

Imperfectionist A Friendship-grounded Approach to Academic Library Instruction

Ashley Edwards  et Julia Lane 

Volume 9, 2023

Special Focus on The Place of Teaching in Academic Librarians' Work

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1108532ar>
DOI : <https://doi.org/10.33137/cjal-rcbu.v9.40952>

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Éditeur(s)

Canadian Association of Professional Academic Librarians / Association
Canadienne des Bibliothécaires en Enseignement Supérieur

ISSN

2369-937X (numérique)

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Citer cet article

Edwards, A. & Lane, J. (2023). Imperfectionist: A Friendship-grounded Approach to Academic Library Instruction. *Canadian Journal of Academic Librarianship / Revue canadienne de bibliothéconomie universitaire*, 9, 1–27. <https://doi.org/10.33137/cjal-rcbu.v9.40952>

Résumé de l'article

Cet article se concentre sur un mode d'enseignement intégré lors duquel les employés de bibliothèques travaillent chaque semaine dans un espace étudiant. Dans le cas présent, le lieu désigné est le Indigenous Student Centre de l'Université Simon Fraser en Colombie-Britannique, au Canada (appellation coloniale). En continuant à étudier en tandem et à apprécier l'érudition et la théorie Skwxwú7mesh (savoirs autochtones des terres que nous occupons), nous avons reconnu que ces concepts font écho à nos propres connaissances et démarches. Notamment, le partage des savoirs de Denise Findlay (Skwxwú7mesh) sur l'eslhélha7kwhiism et le concept de l'amitié imparfaite a influencé notre compréhension de l'amitié et de notre rôle comme professeurs. Sous format épistolaire, nous nous entretenons du temps que nous avons passé ensemble au Indigenous Student Centre et en quoi cette expérience nous a permis de développer et d'apprécier une approche d'enseignement et d'apprentissage basée sur l'amitié. Cet article invite les lecteurs au dialogue entre les auteurs, dont la relation s'est à la base développée au sein de collaborations professionnelles avant de se développer en amitié concrète. En partageant des histoires, des questions et des connexions quant à ce que nous lisons et apprenons, nous encourageons à la fois les lecteurs et nous-mêmes à considérer les possibilités d'imperfection, d'humilité, d'amitié et de radical care dans l'enseignement au sein des bibliothèques universitaires, et ce, au-delà de la salle de classe.

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Imperfectionist: A Friendship-grounded Approach to Academic Library Instruction

Ashley Edwards

Simon Fraser University

Julia Lane

Simon Fraser University

ABSTRACT

This article focuses on a form of embedded instruction, wherein library employees work weekly within a student space, in this case the Indigenous Student Centre at Simon Fraser University in what is colonially known as British Columbia, Canada. As we continued to learn together and deepen our appreciation of Skwxwú7mesh scholarship and theory – scholarship and theory Indigenous to the lands we occupy – we recognized deep resonance with our understandings and approaches. In particular, Denise Findlay’s (Skwxwú7mesh) sharing about eshléha7kwhiws and imperfect friendship have shaped our understandings of both our friendship and our role as teachers. Writing in an epistolary form, we dialogue about the time we spend together in the Indigenous Student Centre and how that time has allowed us to develop and appreciate a friendship-grounded approach to teaching and learning. This article invites readers into a dialogue between the authors, whose relationship initially developed through work collaborations and grew into a real-life friendship. By sharing stories, questions, and connections with what we are reading and learning, the authors encourage one another, and simultaneously the reader, to consider the possibilities of imperfection, humility, friendship, and radical care in academic library instruction beyond the classroom.

