%, $n = 35$), they are “significantly interested in Aboriginal peoples and cultures” (11.1%, $n = 32$), and they are “bored by the whole topic” (10.7%, $n = 31$).

Attitudes after taking the test. After taking the test, we asked students to indicate how they felt about Aboriginal topics. To respond, students could choose one or more of five set phrases. Of those who responded, 2.4% ($n = 7$) said they really did not care or want to know about Aboriginal people; 10.6% ($n = 31$) said they cared deeply about Aboriginal people in Canada today; 15.4% ($n = 45$) said they cared about the conditions in which Aboriginal people live but have very little interest in their culture and ways of life; 29% ($n = 85$) said they cared no more or less about Aboriginal people than about any other Canadian; and 38.2% ($n = 112$) said they felt strongly that there are social justice issues that must be resolved.

Qualitative results

Pre-Test: What the Students Say they Know

Just prior to the test portion of the questionnaire we asked the students to name “the three most important things you know about Aboriginal peoples”. This was a fishing expedition, designed to give them a chance to say what they knew before we influenced them in any way. Yet it is an important question as it is very open-ended and does not direct the students. In a sense, it is an assessment of student knowledge and attitudes in one question, while the rest of the test undertakes a more refined and pointed analysis of student knowledge and social attitude. We were interested in two things: what do students think of when asked about Aboriginal people; and how do their answers relate to their performance on the test. The results from this one question are far more interesting than we imagined they would be – though not heartening.

For the qualitative part of the analysis we looked only at the 295 respondents who completed the questionnaire. That allowed us to carry out our analysis by hand and without reliance on programs like NVivo. Reading through the comments repeatedly, we identified twenty-five strong repeating themes or trends in the student responses. Constructed iteratively, the response themes were created by reviewing each student response and creating themes to fit groupings of responses. At the end of the process, three themes were discarded as too small or unimportant or as too vague and similar to another clearer theme. We will explore the most important themes in depth below but we will begin here by looking at the larger picture that emerged from the analysis. In the end we created 25 themes. These themes can be categorized into three: predominantly negative (yellow in table 6), neutral or mixed (blue), and positive (green). By negative, we mean that they display an important prejudice or willful ignorance. By positive, we mean they bring some openness or critical spirit to the topic that takes them beyond prejudice and ignorance. Neutral themes contain a close to 50/50 mixture of these two within either a single of the three possible responses or the three responses in combination. We will explore these characterizations as we look at the responses in depth. It is worth noting that negative responses are far more numerous than positive ones with, most disappointingly, the observation that Aboriginal people receive advantages that the general population does not, as the most common response. The next most populated category has responses that reflect some discomfort or difficulty in expressing the diversity and specificity of Aboriginal people, whether in Newfoundland and Labrador or in Canada. This is followed by responses in which all “three most important things you know about Aboriginal peoples” are firmly placed in the past and then responses in which all three topics are devoted to problems. Statements in which the influence from the school curriculum is negative, assimilationist statements or assumptions, an inability to name three things they know, and the sense that Aboriginal people are not present, all have significant numbers of respondents. Fortunately blaming Aboriginal people, distancing language and the sense that Aboriginal people are somehow outside history or apart from Canadian history are less common responses in this Memorial survey.

Table 6. Responses to “name the three most important things you know about Aboriginal peoples” organized by the number of responses

#	Themes	# of Responses
1	Receive Advantages	54
2	Exclusive Past Tense Focus	43
3	Difficulty Expressing Diversity and Specificity	49
4	Cultural Preservation	40
5	Reserves	39
6	Exclusive Focus on Problems	38
7	Residential Schools	26
8	Signs of Negative Influence of Curriculum	24
9	Past Wrongs Present Consequences	18
10	Assimilationist	17
11	Can't name 3	16
12	Harmony with Land	16
13	Imp to Canadian History	16
14	Not Here	16
15	Broad characterizations	14
16	Critical of Canadians	13
17	Social Justice	13
18	Critical of Government	11
19	Critical of Aboriginal People	11
20	Signs of Positive influence of curriculum	11
21	Strange Distancing	9
22	Numbers Stats	6
23	Treaties	6
24	History Unknown or Apart	5
25	Critical of Question	3
	Unclassed (just very terse)	6

When, instead of paying attention to the number of respondents for each category, we looked at the average score on the test an even clearer picture emerges (the overall average was 22.23%, so for this discussion we will consider anything above that score to be good or at least better). In this table, in which the lowest score is at the top, the link between negativity and poor performance on our test is very clear, as is the link between better performance and a more positive and critical approach to the topics.

Table 7. Responses to “name the three most important things you know about Aboriginal peoples” organized by the average score on the test

#	Themes	# of Responses	Average Score on Test
24	History Unknown or Apart	5	15
21	Strange Distancing	9	20
11	Can't Name 3	16	20
14	Not Here	16	20
1	Receive Advantages	54	22
19	Critical of Aboriginal People	11	22
2	Predominantly Past Tense Focus	43	22
6	Exclusive Focus on Problems	38	24
23	Treaties	6	24
5	Reserves	39	24
7	Residential Schools	26	24
8	Signs of Negative Influence of Curriculum	24	24
3	Difficulty Expressing Diversity and Specificity	49	25
10	Assimilationist	17	27
22	Numbers Stats	6	27
16	Critical of Canadians	13	27
15	Broad characterizations	14	28
13	Imp to Canadian History	16	28
17	Social Justice	13	28
9	Past Wrongs Present Consequences	18	29
4	Cultural Preservation	40	29
20	Signs of positive influence of curriculum	11	29
12	Harmony with Land	16	29
18	Critical of Government	11	34
25	Critical of Question	3	37
	Unclassed (just very terse)	6	27

Now let’s look at our themes in depth, beginning with the most numerous negative responses.

Negative responses

They Receive Advantages

A surprisingly large number of the students responded that one of the most important things they knew about Aboriginal people was that they receive advantages. This was not a major finding in our pilot survey at Queen’s (2010) or our Ontario survey (2014) – and although we did not have this open-ended “what do you know” question on either survey, we did have an open-ended question about the validity of the survey in which we would have expected to see some trace of such a strong theme. As is discussed in Godlewska et al 2016, one of the great surprises

of our review of the curriculum and texts used in Newfoundland and Labrador was the reinforcing presence of this prejudice in one of the texts of the most attended high school social studies course, geography. Still, to conclude that the source of this view is the curriculum may be a leap. The curriculum may simply be reinforcing an already deeply held view with roots we are unaware of in Newfoundland and Labrador ((Mickler 1998, Shaw 2006).

