

Bringing Indigenous Perspectives into Education: A Case Study of “Thunderbird/Whale  
Protection and Welcoming Pole: learning and teaching in an Indigenous World”

by

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B.A., University of Victoria, 1992

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## **Supervisory Committee**

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## **Abstract**

This thesis explores the Indigenous pedagogy modeled in the university course *Thunderbird/Whale Protection and Welcoming Pole: Learning and Teaching in an Indigenous World*. This case study uses primary data from in depth, retrospective interviews with Indigenous and non-Indigenous participants, as well as document data, to explore the pedagogy and impacts of this course. The research links Indigenous epistemological perspectives with the cultural practices of learning and teaching used. The development of a learning community was part of how Indigenous pedagogy was established through shared goals and principles, respectful relationships and community responsibility. Experiential learning took an Indigenous focus through observation and active engagement in carving and group projects, and through reflective practices and ceremony. The perceived impacts and influences of this course included building cross cultural bridges through the breaking down of cultural barriers, and the development of personal and professional awareness. The course also illuminated the cultural implications of education and demonstrated to Indigenous communities that the university was opening its doors to Indigenous pedagogical practices and culture.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

*“No aspect of a culture is more vital to its integrity than its means of education”  
(Hampton, 1995, p.7)*

Education is a major socializing force within all societies whereby cultural knowledge, skills, and social values are passed from one generation to the next. How these beliefs and ideologies are transmitted can vary considerably according to different cultures and their underlying worldviews. The processes of socialization are tuned to the particular cultural and social structure for which one is being prepared and as these systems differ, so will the content and operations of educational approaches and systems (Cave & Chesler, 1981). Despite diverse and divergent cultural approaches to learning and teaching, in many modern societies, what is considered ‘knowledge’ and how this is reproduced tends to reinforce and legitimize knowledge production from the perspective of the dominant cultural group. Cunningham (1992) argues that formal education systems typically exclude experiences of marginalized people and prescribe a dominant universal perspective with which all groups are to comply.

In the current Western approach to education the capitalist ideology values competitive achievement as the basis for meaning and purpose. This focus on achievement inevitably engenders systems of inequality where alternative cultural perspectives are often viewed as secondary, substandard or even false (Cave & Chesler, 1981). In North American society, schools and universities have a vested interest in maintaining their cultural approach to education. This focus on one cultural perspective has been well established and is promoted with schools and post-secondary institutions. Tisdell, Hanley and Taylor (2000) discuss how Western educational systems present “the Eurocentric aspects of the dominant society...because they are as intrinsic or as necessary to the dominant culture as is the Anglo-centric ways of knowing” (p.138). When embedded in the dominant Western cultural view of knowledge production it is often difficult to even notice that there are

people who might have a different approach or a different way of thinking. This privileged and often exclusive understanding of thinking and learning minimizes the significance of other cultural perspectives and the contributions that they can make towards alternative pedagogies and understandings of the world.

Indeed, Canada's educational institutions are such examples, as they have largely ignored Indigenous knowledges and pedagogy. Indigenous perspectives and histories have often been displaced, rejected or ignored in universities and schools (Battiste, Bell & Findlay, 2002). The exclusive use of Eurocentric knowledge systems in education has contributed to the lack of success for Indigenous students; perpetuating inequality for Indigenous peoples (Schissel & Wotherspoon, 2003). Despite these realizations, few universities across the country have made Aboriginal education a priority and few teacher education programs have developed insights into the foundational cultural knowledge and pedagogy of Indigenous peoples. Consequently, when Western-influenced educators encounter cultural differences, they have little experience, scholarship or tested practice to draw upon. Tisdell, Hanley, and Taylor (2000) comment that "to not introduce other ways of knowing and other ways of thinking is to do a disservice to people whom we are trying to educate. It is also intellectually dishonest and an affront to other peoples from other cultures" (p.138). In order to gain awareness into the diversity of cultural perspectives that exist and to provide a more balanced approach to learning and teaching, cross-cultural openness and sharing are required (hooks, 1994; Issacs, 1999).

With increasing ethnic and cultural diversity of students within classrooms, understanding differing cultural perspectives has become more significant in providing quality education that speaks to students from a variety of backgrounds. Furthermore, Indigenous pedagogy is becoming increasingly important within the context of the Canadian educational system. Aboriginal youth are

one of the fastest growing populations in Canada and projections indicate an increase of over 40% for Aboriginal young adults aged 20-29 entering the labour market by 2017; this is more than four times the projected growth rate of 9% among the same age group in the general population (<http://www.statscanada.ca>). With growing numbers of Aboriginal youth currently in the educational systems, there is a significant need to address how culturally representative pedagogical approaches can foster success for these students. The integration of Indigenous content and the ‘indigenization’ of existing curriculum are becoming more common (Battiste & Barman, 1999; Kanu, 2005). In order to effectively present these materials and understand the cultural values of their students, it is crucial for teachers to develop understandings of Indigenous and cultural ways of knowing and teaching as they strive to meet cross-cultural learning needs of an increasingly diverse student body. Furthermore, Indigenous educational approaches have the potential to offer important and meaningful pedagogies for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous student alike.

While research indicates the importance of Indigenous content and pedagogy in educational curricula for Aboriginal students (Kanu, 2005, 2002; Silver & Mallet, 2002), there is still a need to identify strategies to bring Indigenous approaches into educational systems in culturally representative ways. Indigenous ways of learning and teaching are beginning to emerge in mainstream pedagogical dialogues but their significance is yet to be fully appreciated by the dominant culture (Battiste & Henderson, 2000). Innovative projects and courses are developing that are acknowledging Indigenous educational approaches in ways that are culturally respectful and create space for the sharing of traditional knowledge. Linda Smith, an Indigenous scholar, notes that:

It is extremely important to build...accounts of Indigenous education because these accounts document innovative solutions, telling the stories of Indigenous engagement with education and highlighting issues to be debated or further researched (Smith, 2005, p. 95)

My research provides such an account of a university course that created space within the academy for cross cultural learning to occur through the sharing of Indigenous epistemology and pedagogy based around the carving of a Lekwungen and Liekwelthout house pole. *Thunderbird/Whale Protection and Welcoming Pole: Learning and teaching in an Indigenous world*<sup>1</sup> was the first in a series of courses offered within the Faculty of Education at the University of Victoria. The class included pre-service teachers<sup>2</sup> and university students from various faculties and programs and was inclusive of both Indigenous and non-Indigenous instructors/mentors and students. Drawing on in-depth qualitative interviews and documents, this case study assesses aspects of the course which presented Indigenous pedagogy as distinctive from Western pedagogy. Through narrative accounts, this thesis discusses significant aspects of the Indigenous pedagogy employed, and explores the perceived influences the course had on participants and their understanding of Indigenous ways of learning and teaching.

Understanding the worldviews and epistemologies of Indigenous peoples is central to gaining a full understanding of the contributions and significance that Indigenous pedagogical practices have to offer. Through this research study I explore the connection between Indigenous epistemological and pedagogical understandings and how these perspectives present an alternative educational approach. The Pole Carving course contributes an example of how Indigenous ways of learning and teaching were presented in culturally representative ways within an academic institution and illustrates the potential influences and impacts for participants, the community and the university.

As a non-Indigenous person, I am aware that my understanding and analysis is influenced by my cultural background. My learning has involved grasping and understanding Indigenous worldviews. While I do not claim to have a full comprehension of Indigenous epistemology, I do

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<sup>1</sup> This course will be referred to as the Pole Carving course for the remainder of this thesis.

<sup>2</sup> Pre-service teachers are fifth year education students who are in their final year of a Bachelor of Education program.

recognize the important contributions that exploring Indigenous ways of knowing have made to my thinking and learning. I believe there is much to be gained from expanding cultural understandings and awareness. I want to thank those who have been my teachers of Indigenous ways and who have mindfully shared their cultural teachings, knowledge, and perspectives with me, namely Butch Dick, Bradley Dick, Fabian Quocksister, Dr. Lorna Williams, Victoria Pelkey, Bruce Underwood and members of Tsawout, Tsawlip, Songhees/Lekwungen and various First Nations.

Before providing an overview of this thesis, I will define key concepts used throughout this study.

### **Defining Key Concepts:**

a. Aboriginal, First Nations, First Peoples, Indian, Indigenous, Native, Native Peoples and North American Indian are all commonly used terms to refer to the original occupants of the North American continent. For the purpose of this thesis I mainly use the term ‘*Indigenous*’ as my research has been informed by Indigenous educators, writers, researchers and scholars from around the globe and this concept represents a broad range of peoples that inhabited various nations before the arrival of European settlers. Furthermore, the term ‘Indigenous’ internationalizes the experiences, the issues, and the struggles of some of the world’s colonized peoples which share common experiences and epistemologies. This enables collective voices to be expressed in the international arena (Smith, 1999). At times, I have used *First Nations* (if I know the particular Nation of the individual) or *Aboriginal* (the current legal term used in Canada) when quoting a participant or writer, or if it is the actual term or name used; however for clarity and consistency I will generally use the term ‘Indigenous’. This term is capitalized as a means of emphasizing the identities in the same way as other nationalities.

To further clarify what is meant by the term ‘Indigenous’ the following definitions are offered: Indigenous peoples can be:

regarded as Indigenous on account of their descent from the populations which inhabited the country, or geographical region to which the country belongs, at the time of...colonization or the establishment of present state boundaries and who, irrespective of their legal status, retain some or all of their own social, economic, cultural, and political institutions (May & Aikman, 2003, p.140)

belonging to a place – originating in and being produced, growing, living or occurring in a particular region or environment (<http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/indigenous>)

traditional and tribally oriented groups of people who are identified with a specific place or region and whose cultural traditions continue to reflect an inherent environmental orientation and sense of sacred ecology (Cajete, 1999, p. xi)

**b.** In addition, I use the term *Western* to refer to western European traditions, including North America, which can be characterized by their influences from enlightenment, scientific and capitalist processes and systems.

**c.** *Eurocentric* is defined as reflecting a tendency to interpret the world in terms of Western and especially European or Anglo-American values and experiences (<http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/eurocentric>).

**d.** *Pedagogy* can simply refer to the profession of teaching and the study of teaching methods, including the aims of education and the ways in which such goals may be achieved. For the purposes of this thesis it is discussed more specifically as:

the integration in practice of particular curriculum, content and design, classroom strategies and techniques, and evaluation, purposes and methods. All of these aspects organize a view of how a teacher’s work within an institutional context specifies a particular version of what knowledge is most worth learning, what it means to know something, and how we might construct representations of ourselves, others and, our physical and social environment. (Simon, 1987, p. 370)

The concepts defined above are explored and discussed throughout this thesis. Below is an outline of the following chapters.

### **Overview of this Thesis:**

In Chapter Two, I begin by discussing two schools of thought in the sociology of education, structural-functionalism and conflict theory. I then look more closely at Bourdieu's (1990) theory of cultural reproduction and theoretical propositions such as the cultural discontinuity hypothesis. While these theoretical and conceptual approaches raise awareness of the cultural underpinnings in education, they also expose the lack of consideration of alternative epistemological and pedagogical perspectives within academic and theoretical arenas. Through gaining a deeper understanding of Indigenous epistemology as the starting place for Indigenous approaches to learning and teaching it is possible to see the unique contributions that can be made through broadening understandings of cultural diversity in educational practices and perspectives. In this chapter, I also acknowledge the influences that Indigenous worldviews and epistemology have offered to theorists such as Freire, Giroux, and hooks.

Chapter Three outlines the methodology used in my research and discusses why these methods were chosen to reflect culturally sensitive and appropriate approaches to this research. A case study design presents perspectives from both Indigenous and non-Indigenous students and instructor/mentors, and as much as possible, provides a holistic account of the Pole Carving course. In-depth, retrospective interviews provide primary data which allow interviewees to reflect on and recall their experiences and report influences the course may have had. Document data that were created for, about and during the course provided additional information and triangulation of methods. A descriptive overview of the Pole Carving course addresses the unique nature of this course. The remaining chapters present an analysis and discussion of these sources of data.

Chapter Four highlights the ways participants experienced Indigenous ways of learning and teaching in the course and provides an analysis that links epistemological perspectives to pedagogical practices. Two central themes emerged in the data, learning and teaching in community and through experience. First I explore how community was created and developed in the Pole Carving course through shared goals and principles, establishing respectful relationships, and encouraging community responsibility. Secondly I discuss the experiential pedagogical approach used in the course and how observation and active engagement, reflective practices, and ceremony provided a unique cultural approach to learning and teaching.

Chapter Five reviews the impacts and contributions of the course from both Indigenous and non-Indigenous viewpoints. First, the building of cultural bridges occurred through the breaking down of cultural divisions through cross cultural interaction. This provided avenues for personal learning and created insights in teaching and professional practices. Second, the course opened doors to broader understandings of Indigenous perspectives for participants, communities and within the academy.

Chapter Six concludes this thesis with a discussion of the significance that Indigenous worldviews and pedagogies have and are making to pedagogical and theoretical developments. These contributions highlight the importance of cross cultural dialogue at the present point in history. The potentials for transformative learning and broadening educational approaches are noted. This chapter also addresses the strengths and limitations of this study, discusses possibilities for future research, and concludes with my personal reflections.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

*“Educational systems are universal phenomena in organized society. Their content and character vary tremendously in different cultures, but they exist, nevertheless. The universality of these arrangements can be attributed to the need for all human societies to preserve their cultural heritage, and to inculcate their young with the thought patterns, formal customs and proprieties of that culture.” (Cave & Chelser, 1981, p. 1)*

This chapter reviews divergent literature that informs this study in five main areas: the sociology of education; cultural reproduction through education; Indigenous epistemology; Indigenous pedagogy; and critical pedagogy. In considering the literature related to the sociology of education it becomes apparent that there are varying viewpoints on the role of education within society, ranging from a function that maintains and contributes to social equilibrium to a perspective that considers schooling as a vehicle of domination that reproduces class and cultural inequalities. Some theorists, such as Pierre Bourdieu (1990), explore the class and cultural aspects that influence educational systems and perpetuate the social and cultural capital of the dominant group.

Despite diverse outlooks on educational processes and purposes, these theoretical perspectives do not address epistemological differences and are based in European traditions that are de-contextualized from Indigenous worldviews. It is then necessary to explore Indigenous epistemological and pedagogical perspectives to gain an understanding of their unique cultural outlook. Indigenous epistemology demonstrates a holistic and interrelated understanding of the world, where change, cycles and spiritual dimensions hold valuable insights into knowledge formation. Indigenous pedagogy offers educational models that emphasize learning through observation and direct experience. These approaches to education often reflect cultural understandings of relationships with the natural world and are presented through less formal methods than school based learning. Furthermore, Indigenous learning and teaching are lifelong processes that model a non linear and non

reductionistic approach to life where the focus lies in the development of inner and personal knowledge as opposed to rational, standardized forms of information transmission.

With a broader understanding of Indigenous epistemology and pedagogy, we can begin to see the influence that Indigenous perspectives have had for theorists such as Paulo Freire (1970/2005), the Brazilian educator who generated his theories from interactions with Indigenous peoples. His dialogical approach to literacy and learning call attention to the emancipatory possibilities of education and offer insights into transformative experiences that have influenced critical pedagogy. Education has multiple possibilities that can foster awareness, empower people and stimulate social change, as well as contribute to subordination, oppression, and social control. The exclusion and marginalization of Indigenous viewpoints has contributed to educational inequalities for many Indigenous groups; however, there is a growing awareness of the contributions and importance of these cultural perspectives and the transformative possibilities they inspire.

## **2.1 An Overview of the Sociology of Education**

There are various sociological perspectives on education, its functions, processes and meaning. For the purposes of this thesis, I will offer a brief outline of two of the founding theoretical propositions that have been presented in discussing the sociology of education; structural-functionalism and conflict theory. According to structural-functionalism education contributes to equilibrium and stability, or status quo, of a society (Barakett & Cleghorn, 2000). The educational institutions accomplish important tasks in society, including instruction, socialization, the provision of custodial care, and the sorting of individuals into various statuses (Mooney et al, 2003). This perspectives views school and academic institutions as important systems in maintaining the organization of society, by sorting, selecting and training people for jobs at various levels. The central

assumption of this theoretical perspective is that social stratification and inequality are necessary features of advanced societies (Wotherspoon, 2004). Parsons (1967) suggests that educational attainment had come to replace family background as the primary determinant of occupational placement. Schools and classrooms are viewed as providing opportunities for all students to access desired social positions (Coleman, 1966). In this way education offers avenues for social mobility within a network of personal and institutional relations where people occupy different statuses and roles. The main functions of educational systems are considered as maintaining social stability, teaching skills, values and norms, and upholding existing social structures (Barakett & Cleghorn, 2000).

Conflict theory views society as full of social groups with different aspirations, different access to life chances and different social rewards where inequality is considered dysfunctional and imposed by those in positions of power (Braveman, 1974). This theoretical perspective views education as promoting avenues of oppression, domination and subordination through supporting curriculum, knowledge transfer, and social dynamics that reflect and maintain the perspectives of the dominant social group. Schools and academic institutions reflect society's intention to maintain and reproduce unequal distribution of status and power as well as legitimize 'acceptable' ideas that actually work to reinforce the privileged positions of the dominant group (Fitzgerald, 1993). Connell and White (1998) propose that the education system is as much an arbiter of social privilege as a transmitter of knowledge. Bowles and Gintis (1976) present theoretical ideas that view schools as reproducing class systems and link educational institutions to the surrounding socioeconomic context. Collins (1999) notes that there are distinctions among status groups based on ethnicity and class that allows education to become a means of cultural selection. Conflict theorists argue that if the

education system is to play a part in social change, then students and teachers need to become aware of class and cultural struggles.

The sociology of education is based in the major sociological theoretical perspectives, which offer differing outlooks on the nature of education and educational systems. While various aspects of education have been explored within these traditions, ranging from broader structural perspectives to specific avenues of knowledge transmission, they often represent and focus on European formal educational processes. The cultural components of education are recognized as having a significant role in the processes of learning and teaching and are central in some contemporary conceptual and empirical research in this area.

## **2.2 Cultural Reproduction through Education**

Emerging from the conflict perspective, there has been a growing awareness of the cultural components involved in education and the influences this has on the hidden curriculum that underlies formal schooling systems. Bourdieu's (1990) theory of social and cultural reproduction provides insights into the role of education in perpetuating social inequalities, particularly in analyzing the connections between 'cultural capital' and social structures. In his theory of social reproduction Bourdieu used the idea of cultural capital to explore the differences in outcomes for students from different classes in the French educational system. He explored the tension between the conservative reproduction and the innovative production of knowledge and experience. He found that this tension is intensified by considerations of which particular cultural past and present is to be conserved and reproduced in schools. Bourdieu (1986) argues that it is the culture of the dominant groups, and therefore their cultural capital, which is embodied in schools, and that this leads to social and cultural reproduction through educational systems.

Cultural capital, in Bourdieu's perspective, assumes three forms: dispositions of body and mind; objectified cultural goods; and institutionalized states such as academic credentials (Nash, 1990). He sees schools and academic institutes as validating and legitimating middle and upper class cultural capital. The cultural capital of the dominant group, in the form of educational practices, processes and credentials, is assumed by the school to be the natural and only proper type of cultural capital and is therefore legitimated (Swartz, 1998). This cultural capital allows students who possess it to gain educational capital in the form of qualifications. To gain qualifications, lower-class students or students from other cultural backgrounds must acquire legitimate cultural capital by exchanging their own class or cultural perspectives (Harker, 1984).

This exchange is not straightforward, as the particular dispositions and subjective expectations of school and culture vary. This means that not only do lower class children, and children from non-dominant cultural groups find success harder in school due to the fact that they must learn a new way of 'being', or relating to the world, but they must also act against their instincts and expectations (Ibid). The subjective expectations influenced by the objective structures found in the school, perpetuate social reproduction by encouraging less-privileged students to eliminate themselves from the system, so that fewer and fewer are to be found as one journeys through the levels of the system (Harker, 1990). Of these students who do succeed at school, they have had to internalise the values of the dominant classes and use them as their own, to the detriment of their original class or cultural values (Ibid).

As argued by Bourdieu and Passeron (1990), schools tend to reflect and reproduce the culture of the dominant social group through the use of some languages and not others, the use of certain methods of teaching and learning and not others, the inclusion of certain subjects and not others.

Furthermore, Bourdieu (1986) identified ‘symbolic capital’ (e.g. prestige, honour, the right to be listened to) as a crucial source of power. Intellectuals and educators fall into key roles as specialists of cultural production and creators of symbolic power. When individuals or groups with symbolic capital use this power against others to impose legitimated meanings, ‘symbolic violence’ results through maintaining the economic and political power of the dominant culture and ruling class (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990).

Therefore, Bourdieu's perspective reveals how objective structures play an important role in determining individual achievement in school. While Bourdieu’s theories provide structural understandings into the reproductive nature of educational systems, they have been criticized as being inflexible, overly deterministic and minimizing aspects of human agency (Schugurensky, 1996). Furthermore, his theoretical approaches have been used to understand European-based education and offer a limited understanding of other cultural perspectives. Bourdieu does not account for epistemological variations between cultural groups and tends to focus on external predispositions such as accent or language use. In order to address the educational inequalities that exist between various cultural groups, more than a narrow definition and understanding of culture needs to be incorporated in both theory and practice of education (Hermes, 2005).

“Culture” (with a capital C) has been used in some arenas to refer to literature, art and music of the elite. I refer to a broader definition of culture (with a small c) which consists of patterns of thought and behaviour, including values, beliefs, morals, rules of conduct, political organization and economic activity which are passed on from one generation to the next by learning, not necessarily biological inheritance (Hatch, 2002). This also includes a worldview of a people, group or identity group. Culture is a fluid, complex and dynamic phenomenon rather than a static set of traditional

beliefs and practices (Couture, 1991; Kirkness, 1998; Van Hamme, 1996). Indigenous understandings of culture involve complex and dynamic phenomenon rather than a narrowly defined, static set of traditional beliefs and practices (Couture, 1991; Kirkness, 1998; Schissel & Witherspoon, 2003). Ismail and Cazden (2005) discuss the importance of developing a concept of 'culture' that does not distort its dynamic and holistic nature and argue that this cannot be done with just 'add-ons' or adjusting curriculum. When learning is contextualized, culturally relevant, and authentic, students become more engaged in their education (Hickling-Hudson & Ahlquist, 2003).

More recently, two main theoretical propositions have been presented to explain differences in the success rates in schools among cultural groups. First, micro ethnographic and sociolinguistic research suggests a lack of cross-cultural communication or 'cultural discontinuity' that can result in differences in educational achievement (Dumont, 1972; Erickson & Mohatt, 1982; Greenbaum & Greehbaum, 1983). Second, work by critical theorists suggests larger societal variables, such as power structures, institutional racism, and opportunity structures, also play an important role (Deyhle, 1995; Lipka, 1994; Ogbu 1978). Ogbu (1982) differentiates between universal (discontinuities that occur between home and school settings for all children), primary (differences that result when different cultural groups are introduced to Western-type schools), and secondary cultural discontinuities (which develop after colonial contact and in response to continued stratified domination). He concludes that these different types of discontinuities present different problems and that secondary cultural discontinuity, most prevalent for Indigenous groups in North American, is more difficult to identify and isolate concretely due to structural, historical and diffuse responses to the dominant culture (Ibid). For example, minority groups that have faced a history of discrimination and exploitation and have not been able to develop status mobility systems through academic efforts,

have developed a perspective that equates achievement in schools as “acting white” (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986).

Some research indicates that Indigenous students with a strong sense of traditional cultural identity tend to have a better success rate in school (Chan & Osthimer, 1983; Deyhle, 1989) which seems to contradict the cultural discontinuity thesis. While debates between macro-explanations and micro-explanations have developed (Erikson, 1991; St. Germaine, 1995), it is likely that neither of these approaches by themselves can provide a complete understanding of the whole picture. Poverty and the social structures that perpetuate inequalities for certain cultural groups have been identified in some research as a major contributing factor to high failure and drop-out rates (Hermes, 2005).

Michael Apple’s analysis of schooling recognizes the production and reproduction of cultural practices and social structures where schools contribute to social control and maintaining inequalities (Wotherspoon, 2004). Resistance theory, unlike the more one-dimensional accounts of social reproduction, sees students as active participants in their diverse responses to schooling. For example, as previously noted, school success for some Indigenous students comes with the stigma of failure in the community (St. Germaine, 1995). The goal of preserving their own culture may be more important than succeeding in a system that has been oppressive and discriminatory to Indigenous culture and ways of being. The complexity of issues, including socio-economic, historical, cultural, structural, personal and political factors, still does not address the divergent epistemological positions that are the foundations of different cultures.

