On Grizzlies and Gratitude: Nuxalk College Reflection

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The effects of colonialism on the Indigenous Peoples of Canada are visible through many facets of day to day lives, but they are particularly evident in the field of education (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996; Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015). Daniel Korpal and Anne Wong (2015) point out how strongly Western practices of pedagogy have failed the Indigenous Peoples of Canada. Yvonne Pratt and Patricia Danyluk (2017) reinforce the dominance of these Western pedagogical practices and the absence of Indigenous knowledge in educational curriculum. In contrast, this short memoir On Grizzlies and Gratitude: Nuxalk College Reflection *shows that post-secondary pedagogy can set itself apart from Western themes and, instead, incorporate Indigenous knowledge to promote community healing. This reflective story is about teaching an Indigenous literature course in the rural community of Bella Coola, British Columbia. The Indigenous traditional knowledge held by the students in this course positively impacted their educational experience and yearning to succeed in the community. However, the observations of continued colonial impact speak to a deep need for future changes in pedagogy to address decolonization and Indigeneity. This educational moment in one Indigenous community suggests the dynamic and reciprocal possibilities inherent in such transformative learning environments. This anecdote suggests the pedagogical value of faculty self-reflection, highlights the importance of observation, and encourages openness to new narrative forms by presenting the notion of the classroom as ceremony and the faculty as witness.*

Context

My name is Michelle La Flamme. My Indigenous roots are Métis (mom) and Muscogee/Creek (dad), and I grew up in unceded Coast Salish territory. I am a grandmother and an educator who believes in the use of theatre for social justice. I have been teaching courses in English departments, theatre departments, and in Indigenous studies for decades at the University of British Columbia (UBC), Simon Fraser University (SFU), and the University of the Fraser Valley (UFV). I occasionally get a unique chance to be seconded to teach in Indigenous communities. Living and working in two worlds—that of the university and Indigenous communities—has given me a perspective on how I teach literature and it has also taught me to be humble about what I may learn from students. This reflective article is a snapshot of one experience that transformed me. It began as a reflective journal entry for me alone. Afterwards, I sent the original version to the students and the Nuxalk College located in Bella Coola, British Columbia. Then, I was asked by our Dean to develop it for the other faculty who would be flown in after me to teach in this community. This piece lay dormant for months until I was asked by senior management at UFV to revise this document, to be part of the pilot project final report. Now, I have returned to this anecdote and developed it into something that I hope will be of value to a larger community of educators. I have shared the evolution of this article with my two undergraduate work-study students. My student research assistant, Taylor Breckles, has had the experience of learning about publishing and responding to editor's comments. I am grateful for her assistance in getting this recent iteration to press. My other student assistant, Emily Warwick, must be acknowledged for crafting the first draft of the abstract so her voice should be noted here, too.

Purpose

I am speaking about this article's journey to account for the progression of ideas that came to me and the different audiences that this writing has served. Strategically, it was not going to be an article buried in education theory or a masking of my own personal voice with the "objective" view of the academic outsider. However, as we know, such reflective pieces can be dismissed as anecdotal and biased by academic journals in this discipline. My purpose in writing this article was to reflect on the teaching experience, and consider the impact that the setting had on the course content and on me as an educator and Indigenous woman. I have strategically chosen to not substantiate my own thinking with multiple citations or adopt the formal and abstract voice of an objective writer. I am not objective. I am deeply informed by my own body and my own Indigeneity, and I give myself permission to write in a voice that makes sense to me and with a tone that is in keeping with my original intention; that is, the voice of my unvarnished heart penning an informal reflection. It is the voice of someone who is learning and connecting with my own embodied experience in this educational setting. To my understanding, this anecdote suggests the importance of student-centred teaching, offers a hint at Indigenous cosmology, and advocates for the utility of applied learning in settings where there are multiple modes of teaching and learning. It is also implicitly a challenge to those of us who teach in English departments to Indigenize, to incorporate, and appreciate multiple forms of narrative, and to open ourselves to the ideas of literatures when we teach literature classes.

Reflection

In October of 2016, I was flown on a tiny little plane through a breathtaking series of mountains framed by uncompromising glaciers into the beautiful town of Bella Coola, which is in the traditional territory of the Nuxalk Nation. Bella Coola is a picturesque coastal town located in northern British Columbia. This region is one of the very few land areas of the central coast that is accessible by road, but visitors can also get there by plane. This remote community is a twelve-hour drive from Vancouver and an arduous five hours from the nearest city, Williams Lake. The Bella Coola townsite is at the virtual end of Highway 20. The Bella Coola region used to be a home for over 20 villages, but "[d]isease and changed conditions consequent upon the coming of the white man have so reduced their numbers that the last two groups of settlements have been virtually abandoned, while only one village remains in the Bella Coola valley" (McIlwraith, 1992, p. xxxix). Not only is this community remote, but it is small as well due to its tragic colonial past.

