Transforming pedagogies: pre-service reflections on learning and teaching in an Indigenous world

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Through personal narratives, pre-service teachers recount their experiences from a course based in Indigenous pedagogy within the Faculty of Education at the University of Victoria. These narratives were drawn from the assigned daily reflection journals of pre-service teachers. They highlight how their personal understandings of teaching and learning were transformed. In the context of a Lekwungen and Liekwelthout pole carving course, they developed a deep understanding of the Indigenous concepts of Celhcelh—the development of a sense of responsibility for personal learning within the context of a learning community; Kat’il’a—the act of becoming still—slowing down, despite an ingrained and urgent need to know and desire for busy-ness; Cwelelep—the discomfort and value of being in a place of dissonance, uncertainty and anticipation; and Kamucwkalha—the energy current that indicates the emergence of a communal sense of purpose. The writers share their personal reflections of these concepts and how they affected their views of teaching and learning.

Public schools in Canada have an increasingly diverse student body that requires pre-service teachers to learn how to teach amidst a variety of cultures. This complex task involves mediating learning through the understanding of different personal perspectives, epistemologies and learning styles. Toward this aim, there is a frequent call for teacher educators to think differently about how pre-service teachers learn their profession. Academic frameworks for teacher education programs often focus on knowledge transmission—using a non-dialogic model that defines teachers as experts and students as passive recipients of static information (Britzman et al., 1997). This course is an example of a dialogic approach in which pre-service teachers had an opportunity to engage in teaching and learning from an Indigenous perspective. This encounter was fundamentally different from their previous educational experiences.

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Please note that in this paper the terms Indigenous, Aboriginal and First Nations will be used. Indigenous is a term used throughout the world to refer to the original inhabitants of the land. Aboriginal is a Canadian constitutional term that refers to First Nations, Métis and Inuit. First Nations refer to those who are formerly known in Canada as Native Indian.

A strong need has been identified for educational reform within the context of Aboriginal pedagogy in Canada (Batisse & Henderson, 2000; Menzies et al., 2004). There is a sense of urgency for teacher education programs to provide pre-service teachers with concrete and practical experiences in Indigenous ways of teaching and learning.

The ongoing cycle of First Nations education must be changed. Transformation of schooling and education is not merely a set of strategies related to changing learners’ behavior, changing governance, and so forth. Political, economic, and social changes also need to occur in the wider community context. Transformation and how it is attained requires a critical and political understanding, and eventually commitment to act. (Menzies et al., 2004, p. 2)

A course in the teacher education program at the University of Victoria begins to address these concerns by illuminating the question of how people learn in the context of an Indigenous educational setting. Through this experience pre-service teachers have been able to think critically towards a transformed and transforming pedagogy that can lead to classroom action that will impact both Indigenous and Non-Indigenous students alike.

This paper tells the story of the personal changes that the authors, as teachers, experienced through participating in a course on Lekwungen and Liekwelthout pole carving. As Fabian Quocksister, our carver artist-in-residence, told us on the first day, it is a process of ‘weaving real life into the curriculum.’ This course asks us to think differently about how we proceed as teachers and teacher educators. The course was a chance for us to learn holistically—through our ideas, feelings and actions (Vella, 2002). We tell of our expanding awareness of how this holistic teaching and learning takes place, and how we became different teachers because of our involvement with it.

By telling our stories, we hope to shed light on the common themes we experienced through our various transformations. We have chosen the following salient themes to highlight: Celhcelh—the development of a sense of responsibility for personal learning within the context of a learning community; Kat’il’a—the act of becoming still—slowing down, despite an ingrained and urgent need to know and desire for busy-ness; Cwelelep—the discomfort and value of being in a place of dissonance and uncertainty; and Kamucwkalha—the energy current that indicates the emergence of a communal sense of purpose. These terms are from Lil’wat, Lorna’s ancestral language. It is spoken in the coastal and plateau regions of southern British Columbia, Canada.