Although there is diverse literature on the topic of education, what is considered education often takes a limited understanding of these processes among theorists and researchers (i.e. formal education). Despite the fact that education is a lifelong experience that usually begins in the family setting and can include peer groups, social organizations and workplaces, it is often the case that

education is equated with schools, colleges, classrooms and curricula. Education is often defined within sociological theories as a narrow range of social circumstances which focus on formal schooling processes, often based on empirical evidence drawn from European and North American educational systems.

Western-based education stems from European traditions where knowledge, instruction, skills and social values are transmitted through formal and standardized practices that take place generally in school settings. This involves a focus on school systems and teachers to transmit information often based on government legislated curriculum and evaluation methods. Education in Canada is funded and overseen by federal, provincial and municipal governments and is compulsory up to the age of 16 in every province (except for Ontario and New Brunswick, where the compulsory age is 18). Schools are generally divided into elementary (kindergarten to grade seven), secondary (grades eight through twelve) and post secondary (college and universities). This Western approach to education presents institutionalized instruction from specially trained teachers that tend to use standardized text books, curriculum requirements, and commonly use tests, exam or written assignments to evaluate learning that takes place in an abstracted settings.

Traditional education of Canada's Indigenous peoples was informal, oral and adapted to the economic survival needs of the group (Barakett & Cleghorn, 2000). After contact with Europeans, formal education in Canada was carried out by missionaries whose goals were to convert the Indigenous people to Christianity and rid them of their linguistic and cultural traditions. Residential schools, used throughout the nineteenth and twentieth century, forced a European curriculum on First Nations children, denying them their cultural beliefs, language and disrupting close family relationships (Barman & McCaskill, 1987; Cardinal, 1977). The last residential schools closed in the 1980s and since then many Aboriginal students have been integrated into mainstream schools.

However, there are a growing number of tribal and community-based schools emerging that are controlled by Aboriginal communities.

It has been recommended that teacher education programs provide preparation for teachers in order to work successfully with Aboriginal students (Kanu, 2002). Observations of pre-service teachers found that they used curriculum materials that either ignored the Indigenous students in their classrooms or elicited minimal participation from them (Ibid). Furthermore, pre-service teachers did not possess the cultural knowledge needed to adapt classroom materials and processes to ensure meaningful participation for the Aboriginal students.

The exclusion, limited use, or lack of awareness of Indigenous pedagogical approaches in educational systems and teacher education programs continues to be a significant factor in perpetuating the educational inequalities that exists for First Nations peoples. Educators are “cultural brokers” who shape students’ educational experiences by mediating between Indigenous and non-Indigenous worlds (Schissel & Witherspoon, 2003; Stairs, 1994). Successful teachers of Indigenous students need to be aware of the history, culture and current conditions of their students; moreover culture-based curriculum must go further to create systematic change to reflect the epistemology of Indigenous peoples in the organization of school, language, content, pedagogy and approaches used (Battiste, 1995). Without recognition of the differing epistemological worldviews of Western and Indigenous peoples and how these impact educational structures and approaches, only superficial changes can be offered. In the following section I explore Indigenous epistemology as the basis for understanding the pedagogical contributions that Indigenous educational approaches have and are making in theoretical, conceptual and practical applications.

## **2.1 Indigenous Epistemology**

*Epistemology, the study of knowledge, is the starting point for any discussion of indigenous education. (Aluli-Meyer, 1998, p. 22)*

While there are many distinct Indigenous peoples with their own worldviews, there are significant commonalities among their beliefs (Friesen & Friesen, 2002). Indigenous peoples have their own ways of knowing that preceded contact with European settlers and include knowledge systems complete with concepts of, not only epistemology, but philosophy, scientific and logical validity (Battiste, Bell & Findley, 2002). Indigenous scholars from various nations including Chickasaw, Cree, Dakota, Hawaii, Lakota, Mi'kmaq, Maori, and Pueblo have been documenting their cultural perspectives and epistemologies. These documentations explore central themes in Indigenous epistemology.

Indigenous epistemology understands the world from a holistic perspective where all things, material and spiritual, are interconnected and interdependent (Aluli-Meyer 2001; Deloria, 1999; Ermine, 1995; Friesen & Friesen, 2002; Lane, Bopp & Bopp, 1984). Nothing exists in isolation and in order to understand something, it is necessary to understand how it is connected to everything else. Understanding the interdependence of all things requires attention to individual identity, relationships, and responsibility to the whole (Deloria, 1999; Ermine, 1995). This holistic approach, often absent in Western-based education, offers insights into how learning can be fostered with an awareness of the totality of all things.

Indigenous peoples see life as a symbiotic and spiritual relationship with the environment (Cajete, 1994; Deloria, 1999; Ermine, 1995). While Western views of the natural world are often based on concepts of competition, Indigenous worldviews tend to see the cooperation and communion that exists within nature and focus on existing in harmony with the environment. Survival is based on mutually supportive relationships with all things. Indigenous knowledge is based

on the expression of vibrant relationships between people, their ecosystems, and the plant and animal life that shared their lands (Battiste & Youngblood Henderson, 2000). The purpose of knowledge is to maintain balance between all living things and to transmit this knowledge to the next generation (Cajete, 1994; McKenzie & Morrissette, 2003).

Indigenous epistemologies understand that all things are in a constant state of motion and change (Deloria, 1999; Fixico, 2003; Lane, Bopp, & Bopp, 1984). Fixico (2003) describes the Indigenous circular approach towards life which observes the cycles of nature and reoccurring patterns. This outlook does not separate things into categories or specialties, yet sees things inclusively, where all things are related and come together (Fixico, 2003; Aluli-Meyer, 1998). In the circle of life, a continual effort for balance between the mental, physical, emotional and spiritual realms is the purpose for individuals and communities.

Furthermore, the universe is seen having a moral purpose where the realities of spirit and matter are considered inseparable (Deloria, 1999). Understanding the mysteries of the universe is sought through exploring experience and existence subjectively and manifested through creating community and ceremony. Ermine (1995) discusses how exploration of the self and spirit are the basis of Indigenous epistemology. While Western knowledge seeks to understand the outer space objectively, Indigenous approaches focus on synthesizing knowledge through introspection from an inner space (Ibid). This understanding of knowing provides validation to learning through intuition, visions, and dreams.

For Indigenous peoples, knowing is relational and participatory. There is an awareness of the material and spiritual elements that operate in the universe (Friesen & Friesen, 2002) and a way of

interpreting the perceived world which allows for diverse perceptions to come together in oneness. This understanding recognizes differing parts and comprehends them for what they are yet also acknowledges what they contribute to the collective whole. The Indigenous process of knowing does not leave information in segments, but searches for the connections to meaning and holism (Curwen Doige, 2003). Western knowledge tends to focus on dualities and looks for ultimate truths in either universal or relativistic terms. Aluli-Meyer proposes that “the world is not that way, and these are instead false dichotomies that keep us separated simply because we believe they do” (Aluli-Meyer, 1998, p.194). Couture (1991) explains that “the mode of Indigenous knowing is a non-dualistic process – it transcends the usual oppositions between rational knowledge and intuition, spiritual insight and physical behaviour” (p 48).

The Western paradigm is based on a linear model of thinking immersed in scientific reasoning. It rests on the belief about human objectivity in the outward pursuit of knowledge and truth (Deloria, 1999; Ermine, 1995; Fixico, 2003). This Western worldview segments knowledge into secular forms and presents a fragmented picture of the world (Mckenzie & Morrissette, 2003). Indigenous epistemology understands that people always have different perceptions of what have taken place between them. The issue then is not so much the search for ‘truth’ but an openness and honouring of the different perspectives we all maintain (Ross, 2006). Diversity is considered a natural part of life; furthermore, “great care seems to be taken not to label things, people or events in terms of personal responses to them or argue against anyone else’s view about them” (Ross, 2006, p. 107). There is no a need to compare or prove that one’s perspective is ‘right’ as there is an understanding that people will experience and interpret things differently based on their subjective realities.

Kanu (2005) defines ‘epistemological racism’ as the tendency to marginalize the world views of Indigenous peoples and minority groups and therefore exclude them from knowledge production and representation. McIsaac (2000) discusses how examining Indigenous epistemologies and knowledges reveal a political agenda that defines cultural and historical agency and offers resistance to domination and hegemonic power structures. These understandings represent challenges to dominant discourses and relate a cosmology that contradicts the logic of colonialism and offers a radical alternative (McIsaac, 2000). The term “cognitive imperialism” (Battiste, 1986) refers to the Western scientific quest for universal definitions which ignores the diversity of the people of the world and their views of themselves.

Exploring the diversity of knowledge structures offers us alternative venues in which to expand our understanding of ways of knowing and being (Aluli-Meyer, 1998). Acknowledging the link between culture and epistemology, we can further explore other ways of knowing to increase understanding among peoples and provide a wider, more expansive view of the world. Giving voice to Indigenous epistemology and knowledge assists in recognizing our interdependence and connection.

Language directs how we think and is the vehicle for the expression of ideas (Aluli-Meyer, 2001). Kovach (2005) notes that “incorporating Indigenous epistemology into a non-Indigenous language with all that it implies is complex; It is a troublesome task of criss-crossing cultural epistemologies” (p 27). While the English language is focused on nouns, most Indigenous languages are verb based, reflecting an understanding that life is in process (Ross, 2006). Battiste (1986) maintains the “importance of the preservation of Indigenous languages as fundamental to Indigenous views of education which focus on the development of the whole person” (p. 86). The documentation and recording of traditional languages has become a priority for many Indigenous groups.

Indigenous education is about learning relationships in context where community and ceremony are foundational. Deloria (1999) explains how Indigenous views of education see the importance and significance of personal and moral development to be established first, which is then followed by professional expertise. Indigenous epistemological perspectives often expressed through cultural teachings, stories or myths, are foundational and are the basis of Indigenous pedagogy. The two concepts are interconnected. In the following section I will explore how the cultural worldview discussed above are reflected through educational models and pedagogical practices.

## **2.4 Indigenous Pedagogy**

For Indigenous peoples, education is viewed as a process of lifelong learning that encourages and supports the sustainability of life (<http://www.ccl-cca.ca>). The goals include self knowledge and personal development as the starting place of an educational process that contributes to the collective well-being (Deloria, 1999; <http://www.ccl-cca.ca>). The process of identifying ‘who I am’ and ‘how I relate to the world’ is of paramount importance (Ross, 2006). The emphasis is on the internal process of the learner and their perceptions, rather than focusing on an objective analysis of external world (Kirkness, 1992). Intuitive thinking is encouraged, over the quantitative or analytical modes.

While Indigenous cultures traditionally upheld certain principles or ‘teachings’, such as the law of interconnection, the focus was not establishing who was ‘right or wrong’ or which facts were correct; however, the goal was to understand the relationships between all things and to maintain balance and harmony with the natural world (Ross, 2006). In fact traditional understandings proposed that it is impossible to fully know or control things because of the complexities of their inter-relationships (Ibid). While Indigenous cultures hold beliefs in approaches to life or laws of nature, in

traditional times there was an absence of hierarchical thinking that is reflected in the language structures (Ibid).

The development of the whole person in Indigenous educational perspectives reflects a holistic approach to knowing. Several Indigenous models of education use the concept of a circle or medicine wheel and reference the physical, emotional, mental and spiritual aspects of learning that encourage the balanced development of each of these areas (<http://www.ccl-cca.ca>; Ermine, 1995). Furthermore, the interplay of political, geographical, environmental, social, historical, sensory, instinctual, and intuitive elements of experience are also considered (<http://www.ccl-cca.ca>; Martin, 2003). Like the epistemological foundations, learning is approached as non-linear and not reductionistic. For example, traditional knowledge tries to understand systems as a whole, not through isolating them into parts (Capp & Jorgensen, 1977; Ross, 2006).

Learning in an Indigenous worldview is a trans-generational process of experiencing, absorbing and sharing. Knowledge is gained from a way of living and being in the world and through participation in the natural world. Traditional education was largely an informal process, where skills were taught as part of everyday life (Armstrong, 1997). This pedagogical outlook is comprised of knowledge of the natural environment which has been transmitted from generation to generation, and pertains to a particular people or territory (Battiste, Bell & Findlay, 2002). This ensures cultural continuity and survival in the local environment.

Traditionally, early in a child's life their role would be determined and training for this position would begin as a student or an apprentice, and continue until the person was regarded ready to perform his or her duties (Cajete, 1994). Knowledge was generally transmitted orally and

experientially, and was rarely written down. It was learned through hands-on experience and not taught in abstracted contexts (Ibid). The distinctive features of Indigenous pedagogy are learning by observation and doing, learning through authentic experiences and individualized instruction, and learning through enjoyment (Armstrong, 1997; Battiste, 2002).

Indigenous knowledge is both empirical (that is, based on experience) and normative (that is, based on social values). It embraces both the circumstances people find themselves in and their beliefs about those circumstances (Battiste, 2002). As a system it constantly adapts to the dynamic interplay of changing empirical knowledge, as well as changing social values (Ibid). Furthermore, education is essentially a communal social activity where learning includes involvement in community activities and ceremony (Cajete, 1994; Ermine, 1995).

In Indigenous education, moral development was emphasized through teachings which were often shared in storytelling; through traditional values of humility, honesty, courage, kindness and respect. Instead of relying on explicit hypotheses, theories, and laws, it relies on spiritual, cumulative, and collective knowledge that is annually interpreted (Armstrong, 1997; Deloria, 1999). This worldview considers that “education is more than the process of imparting and receiving information, that it is the very purpose of human society and that human societies cannot really flower until they understand the parameters of possibilities that the human personality contains” (Deloria, 1999, p. 139). In keeping with epistemological perspectives, “the first standard of Indian education is spirituality, at its centre is respect for the spiritual relationships that exist between all things” (Hampton, 1995, p. 42).

The use of storytelling is an important pedagogical practice used in many Indigenous cultures. This approach to transferring knowledge and cultural values indicates that “a widespread Aboriginal understanding that thought or information must be shared in ways that leave it open to the listener to take whatever meaning they wish to find in what they have heard” (Ross, 2006, p. xi). Furthermore, Indigenous approaches to education focus on presenting events or experiences in ways that encourage others to find their own significance (Ibid). In Indigenous worldviews, transmission of knowledge assumes the primary knowledge is pre-theoretical knowledge which centers on “the sum total of ‘what everybody knows’ about a social world” (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, p. 83). Furthermore, the diverse elements of Indigenous heritages can be fully learned or understood only by means of the pedagogy traditionally employed by these peoples themselves (Battiste, Bell & Findlay, 2002).

While contemporary education has attempted to be inclusive to First Nations students, often the approach is also seen as a form of indoctrination when Aboriginal cultural values, perspectives, histories and knowledge are not reflected or presented in the educational curriculum. The integration of Aboriginal students into mainstream schools “has not been one of true integration where the different cultures are recognized; rather it has been a program of assimilation where First Nation students are absorbed into the dominant society” (Kirkness, 1992, p. 14). Inglebret and Pavel (2000) note how additional dimensions of the educational process that intersect with culture, such as existing power relationships need to be addressed within the classrooms and community.

Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2005) reports how there are “major gaps in research that explore the interface of Indigenous epistemology and education and schooling for the 21<sup>st</sup> century” (p. 94). Indigenous frameworks present new and different ways to think through the purpose, practices and outcomes of educational systems (Smith, 2005). Furthermore, Indigenous epistemologies (rather than just pedagogical styles) can lead to a different educational experience and produce a different kind of

learner (Ibid). Similar propositions and understandings have also been emerging in developments in critical pedagogy and will be discussed in the following section.

## **2.5 Freire and Critical Pedagogy**

Paulo Freire's work and theoretical perspectives developed from his work with Indigenous populations, originally in Brazil and later in Central America, Africa and North America. His seminal work, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970), discusses the problem of humanization as a central human issue and as a historical reality. He explains that not only the oppressed, but also their oppressors, have lost sight of humanity and he proposes the need for liberation for all. Freire (1970) presents a critique of "the banking system of education" where teachers consider students to be empty accounts, which they are to deposit knowledge into. Instead Freire proposes a dialogical educational approach where students and teachers establish reciprocal relationships (where there is a teacher who learns and a learner who teaches). This pedagogical approach seeks not only to question the knowledge that students learn, but also validates the experiences that students already possess (Ibid).

Freire uses the term of 'conscientization' to refer to the awakening of critical consciousness that evolves when humans become more aware of the sources of their oppression and relations of power. He proposed an action-reflection dynamic, which both results from and contributes to conscientization, and which combats the 'culture of silence' in which the oppressed are not heard in society (Freire, 1970). The lack of knowledge, acknowledgement and recognition of Indigenous voices and perspectives creates a high risk for the perpetuation of racism, discrimination and an ethic of 'blaming the victim' for their own situation.

Freire differentiates antialogical and dialogical theoretical frameworks for cultural action where the former serves oppression and the latter liberation. The antialogical theory of action is characterized by conquest, division, manipulation and cultural invasion and is used to maintain the

status quo. Antidialogicity is used to manipulate people to conform to its goals and prevents people from uniting through dialogue. Freire states that “One cannot expect positive results from an educational or political program which fails to respect the particular view of the world held by the people. Such a program constitutes cultural invasion, good intentions notwithstanding” (Freire, 1995, p. 84).

The dialogical theory of action is characterized by collaboration, union, organization and cultural synthesis. Collaboration forms through community emancipation where dialogue and mutual trust are present and there is union and organization between leaders and participants. Cultural synthesis is a mode of action for confronting culture that does not deny differences in cultural views and is instead based on these differences. Freire’s concept of “cultural synthesis” provides a framework for understanding the significance of this approach to cross cultural education.

In cultural synthesis, the actors who come from ‘another world’ to the world of the people do so not as invaders. They do not come to *teach* or to *transmit* or to *give* anything, but rather to learn, with the people, about the people’s world. . . In cultural synthesis, there are no spectators; the object of the actors’ action is the reality to be transformed” (Freire, 1995, p. 161)

In cultural synthesis it is possible to resolve the contradiction between the worldviews of different cultural groups, to the enrichment of both groups (Freire, 1970). In cultural invasion, outsiders come to teach their worldview and values while in cultural synthesis outsiders come to learn from and with the Indigenous population (Ibid).

In Freire’s educational approach, authentic reflection considers people in their relations with the world, and is contextual as it draws from learner real life experiences. For example, learners acquire reading and writing skills through a process of inquiry into the nature of real problems facing the community. Furthermore, Freire believed there is a spiritual dimension to people that becomes clear when they are allowed to become fully human. From the exploration of Indigenous

epistemology it becomes apparent that Freire's theoretical and practical applications may have been influenced by the perspectives and worldviews of the Indigenous peoples that he was working with. He proposed an approach for education and social change where open dialogue between teachers and students allows both parties to question, reflect, participate and create meaning (Freire, 1970).

In turn, Freire has had a significant influence on theorists who have developed a new sociology of education that emerged in the 1970s, namely critical pedagogy. Critical pedagogy focuses on the study of the relationship between power and knowledge including how and why knowledge gets constructed, and what the social functions of knowledge are. Critical pedagogy calls into question the hegemonic functions of education that legitimate the dominant power structure's specific forms of authority, where schools and academic institutions act as agents of social and cultural reproduction (Giroux, 1996).

Critical social theorist, Henry Giroux (1996) explores power as the basis of all forms of behaviour in which people resist, struggle and fight for an image of a better world. He considers culture intimately related to the dynamics of power. In keeping with Freire, he challenges the notion of teachers as transmitters of information and presents them instead as cultural producers (Ibid). Furthermore, Giroux (1996) proposed that education should not be fashioned around a particular dogma, but use pedagogical practices which address the changing contexts and conditions and enable students to be critically attentive to the historical and socially constructed nature of the locations they occupy. In his view, schools function not only to confirm and privilege students from the dominant classes, but also through exclusion and insult discredit the histories, experiences, and the dreams of subordinate groups (Giroux, 1994). He urges teachers to be critically attentive to the operations of power implicated in the production of knowledge and authority (Ibid).

Freire's praxis also influenced Peter McLaren and bell hooks in their approaches in education. McLaren (1995) discusses how Freire's writings helped him recognize how the education system is situated within a discourse and legacy of imperialism, patriarchy, and Eurocentrism and to develop counter-hegemonic strategies and tactics of urban educational reform. hooks (2003), who was also inspired by Freire's writing, presents the notion of 'engaged pedagogy' that includes the mind, the body and the spirit. hooks (1994) suggests that part of what we must do is create community in which we can practice engaged pedagogy by bringing our whole selves into the learning environment and examining how we engage with our educational practice.

In her book, *Teaching to Transform*, hooks (2003) discusses how competition in the classroom disrupts connection and how most colleges and universities are organized around the principles of dominant culture. This organization model reinforces hierarchies of power and control. Furthermore, it encourages students to be fear-based, that is to fear teachers and to seek to please them. Concurrently students are encouraged to doubt themselves and their capacity to know. This learned helplessness is necessary for the maintenance of dominator culture (Ibid). hooks (1994) suggests the need to intervene in dominator culture and move towards a partnership model of education that demonstrates how when "students are encouraged to trust in their capacity to learn they can meet difficult changes with a spirit of resilience and competence" (p. 132).

Through this review of literature, an evolution in the sociology of education seems to emerge. Early theoretical perspectives provided explorations into the nature of education as a vehicle to maintain the social systems and equilibrium through status attainment (structural-functionalism), and alternately as a source of oppression and perpetuation of inequality (conflict theory). Bourdieu's theoretical propositions raised the issue of symbolic violence and drew attention to the socially and culturally reproductive nature of educational systems. While cultural educational inequalities have

been addressed through micro and macro approaches, without addressing the underlying epistemological variations they seem to provide shallow understandings of the complete picture. Through an exploration of Indigenous epistemological and pedagogical traditions it becomes clear that this cultural worldview holds a distinctive and complex approach to knowing and learning. We can further see the direct and indirect influences of these viewpoints on contemporary critical pedagogy that is attempting to shift consciousness through educational practices. While Indigenous perspectives are rarely recognized as having important theoretical and conceptual impacts and applications, they have provided inspiration and influences to educational theorists and practitioners who are presenting radical alternatives to the hegemonic structures and exclusionary pedagogy of educational institutions.

## **Chapter 3: Methodology**

In this research I used a qualitative case study design to document and explore the Indigenous pedagogy presented in the Pole Carving course and to address the impacts and contributions of this course. This methodology best facilitated my study by allowing for culturally representative research methods which encompassed diverse data sources. In this chapter I discuss the research design, locate myself as the researcher, and outline the steps taken in my research study. These steps involved gaining access to the research setting, recruitment for the interviews, sampling strategies, data collection, data analysis, and organization of the findings.

### **3.1 Case Study Research Design**

Using a case study design allowed for detailed exploration of the Pole Carving course from multiple perspectives and in ways that contributed to understandings that are comprehensive and contextualized (Bryman, 2001; Platt, 1988; Lewis, 2003). Given that this course was designed to represent Indigenous perspectives, this methodology provided an approach that was culturally compatible with Indigenous holistic worldviews (as discussed in section 2.2 of the previous chapter and outlined below). This case study allowed for exploration of a variety of perspectives rooted in this specific context, where no single perspective could provide a full account of the research issue (Lewis, 2003; Yin, 1994). As there were a diverse range of class members in the course, including both Indigenous and non-Indigenous students and instructors/mentors, there was an opportunity to derive information from participants who had differing roles in the course and various cultural backgrounds.

My research constitutes an intrinsic case study (Stake, 1995) in that the Pole Carving course was the specific and distinctive ‘case’ of interest and the focus of the study was to learn more about

this particular course and its outcomes. The purpose of the study was not theory building or to draw generalizations to other university courses, but to further understand and explore this atypical university course in depth. This research is based on a single case of the *Thunderbird/Whale Protection and Welcoming Pole: learning and teaching in an Indigenous World* course. This was the first time such a course had been offered at the University of Victoria and it presented the opportunity to examine a phenomenon previously unavailable for investigation.

The dynamic and complex nature of the course further lent itself to a case study design (Bryman, 2001; Stake, 1995; Yin, 1994). The course presented a multifaceted educational approach which involved diverse projects being completed by different sub-groups (as will be described later in this chapter) and offered a wide range of experiences bound within this specific setting. A case study design has the ability to deal with a variety of information including documents, artefacts, interviews and observation (Creswell, 1994). Various sources of documentation were created during the Pole Carving course (a DVD, website, and textual documents) which captured information and events while the course was taking place. Retrospective, in-depth interviews provided primary data which allowed interviewees the chance to reflect on their experiences in the course and discuss whether the course had influenced their personal and professional lives in any ways. Through investigation of various sources of data, the research retains the holistic and meaningful characteristics of the experiences and provides deeper understandings into the events.

