

# Learning Our Way, With the Land, and the People: A Collaborative Experience

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## Abstract

The story of land-based immersion learning for nursing students in remote First Nations communities is told through the stories of ten authors. We represent a collaboration between First Nations Knowledge Keepers, nursing students, and nursing faculty. Our inquiry draws on Indigenous knowledge paradigms and research methodologies. Currently in the preliminary stages of gathering our findings, we are learning how transformation happens through culturally safe relationships and ethical learning spaces. We are learning that inquiry requires commitment, authenticity, and a respect for differences. Most importantly, we are learning that nurses need to uncover ingrained and colonized assumptions in order to imagine new possibilities for learning and inquiring with Indigenous people and communities.

**Keywords:** immersion learning, Indigenous research methodology, nursing curriculum, transformational learning, cultural safety

## Path to Emergence

Immersion. To plunge.

Ancient glacial headwaters plummeting into the Gwa'yi River.

Tiny smolt braving the salty Salish Sea.

The fledging of an eaglet from its tree-top nest.

Nature knows transition, adaptation, courage, curiosity.

Separateness is an illusion. We are all immersed.

The river, the salmon, the bears and the forest have always known this.

Raised to see their interconnectedness, to respect the gifts of one another, to contribute without obliterating the other, to know their place is no bigger, no less,

than perfectly enough.

Humankind, who has created a vast global network of instant “connection,” has ironically, lost connection.

Opportunities to be everywhere and anywhere, at any time, have resulted in the loss of our sense of place. We have become outsiders, and destroyers.

To re-connect, we must see our potential for spiritual and metaphysical revision.

We will show up with vulnerability and authenticity,  
our journey guided by kinship, humility, story and soul,  
willing to expose ourselves to all the elements.

The path, not the purpose, is where the wisdom lies.

To heal, we must return to the Land.

We honor the opportunities to learn from those who never left.

## Coming Together

Early in the morning on a spring day in 2019, a group of ten nursing students accompanied by two faculty members excitedly loaded onto a bus heading for the First Nations (FN)<sup>1</sup> community of Huu-ay-aht. The following week, another group of students would do the same thing further north on their way to Kyuqout. Both groups were about to experience living and learning in a remote FN community. The field schools are immersion learning opportunities guided by community Knowledge Keepers using Indigenous<sup>2</sup> pedagogical processes. Students have the opportunity to learn about health and wellness from a remote FN community in a way that is unique to the knowledge, values, beliefs, principles, resources, and opportunities of each community. The students experience learning in the community, in people's homes, and on the land. During the field school, participants engage in formal and informal discussions, ceremonies, and daily community life. Activities include discussion circles, field trips to old village sites, and community events, as well as school and daycare activities. On the final evening, the students host a community dinner in appreciation of the support they received from the community members. This way of learning cannot be replicated in a classroom: it is relational, experiential, and emancipatory. The learning happens on the land and with the people in a remote FN community.

This is a story of how immersion learning can play an essential role in the decolonization and reconciliation of nursing education programs in Canada. It is told

from the perspective of the community members, nursing faculty, and students who have been involved in an inquiry project looking into the benefits and opportunities for all those involved. Indigenous principles of storytelling are woven throughout this paper both as a guiding philosophy of holism and as a pedagogical and research approach. As Jo-ann Archibald states, "stories have the power to make our hearts, mind, bodies, and spirits work together" (Archibald, 2008, p. 12). We are consistent with this thought in our sensibility toward the ethical space that we create in our immersion learning experiences. As described by Ermine et al. (2004), it is a space where power relations are made explicit and differences are not denied. It is an ethical space where we can recognize ourselves and each other without diminishing either one (Donald, 2012; Papps & Ramsden, 1996; Wepa, 2005). Through the process of writing this article with ten authors, we have found that our writing style and the language we use at times is contradictory. These contradictions can help us expose our blind spots and imagine new understandings (Dunlop, 1999). We invite the reader into this space to make their own interpretations and pose the questions that are elicited by engaging with us through our stories.

Funded through a Community College Social Innovation Grant by SCERC, the project titled *Raising Student Nurses in Remote First Nations Communities* (hereafter, RSN) was conducted by a research team seeking to gain a better understanding of the benefits of

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<sup>1</sup> In this article we use the term "First Nations" to refer to the specific people from the remote communities in which the field schools have occurred.