Despite this undeniable remoteness, this small community has two claims to fame in Canadian history books. The first came from the fact that it is the location wherein Alexander Mackenzie completed the first cross-Canada trek on July 22, 1793. This trek was the first recorded European crossing of continental North America and Mackenzie's journal, describing his interactions in this setting, was published in 1802. It deserves to be noted, however, that the presence of Nuxalk people in this territory dates back 13,000 years according to some local experts and is supported by the presence of petroglyphs in the region. The second claim to fame is the presence of The Great Bear Rainforest, which helps to comprise the largest coastal temperate rainforest in the world. More information on the importance of this rainforest can be found on The Nature Conservancy's website.[1] This region gained media attention when the British royalty began to acknowledge its beauty and set about protective measures. On September 26, 2016, Prince William and the Duchess of Cambridge visited the neighbouring community of Bella Bella and have declared that The Great Bear Rainforest is to be protected through the Queen's conservation program. The Heiltsuk First Nation hosted the Royals in Bella Bella and this event also brought media attention to this area. I had known a few folks from this region but I had never been there, so I was keen to say "yes" to the opportunity to teach in this territory.

Even though I did not yet fully understand the impact that this community would have on me, as the plane descended I realized that the sights and sounds here would certainly be different from my urban reality in

Vancouver (see Figure 1). With an open mind and heart, I shunted my suitcase full of books to my hotel. I knew I was teaching Indigenous literature to students who had finished a CHAD (Chemical Healing and Addictions Certificate) at the Nicola Valley Institute of Technology (NVIT). I did not know if they would enjoy analyzing literature, but I did know that the material would lead to some very engaging discussions. I had modified my course to dovetail nicely with their previous learning. For instance, instead of just discussing Tomson Highway's comedic use of bingo in *The Rez Sisters*, we would be drilling down to think about bingo in terms of addictions and I anticipated that we would be analyzing the symbolism and themes in this play with a lens informed by their program of study.

When taking these photos, I noted the bear on the tail of the plane and filed this thought for later reflection (see Figure 2). What I did not prepare for was my own learning in the new community setting. The students taught me and I will share a few examples in this article, in hopes that other educators may also consider the specifics of the communities they are teaching in and remember to humble themselves before day one and be open to the teaching that the community can and always does bring to the table.

There is a running oral narrative of local knowledge in which much is shared and known. In small communities, these oral methods enhance overall community awareness and so are important to the people and local

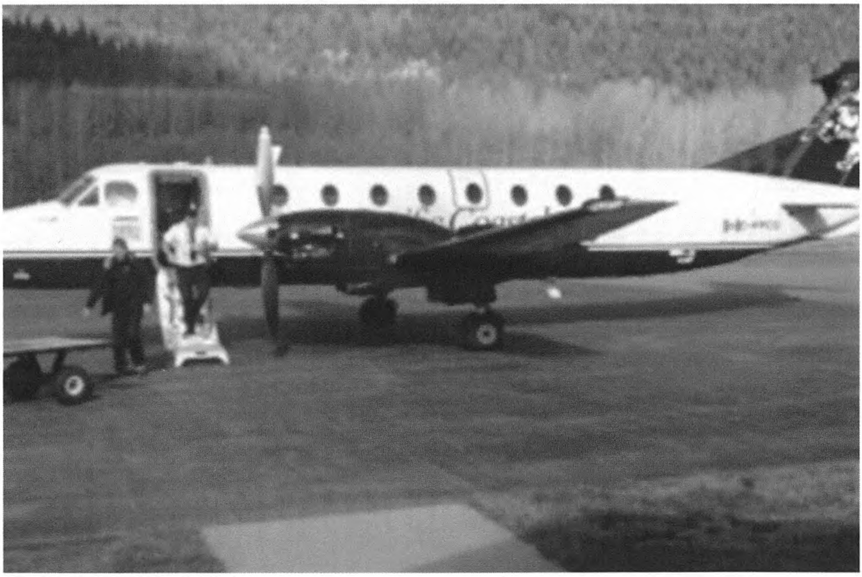

Figure 1. Landing at the airport, Bella Coola.