Keywords: *academic libraries · Indigenous librarianship · information literacy instruction · reference · writing support*

RÉSUMÉ

Cet article se concentre sur un mode d’enseignement intégré lors duquel les employés de bibliothèques travaillent chaque semaine dans un espace étudiant. Dans le cas présent, le lieu désigné est le Indigenous Student Centre de l’Université Simon Fraser en Colombie-Britannique, au Canada (appellation coloniale). En continuant à étudier en tandem et à apprécier

l'érudition et la théorie Skwx wú7mesh (savoirs autochtones des terres que nous occupons), nous avons reconnu que ces concepts font écho à nos propres connaissances et démarches. Notamment, le partage des savoirs de Denise Findlay (Skwx wú7mesh) sur l'eslélha7kwhiwsn et le concept de l'amitié imparfaite a influencé notre compréhension de l'amitié et de notre rôle comme professeures. Sous format épistolaire, nous nous entretenons du temps que nous avons passé ensemble au Indigenous Student Centre et en quoi cette expérience nous a permis de développer et d'apprécier une approche d'enseignement et d'apprentissage basée sur l'amitié. Cet article invite les lecteurs au dialogue entre les auteurs, dont la relation s'est à la base développée au sein de collaborations professionnelles avant de se développer en amitié concrète. En partageant des histoires, des questions et des connexions quant à ce que nous lisons et apprenons, nous encourageons à la fois les lecteurs et nous-mêmes à considérer les possibilités d'imperfection, d'humilité, d'amitié et de radical care dans l'enseignement au sein des bibliothèques universitaires, et ce, au-delà de la salle de classe.

Mots-clés : *aide à l'écriture · bibliothéconomie autochtone · bibliothèques universitaires/ · enseignement de la culture de l'information · référence*

HELLO, dear reader.

Thank you for spending some of your day with us. We begin with a territorial acknowledgement: as we write these words, we are in relationship with lands that have known the presence of the *x^wməθk^wəyám* (Musqueam), *Skwx wú7mesh* (Squamish), *səl ilwətaʔ* (Tsleil-Waututh), and *k^wik^wəłəm* (Kwkwetlem) Nations and peoples since time immemorial. We offer gratitude for the big and small ways that these Nations continue to enact their sacred responsibilities to the land. We also acknowledge the troubling ways that institutions, including both universities and libraries, hide behind the cover of neutrality while benefiting both from the destruction of land and water through resource extraction and from the ongoing land defence work of Indigenous leaders.

Through our many collaborations we maintain a focus on holding the institution accountable, naming our own complicity, and nurturing different forms of relationality with Indigenous Nations and peoples, as well as with the land and waters. We recognize that holding institutions to account is crucial and also fundamentally contradictory work: how can colonial institutions be accountable for decolonizing work? And is decolonization truly a useful framework to use in this context? As Distinguished Professor at Massey University in New Zealand writes, in praise for Jerry Fontaine and Don McCaskill's book *Di-Bayn-Di-Zi-Win To Own Ourselves* (2022), "I am critical of the concept of 'decolonization,' in that it puts the colonizer at the centre of the discussion. I prefer, as you are also arguing, to speak to the issues of resistance, self-determining struggle, and the prior concern to transform

ourselves” (Praise for *Di-Bayn-Di-Zi-Win*). This writing has invited and challenged us to continue deepening our thinking and engagement with these questions and to consider how our work might support us to continually position ourselves “in but not of the university” as we commit ourselves to collectivity, reciprocity, mutuality (Grande 2018, 49, 61) and friendship instead of committing ourselves primarily to our job descriptions.

We work at an institution that is located on the top of a mountain, colonially known as Burnaby Mountain. Learning names beyond the colloquial/colonial is an important way of coming to know a place and establishing our relationship with it. Many of the place names in what is now known as Canada are anglicized and appropriated names from Indigenous languages; for example, Coquitlam comes from *kʷikwəʔəm* and the name Canada itself is an anglicized interpretation of Kanata, a Haudenosaunee word which means village or settlement (Horn 2021). Many other names celebrate Canada's colonial history and individual colonizers, many violent and genocidal. Still more names come from corporate entities, embodying the intersections of capitalism and colonization and their ongoing influence on our contemporary landscape.

Of course, when the colonial project began all the places in the country called Canada already had names used by Indigenous Peoples since time immemorial (Vowel [Métis] 2016, 235-242; Younging [Opaskwayak Cree] 88). Skwxwú7mesh community leader and spokesperson Khelsilem Tl'aḱwasik̓a n has suggested that *Lhuḱw'luḱw'ayten* is an appropriate place name for the area around Burnaby Mountain where we are located (Bill Reid Centre n.d.). *Lhuḱw'luḱw'ayten* derives from the Skwxwú7mesh sníchim word for arbutus, *lhulhuḱw'ay*, which comes from *lhuḱw'* (peel), and means “always peeling tree,” and together it means the place “where the bark gets pe[e]led” in spring (Bill Reid Centre n.d.).