The research fits Yin's (1994) criteria of investigating a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context where the boundaries between the phenomenon and context are not clearly evident and in which multiple sources of evidence are used. This descriptive and exploratory (Ibid) case study addresses the research questions of how participants experienced Indigenous ways of learning and teaching and what perceived impacts, if any, this had. A descriptive account provides the context of

this course, documents the structure and processes that were used, and offers an example of how Indigenous pedagogical approaches were put into practice within an academic setting in culturally appropriate ways. I also provide an exploratory account of the cultural values and epistemological viewpoints that underlie the pedagogical practices used in the course and discuss influences or impacts these ways of learning and teaching had for participants. This application illustrates an intervention that has no clear, single set of outcomes and therefore warrants qualitative exploration of multiple accounts (Ibid).

Case studies have been criticized for potentially compromising construct validity due to potential researcher subjectivity (Ibid). While I would argue that inherent in any research study is some level of subjectivity, I addressed this concern in three ways. First I used triangulation to verify the information and perceptions from the various sources of data. Second, I conducted a member check by providing three of the participants (two Indigenous and one non-Indigenous) with a summary of the results to check for accurate cultural representations and to confirm the overall thematic interpretations. Third, I engaged in reflexivity through documenting the research decisions I made and continually reassessing my process and presentation of the findings (as further explained below).

### **3.2 Researcher Standpoint**

As a third generation Canadian woman of European descent, I am a settler on these lands. My interest in Indigenous perspectives developed from work with local First Nations communities where I was exposed to values and cultural perspectives that differed from my own. Through a variety of experiences with Indigenous peoples I have gained new understandings from cross-cultural sharing. The significance of these experiences evolved over several years and I was interested in highlighting

Indigenous perspectives in my graduate work as I had noticed that they were often absent from formal educational and theoretical understandings.

My academic research and work has allowed me to more fully understand Indigenous epistemological and pedagogical perspectives, including exploration of Indigenous methodology. While I do not claim to use Indigenous methodology or attempt to appropriate these approaches, I consciously chose research methods that were culturally compatible with Indigenous qualitative, holistic, and oral traditions. My research was purposively and intuitively guided by the data rather than theory. Cultural, conceptual, and theoretical perspectives provide analytical contributions to this research yet the process was highly inductive and based around the data.

Kovach (2005) outlines four key assertions from Indigenous epistemology that inform research with Indigenous peoples: (a) experience as a legitimate way of knowing; (b) Indigenous methods, such as storytelling, as a legitimate way of sharing knowledge; (c) receptivity and relationship between researcher and participant as a natural part of the research methodology; and (d) collectivity as a way of knowing that assumes reciprocity to the community. Within this research project, it is important to present and acknowledge these propositions as Indigenous participants may understand and share their experience from this perspective.

Reflective practices informed and contributed to my research approach and I engaged in assessment of my own biases and cultural perspectives throughout the research process. Indigenous research methodologies recognize dreams as valid and significant to the research process and analysis (Kovach, 2005). Several years before I started this research I had a memorable dream where I was told by an Indigenous man “do not idealize our culture.” I reflected on this at various points throughout the research process and made attempts to recognize and address any subjective biases that could influence the analysis. While this research highlights the contributions of Indigenous

pedagogy (as there is a significant gap in this area in academic literature), I am aware that both Indigenous and Western approaches to education have their strengths and limitations. Indigenous systems often provide multi-dimensional understandings tied to specific locations; whereas Western approaches tend to explore broader theoretical concepts that search for overreaching principles. Both offer important insights into knowledge development and formation.

Although I attended some of the classes and ceremonies, my involvement in the course was limited to that of an observer and researcher. As a researcher, I determined the focus of the study, decided which interview questions were asked, and what has been included in the analysis and final report. These decisions provided boundaries for the study and maintained the focus to be addressed within the scope of a Master's thesis.

### **3.3 Access and Recruitment**

I first became aware of the Pole Carving course in the fall of 2005 when the course was already underway. I contacted Dr. Lorna Williams, the University of Victoria Education faculty member who initiated its development. After meeting with Dr. Williams and expressing my interest in conducting research with this course, she agreed to be a sponsor of my study. In November 2005, she introduced me to the class as a graduate student who would be engaging in research for and with this group. I attended the three remaining classes in the term as an observer, as well as two of the ceremonies. I also was able to talk with students and instructors informally about the course and their experiences. This assisted in establishing my connection and credibility as a researcher who had a genuine interest in the course and allowed me, as the researcher, to have a personal experience of the course itself.

With consent from Dr. Williams, I emailed class members at the end of the Pole Carving course asking for permission to contact them in the future to request research interviews. In this email, I explained the nature of my research and that the interviews would be conducted after ethics approval

had been received (see Appendix A). I also asked for permanent email addresses and telephone numbers as some of the students were completing their programs and may possibly be relocating. An ethics application was submitted and indicated how confidentiality and anonymity would be maintained, that participation in the research would be voluntary and that an Informed Consent form (see Appendix B) would be signed prior to each interview. Once ethics approval was received in January 2007 (approximately one year after the end of the course), I contacted class members by email or telephone to request interviews.

### **3.4 Sampling and Composition**

The interviewees for this study were obtained from an overall population of 38 members of the Pole Carving course, including seven instructors/mentors and 31 students. There were three main Indigenous instructors and four non-Indigenous volunteer mentors. The students consisted of both Indigenous and non-Indigenous undergraduate students (including pre-service teachers), graduate students (at both the master's and doctoral level), and two high school students. From this overall population, I selected a purposive sample of 12 class members to conduct in-depth interviews. I used a purposive sample to ensure diverse cultural and educational backgrounds were included and that the sample reflected the range of class members in the course. I based recruitment selection on cultural background and educational program. I was able to select these participants using profiles of class members posted on the website, as well my knowledge of their program of study and ancestry derived through interactions.

The final sample composition for the in-depth interviews included four instructors and eight students. Two of the instructors were Indigenous (Doug and Quinn<sup>3</sup>) and two were non-Indigenous (Richard and Zach). Of the eight students interviewed, four were Indigenous and four non-

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<sup>3</sup> All names used here are pseudonyms

Indigenous, with two of each graduate students and two undergraduate students. The sample included two participants (both Indigenous and non-Indigenous) who had graduated and were now working as teachers.

The Indigenous students interviewed included graduate students at the doctoral and masters level (Jessica and Patricia, respectively), a pre-service teacher who was now working as a teacher (Angela) and an undergraduate student who was continuing with studies (Anita). Of the non-Indigenous students, one was an Education doctoral graduate student (Teresa), one had been an undergraduate student who has gone on to a graduate program (Lorraine), one was a pre-service Education student who was employed as a teacher when I conducted the interviews (Renata) and another was a Post-Diploma Education student who completed a final practicum after taking the Pole Carving course (Fred).

The sample did not account for variables such as age or social-economic status (SES) as this information was not available. Of the 12 interviewees, seven were female and five were male. All four of the instructor/mentors were male. While there were two female instructors (one Indigenous and one non-Indigenous) involved in the course, neither were available for interviews during the timeframe of the scheduling. Of the eight students interviewed, seven were female and one was male. This was representative of the class composition which consisted of a higher proportion of females students (of the 31 students in the course only four were male). This may be attributed to a higher incident of females entering the elementary education program, as the course was opened to this group of students first.

To expand the sample size and include class members who were unable to attend interviews in person, I sent the interview questions out by email. Four responses were returned. Email respondents (Jen, Clare, Barbara and Marie) included a former pre-service teacher who was working out of the

province, an Education undergraduate student, an Education graduate student, and a sessional instructor who took the course as a class member. Three of the respondents were non-Indigenous and one had a mixed heritage.

A relatively small sample size was chosen as the purpose of this qualitative study is to provide a detailed account of the course and is not intended for generalization. After ten interviews reoccurring comments and themes were emerging; I conducted two more interviews before deciding that saturation was reached. Approximately 38% of the class members were represented in the primary data (interviews and email questionnaires) and the document data provided further accounts from others who took the course.

The data for this study also included textual and multi-media materials developed for, about and during this course (which are described in detail in the following section). These secondary data sources included students' reflection and perceptions written in an academic article, articles written about the course, the course outline and proposal, video-taped interviews with the instructors/mentors and class members, photos, video, and audio-visual representations from the course, as well as historical, cultural and reference information. The criterion for choosing excerpts from these materials included quotes or information that directly related to the research questions and that provided details or examples that informed this study. For example, in the DVD created by the Film group there are video-taped interviews with the instructors/mentors. I transcribed these interviews and included quotes from them where they contributed additional or clarifying information regarding the nature, objectives or outcomes of the course. Quotes from the article written by one of the groups were also used as they provided rich details and examples that contributed to the findings.

### **3.5 Data Collection**

As previously noted, various sources of data were used for this case study. They included in-depth interviews, email questionnaires, researcher observations, and documents data which included textual and multi-media sources. I will outline below how these sources were obtained and contributed to this study.

In-depth interviews provided an opportunity for detailed investigation of each participant's personal perspective and for understanding the situational and cultural context within which the research is located (Lewis, 2003). Interviewing participants from different cultural backgrounds, educational programs, and who had varying roles within the course gave voices to differing perspectives and experiences which contribute to a broader exploration of the overall course. As the interviews were retrospective, participants had time to reflect on their experiences and report on influences the course had on educational, employment or personal aspects of their lives.

At the time of the interview, I verbally reviewed the Informed Consent Form (see Appendix B) with each participant and highlighted the measures I would take to ensure confidentiality. I asked for approval to audio tape the interview (no participants declined). I informed participants that they could ask questions, decline to answer a question, or withdraw from the study at any time. I began the interviews with introductory questions to establish rapport and developed a level of comfort with participants. I asked about how the interviewee became involved in the course, what their educational program or area of interest was, and what courses, practicum, or employment they had been involved in over the past year. These questions provided contextual information about the interviewee and assisted in developing comfort with participants. I then asked several open-ended questions for the main data collection (see Appendix C and D for the interview guides).

I developed the questions with the intent of focusing the participants on the pedagogical practices in the Pole Carving course while providing structure to the interviewee's account of their

experience. For example, I asked the question “how did you experience Indigenous ways of teaching in the Pole Carving course?” Other questions allowed the interviewees to reflect on how the course related to their previous educational experiences (i.e. ‘how did the Pole Carving course differ, if at all, from other university courses you have taken or taught?’). I used further questions to understand the interviewee’s perspective more fully and explore any influences the Pole Carving course had on their concept of learning and teaching, and if their practices of teaching were impacted (when appropriate). I used probes throughout the interview to clarify the interviewee’s comments and solicit a greater depth of understanding of the interviewee’s perspective. I also used prompts as needed throughout the interview to ensure that detailed and relevant information was collected. The interviews varied in length from approximately 60-180 minutes.

Four email responses to interview questions provided further input from class members who were unable to be interviewed in person. I sent out the research questions via email to all the class members that were not interviewed in person. I received four email responses to the questions and while these responses were more succinct and brief than the interview responses (without the opportunity to probe), they enriched the data with additional input and information. Email response allowed for input from class members who were out of the Greater Victoria area or had limited time.

The document data involved both textual and multi-media sources. Textual material included the course outline, the proposal submitted for the course, two feature articles<sup>4</sup> and one academic paper written about course, the Dedication Ceremony Programme, and documentation of comments from a bulletin board created by class members. The academic paper was entitled “*Transforming pedagogies: pre-service reflections on learning and teaching in an Indigenous world*” (Tanaka et al,

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<sup>4</sup>“Loving hands bring Old Man home” by Tom Hawthorn – Special to the Globe and Mail (Wed, January 18, 2006) and “First Nations pole is focus of unusual education course” by Patty Pitts – The Ring – The University of Victoria’s Community Newspaper (January 2006, Vol. 32- No1)

2007) and was written by group of a class members and published in the journal *Teacher Development* (Vol.11, No. 1, March 2007, p 1-11).

Multi-media documentation included a website (<http://www.educ.uvic.ca/pole/>) which features a wide range of visual and text information, including photos, students' comments, reference materials and course information. As well a small group of class members created a 28 minute DVD film entitled "Schalay'nung Sxweg'qa". The film uses visual film footage, oral storytelling, music, and interviews with students, instructors and community members to convey the story of the Pole Carving course. These various forms of document data were reviewed and excerpts or quotes that discussed pedagogical approaches or influences of the course were highlighted and color coded. These excerpts, visual images, photos and text data captured processes and experiences that were taking place during the course.

As previously mentioned I was introduced to the class as a researcher by one of the instructors and was able to observe the last three Pole Carving classes. As the small groups were working in different rooms, I rotated among the different projects to gain a sense of the processes and dynamics. I made notes and engaged in informal conversations with class members and instructors regarding the course and their experiences. As well, I attended two ceremonies that were conducted as part of the course and made further observations and notes. This provided a personal connection with class members, gave me a firsthand experience of the course, and introduced and legitimated my role as a researcher.

### **3.6 Data Analysis**

I conducted thematic analysis using both narrative and content analysis to identify themes and typologies that emerged from the various sources of data. Thematic analysis can be seen as a tool to use across different methods (Ryan & Bernard, 2002) and offers flexibility in how it is applied (Braun

& Clark, 2006). Furthermore, thematic analysis is essentially independent of theory and epistemology, and can be employed across a range of theoretical and epistemological approaches (Ibid) and therefore was a good fit for my research. Using both narrative and content analysis contributed to interpreting and understanding the participants' comments and responses within the context of the interviews, questionnaires and documents. Narrative analysis identified recollections and accounts of the course through stories and examples, and presented the voices of the participants. Content analysis allowed for further understanding of both the content and context of the responses and allowed for linking themes to broader circumstances such as the role or ethnicity of the contributor (Robson, 2002). I will provide a brief overview of these types of analysis and then discuss how they were used to interpret and organize the data.

Thematic analysis provided an over reaching guide as a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns within data while describing data in rich detail (Boyatzis, 1998; Braun & Clarke, 2006). This approach allows for a description of the phenomenon while recognizing patterns within the data where emerging themes became the categories for analysis (Daly, Duncan, Kaplan & Lynch, 1998; Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). This is a not a linear process and involves careful reading and re-reading of the data and a recursive approach (Braun & Clark, 2006; Rice & Ezzy, 1999).

In this research, I take a constructionist perspective, where meaning and experience are considered socially produced within socio-cultural contexts (and given structural conditions). These were considered to influence and enable the individual accounts that were provided. I had two main research questions (1. How did participants experience Indigenous ways of learning and teaching in the Pole Carving course? 2. What impacts did the course and these pedagogical approaches have, if any, for those involved?). Thematic analysis involved searching across the data sets (i.e. interviews) to find repeated patterns of meaning related to these questions and to cluster together specific aspects

that addressed the focus of these research questions. Within this approach, I engaged in both narrative and content analysis.

Narrative analysis identifies the basic story being told within the data, focusing on the way the account is constructed, as well as the meaning of the story (Spencer, Ritchie & O’Conner, 2003). This approach adopts descriptive and interpretative understandings and reports the views and culture of those being studied (Ibid). This method of analysis fit well as my goal was to present the story of this course in ways that are culturally compatible with Indigenous worldviews, while staying true to the meaning and understandings offered by the participants. Storytelling and narratives are both used with Indigenous epistemological and pedagogical traditions and represented useful and appropriate methods of analysis given my intent.

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) used story telling in their research as a tool for teachers to reflect on their personal and practical knowledge. They encouraged participants to reflect on practices as a means of becoming more aware of the central premises about teaching. Narratives and stories from the Pole Carving course were similarly used in my research analysis to explore meaning and pedagogical practices that provided rich detail and descriptions based in participants’ own perceptions and words. Retrospective reflection was also used to offer accounts of the course after one year, allowing participants to recall significant aspects of their experiences and to address influences the course may have had for them personally or professionally.

Cortazzi (1993) discussed how the study of teachers’ narratives is increasingly seen as central to the study of thinking, culture and behaviour. He explains that “any real change in curriculum is not likely to be carried through unless teachers’ perceptions and experiences are taken into account” (Cortazzi, 1993, p. 5). This proposition directly applied to addressing the impacts of the course, in particular for the pre-service teachers. Richert (1991) used ‘case methods’ or descriptions of actual

teaching situations to provide a dialectic between events and meaning. Through narratives, participants in my study reflected, recalled and made sense of their experiences, processes and the content presented in the Pole Carving course.

Riessman (1993) describes narratives as social products that are created in the context of specific social, historical and cultural locations that provide interpretive devices through which people represent themselves and their experiences. Throughout the analysis, narratives were used to give voice to these interpretive devices. Using participants' own words and comments increases the representation of these accounts and provides information grounded within the context of their unique stories. While it is impossible to have a complete understanding of the participants' histories that may affect their perceptions, experiences and narratives, I did have general information as to the participants' cultural background, educational program and their role in the course. I considered and included this information when sorting and categorizing how participants experienced and perceived the pedagogical approaches and their understanding of the Indigenous processes.

Gubrium and Holstein (1998) suggest the use of "analytically bracketing" when conducting narrative analysis. This involves focusing on one level of analysis while temporarily suspending other areas of interest. This provided a helpful approach for differentiating various aspects of the narratives that related to specific categories or themes. I used this practice to select a theme or category and then collect and compile relevant information from the transcripts, email responses and document data.

Content analysis allowed for both content and context of documents to be considered and analysed. Themes were identified through focusing on how content was presented and the frequency of its occurrence (Spencer et al, 2003). I coded common concepts and words that had been identified in the interview data and made notes of other emerging typologies and themes. This approach was used to review and code the various textual and multi-media data sources, as well as to clarify and

further develop the initial themes identified in the transcripts from the interviews. Through identifying reoccurring words, concepts, and experiences I was able to cross reference and triangulate information from the various documents and build an expansive overview of the course based on both collaborative and divergent sources. This analysis was at times linked to variables such as cultural or educational background (Berelson, 1952; Robson, 2002) which offered further substantive meaning within the data.

The first step in the analysis involved transcribing the in-depth interviews. I transcribed the dialogue verbatim and included utterances (such as “uhm” or “you know”) but I did not indicate inflection, intonation or places of emphases unless it was particularly notable. I included my questions and comments as the interviewer to retain the complete context of the dialogue for reference if needed. After all the interviews had been transcribed, I read through each transcript in its entirety and made general notes of salient themes related to the research questions and tracked common words, comments or experiences that had reoccurred in various interviews. I created a preliminary outline of significant patterns I had identified and highlighted and color coded specific thematic trends. Once the initial coding of the transcripts was completed, I reviewed each transcript again while listening to the tape recordings. I checked for word accuracy, listened for places of emphasis or emotion and clarified meanings within their verbal context. As well, I highlighted important comments in the narratives that related to the initial patterns identified (primarily based on whether they related to the process, pedagogy or outcomes of the course) and color coded them.

I reviewed all textual documents including the course outline, two feature articles that had been written about the course, the journal article (before it had been accepted for publication), the website and viewed the DVD film. I then transcribed statements and dialogue (from both instructor and

students) that had been featured in the DVD. Identified typologies were tagged in all the documents based on content and themes were then color-coded in relevant categories.

After data had been compiled, relevant quotes, excerpts and information from the various sources were aggregated into one of three categories: (a) an overall descriptive account of the Pole Carving course (b) an exploration of the Indigenous ways of teaching and learning presented in the course or (c) reports on outcomes, influences or impacts of the course. This assisted in the organization of the data and allowed for further analysis within these areas. Once the various quotes and excerpts had been amalgamated, further sub-categories, patterns, typologies and themes were identified within the three categories. An outline was created for each category and this overview was used to manage and organize the data. Establishing central themes and then typologies was an iterative process in each of these sections. I returned to the data sources several times to contextualize the quotes and excerpts and look for further supporting data.

Presenting and organizing the findings took significant consideration and re-evaluations along the way. As there were multifaceted aspects of the course (in both content and processes) that stemmed from Indigenous epistemological worldviews, the themes and typologies tended to be interrelated and iterative. This contributed to the complexity of the phenomenon and presented a challenge in how to represent the case study in culturally representative ways which also fit within a Western academic format. In order to check for cultural content and appropriate cultural representations I had a summary of the findings reviewed by Indigenous key informants. The remainder of this chapter provides an overview of this atypical course and describes the course development and objectives; instructors/mentors; students; pedagogical principles; evaluation of learning; and the small groups that worked on various projects.

### 3.7 Overview of the Pole Carving Course

*Thunderbird/Whale Protection and Welcoming Pole: Learning and Teaching in an Indigenous World* (the Pole Carving course) was the first in what has become a series of courses presenting Indigenous knowledge and pedagogical approaches at the University of Victoria. This course was offered through the Faculty of Education in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction in the fall term of 2005 (September to December) as a 1.5 credit course (one academic term). The course was initially opened to pre-service teachers (elementary education students in their fifth year of study) and was then offered to both undergraduate and graduate students from various disciplines as EDCI 487/591. The course focused on the carving of a traditional Coast Salish house pole and through this process demonstrated and presented Indigenous ways of teaching and learning.

#### a. Development and Objectives

The course developed through a working group of faculty members who were tasked with raising awareness of Aboriginal Education within the university. It started with the idea of installing a welcoming/house pole to provide a First Nations visual presence in the Faculty of Education and evolved into creating a course where students would be involved in the carving of the pole. The idea of the course developed from a collaborative effort to raise awareness of Aboriginal Education and evolved into an opportunity to provide an educational experience to students. The objectives were clearly defined and included:

- (a) increasing Aboriginal student enrollment in the Faculty of Education (supporting the Faculty's action plan and the University of Victoria's Strategic Plan),
- (b) creating a welcoming atmosphere for Aboriginal people in the Faculty of education by making visible the cultures of Aboriginal people,
- (c) increasing the knowledge, understanding, sensitization, and awareness of Aboriginal people by students, staff and faculty in the Faculty of Education, and
- (d) to provide opportunities for Aboriginal people to actively teach in culturally appropriate ways, that work as a model for faculty and students. (Course proposal)

Several steps were involved in implementing the course: fundraising (applying for grants and funding); establishing and conducting protocols (approval from university and community officials); advertising and informing students of this new course; approval from facilities management; work site preparation; acquisition of equipment and materials (involving locating and transporting an appropriate log for carving); and identifying and coordinating the roles of the sessional instructors and faculty.

### **b. The Class Members**

The course was lead by a First Nations (Lil'wat) professor from the Faculty of Education. Two sessional instructors were hired who had experience and knowledge in First Nations carving, art and education. They were a mentor carver/educator from the Lekwungen/Songhees Nation and a master carver/artist in residence from the Liekwelthout and Lekwungen/Songhees Nations. Traditional knowledge was shared by Indigenous knowledge keepers who were invited from the Indigenous communities to share in ceremonies that took place throughout the course. Three faculty members and one sessional instructor volunteered their time and knowledge in support of this course. These mentors had different areas of expertise (web design, film making, and curriculum development) and provided facilitation, leadership and sharing of knowledge within the small groups that formed as sub-groups in the course.

The students included undergraduate students and graduate students (at both the Master and Doctorate levels), community members, a sessional instructor, and high school volunteers. Students came from various disciplines including Education, Social Sciences, Political Science, Women's Studies and Environmental Sciences. There were both Indigenous and non-Indigenous students, including an international student and individuals from a variety of cultural backgrounds.

### c. Pedagogy, Principles and Process

Student centered learning and collaborative learning were mentioned in the course outlines as two pedagogical approaches that would be employed. The course focused on Indigenous ways of teaching and learning which were described as 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 services to the community (Williams, 2005a).

Furthermore, students were given pedagogical concepts that originated from the Lil'wat Nation to further explain cultural perspectives. The Lil'wat principles of learning and teaching presented in the course were:

- a. A7xekcal – how teachers help to locate the infinite capacity we all have as learners; developing one's own personal gifts and expertise in a holistic respectful and balanced manner
- b. Celhcelh – each person is responsible for their learning; it means finding and taking advantage of all opportunities to learn and maintaining openness to learning
- c. Cwelelep – being a place of dissonance; uncertainty in anticipation of new learning; 'to spin like a dust storm
- d. Emhaka7 – each person does the best they can at whatever the task and keeps an eye on others to be helpful; to work respectfully and with good thoughts
- e. Kamucwkalha – the felt energy indicating group attunement and the emergence of a common group purpose; when a group is ready to work together, to listen to one another and speak without fear
- f. Kat'il'a – finding stillness and quietness amidst our busyness and need to know
- g. Relationship – to be conscious of developing and maintaining relationships, with the people, the pole, the teachers and guides, and the communities beyond the learning community; relating what you are experiencing to your past knowledge and to what you will do with what you are learning
- h. Responsibility – each person is responsible for helping the team and learning community to accomplish the task at hand in a good way, entering the workspace clear of anger and impatience
- i. Watchful listening – an openness to listening beyond our own personal thoughts and assumptions; being aware and conscious of everything around you as you focus on the task at hand (Course handout, Williams, 2005b).