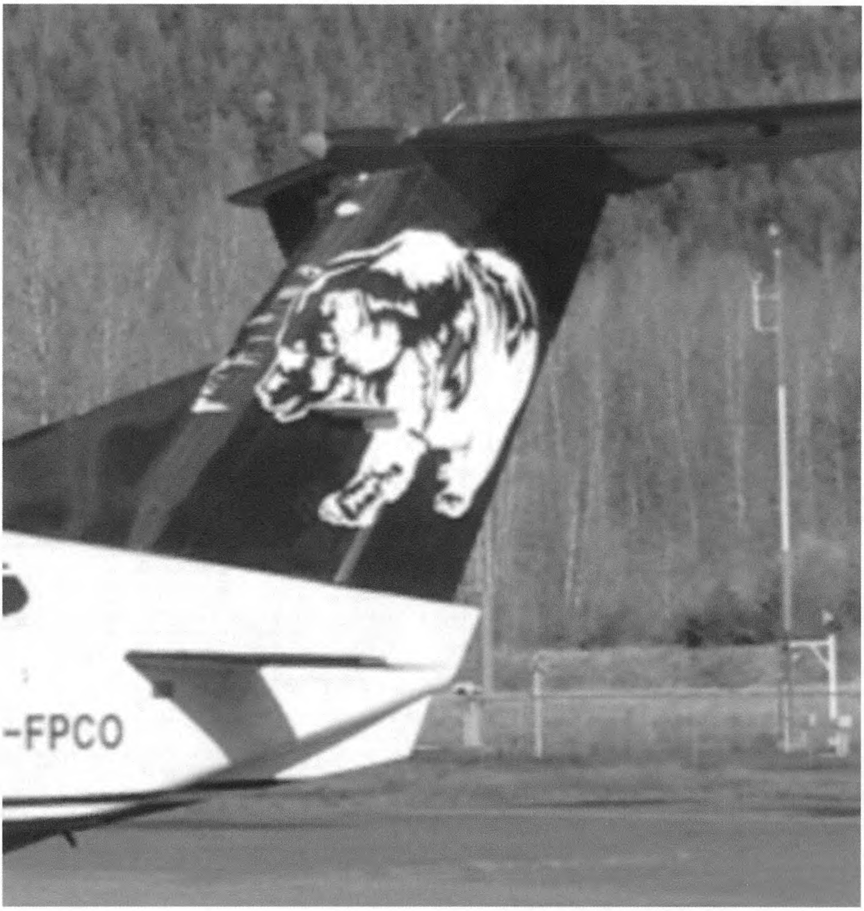

Figure 2. The Grizzly detail of the plane.

culture, and particularly important for newcomers. One such narrative in Bella Coola involves bears. Within a day after my arrival, I saw two sets of bears and heard four anecdotal tales of a grizzly that had been eating, roaming, and sleeping near my motel. "Oh, yeah, she has been seen close by." "Eating the fallen fruit before hibernation." "Sleeps in the flats down by the government dock." That close, I silently gasped! Hmmm...I wondered if she might smell my cooking, so I tried to not use my stove fan at night and decided to wait on cooking bacon or leaving my fruit salad outside! "Um ... what does one do?" I asked tentatively, "I mean, if one encounters her?" "Well, we have a special prayer." Great, I thought to myself, with a wry grin, do I pray when she is gorging on my guts or before? Not knowing the prayer, I was quite ill at ease as I attempted to sleep that night.

The image on the plane and these local discussions of the resident and nomadic grizzlies began to percolate in my mind. Within a few days, I was walking out of my motel door when I noticed to my right, in my peripheral vision, several men at a construction site who were all standing on the top of a roof waving frantically. In my dazed morning slumber it struck me as odd but nothing registered. On top of the roof, all the workers ... different. Waving ... yes, they were waving ... strange way for a coffee break ... I mused. Then, within seconds, I heard the tap, tap, tapping of her claws rasping on the pavement just before she rounded the corner right in front of my motel as I was walking in the parking lot. I froze. Her wild eyes met mine and the cub scampered behind her, followed in hot pursuit by the conservation officer shouting at me, "Get back, I shot her with the tranq!" I arrived at class that day visibly shaken and clearly distressed. The students laughed or smiled, and I was told several oral stories about the grizzlies and regaled with anecdotal evidence from a student who watches grizzlies from a lookout as her summer job. I learned that in Nuxalk *nan* is the word for grizzly bear and *T'la* is the word for black bear. One student informed me that the bears here are understood to be sacred messengers and also relatives. In some parts of Canada, bear is consumed but I was told this was not so in Nuxalk territory, as the bears are treasured as kin. After my anxiety subsided and I considered various perspectives on the bear encounter, my thoughts changed from fear to delight that perhaps a very significant moment had been shared with the bear. "Does this happen often?" "What if I had bumped right into her?" I rattled away as I unpacked my books and prepared to start the class. They laughed. Finally a student chuckled and said plainly, "Well, we are in *their* territory." At this point, I started to revise my perspective on what had occurred and to more deeply consider the protocols of being a guest both in Nuxalk territory and in grizzly territory.

Besides this rather dramatic example of me clearly being a fish out of water, the classroom experience was also shaped and very influenced by the students and their realities in this territory. The course I was teaching was ENG 368, which is *Special Topics in Canadian Literature: Indigenous Drama.* I was very excited to teach this cohort and to see what kinds of insights they might bring to the texts at hand. The course requirements included some research, an annotated bibliography, journal reflections, some essay writing, a final exam, and a presentation. We would meet every day for seven hours and make sense of the plays and discuss the secondary sources that set the context for this exciting field of Indigenous theatre history in Canada. For example, we looked at the *Indian Act* and read the famous Laurier Memorial, which is a letter written by 12 Chiefs in the

Shuswap territory on the occasion of Prime Minister Wilfred Laurier coming to address the community in 1910. It is a powerful archival document that is the basis for the contemporary play *Ernestine Shuswap Gets Her Trout* by Tomson Highway. Some community members from the Nuxalk territory had family ties to Shuswap communities and this added a relevance to our analysis of the play in this region. One student had relatives from the very region that was represented in this work of fiction. For the final presentation, this student created a character that was her relative who had been present at the time and setting of the play. Of course, the Laurier Memorial also has resonance with regards to treaty rights. The significance of this play to the community and the experience of reading about characters "talking back" to colonialism was profound. One student was fascinated that Highway had used a document created by the Chiefs as the basis for his play which features women in the community making sense of these changes. Why didn't he write the play about the Chiefs or the white men making the changes? These discussions lead us into considering gender and how it is represented in most historical accounts. We all got chills when students volunteered to read the Laurier Memorial and literally brought the voices and empowering vision of these ancestral Chiefs into the room.