The course was entitled ‘Thunderbird/Whale protection and welcoming pole: learning and teaching in an Indigenous world.’ It was a unique and timely educational experience in which 36 people had the opportunity to participate in the construction and installation of a Thunderbird/Whale house pole. Undergraduate
students, graduate students and faculty worked alongside an artist-in-residence and mentor carver/educator to witness, experience, carve, learn and position a Lekwungen and Liekwelthout pole in the lobby of the MacLaurin Building which houses the Faculty of Education. As a learning community we engaged in hearing the traditional stories and songs associated with the pole and artists. The semester-long course integrated hands-on practical activities with theoretical and academic goals. Students experienced the principles of traditional Indigenous ways of teaching and learning including: mentorship and apprenticeship learning; learning by doing; learning by deeply observing; learning through listening, telling stories and singing songs; learning in a community; and learning by sharing and providing service to the community.

The course was divided into five student project groups—film, print, web site, ceremonies and education. The authors of this paper formed the print group. Four of the teachers whose stories we tell—Laura, Robyn, Yvonne and Jill—are in the final year of their pre-service program. Michele is a doctoral student, and could be described as being pre-service in her future direction as a teacher educator. Lorna holds a Canada Research Chair in Indigenous Knowledge and Learning, and is the lead mentor of the class in which the rest of us are enrolled. As a subset of the course student body, it was our task to document the making of the pole in print format. The stories we tell here have come from that circuitous, emergent, sometimes uncomfortable and rewarding journey. This paper is an unusual composition of scholarly writing and personal prose from our individual field notes, journals and class assignments. The latter source of writing is set as indented quotations and the individual author is identified at the end of each passage.

The process of carving started with introducing ourselves to the pole. On the first day of the course, Butch Dick, our mentor carver/teacher, introduced us to the ‘Old Man,’ and we took turns going up and greeting the ancient log. Our gestures were as varied as the number of people in the class. Some of us knelt and whispered to the pole, others gave it a friendly pat, while a few stretched their arms as far around the 285-year-old body as was possible, and hugged. We then introduced ourselves to our classmates with a few words, thoughts or tears.

It’s hard to remember how the Old Man looked, a log that lay in the hot August sun, before it was introduced to the class of carvers, before it was transported into the gallery where he now lies, before his form began to take shape. But, it’s not hard to remember how I first felt beside the log. It was early September, when the sun was still hot and the grass still warm under our feet. When I greeted the Old Man, his presence overwhelmed me—and somehow grabbed a hold of my emotions. I felt exposed and so vulnerable amongst a group of strangers and so surprised. How could a log do this? But, I have learned since then not to be surprised or shocked by the unpredictable, not to be so afraid of it. And so it went—the beginning of my transformation as a learner and teacher. (Jill)

Celhcelh—finding our own way

After introducing ourselves to the pole, we spent time getting into groups where we began to gain a sense of collective direction. It was up to each student to decide where
they would place themselves. Lorna instructed us to look around as we made our choice and to be aware of the whole group, but other than that, we were on our own. Faculty members were pre-assigned to specific topics by expertise—and graduate students were asked to divide between the groups so that they could take on facilitation roles as needed.

The very first day of this class I felt an energy present that was different from any I’d felt in a class before. We started off in a circle, facing each other. We discussed what we would be doing in the class, but not the ultimate goal (aside from the completion of the protection pole). We were introduced to our instructors and immediately, as we saw their wisdom and knowledge, we respected them. There was no outline, no list of things to get done, no break down of mini assignments and projects. It was scary, and it would be a while until I would see that it was actually liberation. To me, this was a completely new approach to learning and teaching. As a teacher, I can’t help but to be challenged to develop an understanding of this approach, especially as it has transformed my own opinions and perspectives. The lack of rules calls me to draw from the knowledge within myself and to build on it. (Laura)

Within a relatively short period of time, we had placed ourselves into the small groups. The sensation of not knowing our direction persisted however. This state of uncertainty was disconcerting. In the print group, we spent a lot of time talking about what we should do, and feeling like we were not getting much done. This concern was put to the back of our collective mind when we took our turn as carvers during the second week of the course. We immersed ourselves in learning about the tools and techniques of carving.