There is a striking commonality in the language used by the students when they talk about Aboriginal advantage: “Free education. Separate land for themselves” (18); “Aboriginals receive government funds. Aboriginals receive free university tuition.” (19); “They can get government grants.”(21); “They receive money from the government, they can also receive money from the band.” (44); “Paid post secondary education Get a lot of our tax money Free housing on the reserves” (45); “Some can obtain a 'green card'” (111); University is paid for” (283). Some views are expressed with some subtlety “the government supports sustaining their ways.” (40) or “They receive compensation for what they've been through from white communities” (198). Others are a reaction to a traceable controversy such as the 2010 killing of 250 caribou by Innu hunters for food for the community “They can get away with mass-killings of Species when they can't even use all the resources they've gathered (Like the Caribou herd in Labrador where 3 Innu men killed over 600 animals in a few days about 5 years ago, if a non-aboriginal did that the provincial government would take everything they owned)”⁵ Some consider Aboriginal privilege the only important fact to retain about Aboriginal people: “I don't know three things, however I do know some get free schooling in Canada” (142) and others express themselves with animosity: “They take from the government, expect everything to be given to them, and believe they are entitled to more than the rest of the citizens in Canada.” (56) Many students are sympathetic or even admiring and yet repeat the privileged charge: “They were treated unfairly They had a very inspirational way of life They get certain benefits” (247). One student, aware of the prevailing prejudice associated with the idea of Aboriginal privilege, listed as one of the three most important things he knows: “many stereotypes are associated with aboriginals especially with regards to treaty rights.”(39)⁶ The frequency, coherence and consistency of the privilege perspective suggests a widely and deeply held prejudice.

Difficulty Expressing Diversity and Specificity

Many of the students who responded to our questionnaire seemed to find it difficult to speak about Aboriginal peoples in a way that recognizes the diversity and specificity of their cultures. There is a growing literature on the mutually reinforcing nature of language and prejudice (Collins and Clément 2012) which when combined with attention to the social nature of knowledge and its links to hierarchy and power (Foucault 1976, Foucault 1979) and the way ignorance functions to exclude (Mills 1997, Bergin 2002, May 2006, Sullivan and Tuana 2007, Steyn 2012) means a lack of vocabulary is more meaningful than

⁵ <http://www.fieldandstream.com/blogs/hunting/2010/03/quebec-innu-kill-250-protected-caribou-labrador>

⁶ Male, engineering student from Newfoundland who considers that he was only adequately taught in grades 7-9 about Aboriginal people, who is interested in learning more about Aboriginal histories, cultures and issues and who entered Memorial with A+ grades.

it might first appear: when we lack the words to describe people as they see themselves, then we have little to fall back on than stereotypes and broad generalizations.

The inarticulateness of the following examples suggests an underlying discomfort with Aboriginality and the richness and diversity of Indigenous cultures in Canada.

Some of the respondents are aware of and discomforted by their ignorance:

Sadly, I do not believe I have adequate enough knowledge to answer even this simple question. I do know that they have different values and ideals than, for instance, I have, but that's about the extent of it.
(respondent 237: score 21%)

While other reflexively avoid revealing that lack of knowledge: “The different groups The different places they come from The different rituals the different groups do” (respondent 153: score 4.5%). Others parrot definitions which, while correct, suggest knowledge that remains superficial: “First Nations, Inuit and the Métis are the three main groups” (respondent 86: score 29%). “There are several different types, (i.e. inuit etc.)” (respondent 10: score 50%). These responses suggest some familiarity with the terms Métis, Inuit and First Nations but perhaps uncertainty about the meaning of the terms or the diversity within these “types.” “First Nations People in Canada include Mi'kmaq, Métis and Inuit” (respondent 13: score 34%) reveals confusion about what First Nations means. “Conne River is the last Metis settlement in Canada” (respondent 19: score 36%) speaks of confusion on multiple levels. “They have their own culture” (respondent 35: score 34%); “They have a very unique culture” (respondent 116: score 9%); “They have their own language” (respondent 131: score 57%) speaks to a sense that what is important about Aboriginal people is that they are different from non-Aboriginal people, not that there might be significant cultural diversity amongst Aboriginal people. On the other hand, “They have many traditions” (respondent 67: score 11%) and “There are different tribes” (respondent 48: score 5%); “They have many different reserves and clans” (respondent 253: score 27%) suggests awareness of diversity but the lack of vocabulary to express it. “They are a minority” suggests belief that Aboriginal people do not have identities distinct from other diversity in Canada (respondent 137: score 27%). One has the impression reading through these comments that many of the students do not have enough knowledge to form coherent thoughts about the Indigenous populations of Canada.

Past Tense Focus

One of the strongest themes identified in the pilot survey of Queen’s University students (Godlewska, Massey et al. 2013) was the placement of Aboriginal people firmly in the past. The relegation of Indigenous people to the past is a well-known phenomenon (Jennings 1963, Fabian 1983, Francis 1992, but for more nuance see Egan 2006) being grappled with across the disciplines but especially in museum studies (Phillips and Phillips

2009, Brady 2011). Elizabeth Povinelli examines the ways in which the use of the future anterior tense in the neoliberal present is used to make long standing and continuing suffering seem less important than what might be in the future (e.g. in Canada a perfectly harmonious multicultural society). We will see evidence of that construction in some of the responses to our validity question below.

With the Memorial survey, we considered that if the responses to the question “name three things you know” were predominantly about the past, or if Aboriginal people were described as disappearing, this was evidence of a tendency to historicize First Nations, Métis and Inuit people. It is significant that a predominantly past tense focus was the third most common response in the Memorial survey.

The sense of a vanishing people was expressed in a dismaying variety of ways: “a dying culture” (respondent 34: score 14%); “They are dieing off” (respondent 43: 39%); “there are very few 100% aboriginal people living” (respondent 47: score 18%); “They are an at risk demographic” respondent 52: score 21%); “Very few in Canada today” (respondent 70: score 18%); “Their traditional way of life is being lost through assimilation” Respondent 75: score 27%); “People came in and took their land, gave them diseases, and killed them” (respondent 84: score 25%); “Thare culture is near but gone” (respondent 109: score 9%); “We almost genocided them We assimilated them to the point where there culture almost doesnt exist anymore” (respondent 157: score 34%); “they were killed off by the white man” (respondent 249: score 32%); “They were kicked out of Canada, All the aboriginal's were killed, and they fought hard for the land.” (respondent 250: score 11%). This is supported by the results on question 44 on the test portion of the questionnaire about whether the Aboriginal population of Canada is increasing, decreasing or remaining about the same: of the 292 respondents to this question, 8% considered that the population was increasing (it is); 56% thought that it was in decline, 32% said they did not know and 2% considered that there was no change. Both the qualitative and quantitative data suggests that the vanishing Indian myth is alive and well in this student population.