The group would begin each class by gathering in a circle around the pole in progress where there was the opportunity to share information, experiences and perspectives. Then the class moved into separate smaller groups to work on their various projects, with two groups per week involved in the actual carving of the pole. The groups working on the carving rotated each week as it was not possible to have all the students carving at one time. There were safety issues to consider as most of the students had not worked with carving tools or on a large carving project.

#### **d. Evaluating Learning**

Learning was to be evaluated in a way that was culturally appropriate and took into account the fact that many of the students had never carved before. Indigenous worldviews present learning as a continuous process that may extend beyond the time limits of any one event or course, therefore assessing one's self is most practical and effective. The course was a credit/non credit course and focused on self assessment, self-evaluation, and self-reflection.

The main requirements of the course involved engagement and active participation in the learning community, keeping a personal reflective journal, and submission of a final summative paper that included a statement of how each individual would carry what they learned into their lives beyond the course. These assignments did not involve rigid parameters or specific instructions of how they were to be achieved. They were based on individuals' involvement in the learning community (and this could vary considerably) and self-reflection on this. The evaluation of learning was done by the students on an ongoing basis which allowed students involvement in constantly assessing their own learning goals and attainments, and to determine the level of their own learning. This created a cultural understanding of how learning can be viewed as something that evolves and is not necessarily a static attainment based on a test score or letter grade.

### **e. The Small Groups**

The class was divided into five working groups which focused on various projects that contributed to sharing the processes and experiences of the course. The small groups were comprised of six to eight class members with students deciding what small group they would join. Graduate students were encouraged to disperse among the five groups and assume leadership roles; whereas the instructors/mentors acted as facilitators. The five groups were:

#### **(i) The Print Group:**

This group was given the task of documenting the course through the written medium. This took shape in three main ways. First the group created an interactive bulletin board which informed people passing by the gallery where the carving was happening with information about the project. Second the group provided research and supporting materials that served as content for a website. The third goal was to write an academic paper based around the Pole Carving course. The challenge for this group was deciding what to write about and how to present it as no specific instructions were given. The group eventually decided to use narratives from their personal journals to write an academic paper that expressed some of the some of the emotional shifts that were happening for them as teachers and educators. This resulted in the completion of an article entitled “Transforming Pedagogies: Pre-service reflections on learning and teaching in an Indigenous world” that was submitted to the academic journal *Teacher Development* and was published in the March 2007 edition.

#### **(ii) The Education Group:**

This group arranged for the involvement of local school children to witness the carving project and to experience Indigenous ways of knowing and learning. The education group was responsible for

organizing educational experiences to share information about the course with school students and through a proposed lecture series for faculty, students, and staff. This group encountered some challenges and setbacks; they struggled with how to present Indigenous pedagogy in ways that represented the material and course without using a Western-based curriculum style that many had been trained in.

A second challenge came from a union walk out involving teachers which delayed the group's plans to work with school groups. When the strike broke, one of the group members arranged for her practicum class to come to the university. The group planned for this grade 5 elementary class to make necklaces from the cedar chip shavings; one of the First Nations instructors told a story and had brought a drum. This experience allowed this group to share the Pole Carving project with an elementary school class and also gave one of the Aboriginal students in that class a chance to engage with and participate in his cultural background. A third challenge for this group was how to present the material to adults and faculty members. With only one term (13 weeks) the Education group ran out of time to complete this task.

**(iii) The Web-site group:**

This group developed an extensive web site to virtually document the course and provide information to the wider global community. Photos and information about the course provided content for the webpage. The Home Page of the website describes how:

This website is a tool not only to present the history of this innovative project, but also to provide resources such as educational tools, and to introduce the world to coastal Salish culture and traditions (<http://www.educ.uvic.ca/pole>)

Website design was new for most for the group members and they attempted to maintain the Indigenous approach within their small group. A curved border design was developed and text and photos were presented within circular textboxes to reflect Indigenous holistic perspectives. Indigenous concepts were outlined, group processes (i.e. the blessing ceremonies) and projects (i.e. the pole design) were documented, instructors were introduced, student reflections were represented, and there were links to Indigenous community resources offered.

**(iv) The Film/Video group:**

This group was involved in filming interviews and compiling and editing video footage to create a film about the course. The group developed a 28 minute DVD film which provides a historical record of the Pole Carving course. A story written about 'The Old Man' by one of the class members was narrated by a group member as an opening to the film. Video footage from a group outing was used for the visuals and group members took turns conducting and filming interviews. This group worked together to discuss ideas of what to include in the film and learn a film making software program (Final Cut Pro). They worked voluntarily into the next academic term on editing the film which debuted at the final installation ceremony.

**(v) The Ceremony/Celebration Group:**

This group was responsible for organizing and arranging two ceremony/celebrations for the course. Group members researched protocols in keeping with First Nations cultures and took leadership in planning the celebrations. The first celebration was an Acknowledgement ceremony that took place in mid-November. This celebration involved speeches, acknowledgements, a potluck dinner, singing, drumming and dancing. This ceremony offered celebration as part of the educative process and provided practice for the final Installation/Naming ceremony. The final celebration was held two

months after the official end of the course and entailed the unveiling, naming and installation of the Welcoming Pole in accordance with local Indigenous protocols.

This group worked together in organization of these events which included inviting special guests, arranging for food, gifts, and materials required. Ceremony was used as a learning tool in the discovery of Indigenous processes and ways of learning and being. There was a growing understanding that for Indigenous people ceremony is a part of cultural education and celebration an important part of community development.

This presents some of the unique processes and practices that were involved in the Pole Carving course. While this is not a complete picture of the course, it outlines and highlights some of the developments, characteristics and experiences that shaped this course. The following chapter examines how participants experienced Indigenous ways of teaching and learning in this course.

## Chapter 4: Indigenous Learning and Teaching in the Pole Carving Course

*“It was a different way to learn and a different way to think and be”  
(Renata)*

Two main themes emerged from the research data related to the Indigenous pedagogy presented in the Pole Carving course; learning and teaching in community, and learning and teaching through experience. In this chapter I will first discuss how community was created and experienced by participants through three sub-themes which reflect indicators of Indigenous community development; these include shared goals and principles, respectful relationship, and community responsibility. Secondly, this chapter addresses how learning and teaching through experience was encouraged and developed through three educational practices. These three sub-themes of the Indigenous experiential pedagogy employed in this course include: observation and active engagement; reflective practices; and ceremony.

In organizing the themes, as in Indigenous pedagogical models, the learning and teaching strategies were interconnected and relational to each other. A particular pedagogical approach may have meaning and purpose on various levels and was multifaceted in participants' responses. For example, storytelling was used as both a method of passing down cultural teachings and as a pedagogical strategy to provide indirect guidance to questions. In exploring the two main themes of community-based and experiential learning (and their sub-themes), I recognize the complexities and interconnections of these pedagogical approaches. While this is not a complete list of Indigenous ways of learning and teaching presented within the course, it highlights the most noted aspects of the pedagogy discussed by participants.

The discussion of these themes and sub-themes, at times, distinguishes Western-based pedagogy from Indigenous ways of learning and teaching. While both educational approaches have

strengths and limitations, this is not an attempt to dichotomize these approaches; this study highlights Indigenous educational practices and addresses how underlying cultural values and epistemologies are reflected in pedagogy. Richard, a non-Indigenous instructor/mentor, commented that:

there was something really, very powerful and nurturing about an Indigenous approach to teaching and learning. It unfolds in a way that is very different from a Western, sort of, technical, rational, Eurocentric approach to teaching and learning.  
(Richard)

The differences in the educational approaches that were noted by several participants are documented in the literature.

Adu-Saad and Champagne (2006) remark how Indigenous peoples worldwide carry values and epistemologies that are significantly different from the surrounding nation-states. For example, the circular and iterative aspects of Indigenous worldviews are separate and distinct from Western linear thought processes (Fixico, 2003). As discussed in Chapter Two, Western education tends to focus on formal, institutionalized learning based around standardized curriculum, lesson planning and evaluation methods (e.g. testing); whereas Indigenous educational practices tend to evolve from observation, authentic experience and individualized instruction (Battiste, 2002).

Battiste (2002) discusses how giving voice to Indigenous knowledge and pedagogy provides a new vantage point from which to view and analyze Eurocentric education. Exploring differing cultural perspectives also sheds light on the cultural aspects of knowledge construction and transfer. While Indigenous and Western educational approaches are not necessarily mutually exclusive, they do stem from different ontological traditions and knowledge systems. In discussing the two pedagogical themes in the following sections (learning and teaching through community and experience), I will explore how these pedagogical practices are based around Indigenous epistemological perspectives.

#### 4.1 Learning and Teaching in Community

*“It was a much more community-focused and community-based way of teaching and learning” (Richard)*

The concept of community was the most significant theme identified in my research; it was mentioned by all 12 of the interviewees, in the email responses, and in the document data. I will first briefly explore the understandings of this concept from both a Western and Indigenous perspective to provide reference for how this concept is discussed within this thesis. In academic discourses there are diverse definitions of ‘community’ and often little agreement on what this means (Crow & Allan, 1994; Howarth, 2001). It has been noted that:

The term community is one of the most elusive and vague in sociology and is by now largely without specific meaning. At minimum it refers to a collection of people in a geographical area. Three other elements may also be present in any usage. (1) Communities may be thought of as collections of people with a particular social structure; there are, therefore, collections which are not communities. (2) A sense of belonging or community spirit. (3) All the daily activities of community, work and non-work, that take place within the geographical area. Different accounts of community will contain any or all of these additional elements. (Abercrombie, Hill & Turner, 1988, p. 44-45)

Communities may also refer to a wide range of groups of people that share a history, goals, beliefs, interests, values or activities.

Fettes (1999) discusses how Western concepts of community have evolved in “direct response to the increasing complexity and stratification of western urban cultures, which foster a view of the individual as distinct from their surrounding social groups and relationships, and indeed frequently in opposition to them” (p. 29). He relates this cultural understanding back to Toennies’ concepts of *gemeinschaft* (homogenous relations based on kinship and organic ties which have moral cohesion) and *gesellschaft* (where relationships are dissolved by division of labour, individualism, and competitiveness). He further discusses how community has become an externalist word created by an

intellectual class alienated from its land and kin and instead proposes an ecological theory of community that involves a dynamic, cyclical relationship between expressed thought and lived experience; including the narratives that people tell about themselves, and the way they relate to one another and to their environment (Ibid). This moves towards an Indigenous understanding of community.

From an Indigenous perspective community holds a significant importance as the basis of collective and individual identity and as “the context in which the affective dimensions of education unfold” (Cajete, 1994, p. 165). Education is considered a communal social activity where learning takes place through participation and relationship in community, with not only people but also with the natural world (Ibid). Community also holds an importance in Indigenous worldviews as a central unit from which life is lived and viewed. One of the purposes of life and survival is to live in community and this requires sustained cooperation through maintaining relationships. For example, in Nuu-chan-nulth culture, community strength is directly related to the practice and observation of traditional teachings, where adherence to cultural teachings lends itself to strong community development. Within Indigenous epistemology a collective and interconnected understanding of the world offers an outlook that differs from Western concepts of community.

In the sections below I will discuss three sub-themes that highlight the indicators of community that were experienced in the Pole Carving course as identified in my data. These indicators include shared goals and principles (based on traditional cultural teachings), the modelling and development of respectful relationships, and engagement in community responsibility.

### **a. Shared Goals and Principles**

The Pole Carving course involved collaborative processes that included the whole group's participation in sharing, learning, carving, creating and celebrating. The common goal of carving a house pole seemed to create a bond within this learning community. Teresa, a non-Indigenous graduate student, noted that "the power of the pole is that we're all working together on the pole." This communal effort contributed to a perceived sense of connection and shared sense of purpose within the group. Angela, an Indigenous pre-service teaching student, expressed that she "enjoyed...the whole process, it was just, we all did it together", indicating that it was the collective effort that provided fulfilment for her.

This perceived communal effort extended into the small groups as well. While each group had their own specific tasks to accomplish, they interacted with each other to share information for the documents being developed. Lorraine, a non-Indigenous participant, noted how "for instance, the website group went around and collected images and information and stories from all the other groups." She further noted that "there was a recognition of reciprocity" that included an understanding that they were all working together to assist each other in this process. Doug, one of the Indigenous instructor/mentors, mentioned how class members "started referring to each [small] group as a circle or as a family" and Patricia, an Indigenous graduate student, talked about how "all of those little groups formed a community...that's similar to Aboriginal community." This structure mirrored Indigenous community development where certain families or individuals have established roles within the community in which they offer service, materials or skills. For example, Doug discussed how in preparing for a potlatch "every part of the family has to take a portion of the responsibility" and has a job to do to contribute to a good celebration. I will further explore how community responsibility was established in a following sub-theme section.

Renata, a non-Indigenous pre-service student, confirmed this perceived familial experience in her comment on how the group “felt like a really big family.” Jen, a non-Indigenous student, also discussed how “there weren’t groups of friends as in many other courses but a team or family.” She added that “despite being a large class, I knew everyone’s name and would comfortably talk to and or work along with anyone.” The fact that class members came from differing educational programs, cultural lineages and generational backgrounds did not seem to act as a barrier in the working relationships and was reflective of the inclusive attitude created in the course. For example, one of the Indigenous graduate students had permission for her teenage daughters to attend the classes as volunteers. This modeled inter-generational sharing and learning that is common in Indigenous families and communities. Furthermore, an interested community member who was not a university student was also welcomed as part of the class, as was a term faculty member. As a researcher I experienced and witnessed how the group invited family, friends, and Indigenous community members to be involved in the acknowledgement and final celebration ceremonies.

Several participants mentioned a significant event in the group development when the pole was moved from outside the building into a gallery within the building where the rest of the carving was to take place. Renata described it as “a really connecting experience” that brought the group together in a new way. The Lil’wat concept of ‘kamucwkalha’ refers to “the energy indicating group attunement and the emergence of a common group purpose” (Williams, 2005b). In the journal article Laura commented that “the energy was so strong that night we moved the log” (Tanaka et al, 2007) and this particular experience seemed to establish a common group effort which further solidified the learning community as working team.

Indigenous concepts and principles were presented to students in the course outline and shared through stories and ceremonies. For Indigenous peoples, cultural transmission often happens in

families and communities through the passing on of ‘teachings’ (Cajete, 1994; Friesen & Friesen, 2002; Swan, 1998). Teachings include cultural beliefs, stories, history, traditional knowledge, values and spiritual philosophies. The teachings and knowledge shared in the Pole Carving course were based on the traditions of the three First Nations instructors (Lil’wat, Lekwungen/Songhees and Liekwelthout). How and what they shared was carefully considered. Doug, an Indigenous instructor/mentor, described how “different generations follow the same teachings” that come from “the history of our people”. Patricia, an Indigenous participant, explained that teachings involve “a worldview - it is a lifestyle” that reaches across all aspects of life. Furthermore she noted that teachings act as “governing” and provide a common moral or spiritual foundation for individuals and the community.

The process of how these principles are shared is significant. Doug noted, “How we pass [teachings] down to people is really important”. Teachings may be discussed yet more commonly they are expressed through stories, songs or modelled through actions. For example, within the Pole Carving course the concept of working with ‘good feelings’ was a foundational teaching that was shared with the class members. The course outline presented the concept of Emhaka7 (Lil’wat Nation) where “each person does the best they can at whatever the task and keeps an eye on others to be helpful; to work respectfully and with good thoughts” (Williams, 2005b). This teaching of being aware of your intention and emotions when working was presented to the class and modelled by the instructor/mentors. Quinn, an Indigenous instructor/mentor, talked about how he was taught “to have a clear mind when working on a project like that” and said that “whenever I did get angry I knew I needed to stop and walk away” (Quinn). There were safety issues to consider and Quinn expressed the importance of “coming back after dealing with your anger...because otherwise you are going to get hurt, or hurt someone else.”

Often the instructors demonstrated the central aspects and values of traditional teachings without formal discussions. The modelling of these principles provided an opportunity for students to witness how teachings were enacted and central to all aspects of the learning. Safety was an issue as large and sharp carving tools were being used and most of the students did not have previous experience with them or carving. Quinn also talked about “making sure everybody understood what these tools were used for” and the importance of “keeping an eye on your surroundings.” One of the Indigenous students, who had previous experience with carving, talked about how she was able to contribute by “teaching the other students in the class and making sure they were safe” (Anita). Sharing of information and experience came from both instructors and students.

Learning in an Indigenous world is a process that includes awareness of traditional values and knowledge, in which the understanding and application of life lessons evolve with the learner over time. An excerpt from the website explains how:

Traditional Indigenous teachings can be viewed as a process of life-long learning. Lessons are not necessarily instantaneous and the student might not understand the lesson that they were taught until much later in their journey through life.  
(<http://educ.uvic.ca/pole/foundations>)

This form of learning is not as structured as in the Western-based school systems where learning is evaluated often within a set period of time. Marie, a non-Indigenous student, stated in her email response that one year after the end of the course her learning from the course “is still unfolding.”

In the course, class members shared ceremony, food, common goals, worked on projects together and celebrated together. Renata, a non-Indigenous participant, said “it is the experience of going through that together and of being able to open up to one another and trust one another” that stood out for her and she noted “I don’t think we do that enough.” This sense of community is often lacking in university classrooms and is usually not even considered as part of an educative process from a Western perspective. This reflects a more individualistic orientation and value system within

Western culture, whereas Indigenous worldviews hold collective understandings. Teresa, a non-Indigenous graduate student, noted how through the course she was able to “appreciate the role of community in education on a much deeper level.” Marie, a non-Indigenous participant, commented on how “the community created among us was very powerful - even to this day I miss it.”

### **b. Respectful Relationships**

Creating a learning community evolved through establishing respectful relationships. Doug, an Indigenous instructor/mentor, explained how “you always sort of set a foundation and most of that foundation has to do with respect.” When I asked how students became aware of the foundation he said “well I think it was modelled...it wasn’t drilled into people – we showed them what respect was.” This was confirmed by Patricia, an Indigenous participant, who recalled how one of the Indigenous instructors “laid that traditional foundation out...without telling them what he was doing - he just did it.” The development of respect was modelled by the Indigenous instructors as a way of demonstrating this central protocol or teaching. I will further describe how this was demonstrated in a following section on learning and teaching through experience that discusses their apprenticeship-mentor relationship, and how that modelled a non-hierarchical approach to teaching and leadership.

This approach created a perceived sense of equality in the learning environment and presented learning and teaching as a reciprocal process. Teresa, a non-Indigenous participant, noted that while “I certainly saw [the instructors] as my teachers, and respected them as such, but I also felt like they respected me as their learner or that it was a relationship that went both ways.” Both of the Indigenous instructors that I interviewed made comments that indicated this sense of reciprocity. Quinn, one of the Indigenous instructors, commented that “[he] was going to be learning from everybody else just as much as teaching.” Doug, also an Indigenous instructor, said that he approached his role as an instructor as “just another person sharing with you and, you know, please

accept me at the same level.” These attitudes and approaches to teaching seemed to impact the atmosphere in the course, creating a non-hierarchical environment where students and instructors were able to interact with what Teresa, a non-Indigenous participant, described as a “sense of equalness” that was “very different than a lot of [her] teaching and learning experiences.”

The concept of relationship from an Indigenous perspective was defined in the course outline as being “conscious of developing and maintaining relationships, with the people, the pole, the teachers and guides, and the communities beyond the learning community; relating what you are experiencing to your past knowledge and to what you will do with what you are learning” (Williams, 2005b). The establishment of relationships began in the first class when the students were asked to introduce themselves to the log to be carved in a blessing ceremony. This set the stage for developing relationships with the physical and spiritual realms that are recognized in Indigenous culture. Cajete (1994) describes education from an Indigenous perspective as a communal social activity that unfolds through mutual, reciprocal relationships between one’s social group and the natural world. Through presenting themselves to and acknowledging the 285 year old cedar log that they would be engaged in carving, the students began to gain a sense of the beliefs and values that were involved in this process. An Indigenous guest, knowledge keeper and Elder had come to bless the log and told the group that there was the spirit of an old man inside the log. Renata, a non-Indigenous student, talked about how an understanding developed for her through:

...the totem [the pole], in regards to First Nation culture. We kept referring to the totem as ‘the Old Man’ and the first day of class we introduced ourselves and, it was really um...kind of awkward for me because I was speaking to a tree, but over time, we kept referring to ‘the Old Man’ as this being and working with it and how the course was – evolved around it, I really started to feel this being inside that totem and...I was drawn to it. (Renata)

Fred, another non-Indigenous participant, also discussed how, despite his own personal beliefs, he was able to establish a relationship with the log that was being carved. He explained how:

The thing that stands out for me, see is that whenever I go to the university, ‘the Old Man’ there, we have a little conversation, which you know, from my very agnostic viewpoint, from one perspective feels a little bit strange, you know. On the other hand, it just feels like the right thing to do...And whether there is anything really spiritual or supernatural or whatever happening there, I’m always a sceptic about anything to do with the spiritual world from an intellectual point of view, but from a felt sense point of view there seems to be something, I am not sure what (laughter). So, that is some sort of a transformation I suppose. And an appreciation for how the world looked to somebody who is brought up in a tradition which the world around has spiritual meaning, or has some sort of a deeper connection than an object. (Fred)

Fred’s ‘transformation’ involved an experience of developing a relationship with ‘the Old Man’ which expanded his understanding of how interactions with the material and natural world can occur within an Indigenous context.

Establishing respectful relationships was encouraged through actively engaging in developing positive interactions with others in the class and community. Jessica, an Indigenous graduate student, talked about:

...learning respect in a practical way. Instead of reading a paper ‘you should respect’ - it’s getting out there and showing respect...one group researched the protocols on how to respect the Elders and visitors, and the leaders, and teachers, and what we should do and how to respect each other. (Jessica)

Students also had a chance to observe cultural protocols and development of relationship with community through ceremony. Jessica also noted how the ceremony that occurred mid-way through the course involved:

...acknowledging the people who’d worked on the pole, and the people who had played a big role in the whole thing...but also to acknowledge all of us workers...there were community things about that. We did notice, as we were intended to notice, the protocols that happened, the gifts for people, the way Elders were respected and visitors, the sharing of food – to be part of it and to be part of a community. (Julie)

For example, it is common to prepare and distribute plates of food for Elders at the beginning of the potluck meal before others begin to eat as a sign of respect.

Patricia, an Indigenous participant, commented that “the task is important, but the relationship seems to be more important, and establishing that, and a good feeling”. This awareness of the process and importance of developing positive relationships contributed to the atmosphere in the learning community. In the Pole Carving course students experienced teaching and learning where there was a “sense of respect for a person’s charting their own course” (Fred). This reflects the primary orientation of Indigenous education where “each person is their own teacher and that learning is connected to each individual’s life process” (Cajete, 1994, p. 228). Participants described the environment as “relaxed” (Clare, Fred, Teresa), “comfortable” (Jen, Angela), and allowed for “laughter” (Anita, Fred) and “good times” (Anita, Fred) along with and as part of the learning. Learning through enjoyment (Swan, 1998) has been indicated as part of Indigenous pedagogy. This created a place where students looked “forward to coming” (Fred) and where they could have “fun” (Jen) while learning.

The use of humour by the Indigenous instructors was noted by a number of interviewees and further contributed to a space where instructors/mentors and students could interact with each other in positive ways. Not only did this set a tone for the learning environment, but it also modeled how humour can be a teaching tool. Cleary and Peacock (1998) indicate the importance of humour in the classroom as a way of ‘leveling’ and lessening distance between teachers and students. Fred, a non-Indigenous Education student, commented how he saw humour as a “teaching aspect” which involved “setting up the context for learning.” This approach shows an understanding of the learning process and how when one is open and relaxed that learning can occur more naturally and with less stress and effort. Teresa, a non-Indigenous teacher educator, also noted how “learning happens differently in that kind of an environment.” This provided an environment where students were able to feel open to learning new skills and become absorbed in the task at hand while engaging in their

learning. Furthermore, humour provided examples of being able to laugh at oneself or life circumstances, which in turn creates acceptance and provides a more open and inviting setting. Traditionally in Indigenous teachings, humour acted as a respected trait and allowed for dealing with difficulties and hardships (Swan, 1998).