The third week, Lorna joined our group meeting and gave us some guidelines by telling us that the goal of all the groups was to educate the public on the question: What is really important about this experience? This inspired us to create a list of ideas that we could start to write about. We focused primarily on the transmission of factual information about the history of the pole, the carving tools, biographies of the carvers and a bulletin board to inform people who passed by the project about what was happening. Our personal writing that described our pedagogical changes was not to come until later, as our confidence increased. We wrote about the topics on our list, despite the continuation of an underlying sense of frustration over not knowing where we were headed.

I was drawn to the print group because I have been doing a lot of writing and wanted to write in the context of a more holistic educational experience. When we started forming groups, I was torn because I also wanted to be part of the ceremony group—somehow it seemed like it would be more about real life to me. But I intuitively felt that my place was in the print group, so I stuck with it. I am surprised though at how sticky it is to write about the things we are doing. So far, it seems like we spend a lot of time spinning our wheels … I just have to wait and see what happens I guess. (Michele)

We hadn’t articulated it yet, but we had a sense that we were still not getting to Lorna’s question of what was really important. We asked Butch to visit our group in the hopes that he would guide us. This was not as effective as we had anticipated! Butch, in his typically calm and careful way, listened to our questions and concerns.
He told us stories about the Thunderbird, and about pole carving. But he didn’t tell us what we wanted to hear—how to proceed or what to think.

My education has been spoon fed to me. From childhood, I have been told what to know, what to believe and how to act. When this class began, I opened my mouth to receive my spoonful of knowledge, yet I found no spoon. I found myself confused, not knowing what to do. I asked questions, because that is how I have always been told to find answers. Again, I found nothing. (Yvonne)

As new members of this learning community, we were looking for our teachers to intervene in a way that would guide or direct us. We were used to typical Western educational structures that encourage an over-dependence on the transmission of information and direction. It gradually dawned on us that this was not the intent of the instructors in this unusual course. We didn’t know how to find our own way, and yet that is exactly what we were expected to do. Our discomfort increased.

Rupert Ross, a Non-Indigenous Canadian Assistant Crown Attorney who is responsible for criminal prosecutions on over 20 remote Cree and Ojibway First Nations, writes eloquently on Indigenous ways from his Western viewpoint, and explains the First Nations’ ethic of non-interference. Parents and educators cannot “teach” their children in our sense of the word, by either words or demonstration. Instead, children must learn on their own by watching and emulating what they see’ (1992, p. 16). When adults or teachers interfere with student thinking, it can hinder independent and critical thought (Smith, 1990, p. 129). As students in this course, we were left to find our way over terrain that was very unfamiliar. We had to sort through for ourselves what made sense and what was important in the course.

Kat’iI’a—finding stillness amidst our busy-ness and need to know

Overlapping and complicating our difficulties with finding our own way as learners and teachers, was our Western tendency of keeping busy, fueled by a driving need to know. The roots of this tendency are steeped in our cultural obsession with efficiency (Stein, 2001), and the effects permeate education, causing teachers to often overemphasize a transmissive approach.

I began this class as an individual shaped by western society. As a university student and student teacher, my life was dominated by schedules, timetables, due dates, and curriculum. We are taught that if we do not cover a wide expanse of curriculum in a short amount of time we are in danger of falling into the pit of failure. Once we fall behind we might never recover. Appointments, due dates and to-do lists determine success.