It is not surprising, then, that many students place Aboriginal people in the past in more subtle ways too. The only two important things that respondent 14 can think of (score: 43%) are “Pre-european history” and “Extinction of the Beothuk”. Even when the present is mentioned in association with a largely past tense focus, the present is often confused with a temporal spatial absence “1. Killed in large numbers by European settlers. 2. Many tribes are extinct (Beothuk). 3. Live on reservations today.” (respondent 16: score 14%). And sometimes what is made past is not only Aboriginal people, but the wrongs committed against them as in these responses: “Treaty unfairly by white people at first (took land, residential schools etc)” (respondent 1897: score 5%) and this one too: “Invaded by Europeans Cheated in trade Cheated in distribution of land” (respondent 194: score 36%); “They were brutalized by the Europeans hundreds of years ago and are

still being compensated by the government.” (respondent 282: score 30%). One student provided a cogent analysis of the past-tense focus: “Non-Aboriginals tend to look at Aboriginals as being in the past, or giving them a sort of ultimatum between keeping their traditions or scrapping all and adopting our idea of modern life” (respondent 28: score 36%).⁷

Assimilationist

A fundamentally assimilationist approach to Aboriginal people was evident in the Queen’s University survey (2010) and although not one of the strongest themes, is also present in the Memorial survey. The assimilationist expression ranges from the subtle (e.g. uncritical framing of Aboriginal people as inevitably or ideally part of a Canada dominated by settlers) to outright attacks on the existence of distinct peoples. Raised with multiculturalism and probably unaware of how multiculturalism minimizes difference and can function to support assimilation, these students are more given to subtle support for assimilation. It is certainly less ugly than the outright attack but it is insidious. Perhaps its most muted form is historical inevitability which can be expressed in a variety of ways: “they were a part of Canada’s first trade interaction” (respondent 35, score: 34%); “They were the original inhabitants of Canada” (respondent 91, score 11%); “They were the first people of Canada” (respondent 86, score: 30%). The problem here is a nationalist possessive and anachronism. The second form assimilation takes is the assumption that progress and the only path to development lie with the settler way of life: “rapid technology deployment and its misuse is/will destroy their culture and ancestral way of life” (respondent 224, score 36%); “Aboriginal culture is very interesting, I feel there should be greater amounts of tourism to show respect” (respondent 135, score: 9%); “The power struggles within different Aboriginal groups is holding many back from progress.” (respondent 117, score: 34%); “We imposed our culture and lifestyle upon them, forcing a change which they did not want ... however they do not want to accept some of the help that is being offered.” (respondent 207, score 7%); “Aboriginal Reservations have served more to divide aboriginals with the rest of society than integrating them... given the opportunity [they] can be very successful in the workplace.”(respondent 176, score 59%). Assimilation also assumes that Aboriginal people are not distinct from all other diversity in Canada and that differences are unimportant: “They are a minority” (respondent 137, score: 27%); “They SHOULD be an equal part of our culture.” (respondent 52, score 20%). But the clearest expression of assimilationist thinking is aggressive denial of difference and rights: “They are no different than us. They should be treated no different just because of their ethnic background” (respondent 133, score 27%); “1. They are no better or worse than any other race 2. They all come for different backgrounds, just like everyone else 3. Their culture isn't more important to preserve than other people's culture.” (respondent 277, score 43%); “They

⁷ Female non-Aboriginal student who took high school in British Columbia and was on Grenfell campus at the time of the survey.

were the actual people living in Canada before normal civilization began they are simply given importance God knows why I think we should treat them equal to other people and nothing else” (respondent 287, score 5%); “[they] believe they are entitled to more than the rest of the citizens in Canada” (respondent 56, score: 23%). It is important that range of scores on the test in this category is great, even in all the forms described here, and this is very likely a consequence of the prevalence of uncritical multiculturalism in Canada.

[Not Here](#)

Given the assertion in the high school geography text that the only Aboriginal people of Newfoundland were the Beothuk, that they were themselves settlers in Newfoundland and that they are now extinct, it is not surprising that many students find one way or another to say “Newfoundland has no Aboriginals” (respondent 185, score: 25%). The responses in this category all argue either that Aboriginal people are only on reserves, their culture is dead or dying, or that they are only in Labrador and not in Newfoundland.

[Cultural Preservation and Other Neutral Categories](#)

We have tagged this theme as neutral, meaning answers that display prejudice are well mixed with those that display openness and interest in Aboriginal people. Responses in this theme reveal a concern with the preservation of Aboriginal culture but the way this is expressed is important. Some student frame the concern as a variant of the vanishing Indian myth: the culture must be preserved as a sort of quaint artifact of the past. “They are dieing off. They are a unique culture.”(respondent 43, score 38.6%); or “The knowledge they have is interesting to learn”(respondent 133, score 27.3%); “Interesting customs and practices” (respondent 98, score 29.5%). For others, culture is simply something they have noticed about Aboriginal people and in some of these responses we also see a tendency to speak of Aboriginal cultures in the singular: “they have a rich culture” (respondents 17, score 15.9%; respondent 110, score 9.1%); “Great culture” (respondent 233, score 47.4%); “Full of history and culture” (respondent 89, 31.8%); “they preserve their culture” (respondent 21, 40.9%); “They try to preserve their culture/land” (respondent 82, score 47.7%); “music and dance are very important parts of culture – some customs such as language are in danger of being lost and need to be preserved” (respondent 30, score 68.2%). Some respondents advocate action for cultural preservation but again culture is often expressed in the singular and some of these responses are disturbing on other ways: “There should be more awareness about the uniqueness of their culture” (respondent 126, score 15.9%); “1. Their traditions [and] beliefs are very unique and important. 2. Many of these people still believe in the laws/customs of their peoples. 3. Reserves need to be better funded to preserve this culture” (respondent 8, score 38.6%). In this response, the word “still” gives pause as does the sudden switch to the singular in three and the unexplained linking of reserves and cultural preservation. Some students express the importance of Indigenous history in and of itself as a reason for cultural preservation “A lot of the legends and stories that

have been passed on. The trials we've had to go through in the past. How we've adapted to what's been given to us in the past.” (respondent 193, score 43.2%), and how important that history is to Canada “They were harshly treated, their history deserves to be preserved, Without them we wouldnt be where we are today.” (respondent 192, score 45.5%). One student nailed the principal issue with the focus on cultural preservation: “It is hugely important to remember that Aboriginal cultures are still alive, they are not some 'primitive' group nor 'representatives' of 'our past, primitive ways of living” (respondent 268, test score 32%).