### **c. Community Responsibility**

From the beginning of the course, there was a “shared sense of responsibility” (Lorraine) and collaborative involvement in the learning community was established. The concept of responsibility was presented through one of the Lil’wat teachings and meant that “each person is responsible for helping the team and the learning community to accomplish the task at hand in a good way” (Williams, 2005b). This collective approach to understanding responsibility contrasts with the more individualistic values that are often promoted in Western culture and education. Lorraine, a non-Indigenous participant, described how:

It’s a very, very different way of understanding community responsibility and, it’s a very trusting way of understanding community responsibility, and, it’s in direct opposition to the liberal-humanist approach to life where every individual is responsible for themselves, and for what they gain in life. It’s kind of ironic though, because in the Indigenous context, there is a lot more responsibility placed on the individual in some way, because you have to know your role. (Lorraine)

She further explained how this approach focused on “learning to take up one’s responsibility in, within the community, without being directed to do so” (Lorraine). This course presented students with opportunity to discover their part in their small groups and how they could contribute to the larger learning community. While the concept of responsibility was addressed, what each person was to do was not explicitly stated. Traditional Indigenous education occurred in a holistic social context that developed the importance of each individual as a contributing member of the social group (Cajete, 1999).

Having to figure out what was needed or required within the learning community without being directed as to what to do was challenging and frustrating for some students. However, it also presented opportunities for agency for students that created deeper involvement in their own learning process. Renata, a non-Indigenous Education student, commented that:

I think I felt a great, a much deeper sense of responsibility over what was to happen and how it was suppose to happen and a greater control of what it was to look like – which was hard to comes to terms with – because we’re not used to that, I don’t think we’re used to having so much freedom and being trusted really.  
(Renata)

This concept of trust was mentioned by both of Renata and Lorraine (see quotes above) and can be linked the Indigenous social and pedagogical approach of non-interference (Brant, 1990; Ross, 1992) where the teacher may stand back and allow the student to take the lead in what they want to learn or how to approach a problem. This Indigenous orientation understands that “teaching is relative and each path of knowledge has its own requirements” (Cajete, 1994, p. 226).

The Pole Carving course presented a learner-centred approach where students were given responsibility for their own learning and how they would be involved in the processes of the course. Teresa, a non-Indigenous participant, discussed how being in charge of her own learning created the opportunity to “explore whatever it was I wanted to explore - and there was a freedom to do that and support to do that.” This contrasts with Western-based pedagogy, which often differentiates student and teacher responsibilities and tends to emphasize a transmissive approach to learning. Renata, a non-Indigenous teacher, said, “I think that we are addicted to direction in this [Western] society. We really rely on roles and labels and descriptions of what is expected.” While the tendency to focus on directive approaches in Western education may be considered a more efficient way of transferring knowledge, this can also impact the exploration of diverse meanings. Marie, a non-Indigenous participant, commented that what she enjoyed most about the course “was the freedom to think”.

There is a focus in Indigenous approaches to education on allowing an individual to find their own meaning, on internal orientations to learning, and on personal development (Cajete, 1999; Deloria, 1999; Ermine, 1995).

## 4.2 Learning and Teaching through Experience

*“The experiential component was key for me” (Teresa)*

While experiential learning is a concept and practice used in some Western educational approaches, it holds a different meaning in an Indigenous context. Experiential learning in general is considered the process of making meaning from direct experience which develops through reflection on activities engaged in and is contrasted with rote or didactic learning ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Experiential\\_learning](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Experiential_learning)). Kolb (1984) provides a descriptive four stage model which begins with (a) concrete experience, (b) reflection, (c) abstract conceptualization, and (d) active experimentation which in turns leads into new learning experiences. These stages are similar in Indigenous pedagogical approaches yet the process can be iterative and is not necessarily linear. Furthermore, what makes an Indigenous approach different from Western approaches is how learning opportunities are presented and the epistemological and ontological premises that underlie the pedagogical practices.

Learning and teaching through experience was encouraged in the Pole Carving course in several ways, such as involvement in carving, small group projects, ceremony, sharing circles and through journaling. One of the most common ways that participants described their learning in the Pole Carving course was through “hands on learning” or “learning by doing”. From the first day of class when a blessing ceremony was held, it was apparent that this was not going to be a typical university course based around lectures, textbooks and exams. Renata, a non-Indigenous participant, remembers “it being very different than any other course that I had ever experienced before and I could tell right off the bat that it would be much more experiential than theoretical.” Clare, a non-Indigenous

participant, noted how “theory and facts were not stuffed down your throat. The teaching approach respected the intelligence of the participants and issued forth as a more experiential engagement for participants.” Jessica, an Indigenous graduate student, further explained that:

In this course, you did things. You made the pole. You moved it. You erected it. You celebrated it with First Nations people, learning to do things their way...No one had to read a bunch of academic papers about how to do it. Which is all abstract, and it is not concrete about how to do things. So this is learning by doing - learning practical things. (Jessica)

Students were given the opportunity to actively engage in tasks by working alongside First Nations instructors. This involved not only carving techniques, but also cultural understandings of learning and teaching. Teresa, a non-Indigenous participant, explains how:

...the experiential component was key for me because, like I said, it is one thing to read about Indigenous people, or even to take a class from an Indigenous person, but a whole other thing to actually do a project together, in an Indigenous way. (Teresa)

Learning in an Indigenous way included a focus on the skills involved in carving a house pole, as well as the stories, songs, protocols, and ceremonies that were in keeping with traditional practices that are part of carving and erecting a house pole.

Indigenous peoples commonly use demonstration, observation, modeling, and mentoring as fundamental approaches to learning and teaching (Swan, 1998). The demonstration of skills, behaviours, and values by the instructors/mentors was an important part of the pedagogical approach used in the Pole Carving course. Modeling provided an opportunity for learners to observe the use of tools, carving techniques and skills within this specific context, as well as allowing students to observe the instructor/mentors enacting values, desired behaviours and cultural approaches to teaching. The use of modeling was noted in previous sections (i.e. in establishing respectful relationships) and indicates the widespread use of this technique. This reflects an approach towards

learning and teaching that involves “do as I do”, where education occurs by example and not by a process of indoctrination (Deloria, 1999).

Teresa, a non-Indigenous graduate student, talked about how information was shared and that “it wasn’t like they [the instructors] had all the information and I was going to have to somehow get that information, and, you know, regurgitate it.” She further described how this involved pedagogical practices where “the teacher doesn’t always talk. The teacher might be listening, or be still, and...there was a lot of teaching by showing” (Teresa). Zach, a non-Indigenous instructor/mentor, described how in this approach:

You don’t always have to be told - that’s the thing - you can be shown. And you can absorb information from situations that occurred, you know, interactions from others, amongst others, and listening to what’s going on. So, I think information, these channels of information work in different ways. (Zach)

I will explore the Indigenous experiential strategies that were employed in the course and the influence these approaches had on the learning through three sub-themes: observation and active engagement; reflective practices; and ceremony.

### **a. Observation and Active Engagement**

In an Indigenous context, learning often starts with observing and watching. One of the First Nations participants said this of Indigenous ways of learning:

It is more observing - you would observe the so-called ‘teacher’ doing the carving, and first you are just watching to see how it is done, you get an interest. And you then go watch somebody while they do it and then you start to just see how they are doing it and then after a while then you go and you start to learn but in some ways you already know from watching – it is not just like ‘do this’ and then the person walks away. There are right there with you. (Anita)

The learning process evolves, starting with watching the ‘teacher’, and then gradually giving the learner opportunities to work along with the mentor, who provides guidance. Learning happened

progressively over time and “maybe it’s just a little experience first, and you kind of taste that and then the teacher opens up another experience for the learner. I mean, it requires a lot of restraint on a teacher’s part” (Lorraine). This pedagogical approach understands that a student must learn to do simple tasks before they can develop more complicated skills. As noted by this non-Indigenous participant “we were taught by watching, then doing on our own and as confidence grew, learning to take the lead” (Jen).

The instructors in the course presented learning opportunities for students while offering guidance and support. One of the Indigenous instructors said “hopefully that, some students didn’t take offence to that, when I didn’t answer their questions, but was actually just saying, well try it out and see where it goes from there” (Quinn). Teresa, a non-Indigenous teacher educator, discussed how this approach gave her the sense that the instructors were “really willing to trust me and it gave me confidence that I could do things that I didn’t think I could do”. For many of the students, this was the first time that they had carved and used large carving tools such as an adze, which is similar in purpose to an axe, but with a cutting edge at right angles to the handle rather than aligned to it (<http://www.encyclopedia.com>). Teresa further commented on how there:

was validation of my potential as a participant in the course... like for the first time I picked up an adze and was swinging away at the wood. There was a point, I was like, ‘oh my gosh this is huge tool, can I do this?’, but there was this sense I got from [one of the instructors] of, ‘Yah you can do this. You know, why not?’ And, so, he had me start carefully with a small piece on the ground. (Teresa)

Students were encouraged to start gradually with tasks that were manageable and then encouraged to build their skills and confidence and take on more and more responsibility over the course of time.

Through this type of encouragement, students were empowered in their learning and felt “trusted to do things” which in turn provided “confidence to try new things” (Teresa). This helped to instil skill development in students and allowed them development in their own learning process. Students gained and developed techniques and confidence through active engagement, which

sometimes involved trial and error. One participant talked about “when I spilled paint on the pole” and “what in my culture, or in my upbringing, would have been seen as a mistake, was just seen as something that happened” (Teresa). The response of the instructors to this ‘happening’ provided a “very different experience than a lot of educational experiences I’ve had” (Teresa). Furthermore, she said that this type of learning “implies trust in the learner - that the learner will be able to do what they set out to do, or what they need to do - and so the power becomes a much more shared, back and forth kind of thing” (Teresa).

Many of the participants I interviewed mentioned the instructor/mentors and their approach to teaching. While the instructor/mentors may have had expertise in an area, such as carving, web design, or film making, they provided guidance but did not direct or micro-manage the activities. Jessica, an Indigenous participant, talked of “the quiet way that they [the instructors] taught” and “even though they were the experts, they didn’t jump in and be the experts.” The process involved sharing information, guidance and allowing the students to experience and discover things for themselves. This approach contrasts itself with Western based pedagogy that tends to focus on the knowledge the teacher holds, which can in turn create dependence on the approval of “experts”.

This process of engaging students required the instructor/mentors to be aware of when to present new information and when to step aside and allow students to “build their own learning journey” (Lorraine). This learning process created engagement as well as a sense of agency for the students. This educational approach reflects an Indigenous worldview where learning is often specialized and developed uniquely based on an individual’s talents, aptitudes and interests. This differs from Western education where teaching is often standardized and “the teacher has the knowledge and gives the knowledge” (Lorraine) in a similar way to all students based on established lesson plans, lectures or presentations.

Apprenticeship also evolved as part of Indigenous teaching methods presented in the course. One of the Indigenous students who had previous carving experience was given the role of ‘the apprentice’. This particular student was able to spend additional time engaged in the carving process (both inside and outside of the class time) and was able to further develop her skills and knowledge by working alongside the master and mentor carvers. This demonstrated an Indigenous cultural approach where individuals’ previous knowledge and skills are recognized and built upon, often in individualized ways.

Apprenticeship and mentoring was also modeled in the relationship between the master carver and the mentor carver. How the instructors related to each other was described by Patricia, an Indigenous graduate student, as “a true master and apprentice type relationship” which she noted “wasn’t a hierarchy.” She further explained how the instructor/carvers worked together to decide what needed to happen without one being the authority and telling the other what to do. She mentioned how this modeled Indigenous leadership where the process was based on empowering another to problem solve and did not present a “power struggle” (Patricia). The relationship between the mentor and master carvers modeled shared leadership and demonstrated a mentorship approach to learning and teaching.

The mentorship extended beyond leadership and the carving process and into the areas of teaching. The instructors provided opportunities for learning by creating space and time to listen and share with students. One participant mentioned how some of the pre-service teachers would go to one of the Indigenous instructors and “he’d be just carving away, and might quietly say a few words. And they were going to him as someone who had experience, and yet it was so equal - that was nice” (Jessica). She further expressed how students “could talk to him [the Indigenous instructor/mentor] about the challenges they were encountering in their practicum” and how “he’s not just being a

carving teacher, he's a role model in the community, but in an accepting, safe, non-threatening kind of way for the young teachers" (Jessica). This created opportunities for pre-service teachers to discover new approaches to teaching, to ask for advice, and to feel supported in their questions and learning process.

This approach to learning and teaching conveyed a sharing of power, where the instructor does not necessarily hold ultimate authority. This was expressed by this participant's comment that "I really appreciated being trusted with the experience rather than being told how to experience things or told how to do things" (Renata). hooks (1994) expresses the importance of students being engaged in the process of their learning where they are active participants and not just passive consumers. Richard, a non-Indigenous instructor/mentor, commented on how witnessing this experiential pedagogical approach in the course "reinforced for me, my belief that learning happens by being involved in something. It's not simply listening, or writing, but about being engaged - about being involved in the act itself." Marie, a non-Indigenous teacher, also commented that:

I've always known that I learn better by doing. I get bored otherwise and tune out. I make a point to provide that opportunity for my students as well because I don't want any of them falling asleep in my class like I have felt I might do in the past.  
(Marie)

This active approach to learning worked well for some of the class members and their learning styles and offered ideas for teachers about how to engage students in projects.

Indigenous pedagogy recognizes that there is risk involved in the learning process and an accepting environment can allow the learner to feel more comfortable in order to take the steps to open up to learn at a deeper level. Clare, a non-Indigenous participant, commented that she "did not feel pressure to perform" yet her learning was given "ample space and respect to deepen as time and experience merged." Angela, one of the Indigenous pre-service teachers, discussed how the process allowed her to:

...slow down and realize that you can just take - you don't have to get it right away, and you can take your time, and just through exploration, you kind of start to learn it, and understand. Before I was always, if I didn't get it right away, I thought well this isn't the thing for me, or this is too hard, like I didn't really give myself enough time to kind discover what it was that I was learning. So I think I learnt, even about myself, learnt a little about my learning style and to kind of lighten up a little bit. (Angela)

Having less time pressure created opportunities for learning, not only for developing new skills but also personal and pedagogical process. Jen, a non-Indigenous participant, also noted how “the atmosphere was easygoing and most of us felt encouraged by wanting to achieve rather than being driven to meet a time limit.” This can be contrasted to Western based methods of instruction which are often time focused or result-oriented. Renate, a non-Indigenous participant who was now teaching in the public school system, discussed how she has “42 minute blocks” and commented on “how do I teach math in 42 minutes, I don't know and I don't know how the kids do it, but we just have to do the best we can in the time we have.”

This learning environment created motivation and commitment to the process for some students. This experiential process allowed students to move through some of the challenges of the course. In the article written by the Print Group, Yvonne, a non-Indigenous pre-service teacher, described her learning process in the following way:

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, website)

The process of figuring it out for oneself seemed to provide motivation and created the opportunity for discovery and being able to find one's own answers. This contributes to the development of critical thinking and analytical skills that are fundamental for the development of individuals' full potential. Furthermore, independence and freedom provided through learning opportunities creates

students who are able to make more choices in life and easier adapt to different and uncertain situations (Watt-Cloutier, 2000).

Many of the students and instructors extended their involvement with the course into the next academic term as some of the projects needed more time beyond the 13 weeks of the course. In responding to this continued involvement, one student commented about her commitment to the course and said “I would say that I have more of an investment in this course than any other course I’ve taken. I, you know, in the end I want to see it through, even though after this it’s all voluntary time” (Val, DVD). The course provided a community environment that encouraged engagement and commitment from both the students and instructors. The collective contributions of all the groups demonstrated how collaborative interactions can work in an environment that has solid foundations and upholds the value of the responsibility to the project and larger group.

#### **b. Reflective Practices**

*“Reflection was probably the way that I learned most through this process” (Barbara)*

Reflection is a process that focuses on inward learning and the development of self-knowledge which are central aspects in Indigenous education. Reflective practices involve thinking about and learning from your own thoughts, feeling and practices, and through relationships with others (Brookfield, 1995). As well, experiences and ideas shared by others allow one to gain new perspectives, improve judgment, and increase the probability of taking informed action when situations are complex, unique and uncertain. With ongoing reflection, understandings can develop into a systematic inquiry that begins alone with reflection but may become collective when shared with others (Ibid). Further reflection can be deepened and informed by interactions and consultation with others and through research and reviews of relevant literature.

Teaching practices often offer unquestioned acceptance of values, norms, and practices defined by others about what is "in the best interests" of students and may not be informed by alternative or

cultural practices. Both uncritically assimilated practices and unexamined assumptions need examination from several perspectives so that the learning and teaching strategies are consistent with values, beliefs, and assumptions of both teachers and students. The Pole Carving course presented some alternative methods that were challenging and disorienting for some of the non-Indigenous students and yet they created opportunities for further reflection on teaching and educational practices. There were four main ways that reflection was encouraged in the Pole Carving course: through the process of carving, sharing circles, story telling and journaling. I explore how each of these practices developed reflective learning in the following paragraphs.

Several participants noted that when carving they were meditative and able to be reflective. One of the non-Indigenous participants said that it was:

...a relief for me to come and immerse myself in the carving project. When I was carving, it was a time to relax and meditate, time to think about what was going on in my life. Time to listen to others and learn lessons from them...just taking the TIME. I think this is an important lesson for all of us. (Jen)

Being engaged in the process of carving, which often was done without dialogue, created space and quietness where learners and instructors were focused on the task at hand, which in turn allowed time for reflection. Fred, a non-Indigenous education student, described how this process occurred:

...especially when you were carving and you were sitting there, and enjoying the process but you were also, there's silence at times too, in which you are there with the wood, and the other people around you, in that silence, that was comfortable I think. It seemed like it was time to let your mind, let it go where it would go, you know. Maybe reflect on what was happening. (Fred)

The quietness that developed when students and instructors were focused on the tasks at hand allowed for the integration of experiences and opportunities for reflection.

The carving process, where class members were working side by side with each other and the Indigenous instructors, also created space for discussions and the sharing of ideas, thoughts and cultural perspectives. One of the First Nations instructors remembers how:

...while we were working on the project, I didn't just talk about just carving, you know, I talked about language and different topics came up with students as well. Not only did it open up an avenue just for carving, but many, many different social issues, and issues that are global. (Quinn)

This was confirmed by one of the non-Indigenous graduate students, who discussed how “the discussions that occurred while carving extended beyond the content of the course and modeled interactive dialogue between students and instructors” (Teresa). The sharing of ideas and perspectives further conveyed a sense of equality and reciprocity where understandings and ideas could be developed between students and instructors. This modeled a pedagogical approach and process where students were able to reflect upon and share their experience.

The opportunity for the sharing of information and ideas also occurred at the beginning of the classes when the whole group would come together in a circle around the pole before breaking off into their separate smaller groups. This large sharing circle provided a space for the sharing of teachings, stories and personal reflections, as well as providing a place for students to express their questions, ideas, and concerns. This allowed for making meaning of experiences and ideas within the larger whole (Fixico, 2003). Sharing circles create an inclusive space for learning and teaching that offers a location for the development of shared understandings (Hart, 2001). Teresa, a non-Indigenous teacher educator, explained how there was “an unspoken understanding that anyone could talk in the circle, and that their voice was important and interesting and worth hearing and worth listening to.” Fred, non-Indigenous education student, discussed how this “type of sharing, you don't usually get that in a university course” and he commented that he found it to be “very connecting.” The use of a circle format created an environment where sharing was encouraged and individual comments and contributions were acknowledged.

The circular classroom format used in the large and often in the small groups provided a conceptual and structural framework for learning and teaching. Fixico (2003) discusses how

Indigenous worldviews emphasize circles and cycles and how this is fundamental to understanding knowledge in an Indigenous world. He explains that when people or things are arranged in a circle we can more clearly see the relationships with the whole and therefore the need for treating each other equally and with respect (Ibid). The circle format creates a model in shaping the power dynamics in the classroom. Teresa noted that “what a circle does is equalizes a lot of the power relationships that are in a group.” This non-Indigenous graduate student, who has several years teaching experience, explained that “if I’m standing at the front of a class and my class is all in rows, there is a certain power relationship that is set up. If we are all sitting in a circle it changes that dynamic.” Class members were able to see each other and the circular structure contributed to sharing of ideas and experiences in a non-hierarchical way. Renata, non-Indigenous participant, commented that “it doesn’t feel like it has to be top-down control, it can kind of be open.” Furthermore, the circle provided a space where the instructors modeled “speaking from the heart” (Renata) without lecture notes or a set curriculum. Jen, a non-Indigenous participant, commented that “we were told stories but not lectured to.”

Story telling is a cultural practice that has been historically used by Indigenous peoples and is tied to the oral tradition of transmitting knowledge (Little Bear, 2000). Story telling was used in the Pole Carving course as a teaching technique in at least two ways. Firstly, telling traditional, family and mythical stories provided an opportunity to share Indigenous history, values, and teachings in ways in keeping with Indigenous oral traditions. Jen, a non-Indigenous participant, commented on how “morals were taught by witty and interesting stories or listening to personal experience.” Little Bear (2000) describes storytelling as an important part of the educational process where customs and values are taught and shared.

Secondly, story telling was used to provide indirect guidance to questions that encouraged students to explore finding their own answers. This relates to a non-directive pedagogical approach based on the Indigenous social norms of non-interference. Brant (1990) describes non-interference as a “behavioural norm that promotes positive interpersonal relations by discouraging coercion of any kind, be it physical, verbal or psychological” (p. 535). Students were encouraged to reflect on the stories and how they may pertain to the question or circumstance and then discover their own solutions or realizations. This was challenging for some students and Jen talked about feeling “frustrated and discouraged when [she] was not handed the answer on a platter” and how after reflection this led to an awareness of her dependence on instant answers without critical reflection.

Teresa, a non-Indigenous teacher educator, discussed how:

...if you pay attention long enough, and that could be the next week, it could be three weeks or a month, your questions start to get answered. It just might not happen in that direct, you know, answer-questioning-answer thing that Western traditions are used to. (Teresa)

This indirect approach reflects a cultural value of patience and a belief in allowing understanding to develop individually rather than being directed by an external source. This approach recognizes diversity in learning styles and provides space and room for learners to develop understandings in their own time. This class member, in the Print Group article, described how:

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. –Robyn (Tanaka et al, 2007).

Learning opportunities came in a variety of ways, including one of the course requirements to keep a weekly reflective journal.

All of the class members were asked to keep a learning journal to record their learning and experiences in the course (Course outline). There were no other specific requirements attached to this process and the journal could be highly individualized. One participant talked about how she “did different kinds of journals. Sometimes it was descriptive journaling, sometimes it was sort of thoughtful journaling about, I wonder what was going on there. And sometimes it was very much a, I almost want to call it, like a meditative journaling” (Teresa). Teresa, a non-Indigenous graduate student, also said that this process “helped me learn new ways of suspending my thinking so that other ways of awareness could happen – other experiential ways of awareness.” Jessica, an Indigenous graduate student, talked about the process of journaling and how this ‘helps you learn a lot more because...you process it to another level.’ The journaling process encouraged individualized and internalized learning which required the student to explore their personal experiences, beliefs or understandings. The Pole Carving course involved a final assignment that required students to summarize their weekly journals and express what they learned in the course and how they would extend this learning into their work or discipline of study. This assignment encouraged further reflection on the learning process and how knowledge transfer could be extended into professional practices or their lives beyond the course.

Indigenous pedagogical processes provided venues for sharing, discussions, listening and working in silence where students had opportunities to reflect, process, and internalize learning. While listening and reflecting happens in Western-based education, the Pole Carving course presented these pedagogical approaches in Indigenous ways which often did not present direct answers to questions and focused on the learner looking for answers from within. The concept of “watchful listening” which was presented in the course involves creating “an openness to listening beyond our own

personal thoughts and assumptions, being aware and conscious of everything around you as you focus on the task at hand” (Williams, 2005b).

Through the process of reflecting students were able to gain personal insights and discover a deeper level of learning that may not happen without the time, space and encouragement. Lorraine, a non-Indigenous participant, discussed reflection as “that process of figuring out that creates a deeper level of learning for me. So the Indigenous context of learning is really driving at that deep level of creating, you know, an experience” (Lorraine). Renata, a non-Indigenous pre-service teacher, commented on how reflection allowed her to explore why she was “having a really uncomfortable time” with some aspects of the course and she realized how often she did not take the time to really stop and think about things. She described the learning as “way more reflective” and said “I learned to slow down and... listen to how everyone else was experiencing things and reflect on how I felt a lot about what was happening” (Renata). This type of reflection encourages personal awareness and self knowledge which are considered foundational aspects of Indigenous education.

### **c. Learning through Ceremony**

The inclusion of ceremony within the Pole Carving course was a unique cultural aspect of this university course. Learning and teaching in an Indigenous world includes ceremony as an important experiential and educative process that is based on Indigenous epistemological understandings. The website explains “the importance of First Nations and Aboriginal ceremony is to recognize the gathering efforts of a community, and to connect with ancestors who continue to influence the lives and spirits of each community, individual, animal, and living being” (from the Website: <http://www.educ.uvic.ca/pole>). Ceremonies demonstrate Indigenous ways of being and teaching, while recognizing a spiritual aspect of learning. The course involved four ceremonies which are described below.