<sup>2</sup> We use the term "Indigenous" to refer to the shared and diverse perspectives of peoples who have ancestral roots to a place through which a knowledge system unique to that place is developed (Kovach, 2009).

integrating immersion learning experiences in remote FN communities into the first year of the nursing curriculum at North Island College. Building on over 10 years of partnership between the Wuikinuxv FN, the Dzawada'enuxv FN, and the North Island College (NIC) Baccalaureate of Science in Nursing (BSN) program through its fourth-year nursing elective course, we wanted to offer a similar learning experience to first-year nursing students. Our plan was to make the immersion learning experience as accessible as possible for all students as part of their core nursing program. We were also interested in developing a community-based inquiry design using Indigenous research methodologies (IRM) as part of the process. In this article, we tell the story of this inquiry project. The project is still underway; we are still gathering our findings. The lessons are unfolding as we share our individual journeys with each other and with our readers. We are a collaborative group of community members, nursing students, and faculty. I, Evelyn Voyageur, am of the Dzawada'enuxw tribe of Kingcome Inlet. I was an active RN for many years and retired from active nursing in 1999. I then worked for the Indian Residential School Survivors Society for four years. I have been with NIC since 2005, working mostly with the nursing program. I, Paul Willie, am Dzawada'enuxw and work as a tribal leader in the Wuikinuxv territory. I have been involved with teaching the nursing students coming to our communities since we started in 2007. I, Joanna Fraser, am a member of the nursing faculty at NIC. I am of European ancestry. I am also a doctoral candidate in Culturally Inclusive Place-Based Learning at Simon Fraser University. I, Kate Moynihan, am an immigrant to Canada of Irish, Welsh, and Polish ancestry. I am a co-explorer with the RSN project and a fourth-year BSN student.

I, Jenn Spurr, am a third-year BSN student of settler ancestry and a co-explorer in this project. I, Heather McAnsh, am a third-year BSN student, a settler of mixed European heritage, and a co-explorer with this project. I, Victoria Dick, am a co-explorer with this project and a fourth-year BSN student. I come from the Tseshaht (cišaaʔath) and Tla-o-qui-aht FN with close ties to several other FN communities, including the Xwisten FN. I, Cara Tilson, am a nursing instructor at NIC who has recently been granted a master's degree in health leadership with a rural and Indigenous focus. I, Patricia R. Woods, am a member of the nursing faculty at Vancouver Island University and a PhD nursing student at the University of Victoria. I am of mixed European settler ancestry. I, Heidi Rainbow Deagle, am a human being and a human becoming. Immersed into Haida culture as a babe and child, my connections to Indigenous people, place, and worldviews are deep and heartfelt, though not biological. In addition to Western academic institutional learning and pedagogies, I continue to learn from the planet, from my family and colleagues, and from my children, animals, and garden. Every day and every interaction brings opportunities for emergence from the binding and blinding impacts of colonization. I dedicate the opening poem of this article to the NIC BSN field schools--student nurses and First Nations communities who are on the path together for re-connection, reconciliation, and rebirth.

Our intention in this article is to share the principles and processes that are important for meaningful collaboration between Indigenous communities and academic institutions. We will share what we are learning from our experiences integrating immersion learning for nursing students into the first year of the nursing

curriculum. We will also share our experiences and the lessons we've learned from developing an inquiry process together based on Indigenous research methodologies. Our intention is to share how learning and inquiring together has led us to imagine new ways of decolonizing and reconciling nursing curriculum.

