

# Chapter 15

## Drawing Possibility: Learning About Ourselves Through the Arts

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### ABSTRACT

*This chapter describes the collaboration between the Department of Indigenous Education in the Faculty of Education at the University of Victoria in British Columbia, Canada and the extension program at the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria, illustrating the process of engaging pre-service teachers working in collaboration with Indigenous artists, staff from the Art Gallery, and learners in the schools where art-based workshops were facilitated. Further, it will describe how by being involved on this project, the student teachers were able to reflect on themselves as educators, and on the challenges and triumphs that entails doing decolonizing work and becoming allies, advocates or “Indigenists.”*

### INTRODUCTION

*It is in story, fable, legend, and myth that fundamental understandings, insights, and attitudes toward life and human conduct, character, and quality in their diverse forms are embodied and passed on. But it is not enough to listen to or to read or to understand the truths contained in stories; according to the elders the truths must be lived out and become part of the being of a person. (Johnston, 1976, p. 7)*

Ojibway artist Basil Johnston (1976) reminds us of the importance of paying attention to the life worlds of Indigenous people represented in diverse forms of art while Snively and Williams (2008) assert that in Aboriginal cultures, the knowledge gained from observing and listening allows members of the culture to develop “an intimate and current knowledge.... [thus] helping in building a collective database and updating traditional stories of the environment” (p.114). Stó:lo scholar Jo-Anne Archibald (2008) maintains: “Whenever Indigenous oral tradition is presented in textual form, the text limits the level of understanding because it cannot portray the storyteller’s gestures, tone, rhythm, and personality” (p.

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-7998-8725-6.ch015

17). Sharing these ideas, Stó:lō writer Lee Maracle refers to oratory as words that “represent the accumulated knowledge, cultural values, the vision of an entire people or peoples” (p. 26). Further, Snively and Williams (2008) assert that literacy from an Aboriginal perspective is a process that requires more than just learning to read, write, and use numeracy within printed form because it is a lifelong process that includes oracy, ceremony, storytelling, singing, dancing, and artwork.

In order to advance our collective knowledge about the Indigenous people of this place called Canada, it is imperative that conversations related to land, language, culture, and ways of being are introduced at an early age not just in the home but as importantly, in all educational contexts including schools, art galleries, museums, public spaces, and many more. In post-secondary spaces, courses on Indigenous history, language revitalization, and art among other topics, have become more prevalent in the past 10 years in many disciplines. These courses have become mandatory in Teacher Education programs across Canada since the Accord on Indigenous Education (2010) was signed by the Association of Canadian Deans of Education, and more recently, as a result of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s (TRC, 2015) Calls to Action related to Education not only in post-secondary spaces but also in the K-12 system.

This chapter describes the collaboration between the Department of Indigenous Education in the Faculty of Education at the University of Victoria in British Columbia, Canada, and the extension program at the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria, illustrating the process of engaging pre-service teachers working in collaboration with Indigenous artists, staff from the Art Gallery, and learners in the schools where art-based workshops were facilitated. Further, it will describe how by being involved on this project, the student teachers were able to reflect on themselves as educators, and on the challenges and triumphs that entails doing decolonizing work and becoming allies, advocates or “Indigenists” (Wilson, 2007).

## **PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE**

My journey as a teacher began in Monterrey, México where I worked as a kindergarten teacher for 13 years, and as a Grade 5 teacher for a few more. The passion and devotion I have towards this profession did not end when I moved to Canada to pursue Graduate Studies at the University of Victoria. I am now in the privileged position to be a faculty member in the Department of Indigenous Education, which is only 4 years old, and the first one of its kind housed in a Faculty of Education in Canada. As a woman and scholar of Indigenous heritage from the Kickapoo Nation in Northeastern México, I hold responsibility for the work in which I engage situated on the lands of the Lekwungen and SENĆOTEN speaking people, and the **W̱SÁNEĆ** Nation where the university resides.

I have been facilitating a course on Indigenous Education since 2008, which at the time was an elective for pre-service teachers. The following year, the course became mandatory at the University of Victoria, and the year after that, Indigenous education courses started to emerge in many teacher education programs as a result of the Accord on Indigenous Education signed by the Association of Canadian Deans of Education in 2010. In its vision, the Accord aspires Indigenous knowledge systems, languages, values, identities, and cultures to flourish through the creation and implementation of inclusive curricula, respectful learning environments, culturally responsive pedagogies, assessment, and research, affirming and revitalizing Indigenous languages, and by preparing mechanism for valuing and promoting Indigeneity in Education. As a result, teacher education programs across Canada committed to developing and implementing courses that would honor these values and vision. Further, with the release of the Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) in 2015 and its Calls

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