A cleansing ceremony was the first ceremony that took place as part of this course and occurred in late August, two weeks before the course had officially started. Students were invited by email to this ceremony where the log that was to be carved was brushed with cedar and cleansed in preparation for the carving project. There was a small group of students present, along with some of the instructor/mentors and representatives from the community. This ceremony demonstrated the importance of conducting protocols in keeping with Indigenous cultural practices.

The second ceremony, a blessing ceremony, took place on the first day of the course as has been previously noted. Several participants recalled this ceremony which set the tone for the course in a number of ways and engaged students in opportunities for cultural and emotional learning. Doug, an Indigenous instructor/mentor, described how an Elder and knowledge keeper “was the one that told us that there’s an Old Man inside that tree and, you know, he appreciated what we did as far as bringing him out and – and his personality out and that sort of thing, and how that was actually passed on to all those students that were there.” The students were asked to introduce themselves (aloud or privately) to the cedar log that had been transported from the West Coast of Vancouver Island. Some of the participants mentioned how this was an unusual experience for them and Teresa discussed how “it was different to be actually introduced to a pole, as opposed to being introduced to a person, to have human characteristics put on it was really striking and the pole really did seem to have this sort of presence about it.” She further explained that some

...people had a really emotional response. They were very reverent...and also very brave, because they all did it. And, you know for some people that was probably a very foreign idea, right. So it struck me how people from that very first day, sort of committed themselves to the experience of the course, really deeply. And sort of with emotional ties. And this honesty...you could see it in the way people did it [their introductions]. (Teresa).

Jessica also remembered how at this blessing ceremony that “people were so moved they were crying even at that point.” This process created opportunities for emotional, cultural and spiritual learning and as Doug mentioned “sort of set the pattern of the course.” This ceremony introduced students on the first day of the course to First Nations traditions, practices and spirituality as part of an experiential and educative process.

The third ceremony took place mid-way through the course and was planned and organized by the Ceremony group. As expressed by this participant, “one of the purposes was to acknowledge the people who’d worked on the pole and the people who’d played a big role in the whole thing” (Marie). This included students, instructors, faculty members, administrators and community members and represented an Indigenous practice of recognition and acknowledgement as part of cultural practice. The ceremony began with the planting of several cedar saplings in a wooded area behind one of the buildings at the university as a symbolic and tangible gesture. This demonstrated a cultural teaching of giving back in honour of something that has been taken (e.g. the tree that had been cut down for the pole carving) and provided symbolic and cultural understandings of cedar as a regenerative and healing natural force.

After the planting of the saplings and some words from instructors and community members, the celebration continued inside the building around the pole in progress. There were speeches, acknowledgements, drumming, dancing and a potluck dinner. A local drumming and singing group had been invited and performed traditional songs and dances. There was also a dedication and acknowledgement of a local community organization called “Surrounded by Cedar” that provides programs for First Nations children in foster care. This recognition brought education and awareness to students of the high percentage of Aboriginal children in care and the issues that First Nations people still face regarding their children being removed from their families. This also provided

recognition and support for this community organization and created connections with the community. This provided an example of the importance of community development and connection which are important aspects of Indigenous pedagogical and epistemological perspectives.

This ceremony was a teaching and learning opportunity in several ways and provided an opportunity for preparation and practice for the final ceremony. As well this ceremony represented the importance of celebration as part of the learning process in Indigenous culture. As noted by this non-Indigenous participant, she remembered how they:

...celebrated, and the drumming - that, that was just amazing. It just, there was spiritual things about that. There was community things about that. We did notice, as we were intended to notice, the protocols that happened - the gifts for people, the way Elders were respected, and visitors. The sharing with people, to be a part of it and to be a community. We noticed all those things that we were meant to learn, or notice. (Marie)

This celebration demonstrated to students various processes and protocols that ceremony holds in Indigenous culture.

The final installation ceremony involved the installation, presentation and celebration of the Welcoming Pole. This took place approximately one month after the course had finished due to additional time that was required to complete the carving of the pole. There was extensive planning required for this ceremony which included addressing First Nations protocols, the naming of the pole, and the actual installation of the pole in the building. Invitations were given out by students to family and friends and relevant university and community representatives.

On the evening of the installation ceremony there was drumming, singing, the unveiling of the Pole and the naming of the Pole. The Welcoming Pole was given the name “Schalay’nung Sxweg’qa” having a double meaning of ‘teaching of the ancestors’ and ‘to be a true history man’. Students in their small groups were given the opportunity to speak about their experience in the course and the DVD film was shown. One non-Indigenous participant remembered;

It was powerful and strong, like it almost took the roof off the building when they drummed and I'm like, wow, this power is just about exploding the building. It's much more than struggling to survive. It's thriving, growing. And, the past ancestors were there celebrating. And the future generations, as that one woman said. I felt it too. The future generations were there, celebrating too. It was so powerful and, my viewpoint changed from that day on. (Marie)

Witnessing the cultural traditions presented at this ceremony, shifted at least one person's perspective on the current state and survival of Indigenous cultural ways. While the final ceremony/celebration had different meanings to different people it was a strong demonstration of First Nations culture and traditions.

Ceremony became an important part of the experiential learning in the Pole Carving course and provided educational and cultural learning opportunities throughout the course. The ceremonies involved sharing First Nations traditional practices and allowed students to witness important protocols and practices. The website notes how in "recognizing the spirit of the Old Man (the cedar pole) and the combined transformative efforts of the group, ceremonies have become an integral part of this community" (<http://www.educ.uvic.ca/pole>).

Both learning in community and through experience were uniquely presented in the Pole Carving course through Indigenous pedagogical practices and perspectives that stem from an epistemology that encourages collective and inner learning as foundational to an educative process. Through various strategies described above, students were encouraged to develop new understandings of how learning can take place and to discover for themselves the significance of the cultural approaches to learning and teaching. Personally and collectively the pedagogical processes seemed to engage and connect this class and offer avenues for personal exploration, developing cultural understandings and expanding approaches to teaching. These influences will be discussed in more detail in the following chapter.

## Chapter 5: Influences and Impacts of the Pole Carving Course

*“So I saw that for some of the students, whether it was the non-Aboriginal students, and some of the Aboriginal students, [the course] really shook them, but shook them in a very positive way.” (Zach)*

The Pole Carving course created opportunities for cross cultural sharing to occur within a university setting in ways that had important influences for participants. In this chapter I identify two themes linked to the perceived implications and impacts of the course. First, the course provided a bridge between Indigenous and Western worlds that contributed to breaking down cultural barriers. This occurred through encouraging cultural and personal awareness, and building professional understandings. Second, the course opened the doors of the academy to Indigenous epistemology and pedagogy and demonstrated to Indigenous people and communities that the university was beginning to recognize their ways of being.

As the individual and cultural backgrounds of participants varied so did the influences of the course. The affects for some of the non-Indigenous students involved a heightened awareness of Indigenous culture, while for the Indigenous students their cultural perspectives were being presented and acknowledged within a post-secondary setting. Jessica explained how the Indigenous students, who came to Victoria from various Indigenous communities, “were brought back, sort of, to their community by being in that class. So the benefits for them would be different than the benefits for the white, European students and the other students.” The class consisted of individuals from a range of cultural backgrounds and with differing levels of connection to their cultural heritage. Jessica also mentioned that “I have some First Nations background, and some values and beliefs, but I didn’t grow up around family or [my] tribe.” Some of the non-Indigenous students had previous experiences with Indigenous people while others had little or none. Therefore the influences of the course differed according to the subjective realities of the various participants, as discussed later in this chapter.

The overall comments and recollections from participants about the Pole Carving course indicated affects that were consistently positive. Although some participants mentioned struggles they had while in the course, the overall influences were often seen as deepening the level of personal learning or an expansion of their cultural understandings through these challenges. Donna, a non-Indigenous student, commented that “it was easily the most rewarding and enjoyable course during my years at UVic.” Even one year after the course ended the participants still expressed significant affects that resulted from taking the course. Some accounts were quite notable in that they seemed to inspire shifts in consciousness and deep emotional responses. Marie, a non-Indigenous education student, expressed:

...in the days after the end of the course, I was so overwhelmed with emotion, I could not put into words what the whole experience was for me. Today it is still unfolding for me – and it is still very challenging to put into words how this experience has changed my life. I just hope that in my future teaching career I can provide these experiences in my classroom. (Marie)

This ‘unfolding’ of learning, as discussed in Chapter Five, is reflective of Indigenous approaches to education where understandings develop and emerge over and through time. This process can evolve through deconstructing existing conceptual, pedagogical, and epistemological paradigms which can be initially unsettling and confusing for learners. However, the integration of new ideas can lead to personal and professional awareness. bell hooks (1994) writes about the potential of education for creating openness of mind (and heart) that allows one to face reality, move beyond boundaries, and to further locate possibility and hope. The Pole Carving course seemed to inspire such transformations.

### **5.1 Building Bridges: Connecting through Cultural, Personal, and Professional Understandings**

*“I remember being part of an experience that was eye-opening, and maybe even mind-blowing for some students” (Lorraine)*

The bridging of connections occurred in three main ways which I have divided into sub-themes: cultural, personal and professional. First there was the breaking down of cultural divisions through

cross cultural sharing and learning, which secondly provided space for ‘inner’ learning that contributed to expansion of personal awareness. Thirdly this provided opportunities for cultural and pedagogical understandings that could be extended into teaching and professional practices. This occurred for both the Indigenous and non-Indigenous students in a variety of ways.

One of the unique and significant aspects of the course is that it presented Indigenous concepts and pedagogical practices and engaged learners in these processes. Students were able to learn about Indigenous ways of learning and teaching through hands-on experience and not just through intellectual discussions about Indigenous pedagogy. Teresa, a non Indigenous teacher educator, commented that she was able to “know more about Indigenous culture in a real first-hand way that was more than the surface transfer of information.” She was able “to get a sense of how a ceremony takes shape over time or how ‘the Old Man’ emerges from this log.” The experiential approach to learning contributed to deeper understandings of Indigenous cultural and pedagogical practices. Furthermore the engagement in this learning process provided connections that gave participants the opportunity to internalize and synthesize their learning.

#### **a. Breaking Down Cultural Divisions**

Both Indigenous and non-Indigenous students had an opportunity to develop deeper understandings of how cross cultural interactions can create new levels of awareness and understanding. For non-Indigenous students who had little or no experience with Indigenous peoples, the course provided a place where they could be exposed to Indigenous culture and learn from and with Indigenous people. Renata, a non-Indigenous pre-service teacher, said:

it was a big leap, I think, to take a course like that and immerse myself in a different culture not knowing what to expect and, right away I sort of felt like I was on the edge of like, you know, feeling a divide between cultures but really wanting to understand the kind of thinking, and learning and communicating that the Aboriginals in this area were doing (Renata)

When I asked about what she learned in the course she replied:

Well I learned a lot about Indigenous ways. I learned that sometimes saying that you accept a people was very different than actually experiencing what they are all about and then really, you know, feeling like I could approach them. And it has changed how I approach a lot of things with Aboriginal people, I mean, I hear racism in a different way. Like I hear it way more now than I probably use to, even though I was fairly open and accepting but I was also anxious going into the course because I didn't understand [First Nations] as a people and didn't understand their culture and didn't know how to reach that group. I feel in our society, with lots of cultures, we may think that a group, uh how do I explain it - we may accept them but that doesn't mean we feel comfortable approaching them or talking to them or we feel like there is still a boundary, kind of like this hidden wall, this really fine line, and I feel like the course really broke down that wall and allowed me to feel like we are much more the same than we have previously thought. And I think I have transferred that learning to other cultures also... (Renata)

She added how she now feels “like we can really connect and I feel comfortable talking to [Aboriginal people] and just understanding how they think and communicate a lot more” (Renata).

Renata's comments indicate how cultural awareness and understandings are heightened when people of different cultures get to know one another (Friesen, Archibald & Jack, 1992). The Pole Carving course provided a space for this type of cross cultural interaction to occur within an academic environment.

The course also gave Indigenous participants a chance to witness how non-Indigenous students reacted to the pedagogy in the course and to further understand the significance that cultural sharing can have. In the DVD, one of the Indigenous students talked about an initial scepticism when non-Indigenous class members were discussing insights they were having as a result of the course. He said that at first he had “that mentality of ‘oh they’re not Native and how could they ever know, and this is not their way.’ They may claim all this stuff but I don’t really think they’re feeling it” (Chris, DVD). He expressed that he had a shift in his own awareness: “looking back on the realizations and breakthroughs that I’ve made personally, you know, I take that back” (Chris, DVD). He further

explained his ‘realizations and breakthroughs’ involved recognizing his own preconceptions about non-Indigenous people:

I don’t know if that is stereotyping but just, you know, shutting people out because – assuming oh they won’t know and they won’t understand, you know – that is a big mistake because when you see what people are realizing and receiving [in this course] it is a good feeling. (Chris, DVD)

The course encouraged Chris to “changed his way of thinking” about non-Indigenous people and their ability to understand his culture. Chris was able to witness the influences the course had for non-Indigenous students and challenge his own attitudes. He realized that being introduced to and engaged with another culture could lead to the beginnings of cross cultural understandings and dissipate stereotypical misconceptions. Jessica, an Indigenous graduate student, also mentioned that the course showed her that non-Indigenous people can “change their ways of viewing the world and viewing First Nations people.” The cross cultural learning in this course was a reciprocal process and was reported by both Indigenous and non-Indigenous participants.

Doug, one of the Indigenous instructors/mentors, talked about how the course “creates understanding and it counters a lot of the other things such as racism and stereotypes.” Without opportunities to interact with Indigenous people, many non-Indigenous people get their information through media sources that tend to focus on reporting the problems and challenges that Indigenous people face. hooks (2003) maintains that it is vital to challenge all the misinformation that is constantly presented to people that poses as objective, unbiased information. Zach, a non-Indigenous instructor/mentor, talked about how students were able to learn about “the rich part of [Indigenous] heritage that we’ve had here for thousands of years” and not just the reports that “newspapers splash across the page.” What is often seen about Indigenous people and communities tends to focus on problems instead of successes and this paints a negative picture of Indigenous culture.

Jessica, an Indigenous participant, also discussed how the media focuses on the problems Indigenous communities face and discussed how for her it was really moving to see Indigenous people “who weren’t struggling to survive and still had their ways, and their culture, and their practices, and self-esteem.” She said she had always known Indigenous people who were connected to their cultural heritage yet the course showed her that there were many more than she was aware of and this provided inspiration for her. Witnessing the strong cultural traditions in the course and at the ceremonies highlighted Indigenous people who have remained connected to their cultural traditions. Renata, a non-Indigenous student, commented that it “allowed me to understand just how important it is to maintain [cultural traditions] and to keep those connections.” Through this process class members were able to challenge information and misconceptions and develop new understandings.

The pedagogy presented in the Pole Carving course was at times challenging, confusing or uncomfortable for some of the students; yet it offered unique opportunities for personal discovery, independent thinking, and awareness of alternatives cultural perspectives. In the article written by the Print group, Jill a non-Indigenous pre-service teacher, describes her:

...transformational journey of learning to walk in another world of teaching and learning...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 (Tanaka et al, 2007)

This course provided non-Indigenous students a chance to experience what it is like to ‘step outside’ their culture into another way of learning and thinking. While this can be a challenging experience, it

offered opportunities for confronting cultural beliefs and values, which further generated openings for intellectual and personal awareness and growth.

### **b. Influencing Personal Awareness**

Shifts in personal awareness, realizations and openings to new understandings were noted in both the interviews and the document data. As noted in the previous chapter, Indigenous pedagogy provides opportunities for reflection and critical thinking which can foster the development of ‘inner learning’ or personal awareness. The following quote from the article written by the Print group describes the emergence of Laura’s inner awareness through the experience in the course:

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 breakdown 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 (Tanaka et al, 2007)

Laura indicates that while it was ‘scary’ to not have a clearly defined course schedule and objectives, this also offered freedom and the chance to develop new understandings. Ermine (1995) discusses how Indigenous epistemology and pedagogy promote learning from an inner space where observations and experiences can then be processed internally and subjectively and made sense of from within the individual.

The Pole Carving course demonstrated how being immersed in a different cultural educational approach can be unsettling for those of another culture. The cultural discontinuity in this course was reversed, where the non-Indigenous students were immersed in an Indigenous approach to learning

and teaching. Robyn, one of the non-Indigenous Print group members, wrote that “I understood I was learning in a way of a different culture, but still I 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” (Tanaka et al, 2007, p. 8). For some students, who were familiar with a more directive and externally focused approach to knowledge transfer common in Western based education, this pedagogical approach presented a challenge. This was mentioned by various participants and was described by Renata, a non-Indigenous pre-service teacher, as “disorienting”.

Although this was only one of the many university courses that students would take, it seemed to impact their concepts of how learning and teaching can take place. Teresa talked about how “every week, for three hours, you know, it’s not a lot of time, but for three hours, it’s their rules, it’s a different game, it’s a different thing and it’s disruptive to your way of thinking - and sometimes it’s a relief.” Other participants echoed this sentiment in describing the challenges and realizations they encountered by engaging in Indigenous pedagogical approaches while at the same time feeling a sense of comfort and naturalness in a less pressured environment than is typical of other university courses.

While the course challenged some of the non-Indigenous students’ concepts of learning, it seemed to strengthen and develop some of the Indigenous participants’ sense of self and cultural identity. For example, Patricia, an Indigenous graduate student, talked about how the course provided a place within the university to “be Aboriginal” and a space for Indigenous students to connect with their culture. Patricia’s two daughters attended the course as high-school volunteers and were able to witness the teaching approaches and participate in the classes and ceremonies. She said that this “affected my relationship with my children” in that it “helps support my style of parenting” and “also gave me more tools to parent”. She described how one of the Indigenous instructors/mentors “role-

modeled Aboriginal leadership, and in turn, my children witnessed that” (Patricia). She further explained that:

I don't want my success to be based on the backs of the people I broke along the way. I want my success to be based on seeing the awesome people around me, and you know having a small part in helping them become who they are supposed to be, not what I want them to be. That is what [one of the instructors] taught me. And that's what he taught my girls. (Patricia)

The role modeling of Indigenous values and approach to teaching provided lessons for both Patricia and her daughters.

The course also contributed to a personal and cultural reconnection for Anita, an Indigenous participant, who said:

I am a traditional Coast Salish artist, however once I began university I didn't really have time to continue on with that because I needed to do all the readings, the papers, all that for my classes, so I ended up pushing my art aside. Through this course I was able to go back to my art. (Anita)

Her involvement in the Pole Carving course reminded her about how “good I felt when was able to do my art” and in recognizing this she expressed how she now makes time to “continue on with my art as well as my university education” (Anita). The course provided a bridge for Anita to reconnect with her art and culture.

Transformative learning is described as a process of effecting change in personal ‘frames of reference’ through discourse, critical reflection on personal and social assumptions, and the development of autonomous thinking (Mezirow, 1978, 1997). Indigenous pedagogical practices understand that transformations can be achieved through identifying and reaffirming learning processes based on subjective experience, personal responsibility and introspection (Battiste, 2002). The following quote offers another example of the type of personal learning that occurred for this student:

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. – Robyn (Tanaka et al, 2007)

The affective experiences in the course enabled individuals to make deep transformations in personal, social, and cultural understandings (Williams & Tanaka, 2007).

Freire’s concept of ‘conscientization’ is reflective of the critical consciousness that can develop through cross cultural learning and interaction. Furthermore, critical pedagogy (Freire, 1995, 1970; hooks, 1994, 2003) discusses education as the ‘practice of freedom’, having the potential to shift consciousness with emancipatory goals. Patricia, an Indigenous graduate student, commented: “wouldn’t it great, in the mainstream educational system, to allow each child to be who they are and have the strength that they are born with rather than having the standard of expectation which is blanket standard for everybody to meet?” These objectives, while not explicitly stated as part of the course, emerged through the exposure to Indigenous epistemology and engagement with Indigenous pedagogy. The course offered new epistemological perspectives of how learning and being can be different which provided opportunities for critical reflection on societal and educational structures.

### **c. Inspirations for Teaching and Professional Practices**

*“It has changed how I teach” (Angela)*

The Pole Carving course was designed to provide pre-service teachers with an experience that gave them a deeper understanding of Indigenous pedagogical practices in order to gain insights into some of the ways Indigenous students may approach learning differently. Renata (a non-Indigenous

participant who had graduated from the Education program and was now teaching grade six) said that the course “bridged the gap between myself and Aboriginal culture because I feel like I understand that group more.” She said that she was now much more comfortable in talking with Indigenous students or their families and has a better idea of how Indigenous students “learn and how things are done at home and what is important.” She also mentioned how she is more aware of the importance of the Aboriginal Support Team and talked about getting involved in an Aboriginal education initiative at the school where she works.

Fred, another non-Indigenous participant who had been doing a teaching practicum, mentioned that “taking this course helped bridge the comfort level with being able to use the ideas and materials and cultural connections in the classroom more.” Teachers have reported that their lack of familiarity with Indigenous pedagogical approaches creates a serious impediment to integrating cultural content into their curriculum and classrooms (Kanu, 2005). Fred discussed how, after taking the Pole Carving course, he felt more comfortable bringing in Indigenous content into his classroom, “like, for an example, in my Phys. Ed. course we were doing some things around Inuit games” and he noted that if he had not taken the Pole Carving course he probably would not be doing that as much. He further commented that non-Indigenous teachers may not feel that they have “authenticity” in bringing Indigenous content into the classrooms and he mentioned he was now being “an advocate for bringing that in, and liaising with some Aboriginal resources in schools as well.”

Not only did the Pole Carving course allow this teacher to be more comfortable with introducing Indigenous content within the classroom, he also discussed how he was now able to raise Indigenous issues with his students, such as the meaning of welcoming poles, and furthermore to act as an advocate for Indigenous students. Fred commented on how he was more aware of the

challenges that Aboriginal children face “in terms of celebrating their culture, and the children feeling invited, and strong in the schools.” He further talked about how:

...there needs to be continued work with Aboriginal communities and the school system to try and find ways in which these kids can feel connected and proud and successful...And so as educators we need to really remember that and try to make efforts to understand, and make connection, and develop resources that will help. (Fred)

The course seemed to expand this participant’s understanding of the importance of cultural connections within the school system and how Indigenous students might benefit from this, which in turn, contributes to his role as an educator.

Angela, an Indigenous participant who was now teaching in an elementary school, indicated that the course “made me aware of just how experience really is powerful” as a learning tool. She discussed how this has changed her teaching approach with her grade one students. Previously she would have ended one of her lessons with an experiential activity. However, she learned how presenting students with an experience first “shapes their learning” and “they develop their vocabulary faster through experience, not just by looking at it in a book”. She said “it’s helped me, just shape who I am as a teacher, and to make me a, hopefully, a better teacher.” Angela’s awareness from her own experiences in the Pole Carving course helped her develop and expand her repertoire of educational practices.

Teresa, a non-Indigenous graduate student, talked about her interest in holistic teaching methods and how the pedagogical perspectives in this course confirmed her teaching approach and provided deeper cultural understandings. As a teacher educator she mentioned that “it definitely impacts the way that I teach.” Clare, a non-Indigenous participant, also said that her own orientation to teaching was similar to the Indigenous approach and that the course “further validated and enhanced” her

teaching methods. For some of the participants the course expanded their pedagogical and cultural understanding and for others it confirmed their pre-existing style.

Internationally, the course had impacts as well. One of the graduate students, who was a teacher from Korea and has since returned there, reflected on how the course gave him a “new perspective to see traditions and nature” (<http://www.educ@uvic.ca/pole/reflections>). He explained that in Korea they also had poles, which are different in terms of size and meaning, which have almost perished “without the public's recognition as a beauty of art and a bridge that connect people to the nature” (<http://www.educ@uvic.ca/pole/reflections>). He further expressed how “through this course, I strongly felt I have a responsibility as a teacher to educate my student to recognize that our tradition is invaluable and so precious” (<http://www.educ@uvic.ca/pole/reflections>).

Teaching for social change calls into account “the politics of positionality” (Tisdell, 2001) which challenges the politics of the knowledge production process through the analysis of curriculum and pedagogy. Deconstructing educational process provides opportunities to alter power relations by creating more inclusive education that takes into account the divergent epistemologies and the variety of ways knowledge can be understood. This can expand what is counted as knowledge and give voice and representation to perspectives rarely considered. Lorraine, a non-Indigenous participant, said “I came away with a sense of conviction that space has to be made in the formal education system, and in the policy environment, and in what western capitalists consider as knowledge.” This demonstrates a growing interest and awareness of the need to represent Indigenous perspectives within the academy. The seeds of social change can begin to develop through cross cultural interaction and learning.