### **Our Theoretical Orientations**

At NIC, we started partnering with First Nations communities, on whose traditional territory the college functions, in 2005. These relationships led to students from the nursing program being invited to a remote community to learn what it is like to live there. What transpired was a profound transformational learning opportunity (Fraser & Voyageur, 2017). The transformational learning described from Baumgartner's (2001) perspective extended the process originally described by Mezirow (1997) to include Freire's (2000) theory of consciousness raising. Baumgartner (2001) describes transformational learning as also having a cyclic pattern of intuitive, holistic, and spiritual dimensions. Beyond this, Indigenous authors have described a type of transformational learning that is connected to person, land, and spirit in a holistic way (Battiste, 2013; Cajete, 2015). Cajete (2015) talks of Indigenous pedagogy as more than a transformative process that never moves beyond the cognitive rationalism, but as a "soul journey" (pp. 24, 79). This type of learning happens in connection with the land. It cannot be learned through a textbook or in a classroom (Rasmussen & Akulukjuk, 2009). It happens only when "the environment holds us rather than us holding it" (Rasmussen & Akulukjuk, 2009, p. 289). We resist the common essentialist assumption that immersion learning is about going to learn about another cultural group.

Our immersion learning experiences are orientated towards self-learning and a desire for cultural safety. Culture is conceived as describing a fluid identity of belonging held in relation to others and contingent on contexts (Weir, 2013). Cultural safety assumes that the power to decide what is safe or not is determined by the recipient in a relationship (Papps & Ramsden, 1996). Understanding the self requires uncovering blind spots, recognizing ingrained power differentials, and engaging with differences in a way that does not diminish or demean the recipient (Papps & Ramsden, 1996).

I, Paul, share my perspective with the students and the inquiry team to help us understand each other. One lesson is that we are all spiritual beings having a physical experience in order to evolve spiritually. We are all energy—one—connected to each other and to the source, or Creator. Everything is energy. What we have heard from field school participants, regardless of their religious beliefs or cultural traditions, is that the experience of learning together on the land and learning through stories and ceremony results in feelings of connection and spiritual growth. Another perspective that I believe is important to share is that how you think about reality is based on your context. We will experience similar life events until the lessons are learned. In life, there are no mistakes, only lessons. In this life, we are tasked with letting go of fear in its many forms and practicing unconditional love. What many field school participants experience is fear of the unknown, fear of making mistakes, and fear of being exposed for their unknowing. What they discover is courage through feeling their own vulnerability and unconditional love from others. They are moved by the generosity and understanding of the community members. Finally, I share that our life's

purpose is linked to how we answer one question: How do we leave this world in a better place than it was when we came into it? In this physical plane, we experience physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual events. Our task is to live in balance. We have a responsibility to look after one another and to properly care for Mother Earth.

I, Victoria, entered the nursing program with every intention to work in an acute care setting; however, my journey through the program and through this project has shifted my focus and passion to Indigenous community health nursing. I had previously spent time in remote communities with grandmothers or visiting family; however, it was not until I engaged with this program that I had an increased awareness of the inequities and challenges that exist. The immersion learning experience has a profound impact on our ways of thinking and being, on our understanding of cultural safety, and on our awareness of the historical traumas that continue to affect the health and wellbeing of communities presently. My struggle lies in trying to weave together two ways of knowing into my nursing practice: the Western knowing that is being taught in school, and traditional Indigenous knowing. Through my work on this project, I am learning to find a balance that honors and values both ways. This project continues to help me “find my nursing voice,” through which I can raise awareness of the societal, systemic, cultural, and organizational barriers that affect the health and wellbeing of communities. This ongoing discovery is important in my journey. Experiential learning, especially through oral storytelling from community Knowledge Keepers, is a privilege. I hope that more students will have these opportunities. Following their field school experience, students expressed

to me a better understanding of the idea that we are all one and the significance this has when seeking to live in balance. Many students describe difficulty putting the lessons they have learned into words. It is, however, clear that these lessons are about being in touch with who you are, with your purpose in the world, and with your spiritual connection to everything.

### **Carrying our Learning Forward Together**

For the NIC nursing program, an evaluative study conducted after ten years of experience with the two original field schools reported several significant benefits for community members (Voyageur & Fraser, 2020). We found that the opportunity to build relationships between nurses and community members led to people feeling more trusting of the healthcare system overall. Community members also expressed feeling more confident speaking up for themselves when they felt they were not being treated fairly (Voyageur & Fraser, 2020). Because of the field school programs, the communities have also had increased opportunities to hire and retain nurses who have graduated from the nursing program (Voyageur & Fraser, 2020). This community benefit is echoed in the literature as immersion learning experiences for students have been found to positively impact the recruitment and retention of nurses within the associated communities (Blackstock, 2018).