For the themes reserves, residential schools, and treaties we picked out any mention of them and, as a consequence, these categories are a mixed bag of misinformation and understanding. For the theme reserves, the most disturbing is the view that reserves are some sort of gift from the government “reserves are pockets of land given to aboriginal people to preserve their heritage” (respondent 64, score 22.7%); and “they're given land reserves by the government were they practice their culture” (respondent 216, score 4.5%). Similarly worrying is the idea that all Aboriginal people “Live on reservations today” (respondent 16, score 13.6%), “they live on reserves” (respondent 110, 187, 207, scores: 9.1%, 4.5%, 6.8%); “they are now staying in reserves” (respondent 259, score 4.5%); or simply that “There are reserves for the Aboriginal to live on, and the government supports sustaining their ways” (respondent 40, score 54.5%). Other students seem to have a better grasp of the situation: “Reserve space is dwindling” (respondent 50, score 22.7%); “some reserves in very poor condition” (respondent 167, score 13.6%); “Non-reserve Aboriginals are denied the same benefits that reserve Aboriginals have” (respondent 168, score 27.3%). In some responses there is misinformation mixed with understanding “they have to move off reserves to get jobs, many are trying to make money and one thing natives can do is sell their land to resource companies” (respondent 162, score 38.6%); “societies take away their reserves to replace with business” (respondent 230, score 50%); “Their reserves are basically all that they hold as their own” (respondent 208, score 9.1%). Responses in the residential schools theme are of three types: they are simply mentioned as one of the things known (without any qualification or explanation of what the respondents know about them (13 out of 26 responses); there is some reference to the harm caused by the residential schools (12 out of 26 responses) and there is mention of the lasting damage cause by the schools (1 out of 26 responses). Only 6 respondents mention treaties and only two of these show any knowledge of treaties: e.g. “treaties are still being violated” (respondent 96, score: 32%).

The characterization of Aboriginal people as in harmony with the land is more positive than the other neutral categories and yet often troubling too. “They are connected to the Earth and Nature by their beliefs. They believe in sustainability” (respondent 6, score 55%) is respectful and may be correct for many. Similarly, “Live in harmony with the land” (respondent 31, score 41%), “use resources from the land to the full extent” (respondent 47, score 18%) “respect the environment” (respondent 83, score 7%) “lived off the land

(respondents 70 and 186, scores 18%, 21%) are all positive or neutral but what does “view of nature as equal to them” (Respondent 9, score 16%) mean coming from a settler and does the assertion “Aboriginal people are highly sustainable in their actions because they live off the land mostly” (respondent 286, score 32%) respect the diversity of lifestyles and experiences of Aboriginal people? Part of the problem with the assertion that Aboriginal people live in harmony with the land is that it is a broad characterization. Most such characterizations, “They are proud” (respondent 21, score 41%), seem positive yet, as broad characterizations, are redolent of the “noble savage,” a stock character for use in narratives that has little to do with real people and their experiences. Many of these more positive characterizations seem designed by the students to counter common prejudices “They are hardworking. They are honest. They are excellent teachers and guides” (respondent 209, score 14%), but are unlikely to be any more or less persuasive than the negative characterizations: “They have brown skin -Most of them are poor.” (respondent 269, score 0%). Some of the more specific generalizations from some to all “Resistant to oil pipe construction” may be a product of media coverage. All lack subtlety and evidence of deep understanding.

Negative and Positives from the Curriculum

As already discussed, attributing particular comments to the curriculum is a little problematic as there are many possible sources of influence on these students. But a few aspects of the student responses echo the curriculum: on the positive side, reference to restorative justice, awareness of the violence of relocation and a focus on Aboriginal rights were strongly emphasized in particular courses and appear in the responses classed here as curricular-positive; on the negative side, the claim that Aboriginal people get free education, the sense of all Aboriginal people in Newfoundland as essentially just settlers, and a huge focus on the extinction of the Beothuk are all mentioned in key texts and appear in the responses we deem curricular-negative. Attention to the fate of the Beothuk is not necessarily negative but when it is associated with the concept of extinction and the non-presence of Aboriginal people, it is negative. On balance, if there can be said to be an influence from the curriculum, it is more negative than positive.

Positive Responses

Positive responses, although less numerous, are still significant and are correlated with a higher average score on the test (so, arguably with deeper knowledge and understanding). For the teachers in our midst, it will be no surprise and a pleasure that the highest average score came from students who were critical of the question we asked: “How do I declare the three most important things about any culture?” (respondent 53, score 41%); “Depends on which Aboriginal group we're talking about.” (respondent 140, score 20%); “There are many different kinds of aboriginals in different areas. Each aboriginal group has their own native languages. Each aboriginal group has their own cultures and traditions and varies between groups.” (respondent 243, score

50%). The first respondent misunderstood our question to a degree but the last two took aim and scored.

Students who hold the government responsible for past wrongs and for inadequate response to the needs of Aboriginal people both in the past and today on average performed significantly better on our test, though not, on average, as well as the average score of the three who were critical of our question. Some of these students expressed their views with force: “They've been victims of possibly one of the worst/most racist governments to the indigenous population in the 20th century, that being the Government of Canada” (Respondent 163, score 59%); “Their rights have been suppressed by Canadian government” (respondent 143, score 27%); “are abused by the government and looked down upon by society” (respondent 224, score 36%); “The Government pushes them and their issues to the side, which makes living hard” (respondent 233, score 48%). In this category, there are two responses which focus exclusively on the past wrongs of the Canadian government e.g. “The Canadian government has mistreated them in the past.” (respondent 90, score 9%). If the scores for these two past-focused responses are removed, then the average score of those critical of the Canadian government today is 39%, making it on average the highest scoring group on the test. It might be argued that our test has a bias that fits the critical approach of these students. This may be true but it is important to remember that the test was created through a co-design process with Aboriginal educators and community members. Our collaborators were concerned with systemic problems which means there was a significant focus on governance and the root causes of issues.