Several of the graduate students in the course, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, were conducting research related to or involving Indigenous peoples or topics. The course may have

appealed to them because of their research interests yet it also may have offered new insights for their research processes. Jessica discussed how the course had helped her develop her ideas for her doctoral dissertation, as well as in her work setting. Lorraine, a non-Indigenous participant who had moved into a graduate program, said:

I leave that class with a sense of, that I have some work to do in terms of my own research and my own writing and my own relationships with the system that produced me. That's what I came away from that course with. And the tools, I think, you know, the tools to embark on that journey. (Lorraine).

The possibilities for expanding and transferring learning into other roles was encouraged through the final assignment which asked student to reflect on how they would take what they learned into their personal and professional lives. Cultural awareness created through this course had the potential to impact the class members' understanding of Indigenous culture and people. This could further contribute to how they might bring those realizations into their future professions. Jessica, an Indigenous graduate student, said:

I just think there is just so much opportunities to break down the barriers and create respect. Then when people go out and be teachers, be social workers, be nurses, be whatever, sociologists - they are not going to be as afraid to try to make those contacts after they have been in that course. And, they'll understand more. (Jessica)

Professional understandings occurred for participants in a variety of ways. As previously noted, some of the pre-service teachers who were enrolled in the course indicated a developing awareness of Indigenous culture and pedagogy and the significance of creating connections to culture through education. As well, there were reports of more comfort and ease in relating to Indigenous peoples and a deeper understanding of their approach to communication and thinking.

On the home page of the website the following excerpt describes how:

When creating this project, Dr. Williams sought to "bridge the two worlds and the two ways of knowing; the ways of knowing for Indigenous people and the

ways of knowing in this world that we live in today. We need people who can build those bridges and build them in powerful ways so that people can cross them in respectful and knowledgeable ways.” (<http://www.educ.uvic.ca/pole>)

The Pole Carving course provided a model for the implementation of alternative epistemologies and created a venue for cultural sharing to occur. This building of a cultural bridge offered participants new avenues where cross cultural understandings could develop within an academic environment.

## **5.2 Opening Doors: Bringing Indigenous Perspectives into the Academy**

The Pole Carving course highlighted, celebrated, and recognized Indigenous cultural perspectives within an academic setting. Given Canada’s history of using education to attempt to assimilate and acculturate Indigenous people, this course was a significant shift in validating Indigenous voices. This course represents a new direction towards acknowledging Indigenous cultural perspectives within the academy. This had influences in various ways which I have organized around two sub-themes. First, the course provided an Indigenous pedagogical perspective that contributed to understanding the cultural influences that underlie educational structures. Secondly, the course demonstrated to Indigenous people and communities that the academy was beginning to make space for their ways of knowing and learning. Richard, a non-Indigenous instructor/mentor, noted that “it’s slowly transforming people’s understanding of the contribution that Indigenous communities have to make to teaching and learning.”

### **a. Understanding Cultural Implications in Education**

The Pole Carving course created opportunities for the teacher education program and the university to deepen understandings of Indigenous cultural and pedagogical perspectives. This offered awareness and understanding of the differences between “the way our educational systems run and the kind of learning that happens in Aboriginal communities” (Richard). Richard, a non-Indigenous instructor/mentor, discussed how, by bringing together Indigenous and academic worlds

in a type of cross cultural conversation, that students, many of whom will be going out to be teachers, will have a better understanding of this. Richard described how one can see this ‘mismatch’:

reflected in the graduation statistics for Aboriginal students. You see it in the high leaving rates. You see it in disconnect between the Aboriginal students and many of the teachers who are trained in these kinds of institutions. And, by bringing together those two worlds, more than two worlds, many worlds, and providing our students here, who are going to go out and be teachers, with some of the ways of understanding the world that [Indigenous] people who are rooted in the Indigenous world, carry with them. We can only deepen our understanding by having that conversation. It’s a very important thing that we are trying to accomplish and do. It’s badly needed and it can only happen by these kinds of learning experiences. (Richard)

Richard further commented that “there is lots of value that the Aboriginal culture has to offer in terms of the non-Aboriginal kids, as well. That’s my hope - that this type of educational experience will be more available”. Fred, a non-Indigenous participant, also talked about how he had “a better ingrained awareness of some the issues that Aboriginal people face in our schools.”

The course raised awareness for some participants of their own social and cultural locations and those of the university system that they have been accustomed to. One of the First Nations instructors talked about how students had “opened their minds to First Nation culture in a different way” (Butch Dick, DVD). He further expressed that:

it’s very important because they’re actually going to go out and share what they’ve learned and what they’ve learned about the teachings of First Nation people, and bring that to younger people. So they’re actually, they’ve brought gifts here, and then they’ve compiled more gifts and then they’re going to go out in the community and share that, which is really important. So it’s a first for the university, and it’s probably the best thing that ever could happen to a teacher who’s going to be involved with First Nation children. (Butch Dick, DVD)

Pedagogical practices which address the changing contexts and conditions for students to be critically attentive to the historical and socially contracted natures of the locations they occupy (within a shifting world of representations and values). One of the authors of the published journal article

discussed how she realized through the course that the teaching practices she had learned throughout her education “continue to reflect exclusionary values, beliefs and knowledge within the context of communication and learning in our school system” (Jill, Tanaka et al, 2007). The experiences and exposure in the course led to a broader awareness of the cultural influences in education.

Experience and exposure to Indigenous culture seemed to expose participants to cultural philosophies, epistemologies and ontology that are often ignored within Canadian educational systems. Western knowledge systems tend to focus on the scientific method that focuses on observable behaviour and segmented disciplines rather than holistic approaches. Lorraine mentioned “the whole western paradigm of scientific racism” and how Indigenous forms of knowledge were treated as substandard and discounted. The marginalization of Indigenous forms of knowledge became apparent or more recognizable when alternative worldviews and ideologies are introduced to students who may never had exposure to these concepts and ways of being. Patricia, an Indigenous graduate student, commented that “when you introduce this, you face an unacknowledged thinking that is imbedded in a university.” Educational systems rarely acknowledge their own cultural agenda and acknowledge that there may be alternative perspectives that can be considered.

Merging Indigenous and academic worlds required negotiation and planning. In an interview captured on the DVD, Dr. Lorna Williams, the course developer, discusses how:

Universities have a *long* history in their practice, in their values, and their philosophy that, I think, that they guard, you know, very, very carefully. And they are, in a sense, universities are the tradition keepers of the Western world. And to bring Indigenous ways of learning, to bring Indigenous ways of being, to bring Indigenous ways of teaching, to bring Indigenous knowledge into the academy, and to try to construct it being faithful to the Indigenous ways, is the only way I think that people can take, even a *tiny* step into experiencing another way of being. And, so, for me, to be able to have the Pole Carving course *here*, it changes, first of all, the space. It changes peoples’ sensibilities. It calls people to build a different narrative, finally, into this space, which can only alter people’s relationships.

People now can't go back. And the people who have been immersed in the project, the students who are, will leave the university, but this experience won't leave them. (Lorna, DVD)

Exposure and engagement with alternative knowledge systems draws attention to the social and cultural construction of knowledge and provides new frames of reference. Furthermore, it exposes educational structures and processes that do not address cultural, social, and historical factors in the name of universalism.

Giroux (1994) explores cultural studies classes as sites for decentring power dynamics of institutional and cultural inequalities that marginalize some groups, repress certain types of knowledge, and suppress critical dialogue. Richard, a non-Indigenous instructor/mentor, discussed how this course helped to see:

...education as a tool for reproducing an existing social order. And you see how powerful and pervasive a tool it is, you know, the socializing that happens in schools, at an academic and an intellectual level, and also at a cultural level. And then you think about someone who stands outside that realm - somebody like an Aboriginal person - who is not from that dominant mainstream culture - how hard it must be to swim against that stream. (Richard)

Given the divergent cultural values of Western and Indigenous systems, it becomes apparent how the current educational systems favour the perspectives of the established Eurocentric beliefs. Lorraine, a non-Indigenous participant, commented that “the course confirmed my personal ideas about education. That the system is not designed, really for learning, it is designed for control” (Lorraine). Without acknowledgement of other cultural worldviews and epistemologies, educational systems reinforce and maintain a singular outlook towards knowledge construction and transfer, upholding authority of their own perspectives and perpetuating cultural misunderstandings.

Two of the participants used the same phrase “it is long overdue” (Zach, non-Indigenous instructor/mentor, Patricia, Indigenous graduate student) referring to the need for these types of

educational experiences and the inclusion of Indigenous knowledge. The fact that the course was offered at a university provided a number of interesting perspectives. The course drew attention to the lack of Indigenous courses offered within the education department. One of the students commented that she “had been looking for any sort of courses with First Nations content in education because it seemed like it was really lacking.” (Angela). One of the faculty members also commented that there needed to be more courses and comprehensive programs that include Indigenous approaches as “we have a great deal to learn there, and I think more of that should be part of our courses - whatever courses they are” (Zach). Lorraine, a non-Indigenous participant, commented on how she felt:

...space has to be made in all those areas, in the disciplines in medicine, in science, in education, in social work, and you know, all of these areas that we consider to be credentialed, formal education, to be pure knowledge, need to be opened up to understand Indigenous worldviews, Indigenous ways of teaching and learning. It’s really important for the health of the whole planet really, on a biological level, on a social level, on a spiritual level. (Lorraine)

This response seems to reflect a growing awareness of the importance of holistic understandings and approaches. Within various theoretical and conceptual approaches and disciplines (physics, biology, business, ecology and sustainability) there is a growing exploration of the interconnections among various aspects of interrelated systems (Bohm, 1993; Cabezas, 2001; O’Loughlin & McFadzean, 1999; Sheldrake, 1991).

Zach also talked about the importance of “going back to looking at ways we can involve the people who carry the history - who carry that knowledge” (Zach). Including First Nations people in the development of this program was essential for this course. “So, it’s looking back to the Elders, looking back at the traditions, and bringing the traditions forward so that they can operate in this, in this new environment - in the university environment” (Zach). While bringing Indigenous perspective into the academy is timely and significant, doing this in cultural representative and respectful ways also holds importance. In the following section I discuss how the consultation and inclusion of

Indigenous knowledge keepers, Elders and protocols sends a relevant message to Indigenous communities.

### **b. Creating Connections with Communities**

Community is a central place from which Indigenous worldviews and understandings revolve. It is therefore significant to consider what this course represented to the Indigenous communities whose traditional territory the University of Victoria is presently located. In the Pole Carving course Indigenous artists, educators and knowledge keepers were invited to share their knowledge and skills within a university setting. Richard, a non-Indigenous instructor/mentor, discussed how this provided an example of building community connections with the university. He explained how the course provided a site where the university was welcoming Indigenous knowledge and was saying “teach us about what you know, rather than us going out to the community and saying we’ll show you what we know” (Richard). The impacts of the course extended beyond the class members and one of the non-Indigenous faculty members discussed how this “sent a really important signal to the community that the university was willing to learn from them and is trying to do things differently” (Zach).

Furthermore, appropriate Indigenous Elders, knowledge keepers and community members (based on Indigenous protocols) were consulted and invited to contribute their knowledge at the ceremonies that were held throughout the course. This reflected the importance of inclusivity and community building as part of the Indigenous pedagogy that was being demonstrated and modeled throughout the course. Zach described how at the final installation ceremony, Indigenous people from various communities commented that they “never thought that something like this could happen”, referring to the academy actively celebrating Indigenous culture. Barbara, participant of mixed heritage, noted how she remembered “the impact it had on the greater community.” She recalled how at the end of the final celebration ceremony a First Nations community member told her that “was the

first day that he was proud to be an Indian.” She described this as a “very emotional moment and it made me proud to be involved in something that had such a positive impact on the community, not just the students or university” (Barbara).

Zach, one of the non-Indigenous instructor/mentors, also noted that for “some of the Aboriginal students who were in the course, it was a life-changing experience for them because, for the first time, their ideas were being heard and listened to.” The course offered a place within the university where Indigenous people could express their cultural traditions and ways of being. Patricia, an Indigenous participant, talked about how the course helped “create a place to be Aboriginal” and noted that “if I didn’t already have a connection to my Aboriginal identity it would have opened the door to start reclaiming that.” As noted in a previous section, Anita reconnected with her artwork through the course as an important part of her culture and who she is as an Indigenous artist.

For some of the Indigenous participants, the course provided a familiar way of learning and teaching that offered recognition of their cultural epistemology and pedagogy. Anita, an Indigenous participant, said “personally I felt a lot more comfortable” in this setting. Angela, an Indigenous pre-service teacher, said the only thing she noticed was “just my comparisons to other university courses that I had taken.” These Indigenous participants had been able to adapt to the environment of the university even though the Indigenous approach was more ‘normal’ for them. The course provided a confirmation of their ways of being and the opportunity for the Indigenous participants to witness their cultural traditions highlighted and celebrated within the academic environment.

Some of the Indigenous participants I talked to mentioned how they were bringing their experiences from the course into their Indigenous communities and classrooms. Quinn, an Indigenous instructor/mentor, mentioned how he had talked with a group of Indigenous students in grade five about the Pole Carving course and told them “that even at university they are recognizing First

Nations culture.” Angela, an Indigenous participant who was now teaching, also talked with her grade one class about how “the university, where you go to become all sorts of different professional people, they are recognizing First Nations people“ and “that they should be proud of who they are”.

She further described how:

it made me feel, well, I felt proud that the university was at a place where they could start to allow courses like that, and that people were going to be exposed to First Nations culture, and most importantly that it was in education, and that teachers going through had the opportunity to kind of step in the shoes of First Nations people and see how they learn so that they become a better teacher because they understand that there are all these different types of learning and maybe that at home [First Nations students] are learning this way. They’re learning through Indigenous ways of teaching. And so they have more of an understanding, and an acceptance, and a willingness to teach to that style. (Angela)

This further expresses, as previously noted, that some participants who were now working as teachers had expanded their awareness of Indigenous educational approaches. Furthermore, the course inspired a sense of pride for this Indigenous teacher that she was sharing with her elementary school students and encouraging them to feel proud of their heritage. Cultural pride contributes to establishing self-esteem and the foundations of self identity that build strong individuals with knowledge and positive feeling and role models that are important to the formation of identity. Angela was also able to recognize and articulate the significance of this course for herself as an Indigenous person and as a teacher knowing that other pre-service teachers were able to gain a deeper understanding of the types of learning that have meaning for Indigenous students. The ripple effects of the course reached out beyond the participants in the course as they shared their experiences with others in their communities and classrooms.

This chapter documents the reported influences and impacts of the Pole Carving course which provides further understanding into the learning that participants experienced. Furthermore, this illustrates the possibilities that can result from cross cultural learning and sharing and demonstrates

how participants were integrating new awareness into their personal and professional lives. The bridging of cultural connections involved openings that were created by both the academic and Indigenous communities and this offers inspiration for the development of cross cultural understandings.

## Chapter 6: Conclusions

In this final chapter I will provide a review of the central findings of this case study and present some areas for discussion related to these findings. Possibilities for future research are then noted, followed by addressing the strengths and limitations of this study, and I conclude with my personal reflections.

### 6.1 Summary and Contributions of this Case Study

The Pole Carving course provided a model for the implementation of Indigenous pedagogical and cultural perspectives within an academic setting. Through cross cultural sharing and learning new awareness and understanding arose for both the non-Indigenous and the Indigenous participants. The unique focus and format of the course provided a cultural template for this Indigenous approach to learning and teaching. Without the use of exams, grades, and required readings students were encouraged to actively engage with decision making, critical thinking, and developing content for projects that documented and celebrated this course. The diversity of class members and inclusion of community members supported a wide range of viewpoints and allowed for much latitude in the learning processes.

The development of a learning community was a central aspect of the pedagogical process in this course and demonstrated the collective ethos that underlies Indigenous worldviews. Not only did this allow for a sense of connection among people in this course, it also illustrated how interconnections with the natural and spiritual realms are embraced in Indigenous culture. These ways of knowing and learning are linked to traditional Indigenous teachings and ways of life, where common goals and values, protocols of respect, and the development of relationship and shared responsibility establish opportunities for people to work together in ways that were not focused on

competition and hierarchy. Cultural teachings, stories and values acted as guidelines for educational practices where teaching modeled desired skills, traits and behaviours. Through demonstrating examples of mentoring relationships the instructors encouraged a sense of equality and reciprocity among class members that allowed for laughter, fun and enjoyment in learning. Finding one's role and place in the group created opportunities for the development of personal responsibility where participants were able to discover their own unique contributions to the small and large groups. The course did not use a standardized or uniform approach to learning which allowed for diverse input from class members. The lack of clear guidelines and expectations did not always create smooth processes, which led to frustration for some of the students and also presented challenges to accomplish tasks in ways that were in keeping with Indigenous protocols, especially given time frames and individual and cultural differences.

The Indigenous approach to experiential learning was developed through allowing students to observe first and gradually take on more active roles in both the carving and small group projects. A sense of trust was established by allowing students to be involved with the hands-on tasks without telling them specifically what to do or directing the process. This allowed them to observe techniques and practices, learn through watching and listening, and then develop skills and confidence gradually over time. Furthermore reflective practices such as storytelling, sharing circles and journaling encouraged students to integrate their learning in new ways, challenge their assumptions and further develop understandings. Storytelling involved not only sharing cultural teachings and myths but also provided indirect guidance to students' questions. The use of sharing circles allowed opportunities for instructors and students to express their ideas, feelings and perspectives collectively to the group, empowering a sense of connection among the class members. Keeping a journal encouraged students

to process their learning and experiences to a deeper level and provided a venue for expression, exploration and the deconstruction of personal and cultural assumptions.

Ceremony was a unique part of this course that offered participants the opportunity to witness and experience the importance of cultural practices as part of educative processes for Indigenous peoples. The blessing ceremony on the first day of the course established the spirit of ‘the Old Man’ and allowed students to see and experience how relationships with the material and immaterial worlds are established in Indigenous culture. Ceremony also represented the importance of acknowledging others, following cultural protocols, and celebrating as part of Indigenous pedagogical practices.

While the influences and impacts of the course varied for those involved, they included the development of cultural, personal and professional awareness and understanding and also represented new directions and possibilities for relations between the university and Indigenous communities. Cultural understanding developed through sharing and interaction, allowing both the Indigenous and non-Indigenous participants to challenge their unexamined assumptions and expand their understandings of each other. Participants described new developments in personal awareness and professional practices. Some of the pre-service teachers that had moved into teaching roles reported they were better able to integrate Indigenous content and relate to Indigenous students and families as a result of the course. The influences also demonstrated how the university is opening its doors to Indigenous cultural epistemologies and pedagogical approaches, which in turn sent a message to the surrounding Aboriginal communities of a willingness to understand their cultural ways of being and teaching within the academy.

This reviews some of the major findings identified within my research and in the following section I will draw upon some of these for further discussion.

## 6.2 Significance of Indigenous Pedagogy and Epistemology

Indigenous education is an important and timely matter at this point in history. Aboriginal youth are the fastest growing demographic in Canadian society (58% of Aboriginal people are under the age of 25 compared to 23% of the non-Aboriginal population of the same age range) and yet their success rate in the current educational system is less than half that of non-Aboriginal youth (<http://www.statscan.ca>). This indicates the need to address how the school system and the pedagogical practices it employs are failing to meet the needs of First Nations students and provide them with the request skills and knowledge to participate in the broader society. As the educational gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal youth continues to grow there is an urgent need to look to educational reform (Battiste, 2001).

The issues related to these disparities in educational outcomes are complex. To adequately address these concerns requires understanding the historical, cultural, social and epistemological interplay of these factors within differing contexts. Awareness of these multi-dimensional issues requires understanding the concerns from various perspectives in order to shed new light on potential interventions. Kirkness (1992) discusses how:

From an institutional perspective, the problem has been typically defined in terms of low achievement, high attrition, poor retention, weak persistence, etc, thus placing the onus for adjustment on the student. From the perspective of the Indian student, however, the problem is often cast in more human terms, with an emphasis on the need for a higher education system that respects them for who they are, that is relevant to their view of the world, that offers reciprocity in their relationships with others and that helps them exercise responsibility over their lives. (Kirkness, 1992, p. 39)

Understanding these differing outlooks addresses the systemic, social and cultural factors that contribute to the perpetuation of educational inequalities. This requires innovative methods and practices that acknowledge and recognize these inter-related factors, the experiences and worldviews

of Indigenous students and teachers, and also the institutional factors that contribute to perpetuating exclusionary practices (Battiste, 2002). Research indicates the need for educational processes, pedagogical practices and curricula to be culturally relevant for Indigenous students to promote retention and success. Identifying ways of learning and teaching that are meaningful and promote engagement for Indigenous students and how they can be incorporated within the prevailing educational system has the potential to expand the repertoire of educational strategies for all students.

Furthermore, teachers and educators need to develop understandings of the worldviews and values of Indigenous peoples. Racism is still perpetuated through lack of information and awareness of cultural beliefs, values and perspectives (Bishop, 1994). With increasing multiculturalism in Canadian society and in classrooms, there is a growing need for more solid understandings of differences in cultural values, worldviews and educational processes.

This study identifies several pedagogical practices that were presented in this course that are also documented with the research literature on Indigenous pedagogy. Modeling of skills, behaviours and values was an important technique used by the instructors to establish the foundation for this learning community as well as to encourage interactive and engaged learning. While this may be considered a basic pedagogical principle, the strength this approach holds in setting an example for preferred or acceptable behaviour is often underestimated or forgotten. Modeling as a central aspect of teaching reflects a philosophical approach to learning that emphasizes “do as I do” without the reliance on directive applications (Erickson, 2006). Western education has tended to focus on verbal or written forms of knowledge transfer and formalized instruction techniques; however when observing children, youth and adults we can see the strong impacts of the behavioural examples that are being set by the actions and attitudes of teachers, mentors, and role-models (Schultz, 1996).

Through demonstrating Indigenous values, teachings and protocols, the instructors allowed students to witness this cultural approach to teaching and observe examples of the types of sharing, relationship building and decision making that occur within such a cultural context. Modeling skills and behaviours included carving techniques but also extended to pedagogical practices, relationship building and attitudinal teachings such as working with good thoughts or demonstrating respect for Elders. The expression of these central principles and teachings by the instructors provided a powerful message to students without the use of lectures, standardized instruction and external measures of achievement. Furthermore the limited number of students studied here reported feeling trusted in this process and expressed a perceived sense of commitment to the course that seemed to go above and beyond the time and scheduled requirements. This indicates an important methodological and pedagogical practice that potentially inspires learning from an internal motivation.

The sense of community established in the Pole Carving course was particularly notable in that all of the interviewed participants referred to this and it was also present in the document data. While 'community' can hold various meanings, in this course it was purposefully developed as part of the collaborative approach to learning and teaching and reflective of Indigenous pedagogy, worldviews and values. The development of this learning community involved establishing shared goals and principles, respectful relationships, and community responsibility. This also contributed to a shared sense of involvement and connection among the class members. Without being directed or assigned specific roles, students were expected to discover their unique contribution to this project, which would vary depending on the skills, interests and motivations of the individual. Furthermore, the inclusive atmosphere within the course seemed to provide support and allow for more latitude in the variety and depth of the learning that was taking place.

The cultural teaching of working with good thoughts and feelings seemed to provide the template for interactions and relationships within this course. Setting this intention seemed to allow students to be aware of how working together to accomplish the task in a positive way superseded the need to be right or have things evolve according to a specific format. That is not to say class members did not experience conflicts, discomfort or negative feelings. As indicated in Chapter five, there were times when students indicated that they were frustrated or uncertain of how to proceed. However, the reflective component of the course encouraged awareness of personal processes and the sharing circles provided opportunities for discussions. This Indigenous understanding of community seemed to develop a bond among the larger group and provide a feeling of commitment to the completion of the project.

Active engagement in the process of the course and inclusion in decision making also seemed to allow class members to become more aware of their learning styles and preferences and become committed to the process. Allowing students to find their own answers with guidance, but not direct answers, was perceived to encourage the development of autonomous thinking, personal choice and problem solving. Through reflection on their experiences and feelings students were encouraged to develop understandings, challenge their assumptions, and discover answers for themselves. The mentorship and apprenticeship relationships that were established encouraged the learner to be equal partners in the learning process and further demonstrated a non-hierarchical approach to learning and teaching. The course presented pedagogy techniques and tools to participants (including the pre-service teachers) and provided experiential opportunities for learning engagement and the establishment of fundamental skills.