Because the impact of colonialism is condensed into a day in the play, and humour is used to represent the Indigenous view of these absurd and offensive changes to the characters' homeland, the play became an inroad to discussions of colonization and sovereignty. We had lively debates on the interracial love story that turns tragic at the climax of the play. Everyone has an opinion on endogamy and exogamy, and the analysis of the play allowed space for those views to surface. The idea that there is a ghostly presence of a cowboy hat throughout the play was mesmerizing, and no one needed to be an expert in theatre analysis to understand the signifying nature of this single prop. The play represented berry picking which gave us an inroad to discuss traditional medicines in the territory and mushroom picking.

As we read through the other works, we discussed concepts such as pan-Indigeneity, blood quantum and ideologies, the legal and colonial patterns of endogamy and exogamy in Canadian history, and the use of writing to counter stereotypes. We discussed the concept of using laughter for healing, as is evident in the famous play *The Rez Sisters* and the play by Drew Hayden Taylor called *Baby Blues*. We considered how Monique Mojica uses pan-Indigeneity, satire, and camp to unpack stereotypes of Indigenous women in her play *Princess Pocahontas and the Blue Spots*. By having these conversations about the plays, we were able to consider how these different playwrights represent Indigenous communities and healing. Students laughed at Margo Kane's depictions of the Indian Princess and Cowboy Dad in her play *Confessions of an Indian Cowboy*, and this play brought us into deep analysis of hybridity and contact zones and the frontier. While we analyzed the literature and met the course objectives, we were simultaneously gathering in a powerful way to heal from colonial violence. Literature and drama became the method to prompt this analysis and these discussions. How did these plays use fiction to navigate through topics such as domestic violence, racism, nepotism, intergenerational trauma, sisterhood, leadership, and suicide? These students were engaged with the material in ways that extended beyond the classroom and, because the topics affected all of our lives, the discussions were much more meaningful than in the sterile academic environment of a university campus.

The violence of the colonial encounter is felt deeply in this area and the land resonates with the experience. This violence has yet to end. After the visit by Prince William and the Duchess of Cambridge, for example, wherein the royals declared that the rainforest is to be protected, within days the coastal community was devastated by an oil spill from a tug going through these waters. Families are now unable to go clamming or support themselves through winter, and the long-range ecological damage is yet unknown. Clearly, the impact of colonization is still being felt in these areas.

Other waves of colonization occurred in this region as a result of the Gold Rush and timber extraction. There is still an old Norwegian settlement called Hagensburg in the upper part of the valley. This community began on October 30, 1894 with the arrival of 84 Norwegian-speaking settlers. They came to take up land grants of 160 acres on condition that it was cleared and a dwelling built. There was also a Hudson's Bay fur trading post at the mouth of the river, and this site was once considered as a possible location for the terminus of the Canadian Pacific railroad. Despite the fact that the Nuxalk community was decimated from over ten thousand to as few as two hundred members due to the European introduction of smallpox to the region, they are now beginning to heal and education is a critical part of community health and wellness.

Powerful examples of healing are evident throughout the community. These students taking this program, in order to affect change in terms of sobriety, is but one example of healing initiatives in the community. There is an active radio station beside the college that broadcasts in the Nuxalk language, and there are people taking up traditional foods and opening a restaurant by, for, and to the benefit of the community. There are also powerful physical reminders of protocols and healing initiatives that inspire the community. Near my motel was a totem pole and a plaque explaining its significance (see Figures 3 and 4). I will share it here as it was an important part of my own learning and my experience of narrative in this territory. The pole was designed and carved by Alvin Mack, who is an elder and teacher in Nuxalk territory. He also shared the story that is depicted on the plaque mounted beside the pole (see Figure 5).