The NIC nursing curriculum has also benefited from the partnerships and understandings with Indigenous communities that have been created through the field school experience. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) of Canada addresses nursing schools specifically in the twenty fourth call to action that requires “all students to take a

course dealing with Aboriginal health issues” (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015). The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) has also guided this work as it offers guidance in collaborative relationships while respecting the unique and collective rights of Indigenous Peoples. The partnerships we have between Indigenous communities and NIC have helped us to develop culturally safe ways to address UNDRIP and the TRC’s Calls for Action.

The journey that I, Cara, began in 2005 is an example of the impact a course in Indigenous health can have. I was a second-year nursing student when I took the first Indigenous elective at NIC. I had gone into the nursing program with the specific goal of working with First Nations and Inuit populations, an objective that I have since realized. Later, as a nursing instructor, I went to one of the immersion field schools in Wuikinuxv territory. The theory behind the field school is one of learning from and with those who are so connected with the land, not only for survival, but also for the spiritual sense of place and belonging. As a nursing instructor here at NIC, and after speaking with the students who have experienced the immersion program, I have learned the importance of immersion learning experiences. This partnership has helped the college to imagine decolonized ways of integrating learning throughout the curriculum by way of authentic and reciprocal relationships with Indigenous partners.

The RSN project was initiated with the intention of building on our experiences offering field schools to allow students the opportunity to participate earlier in the nursing curriculum. We realized that the students who participated in the advanced elective were nearing the end of their

educational experience and therefore had less opportunity to integrate their learning and build on the knowledge they gained. We identified a need for nursing students to discover Indigenous perspectives on health early in the nursing curriculum for their value to be considered alongside Euro-Western traditions and integrated into the students’ nursing practices. We provided a context that would counter the prevailing tendency to prioritize the biophysical and mechanistic ideas of medical science over relational, holistic, and wellness-focused perspectives also found in nursing (Bevis & Watson, 1989, p. 18). Our experience with the field schools helped us recognize that there are important protocols, procedures, and processes that need to be followed when developing immersion learning experiences. We needed to start with recognizing, and as necessary, challenging the colonial structures and assumptions embedded in our taken-for-granted actions that inherently value some ways of knowing over others (Battiste, 2013). For example, the usual practice placement between nursing schools and First Nations communities positions the student with a practicing nurse in the community, typically in a preceptorship role.

Although this model has some worthwhile learning and outcomes, it is not inherently designed to change nursing practice. We needed to challenge the common view of community as the recipient of nursing care, and instead, see the community as both a resource and a teacher. The early immersion experiences are designed by each of the partnering First Nations communities to reflect the ways of learning, knowledge, values, resources, and opportunities that are prevalent in each community. We recognize our responsibility to work in synchronicity with the community. We work together to let

opportunities and learning experiences emerge from the community at the right pace, in the right time, and in a way that is innate to the community's way of doing things. We recognize the fundamental existence of Indigenous scholarship and the knowledge that is often silenced within the walls of academic classrooms (Battiste, 2013). This experience of trusting the process and working with an open agenda has consistently delivered profound learning for the participants and faculty involved.

I, Joanna, have always found working with an open agenda to be one of the most challenging and rewarding aspects of facilitating the field school experiences. My predisposition to be in control of an agenda is reinforced by my students' expectations that I will tell them what I want them to learn, and by the expectations of community members who wait for me to tell them what I want them to do. Instead, I try to model unknowing and a willingness to live with ambiguity. When I achieve the right balance of navigating expectations and letting go of control, the community and the land emerge as the teacher. The students learn whatever is most significant for them as individuals.

Together we experience transformation through stories that are both emancipatory and holistic (Archibald, 2008). We have found that immersion learning experiences lead to students gaining a better appreciation for how to work effectively in partnership with First Nations people, how to be inclusive of Indigenous values and traditional wellness practices, and how to be more effective at addressing the health challenges and inequities faced by remote communities (Voyageur & Fraser, 2020).