Through an exploration of Indigenous epistemological understandings it becomes apparent how these differ from Western based knowledge systems. Recognizing the variations in the focus and

scope of these cultural worldviews and how they consider validity within the realms of existence allows one to see the diversity that exists in understandings of the world. The acknowledgement of these divergent approaches to knowing assists in clarifying the distinctions between the educational practices and perspectives. Furthermore, exploring the epistemological underpinnings of these two cultural pedagogies allows us to see how both approaches deserve recognition and respect. Eber Hampton, an Indigenous educator and scholar, aptly expresses how:

The transformation of personal, cultural, and historical misunderstanding demands that both Native and non-Native have a place to stand, that both accept the other's right to be, and that the fact of misunderstanding is recognized...Epistemology, ontology, and cosmology are all different. The European segments his or her thoughts and stories, and speeches in three and the Native in four. The list goes on and there is at once richness of opportunity and the difficulty of communication. (Hampton, 1995, p. 41)

This 'difficulty of communication' can be seen in the misunderstandings and stereotyping that occur when people from differing cultural groups do not have a sense of how the other group may express themselves and their values, and how their foundational beliefs may differ.

In Chapter Five, I discussed the breaking down of cultural barriers that occurred through cross cultural sharing and learning in this course. Renata, a non-Indigenous teacher, talked about how she previously did not understand how First Nations people communicated. The course helped to increase her awareness and address some of those cultural barriers. Chris, an Indigenous participant, discussed how he challenged his ideas about non-Indigenous people and their ability to understand his culture. Through cross cultural sharing and learning awareness of the distinctions between these cultural ways of being and thinking, these participants were able to gain perspective into the misunderstandings and miscommunications that can occur between people of differing cultures.

Gregory Cajete (1994) discusses how "traditional Indian education represents an anomaly for the prevailing objectivist theory and methodology of Western education" (p.14). The relational reality

that is the basis of an Indigenous frame of reference recognizes subjective experience, communal relationships, artistic and mythical dimensions, ritual and ceremony, ecology, and psychological and spiritual orientations that are not readily quantifiable, observable or even verbalized (Ibid). These affective elements are often given little credence in mainstream approaches to education and research while they form the profound basis for learning in an Indigenous worldview. Cajete (1994) further suggests that “a key to dealing with the conflict between the objective and relational orientations, the cultural bias, the cultural differences in perception lies in open communication and creative dialogue” (p. 14).

The recognition of diversity in worldviews allows one to see the significance this can have in shaping our understandings of the world around us, our experiences, and our existence. While many Canadians accept some of the fundamental assumptions underlying public education, they may not recognize the ways this system denies and disclaims other knowledge bases and systems. The assumptions inherent in Western knowledge have been described as upholding epistemological racism and contributing to exclusionary practices and intellectual dishonesty. Battiste (2000) uses the term “cognitive imperialism” to describe the policies and practices that have denied Indigenous people of their language and cultural identity by maintaining the legitimacy of only one language, cultural perspective and frame of reference. Ethnocentric and racist interpretations of knowledge production and transfer have not allowed space for Indigenous consciousness, language and identity to flourish (Ibid). Furthermore, this system seeks to change the consciousness of Indigenous people, not the social and institutional conditions that oppress them; therefore negating exploration into new solutions that can fully address the issues in meaningful and lasting ways (Ibid).

The differing values become more apparent when we understand that an Indigenous approach focuses on the collective whole and maintaining balance and harmony with the physical, natural and

spiritual worlds. In the current Western capitalist economy the emphasis on the efficiency, production, and profit often comes at the expense of relationships with other people and the natural world. In Western perspectives nature is often viewed as something to be conquered, tamed, managed or used for its resources. Deloria notes that:

if we subdue nature, we become slaves of the technology by which the task is accomplished and surrender not simply our freedom but also the luxury of reflection about our experiences that a natural relationship with the world had given us.  
(Deloria, 1999, p. 4)

This comment offers insights into how the Western approach to natural resource extraction and management draws heavily on technology and machinery (which requires ongoing maintenance) and shifts attention away from understanding natural cycles and interconnected relationships between human, animal and plant ecosystems. The current capitalist economic focus emphasizes material gain often with the use and misuse of natural resources and human relationships (Wallerstein, 2001, 2004). As growing global and ecological concerns mount, we have much to learn from Indigenous perspectives around sustainability, resource management, and developing maintainable relationships with the natural world.

Cajete (1994) describes how traditionally “the ultimate goal of Indigenous education was to be fully knowledgeable about one’s innate spirituality” (p. 27). I have discussed spirituality (not religion) as a central aspect of Indigenous pedagogy and part of moral and personal development considered essential to this holistic approach to learning. Spirituality is expressed in a variety of ways across different Indigenous groups yet underlying these differing practices and rituals are common elemental understandings. These shared beliefs include a perception that all things are sacred and related and embraces an approach to education that includes the lifelong learning of the nature of one’s spirit. These understandings are distinctly different from religious dogma and in fact First

Nations languages lack a word for “religion” (Cajete, 1994). Spiritual understandings do not espouse a doctrine but a way of living which is the tradition of the people (Ibid).

This central focus on spiritual development offers a challenge to Western based education which often differentiates personal, religious and spiritual beliefs as something that are external from formal education. While spiritual pursuits and knowledge are encompassed within certain areas of Western education, they tend to be separated into a sub-set of specific disciplines, as are various subjects. This segmentation of knowledge does not always provide holistic understandings and compartmentalizes learning into specialized branches of inquiry. While this approach allows for in-depth examinations of concepts, theory and subject matter within specified fields of study, it lacks a foundational understanding of how things may be interrelated and interconnected. Manu Aluli-Meyer comments that “we can no longer afford to misunderstand the interconnection between knowledge, essence, and origin. It is kin to separating creation, experience, and ideas from the notion of what culture is and who we are as evolving human beings” (Aluli-Meyer, 1998, p. 198).

When we can understand Indigenous holistic approaches to learning and their underlying epistemological perspectives, it becomes more apparent how separating and segmenting various aspects of education is antithetical to this worldview. Forbes (1979), a Native American educator, says “knowledge without the spiritual core is a very dangerous thing” (p. 11), because learning remains at the superficial level of skills and facts, where ideas can be formed without the influence of morals and values (for example the creation of the atomic bomb). Meaningful education, according to Forbes, is “learning...how to live a life of the upmost spiritual quality” (p.11), which is more than acquiring facts and knowledge. This connection between morals, values, and learning is foundational to Indigenous identity.

The use of spirituality in learning and education is fundamental to making education culturally relevant for Indigenous students (Curwen Doige, 2003). Dei (2002) argues that spirituality and spiritual knowing is a valid body of knowledge that can be pursued in schooling to enhance outcomes of diverse aspects (Sharma, 2001). Spirituality can be presented through encouraging the sharing of personal and collective experience which in turn allows individuals to develop an understanding of themselves and the world. Olson (1998) notes that the issues of spirituality in learning and pedagogical situations are critical for transformative teaching given that much of what is “universal” in spirituality exists in knowing who we are, what our cultures are, and where we come from. In this way, spirituality can be “a powerful tool in resisting the mis-education, domination or oppressive forces of schooling” (Dei, 2002, p.10).

The term “transformative learning” stems from Transformative Learning Theory (Mezirow, 1991, 1995, 1997, 2000), which describes a learning process of “becoming critically aware of one's own assumptions and expectations and those of others and assessing their relevance for making an interpretation” (Mezirow, 2000, p. 4). Askew and Carnell (1998) explain transformative learning as the process in which people and organizations are transformed through engaging with the learning process. They describe an approach that is collaborative, non-hierarchical, and which focuses on the learning experiences and processes in the social context (Ibid). They further discuss the interrelationships of the emotional, social, spiritual and cognitive aspects of learning while maintaining the importance of the group and social context (Ibid). This approach views people as proactive learners who can use intellectual and emotional skills to initiate, negotiate, evaluate their experiences and bring about actions for change (Ibid). Transformative education presents learning as a process of strengthening individual and collective identities in the pursuit of agency, resistance, and politics for educational change (Dei, 2002).

Given Canada's history of using education for assimilative goals, there is a need for review, reflection, and exploration into the foundations of an approach to education that tends to use an overarching template to which all students are expected to comply. Through deeper exploration of the economic and political agendas of Western capitalism and the historical use of exclusionary practices, we must determine the goals and actual impacts of such an approach. The limitations of such standardized methodology speak to the need for a clearer understanding of interconnections, to respect cultural beliefs and values, and to expand knowledge structures. The inclusiveness of all epistemological perspectives is an essential component to honest and integral academic learning that can lead to empowerment for all. Indigenous educational approaches provide pedagogical practices that expand the repertoire and conceptions of how learning and teaching can take place. Furthermore, incorporating Indigenous worldviews is important to re-establish and repair historical relationships:

At a historical level, Native and non-Native look at the world from opposed positions. Not only must they contend with personal differences with cultural differences in value, understandings of human relationships, and models of communication; but they must contend with the world-shattering difference between the conquered and the conqueror, the exploited and the exploiter, the racist and the victim of racism. It is this historical difference of perspective that demands more than learning about each other's culture. It demands that we can change the world. (Hampton, 1995, p. 41)

Bringing Indigenous ways of teaching and learning into educational systems can help to illuminate cultural approaches to knowledge transmission that include and validate First Nations students and their histories, values, and worldview. The inclusion of Indigenous pedagogy and knowledge in teacher education programs may provide new teachers with broader pedagogical approaches to draw upon, while offering an opportunity to develop a deeper understanding of First Nations peoples of this land. As noted:

...an Education that builds bridges, that makes fuller learning more possible, that extends a young person's potential for independence is in today's terms, an

“empowering education” that is a goal worth striving for. And it is a goal that is possible. (Perrone, 1991, p. 26)

The Pole Carving course set an example of a potential approach to bridging intellectual and cultural divergent philosophies.

This course created an awareness for the need of such courses. Fred, a non-Indigenous Education student, commented that “this ought to be (maybe) a requirement for education students, as opposed to some sort of elective; it just feels like it is an important thing.” The course did affect changes within the Faculty of Education at the University of Victoria where subsequent similar courses have been offered through the department, each with unique content matter.

So, through this course, through last year’s course, through a program that is now being developed here within the faculty where a course on Aboriginal teaching and learning is going to be, everybody is going to be taking that who, who is involved in the Bachelor of Education program. Some other courses, they cut back a little bit on some of the other courses in order for this course to come through. But, it’s long overdue. (Zach)

The Education program at the University of Victoria now requires that students take at least one course in Aboriginal Education as part of their program requirements.

### **6.3 Strengths and Limitations of this Study**

Presenting a multi-perspective viewpoint of the Pole Carving Course and the pedagogy it employed was the aim of this case study, as well as reporting on the influences the course had for participants. While presenting a holistic account was the intention, it is important to acknowledge that the complete story of the course can never entirely be accounted for. There are limitations to the participants representations documented within the confines of this thesis as I was not able to interview all of the class members. The interviews were conducted on a voluntary basis and may have been determined by the class members’ availability and willingness to be part of this study. Students who took this course and did not have a significant or positive experience may have been less likely

to engage in my research study. In order to address these concerns, I expanded the sample size by sending out an email questionnaire that was able to capture further responses from those individuals who were unable to attend in-person interviews due to time or location issues. The use of document data also allowed me to extend the perspectives included in the study and to triangulate the findings from the primary data.

The questions asked during the interviews and in the questionnaires were based on the research questions and shaped the dialogue and nature of the data collected. While this provided a necessary focus to the study it also presented limitations to the data collected and contained in the scope of this study. The results of this study are not generalizable beyond the immediate case or the students included in this study (Lewis, 2003; Stake, 1995; Yin, 1994). The unique nature of this particular course and its cultural and epistemological stance make using a predictive model inconsistent and contradictory with case study and Indigenous methodologies. While conclusions about cross cultural interaction, sharing or learning may be drawn from this research, generalizing beyond the case was not the goal of this study.

The purpose of this research was to document this innovative course and to highlight and explore the Indigenous epistemological and pedagogical approaches it presented. The influences and impacts of this course were acknowledged to provide additional information about how the implementation of such an educational intervention in cross cultural learning could lead to diverse responses and contribute to individual, professional and institutional change. This study offered opportunities for catalytic validity, whereby participants may have increased their self-understanding and gained a sense of empowerment through giving voice to their experiences and providing further understandings for the way this course had influenced them. The strengths of the study also include

additional documentation of this course from a socio-cultural perspective and contributions to a growing body of research on cross-cultural and Indigenous educational initiatives.

#### **6.4 Future Research**

This study documents a specific case of interest featuring this Aboriginal education initiative. The descriptive element was included to offer an example of how this cross cultural learning model actively involved Indigenous people, protocols and perspectives in the planning and presentation of the course. While my research involved interviews approximately one year retrospectively, further research with this particular case could expand on a longitudinal approach. Contacting participants after another span of time (i.e. five years retrospective) to assess the long term implications would offer additional information of the perceived long term affects and diverse impacts. This would provide further information about the perceived lasting influences of such cross cultural interventions and provide accounts of perceived affects that can occur and develop over time. As well, such a study could address whether participants were actively engaged in any further professional or academic practices that were related to the course.

Another graduate student at the University of Victoria, Michele Tanaka, a PhD student in the Faculty of Education has conducted research based on the second course (*Earth Fibres Weaving Stories: learning and teaching in an Indigenous world*) offered in what has become a series of courses based around this model. She is currently writing her dissertation looking specifically at pre-service teachers' experiences and will be reporting on their conceptual changes in learning and teaching and their dispositional changes towards Indigenous pedagogy.

Suggestions for further research include in depth exploration of some of the factors and findings identified within my research. Further understanding of the Indigenous concept of community and how this is developed could provide additional documentation into cultural

approaches to collaboration and collective responsibility. Such research could contribute to broader cultural understandings of the concept of community and demonstrate how groups within Indigenous cultures are organized (formally or informally). Such data could expand cross cultural understandings and have implications for policy and practice (i.e. how governmental organization could foster community development).

Further research and analysis of the pedagogical practices of modeling, mentoring, storytelling, and ceremony as cultural and educational tools would offer further insights into alternative and effective teaching strategies. Detailed investigations of how such methods are utilized and how students' respond would expand the documentation of these pedagogical practices and offer additional information into diverse educational approaches. This could provide new strategies for engaging Indigenous and multicultural students in educational processes. As well, additional research into the development of learning communities and the meaning these hold for members is an interesting area for further exploration.

The documentation of similar cross cultural educational models or initiatives occurring at other educational institutions or settings would generate evidence and provide additional resources to draw upon. Recent research has come out of Australia and New Zealand representing Indigenous educational efforts in these countries. Cross cultural comparisons could strengthen epistemological and pedagogical understanding from various cultures. With the increase of multicultural classrooms and the sharing of knowledge on a global level this could provide important information towards improved cross cultural understandings and communication. With greater awareness of differing cultural perspectives, values, and ways of viewing the world there is the possibility of reducing cultural stereotyping and racism.

Research on the impacts of cross cultural learning and sharing may also increase the awareness of various cultural approaches to knowledge production and transfer and further expand definitions and concepts of how knowledge is culturally constructed. Commonalities and differences among various Indigenous peoples may provide continued understandings of diversity within educational practices as well as identifying central or common principles that are shared among various groups. Such research has the potential to provide additional awareness of inter-cultural understanding and the expansion of pedagogical practices.

### **6.5 Personal Reflections**

My interest in looking at Indigenous perspectives developed from work that I had done with local Indigenous communities. My experiences, while they had their challenges, were rewarding and ignited my growing interest in other cultural perspectives. Starting this Master's program I wanted to explore Indigenous cultural perspectives, and in meeting one of the instructors of the Pole Carving course, learned about this initiative and was intrigued. Through observing the ceremonies and classes I was able to get a sense of the specialness that occurred within this course and gain a sense of the inclusiveness that enveloped this learning community. This was only the beginning of my learning journey. My understandings of Indigenous epistemology and pedagogy have grown significantly through the reading of diverse literature, interviews I conducted and transcribed, data analysis, and in writing this thesis. Throughout these processes I can see the enhancement of my own learning process and plan to continue to allow my cultural understandings to unfold and deepen over time and through further experiences. I feel truly grateful for being able to study such an interesting and innovative course, to have had the honour of individuals sharing their experiences with me, and to have learned so much in the process.

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## Appendix A: Recruitment Email

### Recruitment Email

#### **RE: Research with “Thunderbird/Whale Protection & Welcoming Pole: Learning and Teaching in an Indigenous World” course (the Pole Course)**

Hello Pole Class Members!

My name is Vivian Leik. I was introduced in November 2005 in the Pole course by Lorna Williams as a researcher. I will be conducting a study of the Pole course for my Master’s thesis. I sent out an email last spring to ask if you would be interested in participating in my research.

I am now inviting you to be part of this study, which will document some of the processes of the course and explore the how Indigenous ways of teaching and learning were experienced in the course.

All types of experiences are important and I would like to interview people who have diversity in their outlook or input about the course. So whatever your experiences in the Pole course were, I would be interested in talking with you.

Your participation in this study is voluntary and will contribute to the documenting of this educational initiative and the development of new knowledge that will inform educators and social scientists about this course.

Participation will include being interviewed (one interview of approximately 90 minutes, at a time and location of convenience to you) about your experiences in the course and will allow you to share your thoughts and reflections on the course.

If you are in contact with other class members of the Pole course could you please forward this email on to them as I am attempting to reach as many people as possible?

**If you would be willing to discuss being a participant in this study please contact me by email at [vl@uvic.ca](mailto:vl@uvic.ca) or by telephone at 250-595-1086 as soon as possible.** I will then be in contact with you to discuss your participation in the study and address any questions or concerns you may have.

Thank you very much. I look forward to talking with you!

Vivian Leik  
M.A. Candidate – Sociology

## Appendix B: Participant Consent Form

UNIVERSITY OF VICTORIA  
OFFICE OF THE VICE-PRESIDENT, RESEARCH  
HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

*Participant Consent Form*

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### Bringing Indigenous Perspectives into Education

You are being invited to participate in a study entitled: **Bringing Indigenous Perspectives into Education** that I (Vivian Leik) am conducting through the Department of Sociology at the University of Victoria. As a Graduate student, I am required to conduct research as part of the requirements for a Master's degree in Sociology. It is being conducted under the supervision of Dr. Neena Chappell. You may contact my supervisor at 250-472-4465 or by email at [nlc@uvic.ca](mailto:nlc@uvic.ca). You may contact me if you have further questions by telephone at 250-595-1086 or email at [vl@uvic.ca](mailto:vl@uvic.ca).

The purpose of this research project is to explore how class members' experienced Indigenous ways of teaching and learning in the "Thunderbird/Whale Protection & Welcoming Pole: Learning and Teaching in an Indigenous World" course. This study is interested in learning from you whether the Indigenous approaches to teaching and learning presented in this course had any impacts. Research of this type is important because there is little documented information about how Indigenous pedagogy can be included in educational systems and what outcomes might result from the inclusion of First Nations' ways of teaching and learning.

You are being asked to participate in this study because you were enrolled in the "Thunderbird/Whale Protection & Welcoming Pole: Learning and Teaching in an Indigenous World" course. If you agree to voluntarily participate in this research, your participation will include being interviewed at a time and location convenient to you. The interviews will take approximately 90 minutes and will involve answering a series of questions related to your experience in the course noted above.

Participation in this study may cause some inconvenience to you, including the time involved in the interview process. There are no known or anticipated risks to you by participating in this research. The potential benefits of your participation in this research include reflecting on your experiences in this course and having a chance to provide your input or feedback about the course. You will also receive a copy of the summary of the results of the study if you like. By participating in this research, you will be contributing to new knowledge that will inform educators and social scientists of the impacts of bringing Indigenous ways of teaching and learning into education.

Your participation must be completely voluntary. If you do decide to participate, you may withdraw at any time without any consequences or any explanation. If you do withdraw from the study your data will not be used. You can choose to refuse to answer any question or discontinue the interview at any time.

In terms of protecting your anonymity, a pseudonym will be substituted for your name on all the written and electronic materials that you provide and any descriptive particulars that might identify you will be changed. You might like to choose your own pseudonym. Your confidentiality and the

confidentiality of the data will be protected by storage of the data in locked file cabinets and/or computer files with passwords. Data from this study will be disposed of by destroying audio tapes or digital audio files and shredding paper copies at the end of five years.

It is anticipated that the results of this study will be shared with others in the following ways: a written thesis; presentation at scholarly meetings and /or university education courses; published articles; directly to participants, if requested; and possibly to relevant organizations, Indigenous communities or media sources.

In addition to being able to contact myself, the researcher [and, if applicable, my supervisor] at the above phone numbers, you may verify the ethical approval of this study, or raise any concerns you might have, by contacting the Associate Vice-President, Research at the University of Victoria (250-472-4545).

Your signature below indicates that you understand the above conditions of participation in this study and that you have had the opportunity to have your questions answered by the researchers.

<i>Name of Participant</i>	<i>Signature</i>	<i>Date</i>
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**I give permission to the researcher to audio tape this interview:**

Yes  No

<i>Name of Participant</i>	<i>Signature</i>	<i>Date</i>
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**I give permission to the researcher to take notes during this interview:**

Yes  No

<i>Name of Participant</i>	<i>Signature</i>	<i>Date</i>
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**I would like to receive a summary of the results of this study:**

Yes  No

***A copy of this consent will be left with you, and a copy will be taken by the researcher.***

## **Appendix C: Interview Guide for Students**

### **Interview Guide for Class Members**

Preamble:

Hi. Before we start, I want to remind you that you can opt out of this interview at any time or choose to not answer a question. Please let me know if you want to stop or pass on a question....okay?

The purpose of this interview is to give you an opportunity to tell me about your experiences in the “Thunderbird/Whale Protection & Welcoming Pole: Learning and Teaching in an Indigenous World” course – which I will refer to as the Pole course for the rest of this interview. I am interested to hear about your experiences with the Indigenous ways of teaching and learning that were presented in the Pole course and anything else you consider being different, important or interesting about the course.

Do you have any questions? Are you ready to start?

Introductory questions (rapport building):

1. How did you come to take the Pole course?
2. What educational program are/were you taking at UVic?
3. What courses/practicum/work have you been doing since the end of the Pole course?

Interview questions:

1. It has been a year since the end of the Pole course – what do you remember most about your experiences in the Pole course? Probe: Is there anything else?
2. How did the Pole course differ, if at all, from other university courses you have taken? Probe: Is there anything else?
3. How did you experience Indigenous ways of teaching in the Pole course? Probe: In what ways? Anything else?
4. How did you experience Indigenous ways of learning in the Pole course? Probe: In what ways? Anything else?
5. How did the Indigenous ways of teaching and learning presented in the Pole course influence your views of teaching and learning, if at all? Probe: In what ways?

6. (Specifically for pre-service teachers) How did the Indigenous ways of teaching and learning impact your views of teaching, if at all? How did the Pole course impact your practices of teaching, if at all? (In your practicum?) Probe: In what ways?
7. What impact, if any, did the Indigenous ways of teaching and learning have for you? I am wondering in relation to how you have learned in the past? Probe: Does anything else come to mind?
8. Where there any other significant influences that the Pole course had for you? Probe: Anything else?
9. Is there anything else you would like to add?

## **Appendix D: Interview Guide for Instructors**

### **Interview Guide for Instructors**

#### Preamble:

Hi. Before we start, I want to remind you that you can opt out of this interview at any time or choose to not answer a question. Please let me know if you want to stop or pass on a question....okay?

The purpose of this interview is to give you an opportunity to tell me about your involvement and experiences in the “Thunderbird/Whale Protection & Welcoming Pole: Learning and Teaching in an Indigenous World” course – which I will refer to as the Pole course for the rest of this interview.

Do you have any questions? Are you ready to start?

#### Introductory questions (rapport building):

1. How did you come to be involved with the Pole course?
2. It has been a year since the end of the Pole course – what do you remember most about your experiences with the Pole course? Probe: Is there anything else?

#### Interview questions:

3. How did you present or experience Indigenous ways of teaching in the Pole course?
4. How did the Pole course differ, if at all, from other university courses you have taught or taken? Probe: Is there anything else?
5. How did the Indigenous ways of teaching and learning presented in the Pole course influence your views of teaching and learning, if at all? Probe: In what ways?
6. How did you experience Indigenous ways of learning in the Pole course? Probe: In what ways? Anything else?
7. How did the Indigenous ways of teaching and learning impact your views of teaching, if at all? How did the Pole course impact your practices of teaching, if at all? Probe: In what ways?

8. What impact, if any, did the Indigenous ways of teaching and learning have for you? I am wondering in relation to how you have taught in the past? Probe: Does anything else come to mind?
9. Where there any other significant influences that the Pole course had for you? Probe: Anything else?
10. Is there anything else you would like to add?