This type of environment has lead to a sense of urgency in all that I do. I have grown accustomed to a burning ‘need to know.’ When I have a question, I get an answer. Professors, teachers and parents have always answered my questions immediately, with a quick and sufficient answer. If posing the question to someone else is unsuccessful I have a mass of resources available to me that locate answers in seconds. Technology such as the Internet has made knowledge available at the click of a button.

It was the Thunderbird/Whale Protection Pole class that took my ‘need to know’ outlook and turned it upside down. When a question arose for me I would, as usual, take that
question to one of our class leaders. Instead of receiving my usual quick and perfunctory answer I often received a story. These stories were enthralling, but often circular, ending near the beginning and missing an obvious answer to my question. Often when a leader was finished, I would think to myself, ‘well that’s great, but where is my answer?’ I grew frustrated and discouraged when I was not handed the answer on a platter. The concept of waiting it out, watching and observing was completely foreign to me. I understood I was learning in a way of a different culture, but I still could not handle how different it was from my own. This led to mounting frustration towards myself. I was unable to comprehend my inability to adapt. I chastised myself for not being able to wait, slow down and just listen. All I was after was a quick fix, and that fact upset me. (Robyn)

The anxiety of not having the answers at our fingertips was apparent at our print group meetings. Gradually, as we became more comfortable with each other, we began to talk about how we were feeling. It was laborious work to share our concerns with each other. It was not something that we had done in other university courses. There was no model and we weren’t used to letting things unfold in their own time. As Robyn said, there was no quick fix. As we mucked about this unknown terrain, the pole was moved into the building. Through the efforts of many people, the shape of the Old Man was beginning to emerge. A new shape and direction for ourselves as learners and teachers was beginning to surface as well.

I sat one grey, drizzly day in late September, reading Rupert Ross. I was struck by a realization so intense I could feel my face burning. It was like I had been slapped—I was speechless. The reading described one woman’s explanation of how within Aboriginal culture, answers to questions are not necessarily obligatory and that an absence of answer merely means the floor is open or that it continues to belong to the questioner (Ross, 1996). This all made sense! A few nights previous, I had spent a great deal of energy to draw out answers to my endless questions from Butch our master carver; I remember his empty answers (or seemingly empty at the time, anyway.) I left that night feeling so confused and frustrated. Why didn’t he answer the questions? In learning the importance of indirectness and the importance of listening and waiting for the answers instead of demanding them, I finally gained some clarity.

This was a stumbling block for me—a good one. Its significance lies in the fact that it was as if everything I had ever learned about the importance of questioning was flipped over, spilling out in every direction—all the books I’ve read on ‘how to ask better questions’—all that teaching pedagogy! Most significant from all of this though, was the realization and recognition that the teaching practices I have learned over my own years of schooling—elementary, secondary and post-secondary—continue to reflect exclusionary values, beliefs and knowledge within the context of communication and learning in our school system. Of course I realize that the issue of questioning is just one of the many examples of the diverse principles of learning that I will face as a teacher. (Jill)

Cwelelep—being in a place of dissonance, uncertainty and anticipation

Jill’s ‘slap in the face’ was uncomfortable and unpleasant. We have all felt similar feelings at one point or another over the course of this class. With uncertainty there is sometimes a tendency to hold on to what is familiar. Cwelelep describes the state of feeling off balance and, with a heightening of the senses, realizing an anticipation of how the energy is moving forward into the unknown. Ignoring this occurrence by
staying stationary can lead to a fear of doing the wrong thing—of offending others, having the wrong answer, of being somehow at fault. Overcoming this fear is a critical step in moving forward in our growth as teachers working with students who come into our classrooms with their unique experiences and knowledge. The fear sometimes holds us back and begs to be examined.

of course, there’s always the fear of it and the fear in it. But isn’t everyone in some way or another, guilty of resisting to change? Sure, some call it fear. Some call it egocentric behavior and in various contexts, it can be labeled as ignorant or absolutist. Of course, within the context of this class, there are no ifs ands or buts; some will refer to it as just plain old, Eurocentrism. But let’s not get carried away with words. After all, Rupert Ross warns us that the English language has a tendency to apply labels that deny the complexity or wholeness of a situation or of a human being (1996). He argues that a significant difference between the English language and Aboriginal languages is this idea of ‘every person seen as a “thing-which-is becoming”, as opposed to a “thing-which-is”’ (Ross, 1996). This idea is powerful—it reinforces the whole topic of this paper—a transformational journey of learning to walk in another world of teaching and learning. But, I suppose on every journey there are roadblocks and stumbling moments that are marked in time forever.