Students who expressed what they know about Aboriginal people in terms of social justice (a focus on systemic wrongs that need to be righted) also on average tended to perform better on our test. In some of these responses there is a sense of the long term impact of racism: “The negative impacts of residential schools didn't end with the generation that was forced to go” (respondent 28, score 36%); “treaties today are still being violated” (Respondent 96, score 32%); “Aboriginal issues often are shoved aside for more "important things", like pandas or oil” (respondent 244, score 27%). For some in this category there is a sense of societal responsibility: “they should be treated as equals in society (respondent 238, score 43%); “There is a lot of discrimination against aboriginal peoples Their issues are often neglected” (respondent 94, score 25%); “Their way of life and traditions have been made a mockery by contemporary society” (respondent 143, score 27%); “There is inadequate information given to the general public regarding aboriginal people” (respondent 254, score 6.8%). While this last example is a below average score, it reflects awareness of ignorance, which is an important first step in addressing it. Even more impressive is the sense of personal responsibility in some responses: “I wish I knew more. I think a lot of the things I think I know are wrong.” (respondent 288, score 16%).

What the students think of the questionnaire and test

At the end of the questionnaire we ask students whether they consider our test a valid measure of their knowledge about Aboriginal people and why or why not. We feel it is an important question as it works to include the respondents in the process of survey re-design, redress the power imbalance inherent in administering a knowledge test, and allows us to further explore student understanding of their knowledge and its limits while acting as a secondary check on our questionnaire. The test the participants receive has been co-designed with Indigenous knowledge holders because they have deep insight into Indigenous life in Canada and can help us to discern what topics are absolutely vital to cover, how to phrase them to avoid colonial prejudice, to help us balance out the survey between essential historical context, current events, and cultural expression, and to allow us to better plumb the relationship between prevailing social attitudes and what students can learn. Working with knowledge holders and informed by our analysis of the curriculum, we are also able to keep the curriculum in mind as we co-design questions with them. The co-design process amounts to a series of very rigorous checks of the test and questionnaire, as described in Schaepli and Godlewska (projected 2017). Those consultations have included students both Aboriginal and not. Certainly we recognize that students taking the test are not in a position to assess *the validity* of the test but we feel that a majority of responses in the negative would be a red flag for us. When we receive criticism from more than a small number of students focused on a particular issue (e.g. the specificity of questions or that we are not capturing the kind of knowledge they do have), we reflect back on our discussions with co-designers and pay special attention to that issue both in our analysis and in our co-design of future questionnaires. In any testing situation there is a power imbalance: those administering the test determine what knowledge is important. Respondents can decline to take part, withdraw and decline to answer particular questions. That is significant power, but not quite enough. So we also give respondents the opportunity to tell us what they think of the test. Finally, asking whether the test is a valid measure of their knowledge about Aboriginal people(s)?" allows respondents to reflect on their knowledge, where they acquired it and what should be expected of them. These reflections are often fascinating.

The Test is a Valid Measure of My Knowledge

Despite an average score of 22.18%, the vast majority of those who completed the test judged it a good measure of their knowledge. 78.8% regarded it a valid measure of their knowledge while 21.2% considered that it was not. The comments of those who considered the test valid and shared comments with us about that (77.6% of those who made comments) can be divided into 3 categories: they thought the test was valid because of the quality of the questions asked; they thought the test was valid because it showed them what they did not know; and they thought the test valid because the issues it raises are important.

Thirty four respondents (so 14% of all who made comments) liked the test for the variety of questions asked:

Covers history, distant and recent. - Covers not only personal knowledge but how knowledge was acquired. - Includes cultural and political aspects. (Respondent 119, score 50%)

Despite having many province specific questions, there were also country wide questions. (Respondent 291, score 18.2%)

This survey asks many diverse questions regarding aboriginal people, and really makes you reflect back on what you've learned over the course of your education. (Respondent 254, score 6.8%)

Sixteen respondents (so 6.6% of all who made comments) declared the questions asked important.

Asks interesting questions on important and controversial topics regarding Aboriginal peoples. Asks information that should be learned by many in schools. (Respondent 98, score 29.5%)

Because it is asking a lot of the basics that anyone versed in the subject should be able to answer. (Respondent 14, 43.2%)

Ten respondents referred to the fairness of the questions asked

All questions were fair game. None were tricky (Respondent 21, score 40.9%)

Because they asked basic question that one should likely know if you know anything about aboriginal people at all. (Respondent 180, score 6.8%)

So, altogether about 25% of respondents commented specifically on the quality of the questions.

The largest number of those who provided comments (89, so 37% of those who commented) focused on what the test taught them about what they knew. Some (6) commented that the test did measure some things they were taught in school and should therefore know.

It goes along with most things that we were taught in school, while extending to things that we probably did not know. (Respondent 165, score 31.8%)

Some (6) commented that they learned from taking the test.

It's informative to read and just think about the questions ask and really see how much knowledge you have on aboriginal people (Respondent 167, score 13.6%)

This test was very thorough in getting to know the test taker. Also, this test makes the test taker think about both the past as well as the present situations of Aboriginal people. (Respondent 139, 50%)

a lot of information in this test made me aware of certain situation aboriginals face day to day for many years and they are still not to where they would like to be with society. (Respondent 230, 50%)

Or that it stimulated their desire to learn:

Because asked me many questions and now made me want to google the facts i was unsure of! (Respondent 285, score 20.5%)

More (38) described the test as valuable because it showed them how little they knew.

I was asked many questions about past and present issues involving aboriginal peoples and I found that I had little to no knowledge about such issues even if they were significant parts of Canadian history (Respondent 34, score 13.6%)

There was so much that I didn't know (Respondent 64, 22.7%)

Even more (39) referred to two levels of ignorance: not knowing and also not being aware of not knowing.