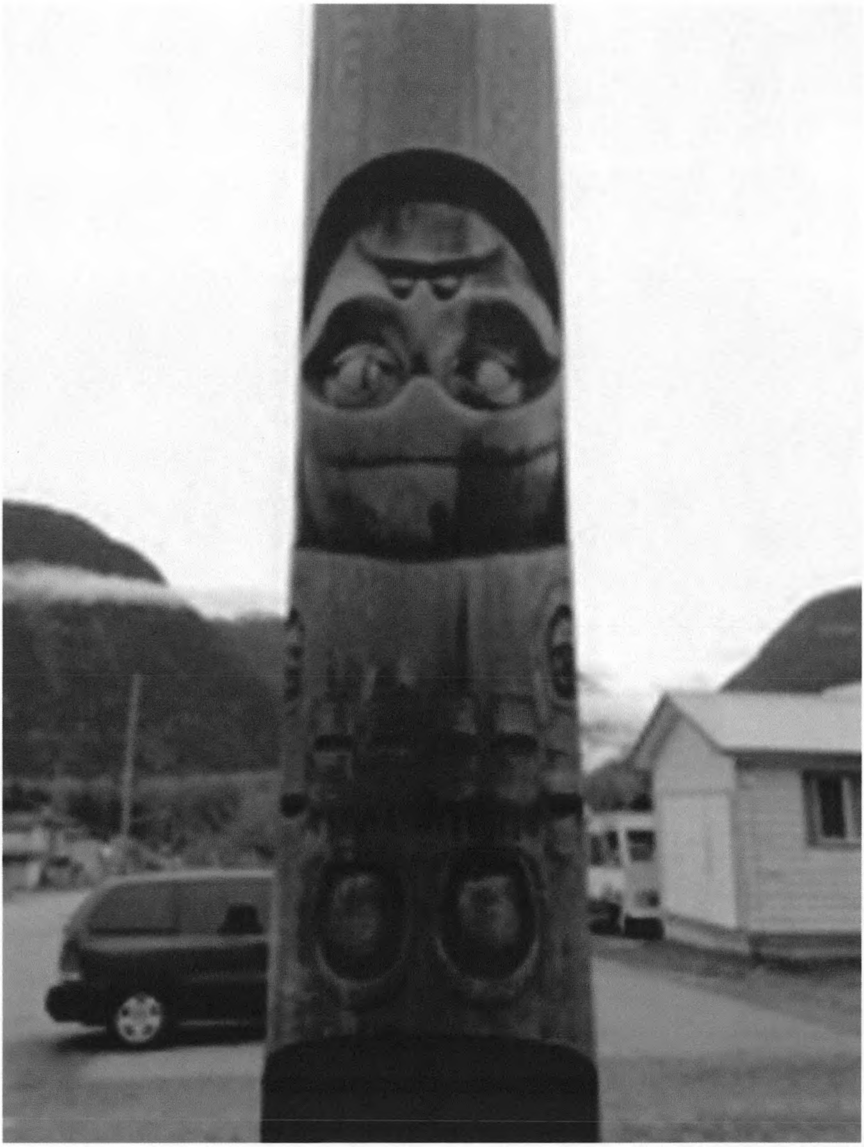

Figure 3. Totem Pole, Bella Coola.

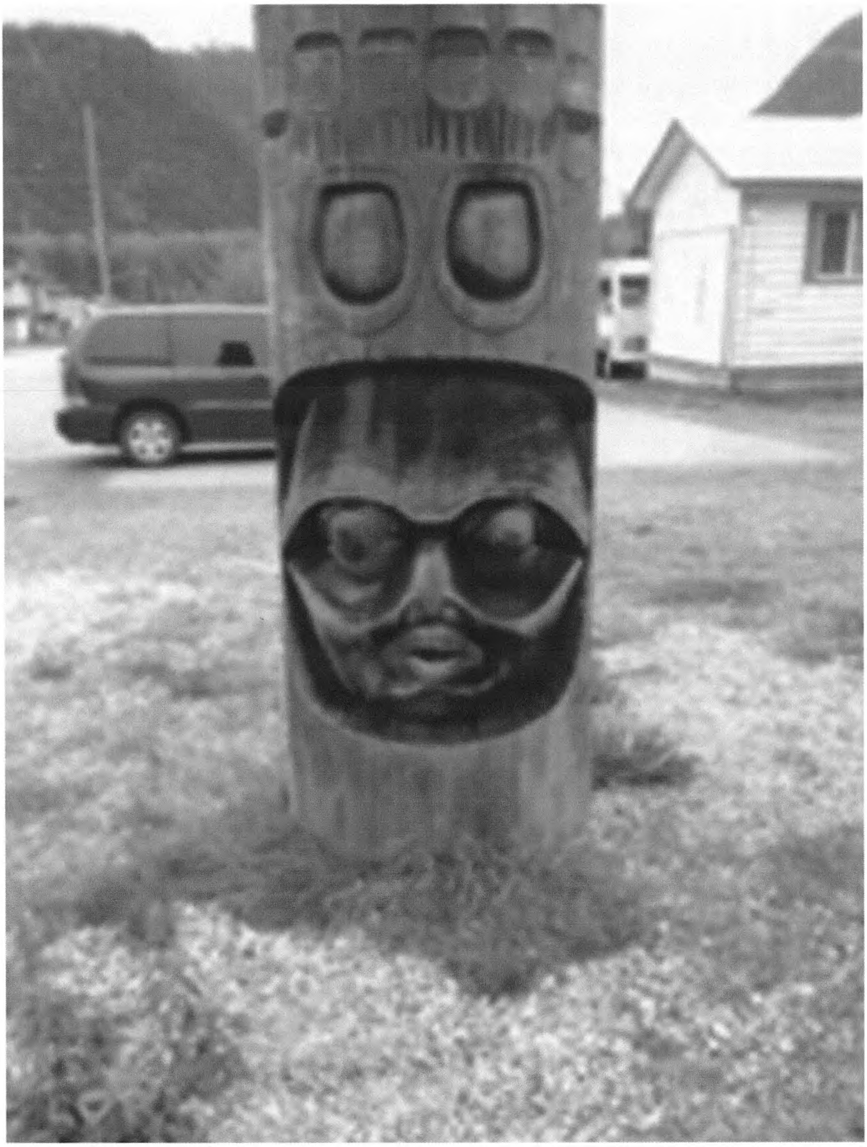

Figure 4. Details on pole.