Undoubtedly, it is challenging any time, when one ‘steps out of’ their culture and into another. It’s like you’re suddenly completely naked, without the weight of your own cloak of culture, wrapped around you. In these experiences, your sense of open-mindedness can dissolve easily into a dark cloud of doubt. The term coined by social psychologists to describe this feeling, ‘cognitive dissonance’ (Franzoi, 2003) highlights the immense challenge one faces when his or her knowledge or ideas about knowledge are challenged.

There’s no denying, when you’re unprepared for this, you experience a moment when it feels like you’ve stumbled, but a moment to learn from, nonetheless. (Jill)

The view that each student is a person who is becoming, gets close to the heart of our discomfort and fear. When we, as teachers, embrace the notion of students as complex, multi-dimensional beings that are constantly changing and becoming, we move a step closer to Fabian’s suggestion of weaving people’s real lives into the curriculum. Our fear comes from the loss of control and the uncertainty that this realization brings, and we feel naked and vulnerable. When this fear is overcome and we move forward with the process of Cwelelep, we can remove our cultural cloaks and begin to suspend our assumptions about others (Isaacs, 1999), opening a new space that allows students to continue on with the process of becoming who they are.

Butch warned us, early on in the course, that the Old Man would keep calling us—and he did. As we persisted with our desire to understand—returning again and again, despite our uncertainty, discomfort and fears—we began to deepen our appreciation of Indigenous pedagogy and this knowledge changed the way we proceeded in the class.

Over time I came to see that while questions would not be automatically answered, answers did exist. This Aboriginal approach to education suggested that finding them was my responsibility. I was suddenly, for the first time, responsible for my own learning in an educational setting. Upon this recognition, I closed my mouth and opened my eyes and ears. I took advantage of every opportunity to learn. I didn’t just watch, I observed. I didn’t just listen, I heard. I wanted to learn. I wanted to understand the purpose of all this—I wanted to understand what I was being told. The potential of discovery of the answers I sought, intrigued me. Motivated me. (Yvonne)
Kamucwkalha—an emerging energy of purpose

Somewhere about midway through the course, Lorna returned from being absent the previous week, and told the whole class that through our emails and other communications with her, she could tell that we had come to a very significant place in the process of the course, and that it was important to pay attention. She told us of the concept that the Lil’wat refer to as Kamucwkalha—when the energies of people in a group come together, and collectively everyone becomes clearly focused towards a common goal.

Kamucwkalha...That is what this class community has created. Or maybe it is always present and we just need the right tools to draw it out. I felt it from the beginning and the energy was so strong the night we all worked together to move the log from the cool outdoors into the warmer inside. How exceptional would it be to have our own individual classrooms focused on a common goal, excited about that goal and filled with energy related to that goal? By goal I mean a general love of learning. Students excited to learn, involved in their own learning processes. How do we get there? What is it that is present in this class that has been missing in so many classes at this university? Whatever it is—is it missing from the classrooms of elementary students too? I have a suspicion that it may be. There is community here in this class. We share our ideas, we discuss, and we embrace the thoughts and ideas of others. We have been respected by those who have trusted us to take this challenge and present it in new ways to those both within and outside the class, and in return, we respect others. (Laura)

We felt this sense of Kamucwkalha—of things coming together—with the whole class and within the print group as well. When we weren’t carving, we began to brainstorm for this paper. The idea of trying to publish was daunting to some of us, but we felt that it was important to share this experience with others—to describe our thoughts and feelings about the transformations we were going through because of this opportunity to carve a pole. The shift of focus within our small group reflected the overall change that the whole class was noticing.