### **Inquiring Together**

With this inquiry project, we seek to understand the benefits and challenges of integrating immersion learning experiences

into the first year of the nursing program. To do so, we convened an inquiry team of community leaders, Knowledge Keepers, NIC faculty, and nursing students to work together to guide the development of an Indigenous community-based research process. IRM requires engaging in critical reflexivity using the hermeneutic phenomenological lens to develop a deeper understanding (Bearskin et al., 2016). The inquiry process needs to be relationally accountable, holistic, and pragmatic in a way that is useful and meaningful to the communities involved (Kovach, 2009). Everyone involved needs to engage in a continuous process of collaborative "conscientization," working together to develop an awareness of how our own thought processes and ways of doing things whether we are Indigenous or not, are influenced by colonized assumptions (Freire, 2000). Decolonizing methodology requires us to deconstruct our narratives and our institutional processes to give voice to alternative stories and constructions of reality (Smith, 2012).

I, Kate, am a co-explorer. What a fitting word for my role in this expansive journey we are all taking. Alongside wise teachers, friends, and the Great Spirit, I am travelling on a sea of inquiry and reconciliation. I am beginning to see on the horizon the outline of my context, the borders of my perspective, and the contours of my paradigm. I see that my experiences are shaping my perspective and my paradigm. The experience of being a co-explorer has added to this shaping. These experiences in remote Indigenous communities, in inquiry meetings, in conversations, and in relationships, have liberated me from many of my unconscious colonial assumptions. Through this inquiry process, I am emancipated from the narrow vision that declares Western colonial science



superior to all others. The way in which my body and soul know this cannot be articulated. This knowing has become embedded in my entire being. Working from this solid foundation, I can hold fast in the face of cognitive imperialism and the oppression of Indigenous ways of knowing. I cannot be swayed from this understanding, however much the forces of colonization persist. I have seen the tip of the iceberg and I am spurred on by grace and fury to continue the journey of decolonizing myself and the institutions of healthcare.

At our regular inquiry team meetings, we discuss how embedded forms of cognitive imperialism in our education and healthcare system continue to marginalize and devalue Indigenous ways of knowing, learning, and being (Battiste, 2013). We have purposefully incorporated Indigenous forms of scholarship and pedagogy that privileges holistic orientations, storywork and synergy with the natural world (Archibald, 2008). Sean Wilson (2008) describes an Indigenous research paradigm where ontology, epistemology, axiology, and methodology are all connected in a circle of relationships. Wilson (2008) states that “ontology and epistemology are based upon a process of relationships that form a mutual reality” (p. 70). Truth is considered to be a relationship between the knower and the knowledge, rather than something that is “out there.” Wilson (2008) describes the axiology and methodology of an Indigenous research paradigm as being based on maintaining a relational accountability that is situationally and contextually determined. It is a form of paying attention to respect, reciprocity, and responsibility in your relationships throughout the research process (Wilson, 2008). We were informed by Sean Wilson’s ideas of relational accountability throughout the research process. Our processes and

work plan require us to co-construct the process in collaboration with community and academic partners in a way that is accountable to the whole community.

I, Patricia, am part of this project because as an educator, I want to contribute to truth and reconciliation within nursing education with both intent (my mind) and integrity (my heart). For this to happen, I realized that I needed to spend time with, and listen to, Indigenous people. It has been such a meaningful experience to listen to the Knowledge Keepers and community members speak about their perspectives and practices. It is a valuable opportunity to think about and explore new ways of seeing, knowing, and being in the world. This project will profoundly shift and re-shape the underlying thoughts, beliefs, and practices that are inherent in how we teach and learn in nursing.

We purposefully designed our inquiry process to incorporate the time necessary to develop authentic relationships. Our first step was to hold an initial gathering between the partnering communities, Indigenous Knowledge Keepers, NIC faculty, nursing students, and research advisors to discuss Indigenous research methodologies and to learn about the knowledge traditions and protocols that would be important for doing research together. This gathering started with a highly regarded member of the Nuu-chah-nulth community giving us a lesson on the important protocols for working together. He explained how “*Hishuk-ish-ts’awalk*” (everything is one) embodies “*iisaak*” (respect) for the interconnectedness of the land, water, and all living things and governs the Nuu-chah-nulth way of being (Atleo, 2004). Atleo (2004) states, “whereas other theories may assume that if variables do not show significant relationships, these variables are not related or connected to