I didn't realize how little I knew until I did this test. I would love to know more! (Respondent 132, score 9.1%)

It really challenged my belief about how much I know. I feel as if I am much less informed than I previously thought. (Respondent 53, score 40.9%)

It allowed me to see just how many aboriginal problems and controversies I knew about and how many were more complex than I originally thought. (Respondent 92, score 59.1%)

I thought that I had a vast knowledge about Aboriginal People, but after taking this test I realize that I was under Educated. (Respondent 182, score 20.5%)

This survey asks a lot of questions that would require more than word of mouth to be informed about. A lot of the questions I had no idea about, and my best friend is Inuit. I think it made me think about the level of knowledge i had on aboriginal peoples (Respondent 166, score 6.8%)

Shows just how much I didn't know, even with personal interest and a family history of Aboriginal status. (Respondent 292, score 36.4%)

It really showed I didn't know as much as I thought about Aboriginal people, I mostly know about the residential schooling, which I think is really important but it isn't everything either. (Respondent 198, score 18.2%)

I realized I have very little knowledge about Aboriginal people. It is quite sad actually that they are a community of people in my own home province that I know little to nothing about. (Respondent 229, score 22.7%)

Other strong themes that emerge from these and other comments are dawning realization of the complexity of the issues in Canadian-Indigenous relations and consequent disappointment with the school system. One respondent wrote thoughtfully on the political nature of knowledge and ignorance.

...there may be a political stance to set aside native issues because they are both hard to find solutions to and our fault (really our ancestors from distant lands), but hey we still treat the land as they did. (Respondent 224, score 36.4%)

Approximately 9 % (27 respondents) pointed to the importance of the topics covered by the test. Many focused on the inadequacy of their education for responsible citizenship:

It asks about a lot of things that about the knowledge of the aboriginal people, and as a canadian, i felt absolutely shameful that I have no knowledge about the people who is originally from this country, I should ve learn more about them. This is a vaild measure of my knowledge about aboriginal people and a little good mirror for me to tell me that what a shame for me that i should learn about it. (Respondent 220, score 9.1%)

This test asked me things I'd never even heard of, but I felt guilty that I did not know the answers. Canada is a country of many cultures and I feel ashamed that my schools have not taught me enough about Aboriginal and First Nations people. (Respondent 143, score 27.3%)

It has brought up many significant issues that have impacted on mostly all of the aboriginal peoples not only in Newfoundland and Labrador but Canada as well. All of these treaties, and laws have impacted on my heritage and life, therefore I should definitely know more about them. Yet, we are not taught this in school, the most I learned in school about Aboriginal people was Shanawdithit, the last known survivor of the Beothuks. This test truly

showed me how much there is left to learn about my own culture and heritage. (Respondent 29, score 43.2%)

4% (10 respondents) while answering that yes it was a valid measure of their knowledge qualified their assertion. For some the level of knowledge required by the test was too high for the average person or for someone not interested in Indigenous topics or indeed for someone from another part of Canada:

It asks many questions that someone would know if they were interested in Aboriginal heritage and history, for those who don't know about Aboriginal heritage and history they will not be able to answer many questions (Respondent 152, score 22.7%)

There were several types of questions. Cultural questions, historical questions and current issue questions giving a broad range of questions. However, there were many questions about East coast aboriginal peoples and as a BC resident, we learn more about BC First Nations. (Respondent 75, score 27.3%)

A few respondents considered that while they were uninformed, they were sympathetic and that the survey did not measure that kind of emotional understanding.

i know very little about the specifics of native issues and culture. but i do value their way of life(nondestructive to the environment, close nit communities) ... (Respondent 224, score 36.4%)

Does not indicate personal experience and should not be used for this purpose. (Respondent 245, score 27.3%)

I believe this tested for a great deal of varied information on different topics within the aboriginal community. However, there was not a whole lot of information tested on the day-to-day life of those living in the aboriginal community. (Respondent 208, score 9.1%)

I seem to have a vague idea of what's going on in the world, stressing the vague. Taking this was scary because I just got smacked in the face with my own ignorance -- and I consider myself to be a youth who has slightly more knowledge than the average person regarding Aboriginal people. I should, seeing as I elected to take BC First Nations 12 in high school, and then lived for three months in Yellowknife. Yet doing this questionnaire I realize I know little more than the few buzzwords or catchphrases. History of any kind has never been a huge interest/skill of mine, but I did study the Nisga'a land claim + the Indian Act + the Royal Proclamation and should have at least remembered some specifics of those. However, I do remember clearly the stories I heard in Yellowknife from men who attended residential school as children. They were the most affecting moments of my life. What I took from it though was a different kind

of knowledge. Can empathy considered knowledge? A personal knowledge maybe? The kind that comes from truly listening to and individual and then looking around with that floating in your head. I might not know the history as well as I should, but I sure as hell know that the guy clutching a bottle of hairspray while convulsing on the ground at 10am on a Sunday isn't doing it for shits and giggles or because he's "just another chug". He's doing it because he's struggling. He's looking for a way to cope. (Respondent 28, score 36.4%)

It is true that we did not seek to assess emotional understanding as we do not know how to assess it meaningfully. We did ask students to tell us how they felt about Aboriginal people and gave them numerous possible answers and a textbox in case they found our options lacking (no students elected to use the textbox). We conceived of the possible answers as on a sliding scale of engagement from care deeply to really don't care or want to know (see above). Although, given our findings on the name "the three most important things you know about Aboriginal peoples" question, the second category, "I feel strongly that there are social justice issues that must be resolved" may also be closely linked to an approach to Aboriginal people that always looks for problems and issues.

With respect to capturing day-to-day life of those living in First Nations, Metis or Inuit communities, we do not feel that it is reasonable or strictly necessary for Canadians to have that insight, though we understand that people with deeper experience of communities, who have had much the same education as other students have had, would want to be able to display their more intimate knowledge of the communities and ways of life. The real question is always whether knowledge, and particularly knowledge of the structures of oppression that limit group and individual self-realization, will lead to greater compassion and better decision making. That is a very large question both at the heart of this research yet well beyond its capacity to resolve.

The Test is Not a Valid Measure of My knowledge

It is worth looking in detail at the reasons fifty-four students felt that the test did not fairly assess their knowledge. As on previous surveys, some students (8) feel that if what is being asked is not on the curriculum, then it cannot be important and certainly falls outside the realm of what they might be expected to know. In thinking about the student's responses, it is worth remembering that the curriculum and texts for Newfoundland and Labrador are very limited and problematic (Godlewska et al 2016). This is summed up very nicely by respondent 169 (score 38.6%):

This test is not a valid measure of my knowledge about Aboriginal people(s) because in school we were only taught about historic Aboriginal people(s), groups that are now extinct. We are not taught about today's Aboriginal people(s) and the situation/problems they are presently facing.