The story of the pole is reflective of the experience of residential school survivors and their community and bears a striking similarity to the Nuxalk Creation Story. The mother sits at the base of the pole and above her are four children. Those right side up are the ones who managed to escape going to the schools, often accompanying their parents into areas the Indian agents could not reach ...The government couldn't assimilate the adults because their culture was so strong so they went after their children. These are the upside-down children who were taken away to the schools and forced to abandon their traditional way of life. Above the children is the figure who is upside down and without a mouth. This is to represent the turmoil of life without a voice, as residential schools tore apart families and left parents without the power to speak for their children. The blank space above the father represents ... a gigantic void. We used to live all together ... families in one longhouse. The schools were meant to take away the collective cultures by turning us into individuals and removing us from our communities ... in the middle of the pole is the sun ... the Creator sent us and this represents hope ... Above there is a half-man, half-eagle representing the transformation of the people as they reclaim their culture, language, songs and dances. The transformation is taking place through our healing and our reclamation of our culture ... (Residential School Survivor Pole, Bella Coola, Nuxalk Nation, see Figure 5)

Totem Pole Story

Figure 5. The plaque near the pole, Bella Coola.

In this territory, as in most Indigenous communities, stories are proprietary and different stories are owned by different families which they may, in turn, offer to another family. In this one example, a narrative of communal healing is public and evident. Respect for oral tradition, culture, and a holistic view on healing are evident in this community. The classroom becomes an extension of the healing that is already taking place. In my view, Indigenization is not something that a theorist or expert in Indigenous land claims brings to the territory. The classroom is necessarily always/already Indigenized because we are always/already guests in their territory. This is why I suggest we consider the classroom as a ceremony and the faculty member who has been flown in as the witness. This reminds the faculty member that there is something sacred about the circle they are joining. In many educational teaching contexts with Indigenous learners, we start with a check-in circle. In this case, we utilized the talking circle to great effect and we also had an elder in the classroom. Of course, in small communities everyone knows everyone, and there are deep connections and rifts between people. This is different from the rather anonymous cohort of students taught in most post-secondary institutions in other locations. Here, as in many small communities, most people in the class knew everyone else's backstory and families. This creates a lot of cohesion between the students and makes for very powerful learning opportunities. Rarely in my 25 years of teaching have I encountered such a dedicated group of learners who cared so deeply for each other's success.

The strong relationships forged in this community, however, could also be challenging to navigate from the perspective of an outsider. Research has shown that "every society has institutionalized particular forms of relationship that constrain relations between people"; furthermore, according to network theory, "any relationship must exist within a web of other relationships ... so that the focal relationship cannot be adequately understood without taking account of its position in this structure" (Duck, Lock, McCall, Fitzpatrick, & Coyne 1984, p. 2). While this web can be navigated more easily over time, I did not begin my journey in Bella Coola with the intimate, interpersonal knowledge that was shared by all of the residents, so some conversations were, rhetorically, more layered than I could realize at the time. For instance, there was palpable tension in the classroom as we addressed issues of culture, language, and authenticity as thematic concerns in our texts. Also, some students were reluctant to communicate on certain topics in this classroom because of these stronger and deeper ties to the community members in the room. Unlike the typical university classroom wherein people are often anonymous—these are folks who are meeting with relative freedom to chat about many topics—there is a complexity in small community settings of which educators must be mindful. The challenge for educators can then be to "[specify the] functions served by particular forms of relationship, and [identify] the personal and social consequences of their disruption, transformation or demise" (Duck et al., 1984, p. 3).

Despite the social complexities of teaching in small communities, the aforementioned dedication of the learners did encourage attendees to participate in this class. This eagerness was driven by a desire for the community to share in this learning experience. They also all knew that their own community was to benefit from the application of the learning that these individuals were gathering. There was a vested interest in everyone succeeding that you do not see in typical cohorts at university who often come from disparate community settings. This is the benefit of this model of delivery, which involves the faculty flying in to offer classes in the community.

While we were engaged in the discourse surrounding Indigenous drama, we were also engaging in dynamic ways with each other in the space. Every day, people brought food to share, and someone took care of the emotional and spiritual needs of the group. This is something that we do not encourage in conventional academic spaces. People in small Indigenous community settings have strong(er) ties to each other; they are more connected as community than students who enter the white cube of the classroom for a few hours in a given day. They are people who are together before, during, and long after the course has concluded. This type of cohort makes for deep, vested, and communal learning. Every person in this group was supported by others during difficult times. Yes, this is typical of the cohort model but the cohort model in an Indigenous community that is remote and that has faced genocidal conditions is all the more tight-knit, hopeful, and supportive of each student's success. The physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual well-being is considered beyond the obvious connection of student number and transcript alone.

Non-Indigenous cohorts in academic settings do not have cultural supports built in. Both NVIT and Nuxalk College heads were insistent on this facet of the learning model. When I worked for the Justice Institute, developing leadership programs for community delivery, we also ensured this model was utilized. Included in this group in Bella Coola was elder Harry Schooner, who shared his observations and also participated in the analysis of the poetry and plays when he was inspired to do so. He was initially going to come in for just for one class and be available on call. However, he was drawn to stay for several classes after engaging in the discussion on the *Indian Act*, getting his hands on a copy and witnessing everyone's eyes as we feasted on a thick anthology titled *Native Literature in Canada*. Students were only introduced to a few writers in this course but now they know there are many, many published writers whose work they can access. This anthology is but one of many anthologies available. They were all delighted and surprised to see that such a body of work exists, and many were inspired to continue reading more work by Indigenous writers. All of us were empowered to read work that is so deeply connected to our lived experiences. This was certainly a highlight and a central pedagogical objective of the course.