each other. The theory of Ts'awalk always assumes a meaningful relationship between variables" (p. 117). Our processes involved taking the time to come to know each other and to visit with each other as often as possible in the communities and on the land. We also heard from experienced researchers. I, Paul, shared understandings of paradigms versus perspectives as a foundational element. Foundational elements are those that are necessary, essential for, and central to understanding the similarities and differences between paradigms versus perspectives. Paradigms are ways of thinking and being in the world, combined with an understanding of how those ways of thinking affect our ways of being. They are based on one's values, beliefs, principles, and practices, as well as the means by which one obtains knowledge. Perspectives are the approaches, the ways of looking at or interpreting, and the ways in which that interpretation, although embedded in the paradigm, is often formed and expressed in the context of the reality of the situation. A prime example is the learning of a new language, for which a total immersion experience has proven to be more effective than one-hour classroom settings.

The success of the NIC School of Nursing's "Field University with First Nations" is the result of the total immersion of nursing faculty and students into the Indigenous communities' way of life. I shared with the attendees at the gathering that effective Indigenous research requires one to understand the nature of reality and our mindset or way of thinking about that reality. I also talked about how research methodologies need to build and support the improvement of the social fabric of the lives of the Indigenous participants. We need to consider the most ethical practices when carrying out the research. Indigenous research methodology goes beyond the

accountability of validity and reliability in conventional research. It is based on relational accountability. This means using data collection methods that support the building of relationships in order to add to the outcomes of the research. We talked about research methods that support relationship building such as talking circles and storytelling. We discussed how to do participatory action research that includes defining the role of researcher and exploring the nature of one's reality; one's values, beliefs, principles, and practices; and how one obtains knowledge through the context of discussion.

I, Heather, came into nursing school with the goal to work in relationship with rural and remote communities. This project has provided me with the opportunity to deepen my learning about the structural inequities and extraordinary resilience of remote FN communities. I also have both a personal and conceptual interest in how experiential land-based learning both forms and informs the process of decolonizing nursing education, which this project gives space to explore. Through the collaborative process of actively holding the stories of students and community members, I am learning to constantly open and re-open my ways of seeing stories and coming to understand how this can be a site for decolonizing action.

### **Ethical Ways of Inquiring Together**

After we were given presentations on the Nuu-chah-nulth protocols, Indigenous methodologies, and community-based research from the Knowledge Keepers and research advisors, we broke up into smaller groups to hear from community members. A rich conversation ensued where the inquiry team and co-explorers gained ethical clarity and relational accountability related to the consent process, the rights of information

use, and the sharing of personal stories directly from community members. As a result, we made the following updates to our ethics application and the commitments we have made to the community related to our research process. Our commitments were framed around the principles of Ownership, Control, Accessibility, and Possession (OCAP<sup>®</sup>) (Assembly of First Nations, 2007), and as they were intended in our original ethics application.

It was acknowledged at the methodology workshop that any information related to traditional or personal knowledge is given by community members with the intention of being shared. In the same way, the inquiry team commits to sharing any personal stories or traditional information only with the permission and acknowledgment of the person who has shared it unless explicitly stated otherwise. Everything will also be shared with the intention and purpose for which it was originally intended and with respect to community authority and protocols over traditional knowledge.

Community members and representatives will continue to be involved in the process of designing the inquiry, collecting information, making meaning from the information, and sharing the information. The process is guided by Indigenous Knowledge Keepers. All members of the inquiry team are individually accountable to the co-explorers and inquiry participants for the information and stories they share. Information shared should acknowledge the subjectivity of the storyteller, the context in which it was learned, and the people who were involved in co-creating or influencing it. This collaboration is still underway and continues to be done online, by phone, and through in-person meetings and gatherings.

The inquiry team also commits to the principles that underpin the possession of any cultural knowledge and/or personal stories gained by members of the inquiry team throughout the research process. Cultural knowledge is not intended to be the focus of the research questions and so is unlikely to be included in the research findings. However, any cultural knowledge and/or personal stories will not be shared by any member of the inquiry team without the explicit permission of the person sharing it, nor will it be shared without the intention and purpose for which it was originally shared.