I learnt about Aboriginal people from my text book and teachers. What I learnt is different from the questions asked. (Respondent 284, score 2.3%)

More disturbing is the denigration of knowledge about Indigenous people if it does not conform to what was taught in schools:

Well, it covered a lot of new-age issues and stuff however it did not really seem to touch all that much on the history and stuff.. So really anything I actually learned. (Respondent 218, score 13.6%)

As in the Queen's University pilot study, some students disliked the test for the specificity of its questions. Some (4) found the test too historical, rejecting history itself in favour of a multicultural future:

I think that when focusing on the problems of the past, there cannot be a better future. If we look ahead, for every Canadian, not just one race, being Canada a multinational country. That then, only then can we start to fix the problems communities are coming upon. (Respondent 108, score 20.5%)

In spite of the way we framed the questions these students could not see that the present is formed by the past and social justice issues continue to be framed by institutions forged in the past.

there wasn't enough about current day problems natives face most of it was stuff from the past that you need some history degree to remember those numbers and people , their past has past , sure it was bad but it needs to be focused on modern day since that would be more useful knowledge than what happened in 1798 (Respondent 162, score 38.6%)

1798 is not a date mentioned in the questionnaire and students are not asked to identify dates.

Some out-of-province students (16) considered the questionnaire too province specific. The questionnaire was designed with 55% of the questions relevant Canada-wide and 45% province specific. In fairness, the first year students we surveyed would have had little time to absorb understanding of the local environment in one month of residence in the province but we did tell the students that we would take their province of residence in high school into account in our analysis.

This test is only for people who went to school in Newfoundland all of their lives, it is not suited for students (test subjects) from other provinces. (Respondent 186, score 20.5%)

Because it assumes I am from Newfoundland, which I am not. (Respondent 77, score 9.1%)

Five students considered that the test questions were too specific for “normal” people. This is an important perception, especially when linked to hope for a multicultural future without awareness of a colonial past. Many of our questions were about current and long-standing structures and attitudes working against the survival of Indigenous peoples in Canada. If this knowledge is relevant only to Aboriginal people, then there is little hope for social justice.

you asked a bunch of questions that normal people would not know the answer to unless you were an aboriginal person or studying their history (Respondent 249, score 31.8%)

I do not know a specific history of Aboriginals in Canada and I do not think it's necessary, unless you're looking at a broader sense of Canadian history, a religious class or a First Nations studies course. Knowing very specific, almost trivial, facts about the Aboriginal communities will not help the issues that plague them. (Respondent 278, score 18.2%)

Also embedded in respondent 278's response is a sense that the focus of any survey about Aboriginal people should be on “the issues that plague them.” This, as we have seen, is a preoccupation of many Canadian students.

The Awareness Survey was designed to assess the knowledge of all students as a mechanism for helping schools, colleges and universities improve the education they offer on Indigenous peoples in Canada. It is not aimed at First Nations, Métis or Inuit students, though some do take the survey and as most have been educated in the provincial systems, many have the same gaps in their education and understanding. On average, they do perform better on the test, but some individuals do not. Arguably, unawareness of Aboriginal realities by Aboriginal people is more tragic as one must understand the sources and nature of prejudice to hope to fight against it. It is important then, that more than 50% of the students who disliked the test because it did not assess Indigenous culture or their personal knowledge (13 students) were themselves Indigenous (7 or perhaps 8 respondents). Again, we do not feel it is reasonable or constructive to expect non-Indigenous people to have intimate knowledge of Indigenous culture and day-to-day lived experience. Yet we do not want Indigenous students to feel we are denigrating their experience and knowledge. This survey was constructed through extensive consultation with community leaders in the communities from which some of these students come. But we did not tell the students that. We will do so in future iterations of the survey in Newfoundland and Labrador and across Canada.

Finally, a small number of students (3) did not consider the test a fair measure of their knowledge because it is unreasonable to expect someone to retain knowledge about a subject not important to them, that they do not care about, or that has not “direct significant impact” (respondent 59, score 11.4%) on their lives.

Conclusion

In commissioning and supporting this study, Memorial has begun to respond to the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Report. If this study leads to curricular and co-curricular reform, Memorial will find itself at the forefront of universities committed to addressing the marginalization of Indigenous people in Canada.

This report delivers back to Memorial the results of a 2013 survey of first-year students. Also available upon request is a study of the curriculum and texts available to these same students from K-12. We are fulfilling our obligation to report back to Memorial and our co-designers in delivery of the raw data to Memorial on the 30th of June 2014, in presentations during our visit to Memorial during Awareness Week (21-24 March 2016), in delivering this report today, and in articles we plan to submit to community newspapers summer and fall 2016.

As our article “First Nations, Métis and Inuit presence in the Newfoundland and Labrador curriculum” accepted in *Race, Ethnicity and Education* makes clear, the Newfoundland and Labrador K-12 curriculum is substantially inadequate to train responsible citizens about Aboriginal peoples and topics. As we have seen, this is very clear in the knowledge and social attitudes of the students who took the test.

Student knowledge is being tested against what Aboriginal educators, community members and Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal experts believe is information of critical importance. The questionnaire addresses where students learned what they know, what they think of what they have learned, some social attitude questions, the test, and demographic questions (e.g., age, gender, self-identity, etc.). The survey had a completion rate of 12.5%. While this allows useful analysis, in light of the increasing flood of online surveys, together with Memorial, the Awareness team will be developing better ways to deliver the survey to students: as part of Orientation and in classrooms.

The two kinds of analysis conducted on the 2013 survey results (quantitative and qualitative) provide supporting results. The quantitative analysis is focused on performance on particular types of questions, the influence of the school curriculum on student knowledge, where students learned what they know, whether the test itself could function as an educational tool, whether the nature of a person’s contact with Aboriginal people is correlated with better performance, and on the impact of family attitudes.

Across all types of questions, unsurprisingly we found that on average Aboriginal students know more than non-Aboriginal students but that even Aboriginal students struggle to understand the fundamental issues affecting quality of life for Aboriginal people in Canada and in Newfoundland and Labrador (aka, governance). Aboriginal students are more aware of Aboriginal presence in Newfoundland and Labrador than non-Aboriginal students and this general sense of awareness may be a fundamental area for improvement to be dealt with in the curriculum. Certainly, we know that the high school geography course is a particularly problematic part of the high school curriculum. This may represent a significant opportunity for geography education at Memorial, particularly around issues in Newfoundland and Labrador. Students appear to be relatively uninformed about current events involving Aboriginal people, even those of major importance, e.g. the Prime Minister’s residential schools apology, is the Aboriginal population declining or rising. Students don’t seem to know much about Aboriginal contributions to the arts and culture in Canada but are aware of some cultural practices. Historical questions are relatively well answered when they are covered on the curriculum but much less well answered when they are not or when they have to do with the structures underlying Aboriginal existence in Canada today.

