

Honoring What They Say: An Open Letter

Dear colleagues and friends,

We are happy to share our research process, experiences, and recommendations with you in this special edition of the *Canadian Journal of Native Education*.

In carrying out our tasks over the past several years as we completed our research, our experiences seemed to us to have been like learning about a great forest. In order to understand the forest, we had to journey through it. On the journey we identified particular bearings, which established new trails and which marked existing ones. On the journey we learned about each tree and its surrounding undergrowth. By the end of the journey we had mapped as much detail about the whole forest and about each tree as we could.

This research report, "Honoring What They Say: The Postsecondary Experiences of First Nations Graduates," is our map, respectfully re-presented for anyone who wishes to travel in our territories or to prepare a map of their own lands.

As you travel through our report, you may sometimes feel overwhelmed by the complexity of the forest. We who have mapped it feel that there are places of surprising beauty and power within. Just as our ancestors sought knowledge and understanding from interacting with the land, so we too sought knowledge and understanding from the people who have lived in the world of postsecondary education.

We raise our hands in thanks and respect to all those who participated in this research project, including the graduate research assistants and a number of staff at the First Nations House of Learning and the Native Education Centre. The participation of the NEC was made possible by the much appreciated commitment and dedication of the board members of its parent organization, the Urban Native Indian Education Society. We thank as well the Ministry of Advanced Education, Training and Technology, Aboriginal Programs (now the Ministry of Skills, Training and Labor, Aboriginal Programs) who generously supported the project.

We acknowledge with gratitude the Musqueam people whose Ancestors' spirits and teachings pervade their traditional lands, on which UBC and the First Nations House of Learning now stand.

Most important, though, is the contribution made by the many graduates, who willingly filled in questionnaires, participated in focus groups, spoke with us, and showed great commitment to the research. Without them this report would have been impossible to write. They "spoke from the heart" to us—we hope that we have re-presented their words in the ways they intended.

We hope that our map, and the forest it represents, will help to nourish and sustain future generations of postsecondary students. Throughout our work we were guided by the principles expressed so cogently by the late Chief Dan George of the Squamish Nation:

Have I done all to keep the air fresh?
Have I cared enough about the water?
Have I left the eagle to soar in freedom?

We offer our work as a humble contribution to the effort of improving postsecondary education for First Nations peoples.

Love and respect to you all, and a good journey,

*Jo-ann Archibald
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Editors*