Following this initial larger gathering, the inquiry team has met once a month in person or through communication technology to discuss our processes, learn from each other, and develop a research methodology that is accountable, ethical, and meaningful for all those involved. We all needed to discover our own role in the process of reconciliation and learn how to move forward with decolonization and Nation building. Coming into the BSN program as a mature student with prior postsecondary experience, I, Jenn, was pleasantly surprised by the focus on Indigenous knowledge and ways of knowing. Through some of these learning opportunities, I developed a greater awareness of the importance of reconciliation in healthcare and healthcare education. As a settler, one way I felt I could participate in this was by holding space for the lived experiences of people who may be willing to share their stories. This inquiry seemed like an essential step towards bearing witness, working to decolonize the nursing curriculum, and beginning to address racism in healthcare. I have learned so many things from being involved with this project over the past two years. This process has involved significant unlearning

of what I thought I knew about research, relationships, and how I walk in the world. It has fostered a deep appreciation for how complex and messy true collaboration can be and the beauty that can arise out of the complexity.

### What We Have Found So Far

Although our journey together as a group of inquirers is not over, we offer some preliminary lessons gleaned from learning and inquiring together. We can share three overarching lessons from participating in the immersion learning experiences. The first is that transformation is a holistic and emancipatory process when it happens in relationship with each other and the land. The second is that learning through cultural safety (Papps & Ramsden, 1996; Wepa, 2005) and ethical space (Ermine et al., 2004) leads to imagining new ways of being in relation to others that embraces the fluidity of cultural identity and the benefits of our differences (Donald, 2012; Dunlop, 1999). The third is that authentic learning requires being in sync with the community rather than imposing external expectations and structures on the learning experience. When these three things happen, there is the possibility for reconciliation in ourselves, our institutions, our curriculum, and our communities.

We also offer three lessons from our experience of working together as an inquiry team. The first is that our processes and relationships are contingent on the context, including the specific relationships and geographies that are involved. It requires time and commitment to develop these relationships authentically. We must all go through a process of conscientization to uncover our blind spots and reveal the historical and ingrained power differentials that exist in our relationships (Freire, 1993).

Secondly, we have learned that the ways in which we approach our inquiry and make meaning of it are idiosyncratic and unique to each of us. This means that we each must locate ourselves in the process. When we see everything in relationship, *Hishuk-ish-ts'awalk*, then everything matters (Atleo, 2004). Our best conversations involved letting go of an agenda and following at times seemingly disconnected and irrelevant threads.

Finally, we recognize that we will hold different perspectives and any sharing of our work requires an acknowledgment of difference. Rather than searching for one representation of our hybridity, we choose to juxtapose our realities in a way that illuminates our connections and contradictions without resolving them (Donald, 2012; Dunlop, 1999). It is through these three lessons that we share our stories of contradiction and connection as a group of ten authors.

In closing, I, Evelyn, would like to say that I am very glad to be a part of the NIC school of nursing for it has made my dream of seeing the nursing curriculum become inclusive of other nationalities come true. When I started to work as a nurse, I realized quickly that it was lacking this inclusivity. I remember being taught only how to care for the dominant society in my training as a nurse. NIC nursing is training the students to be inclusive of everyone and to treat all clients equitably. We have been doing what the TRC has recommended—being inclusive of cultural awareness—for 14 years. Why do I continue to promote equity in healthcare and cultural safety in nursing education? It is because I know that our healthcare system will only improve with a full understanding of the history and way of life of my people. I know that our field school programs are giving these students that understanding.

The lessons we have learned so far from this project have inspired us to imagine new ways of working together to decolonize and reconcile nursing education. We hope that these lessons will help other nurses and educators challenge some of the taken-for-granted ways that we engage in our work. As nurses, we need to uncover some of the essentialist ideas about culture that prevent us from authentically and vulnerably engaging in culturally safe relationships. We also need to see past our ingrained way of doing things that prevent us from recognizing our own complicity in perpetuating unequal relationships in healthcare. Instead, we need to value a relationality that creates new possibilities for imagining new ways of being together. Finally, as nurses who promote wellness, we need to reconnect ourselves with the land. Our own wellbeing, as well as the wellbeing of our communities and our planet depends on it.

The *Raising Student Nurses in Remote First Nations Communities* project has revived ethics approval from the NIC Ethics Board 12.19.2018 to 03.01.2020

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