The fact that the class is divided into project groups has created a class so strong, and so believable that we have developed an incredible sense of community. By giving the students a choice of what they would like to work on, leaders create students that truly believe in their own project, and therefore are willing to work harder to achieve success. Even though we each have our own special project, we are all working towards one common goal. (Robyn)

The common goal of the class at large was to carve a pole and to share the experience with others through a web site, fieldtrips for local primary students, a video, an information bulletin board, community ceremonies and academic papers. We have done all that, and more. But there was a subtle change that took place—seeping in between the cracks and connections of our expanding relationships—that affected us all. We became an active and connected community of practice. Through our mutual engagement in the joint enterprise of pole carving, with our shared repertoire of tools, stories and actions, we were growing into a community with the ability towards ‘real transformation—the kind that has effects on people’s lives’ (Wenger, 1998, p. 85).
People are saying goodbye for the night and Lorna is sweeping. Fabian is tidying up too, putting the tools away. It is quieting down. There is something underneath all this activity that is important. Something that I want to listen to … as I contemplate the growing silence, I realize that this place feels like home. Sweeping, hollering goodbyes, the last buzz of a power tool, a promise we'll talk next time … It feels like someone’s kitchen. Lorna is now brushing behind the Old Man’s knees. Fabian jokes about the Old Man’s bath, and has to convince Lorna into giving up the broom so they can lock up, ‘you should just give it to me,’ he says, ‘or you’ll keep seeing more to sweep!’

… Now it is very quiet. The Old Man is covered for the night. Everyone is gone but me—and a few voices down the hall. It is so surprising that I feel a sense of home in this place we call the MacLaurin Building. I look up and imagine the weaving project that Lorna has envisioned for another time, perhaps another course …

Home—a past, being present, and plans for the future—a tender balance. But, whose kitchen is this? Lorna invited us here. Butch guides us. Fabian instructs us. The university hosts us. We all take turns sweeping, carving, and creating. I guess this space belongs to us all. We have created a community—thanks to the arrival of the Old Man. I love this idea of Kamucwkalha. I see us all bowing towards the Old Man—focusing in and drawing strength. Then being able to create. We do it together. Lorna was saying that this comes from a tradition of depending on each other. How did we lose that? How did that morph into what we are now—always competing with each other? Kamucwkalha—what a sensible thing. (Michele)

Conclusion

As a learning community, we have been weaving real life into the curriculum. And the experience has changed each of us in ways that are deep and, we expect, long lasting. At one of our first meetings, Lorna spoke of the ‘longing of the Western world’ to better understand the fundamental commonalities that are shared with Indigenous peoples. She suggested that the best way to learn about them is to live them. We have taken this action learning to heart and it has significantly changed our understanding of teaching and learning.

I chose to enrol in the Thunderbird/Whale Protection Pole class not quite knowing exactly how the class was going to run and exactly what it entailed. What I received from this class is something that I can only call a gift—a gift to me as a person, a student, a teacher, and a spirit … Slowly, this class was able to transform me. By bearing with it, just sitting and listening, I was able to finally come to the understanding that I was responsible for my own learning. No one was going to hand it to me in a neat little box. I would get from the course what I myself would pull out and take with me. Those stories I was told all had meaning. Each one was a nugget of lesson that I could choose to take or not to take. Slowly I was able to understand. Up until this class, schedules, grades, and curriculum were my life. Slowly, but surely, this class has taught me that life is first. As a classmate eloquently remarked amid a discussion, ‘Life is the curriculum.’ As an educator, I want to teach my students to be caring, responsible, and capable students, not make sure they can recall the first Prime Minister of Canada. That material is important, but when compared with how you treat others, and how you live, it is inconsequential. This class taught me how to slow down. This class taught me how to take charge of my own learning. This class taught me that there are many different ways of learning, and some of them hold more meaning than others. It is the meaning in the lesson or the class that draws the student. If they care about
the material or the project, they will truly learn—perhaps not about the material, but about life itself. (Robyn)