I made a few other adjustments to my course delivery to enhance the learning experience. At first, the students did not like the idea of presentations but when I framed it as something like sharing in a Longhouse or offering a teaching in a ceremony, they quickly made the link. "Come on," I urged, "we have a ten thousand plus year tradition of sharing in public, so think of this as sharing." Suddenly, the pressure of a classroom capital P "presentation" was softened and everyone had a good laugh. Laughter is one thing that is common in many Indigenous communities. At one point, we crammed into a tiny room and watched the NFB film *Redskins, Tricksters and Puppy Dog Stew* by Drew Hayden Taylor. It was healing and educational. I did not have to explain the jokes! We were all laughing together as Taylor travels the nation, and interviews local folks and comedians as he attempts to describe and define Indigenous humour. Puns, self-deprecating humour, physical humour, and political satire are some of the forms that are evident.

Another highlight for me was a moment during the last class when a student shared a haiku he had written. With his permission I share it here:

Grizzly Bears and Wolves

Oppressed by Mankind
We now roam your yard to live
We *All* will dissolve.

Jim Nelson (10/22/16)

This student was quiet, but had shared his love of literature early on in our opening circle. He was committed to continuing with his education and was also excited by poetry as a genre. The grizzly again returned to my analytical rubric.

Other highlights for me included a day of presentations and witnessing the eldest student performing a comic role based on one of the characters in the plays. Many elders had to suppress their impulse to be expressive in residential schools. The traumatic and tragic circumstances they faced before, during, and after residential school often hardened their capacity for laughter. The student shared with the class that her children were delighted to see her laughing while she was rehearsing at home. Lastly, there was the very special moment in class when I was honoured to receive an eagle feather from the youngest traditionalist in the class. He shared stories of the grizzly that had been passed on to him. His father and uncle were also students in this class, and they beamed proudly whenever he shared his language and traditional stories from this territory.

I facilitated learning through this intensive course with a cohort that had grown very close to each other before I even entered the space. They were learning about chemical healing and addictions in the CHAD program at NVIT. They had been dedicated to healing and post-secondary learning for three years, and went on to complete their academic coursework through the University of the Fraser Valley (UFV) so that they could graduate with a Bachelor of General Studies (BGS). Their coursework transferred to credits that UFV accepted, which allowed the students to take academic courses so they could roll their diploma into a degree. I was one of seven instructors who had relevant teaching experience, courses, and a desire to teach in this community setting. We all revised our curriculum to link to their previous educational experiences. We met regularly to discuss links between our courses, and share ideas for modification and pedagogical design. We met with the head of the college, members of the community, and the students before coming to their territory. We discussed their needs and our teaching strengths, and designed a program that would meet all of the objectives. It was a pilot project that was quite successful and had a 90 per cent retention and graduation rate.

NVIT prides itself for being "BC's Indigenous Public Post-Secondary Institute" and with institutional partnerships and agreements like this, they are able to enhance their educational outreach. Of course, without the keen, committed, and resilient students, this would not be possible. It is the tireless work of visionaries, such as Verna Billy Minnabarriet who linked up with folks like Lawrence Northeast of the Nuxalk College in Bella Coola (see Figure 6), who move community learning forward. UFV is keeping its strategic priorities of community engagement and Indigenization through such institutional agreements. Ken Brealey from UFV and Indigenous affairs advisor Shirley Hardman worked hard to create an accreditation process and to ensure that qualified UFV faculty would be made available for these community deliveries. They also worked hard to bring the Nuxalk/NVIT students on as UFV students in ways that would enable them to obtain bachelor's degrees. This is an example where community-based delivery, an institutional partnership, and the strategic goal of Indigenization combine in a good way within an academic setting. I am delighted to report that I have just heard that I will be flying up to meet yet another cohort of students in Bella Coola before the end of October 2018. I do not expect that my grizzly visitor will come to greet me again, but I have respect for her presence and new insight into the territory she calls home.

Conclusion

It is challenging for an instructor to be parachuted into a community without contextual preparation and knowledge. I had been living and working in remote communities before this, so I was prepared for the different nuances that come with community. My mom lived for years in Hay River and Yellowknife, and I was familiar with the warmth and support that comes with knowing people for long periods of time. Other instructors would do well to revise their curriculum to tap into local knowledge. I think it is always a good idea to adjust the curriculum to encourage orality in the classroom, while still meeting the learning objectives. These students had to learn about research methods and engage in critical thinking around literary analysis, develop an annotated bibliography, and write an essay, but they were also invited to connect their own life stories and traditions to the material at hand. This made the learning more relevant and respectful. For instance, for the final presentation, students could share a teaching that was connected to the material, write a new character that had not been developed, offer a monologue from one of the plays, or develop something unique for the presentation that demonstrated their engagement with, and critical thinking about, the texts.