Bearing in mind caveats related to the limitations of assuming too much from curriculum documents, it seems that material covered in the curriculum is better assimilated than material not so covered. In the “Might be covered” category are topics that are not referred to in quite the same way or which are on the curriculum but in a course taken by very few: e.g. Aboriginal law. Sometimes students will know the answer to questions because, while not on the curriculum, they are well known in popular culture.

Our analysis of the curriculum revealed a very strong grade seven course, so we were pleased to see that the students described the grade 7-9 courses as the grades in which they learned most about Aboriginal people and topics. This should be heartening for educators: when the curriculum and texts are strong, it does make a difference. On the other hand, one course is not sufficient to substantially improve the knowledge and understanding of students. There was significant coverage of Aboriginal content in high school, but much of it was problematic. Unsurprisingly, Aboriginal students consider that they have learned most of what they know from personal experience, family and an Aboriginal person or elder. But this probably limits the kind of knowledge they have, e.g. they lack understanding of the long-standing structural factors limiting the achievements of Aboriginal people today, which requires more of a critical historical and social scientific focus and training.

We asked a few questions both before and after taking the test to gauge the impact of taking the test on student’s sense of what they know, how well they felt they were trained, and why they did not learn more. We found that the test revealed their lack of knowledge and understanding of Aboriginal topics quite dramatically and increased their sense that they should have been better taught. Sadly, a small number reacted to the test by saying they did not want to learn more.

We did not find that the quality of contact students had with Aboriginal people was strongly predictive of performance. When we compared people with no contact with a grouping of those with people with occasional but significant and sustained engagement we did find a difference in performance. The weakness of the results is not surprising in light of the fact that many of the Aboriginal students who took this test did not do well on questions requiring critical historical and social scientific modes of thought. As we have discovered through our co-design analysis (Schaepli and Godlewska 2016 (Submitted)), this kind of knowledge is not easily acquired from brushing shoulders or even conversation.

We are only beginning to explore the role of family attitudes in influencing student knowledge acquisition about Aboriginal people and topics. Most student respondents reported that Aboriginal people and topics had never come up in family conversations. Those student performed significantly less well on the test.

The qualitative analysis is focused on two principal questions: one before the test: name “the three most important things you know about Aboriginal peoples” and the second, the last question on the survey, “In your view, is this test a valid measure of your knowledge about Aboriginal people(s)?” Both questions were designed to allow the students to express themselves in an unfettered way.

Unfortunately many of the students who named the three most important things they know about Aboriginal peoples responded with prejudicial observations, stereotypes and in language that suggested difficulty in finding words to express the specificity and diversity of Aboriginal

peoples in Canada. There is a clear correlation between better performance on the test and more positive responses to Aboriginal people, suggesting that knowledge can counter prejudice. Despite a very low average score on the test, most (78.8%) considered it a valid measure of their knowledge. For those who considered the test a good measure of their knowledge it was for the quality of the questions it asked, because the test made clear what they did not know, because the topics it covered were important, and/or because it pointed to the complexity of issues in Canadian/Indigenous relations. Dissatisfaction with the test revolved around its digression from the curriculum (an essential and intended element of the questionnaire), the specificity of the questions, the emphasis on historical continuity, and what some from away considered an undue focus on Newfoundland and Labrador. Finally some student who identified as Aboriginal felt it did not focus on their experience and knowledge of their own communities.

Recommendations

There is no question that the knowledge and understanding of Aboriginal people and topics is inadequate in students coming out of secondary education in Newfoundland and Labrador. The Ministry of Education must continue to work to improve this situation through curricular and text redesign. But the university has an important role to play. Pre-service education for teachers should include rigorous and community-driven reform with some required courses on the contemporary realities facing Aboriginal people in the province that have historical and legal depth and that build awareness in future teachers of where Aboriginal people(s) are and the impact their presence and their contexts. Above all, future teachers should leave their training at Memorial aware of the resources – human and otherwise - available to them to continue to learn about Aboriginal topics. And they must understand that this learning will be life-long and may not always be comfortable. It is important that the rest of the student body also receive further education. We hesitate to call for a mandated course for the backlash this may cause. But the university needs to signal clearly to faculty that they need to integrate Indigenous content and, where appropriate, methodologies into their teaching. Working with the Aboriginal Advisor to the President on Aboriginal Affairs, the Aboriginal Resource Office, and the remarkable faculty and students we consulted in our co-design process, the university could set aside a fund and the expertise to help encourage professors to make such changes. The focus will need to be on all disciplines: sciences, applied sciences, social sciences, humanities, nursing, and many more. A small amount of incentive money combined with clear direction from the university could make a huge difference. Student Life has a powerful role to play by intentionally integrating Aboriginal perspectives and content into all of its programs including career advising, leadership development and service learning; and by ensuring the student learning support programs are sensitive to the realities of Aboriginal students on the MUN campus. . Including the Awareness Survey in Welcome Week this year will be a powerful statement in itself.

The Future of the Awareness Project at Memorial

The Awareness Project is schedule to review universities in British Columbia in 2017 and in Quebec in 2018. We have committed to return to Memorial this fall (2016) to conduct another first-year survey and a fourth-year survey in three different venues: online for Grenfell campus, as part of the St. John's Welcome Week, and in first-year and fourth year classes at the St. John's campus. Coming to Memorial in September/October is expensive, time consuming and disruptive of our responsibilities at home and elsewhere in the Awareness Project. But Memorial has asked us to do this and we are convinced that making effective change involves ongoing commitment. We are happy to do it.

Acknowledgements

With heartfelt thanks to the St. John's Native Friendship Centre; Newfoundland Aboriginal Women's Network; the Nunatsiavut Government; the NunatuKavut Government; Miawpukek First Nation; the Labrador Institute; Clarence and Kanani Davis of Sheshatsiu; Tom Brophy, formerly Director of Student Success Programs, Memorial University, now Associate Vice-President (Student Services and Enrolment Management) and University Registrar at Brandon, Manitoba; Cecilia Reynolds, Deputy Provost (Students) & Associate Vice-President (Academic), Undergraduate; staff, students, and faculty at Memorial University; and most especially Sheila Freake, Manager of the Aboriginal Resource Centre at Memorial.

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