We weren’t handed a neat and tidy curriculum when we began this course. We were given a chance to actively participate in an Indigenous way of learning and teaching. By paying attention to ourselves, and those around us, we experienced firsthand how people learn, in a setting different than those prescribed by a Western approach. We feel honoured and ready to bring this knowledge with us into our own teaching practice.

Really there is no ‘there’, it is continuous, a circle. That is something that has come to me during the course of this class. There are questions that will never have answers, things that won’t get done, and things that will get done. But if you are open to the process and do your best, it will work out. Give things time. Don’t rush. Find some balance … How will this change my approach to teaching? Find balance, slow down. Focus on creating a strong community within my classroom. Get everyone on board, with the common goal in sight! Let the process guide the learning—not necessarily the curriculum goal—this will be difficult, we do have curricular responsibilities, but it’s worth the effort. (Laura)

As teachers who want to keep this circuitous and active way of learning and teaching alive in our own classrooms, we are now finding our own way. We still have questions unanswered, and fears of the unknown. Our over-busy lives leave us open to impatience. Yet, some of our questions have been answered—and our confidence is growing. From our experience in this course we don’t take away a neat little package labeled ‘how to teach.’ Instead, through reflection on our own experiences, we carry with us a deeper understanding of how people learn. We begin to reap the benefits of finding our own way, and we are committed to sharing this transformative knowledge with others—our students, colleagues and administrators.

Sometimes I walked away feeling full of new knowledge, but not knowing exactly what I had learned. I struggled to put it into words, as I do now. However, I will do my best to articulate my learning. I believe that I have learned that our western way of forcing understanding upon a student may work to destroy meaning and kill motivation. I believe that this approach to learning will only result in a superficial understanding of a concept, and may result in the student walking away with nothing. However, presenting a concept and letting the student approach it on their own will give the learner responsibility of their learning. Although it may be a slower process than we are used to in our fast-paced society, the student will be more likely to seek out opportunities to discover answers for what they want to learn with more passion and enthusiasm than seeking out answers for what we want them to learn. This is a concept taught in university classrooms, but has had very little meaning for me until now. (Yvonne)

At the end of the course, we held a celebration to acknowledge the work that had been done by all the students in the class. There was food, drumming and speeches. Butch’s older brother, Skip Dick, came up to one of us after we had been introduced to the crowd. Patting his hand over his heart, he said: ‘Be sure you always speak and write from here.’ We trust we have been true to his request and that this paper will give you a glimpse into what we have taken away from this extraordinary experience.
For weeks now, I have peered over the railing of the Wilfred Johns Gallery to look at the Old Man. I've watched his body take shape—his limbs, chest and shoulders emerging from the cedar. Some mornings, I stand watching from above—quiet and careful not to disturb the rhythmic cuts and chopping sounds below me. I watch the red cedar shavings fall around the Old Man and observe the process that reveals his shape, his form, his being … Of course, my own transformation isn't nearly as easily observable or defined as the transformation of the Old Man. The log’s deep and deliberate cuts reveal such a clear sense of the Old Man, whereas I'm just beginning to scratch the surface of my own transformation … It’s okay. I've got time … I once read somewhere, ‘When you are near a lake you can only see the surface and often ignore the whole world that exists beneath. Formal education deals only with the surface, whereas Indigenous learning includes much more depth and wisdom.’ I suppose that for a learner like myself, beginning this journey has allowed me to understand my role as a learner and teacher who is ‘becoming,’ rather than one who has ‘become.’ And so it goes—the continuing transformation of the Old Man and I. (Jill)

References