The stories that the students shared with me transformed me as an educator. The learning was reciprocal. This experience of teaching English literature to these focused students at this tiny college in this remote community was gratifying. By entering their territory and their classroom, I, too, was enlightened and healed by the experience. The oral stories, the art, songs and dances, and the poles all represent Indigenous narrative formats. These narrative modes offer different ways of learning and teaching that transcend the written word. When mainstream institutions send faculty to remote Indigenous communities, they often think they are sending faculty to simply teach their students, but what often happens is a reciprocal dynamic of learning that includes an Indigenized classroom and content that is often using multiple modes of narrative. We opened and closed each day with a circle and, for once, I did not have to explain the protocols of the circle as I typically am required to do in my university classrooms. I have tried to capture a sense of my experience with respect, clarity, and humour, and I hope that I have adequately captured the teachings that were shared with me. I raise my hands in honour of these students because they have overcome huge barriers, isolation, and multiple forms of colonial violence in order to demonstrate their commitment to healing, community, and education. I look forward to opportunities to be parachuted into community settings. I bring what I can to the table to facilitate knowledge and, in every opportunity to teach in community, I gain insight into how we learn, how we teach, and what apsects of life are truly important. Rarely am I teaching in a classroom where most of the students look like me. I am rarely in a classroom where people share similar cultural values. As such, I have a vested interest in supporting community initiatives for higher education and I get powerful rewards by simply being a witness to the resilience and strength of people who could be my cousins.

I hope that what I have shared here is received well. It has been presented candidly with an open heart, positive intentions, and with honour

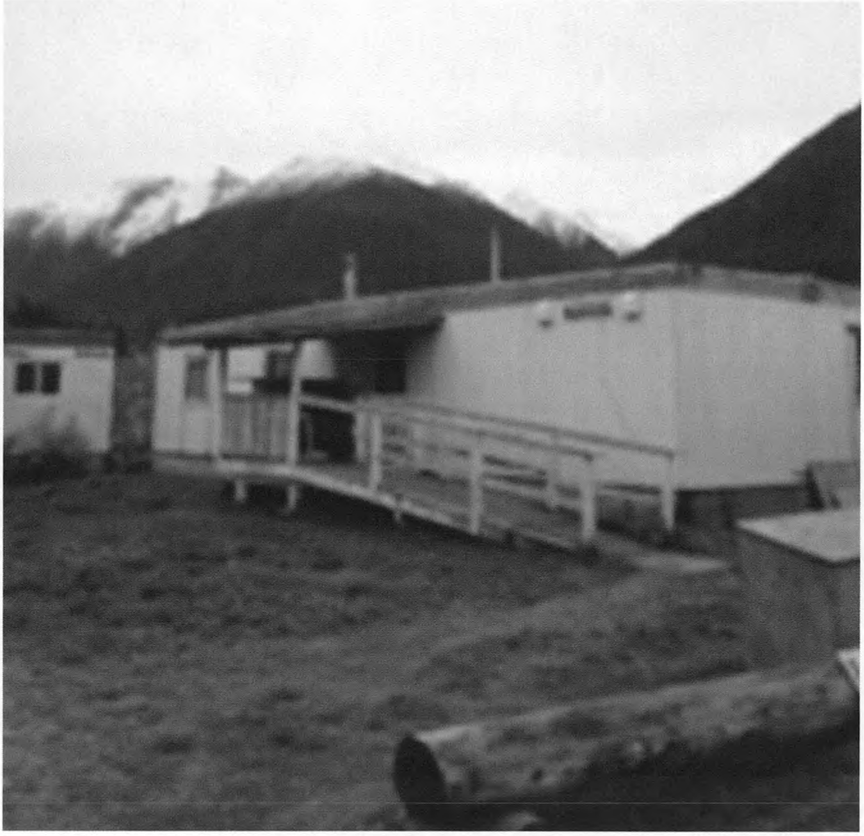

Figure 6. The Nuxalk College, Bella Coola, BC.

and respect for all who I have met on this journey. And now, my gentle reader, my story is yours to ruminate over, to consider, to contemplate, to grow from, to be inspired by, and to share.

Postscript

The students completed their BGS and convocated with the UFV graduates, and also had a community ceremony. I was invited to fly back to Bella Coola to attend the community graduation ceremony, along with other UFV faculty, the Indigenous Affairs Advisor, and the Vice President Academic. I was happy to see the students again and I was thrilled to see the whole community come out to honour them in a good way, with speeches and a feast. We also had the chance to speak on the local radio station about the program so that the larger community would be inspired. We brought a suitcase of books to the college campus. These were the highlights for me. However, I was saddened to hear the news that Jim, the student who had shared his haiku and was committed to reading literature, had passed away. I sat for a while with Jim's family, showed them his haiku, and sat quietly for a moment with his daughters and his mother who were necessarily shaken. They were very proud to be present at what would have been his graduation day. An empty chair stood on stage where Jim would have been seated with his cohort. His certificate was awarded posthumously and his tearful daughter received it. The impact of his commitment to education will resonate within the community. Jim's words in class, the sharing of his haiku, his total enthusiasm to learn, and his tragically shortened life will resonate with me for many years to come.

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Thanks to Taylor Breckles for her editing assistance with this article. Taylor Breckles is currently an honours student and research assistant in the Department of English at the University of the Fraser Valley in Canada. Her research interests include sociolinguistics, media and culture, Indigeneity, gender studies, and historical analysis. She is also fond of editing. She has presented at conferences in England and Poland, and has also lived in Poland. Recently, she co-authored an article with Dr. Michelle La Flamme, "The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly: A Review of *God and the Indian* by Drew Hayden Taylor."

Notes

[1] The page related to The Great Bear Rainforest is here: https://www.nature.org/en-us/get-involved/how-to-help/places-we-protect/great-bear-rainforest/

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