The institution we work at is called Simon Fraser University, named for an American-Scottish explorer (Simon Fraser University n.d.). In a 2018 blog post that shared research from her SFU History honours project, Georgia Twiss writes that she consulted the SFU Archives and found that the name came about by accident. The planned name for the school was Fraser University (for the local river) but the realization that the acronym would be “FU” meant that “Simon” was added. From there, the university's first president endeavoured to create a sense of tradition by embracing aspects of Scottish culture (Twiss 2018). This naming occurred in 1965 and demonstrates how contemporary colonialism operates: instead of learning what the local Nations call Burnaby Mountain or the surrounding area, the university president and board embraced and uplifted European traditions and intentionally built a university culture around them. Only with the release of the Aboriginal

Reconciliation Council (ARC) final report, *Walk This Path With Us* (Simon Fraser University 2017), has there been widespread recognition of the need to incorporate art and language from local First Nations into the institution.

We want to encourage you, dear reader, to pause and reflect on the name(s) for the place(s) where you live and work. What name(s) do you know? Do you know where those name(s) come from? Are there other names that you can learn? If so, why do you think you didn't know those names? Finally, what connection do you feel or have to these lands where you live and work? What kind of connection do you want to nurture?

We ask these questions during a time of climate collapse, with an awareness that the health of the land and of our relationships to the land come before all else. We ask these questions with an awareness that everything – including our friendship with one another, and our teaching practices – exists in interdependence with the land.

Kanawaapamisho (take care),

Ashley and Julia

P.S. When writing these letters, we referred to author Gregory Younging's 2018 work *Elements of Indigenous Style* (EIS). In cases of discrepancy between publication and style guidelines, we follow EIS. Following EIS, in addition to practices outlined by many other Indigenous authors (See: Joseph [Gwawaenuk] 2018, 10-12; Justice [Cherokee Nation] 2018, 6-10; Vowel 2016, 7-13), we use the word Indigenous when referring collectively to First Nations, Métis, and Inuit. When referring to one group only, they are named. Additionally, where possible, the name of an author's community or Nation has been included the first time we cite them. We are responsible for any omissions or mistakes and apologize for them.

Taanshi kiyawaaw (hello everyone),

We chose to write this piece as a collaborative autoethnography in an epistolary (or letter writing) format. Autoethnography can be understood as “self-study,” or research about oneself and the communities in which one already belongs. Bochner and Ellis describe “evocative autoethnography” as a “critical response to disquieting concerns about silent authorship, the need for researcher reflexivity, or as a humanizing, moral, aesthetic, emotion-centered, political, and personal form of representation” (2016, 47). In their writing of counterstories, Quiñonez, Nataraj, and Olivas share, “Autoethnography focuses on self-interrogation and self-reflection, but when we shift toward a collaborative methodology, we are ‘building on each other’s stories, gaining insight from group sharing, and providing various levels of support’

(Chang, Ngunjiri, and Hernandez 17)” (253). In writing letters to one another, we seek to build on one another’s stories to recount how our friendship has supported us to approach teaching and learning in unique ways. In addition to allowing us to gain insights from one another, this approach serves to deepen our friendship and our collaborative teaching and learning practice, thereby not merely describing but also strengthening our work.

The epistolary form is inspired by texts we have enjoyed reading in recent years, including Shawn Wilson’s *Research as Ceremony*, Frankie Condon and Neisha-Anne S. Green’s “Letters on Moving from Ally to Accomplice: Anti-Racism and the Teaching of Writing,” and Robyn Maynard and Leanne Betasamosake Simpson’s *Rehearsals for Living*.

In “Letters on Moving from Ally to Accomplice,” Condon and Green explain that the letter-writing genre;

enables us, we think, to both discuss and to model the honest, hard, and tender dialogue we believe is necessary [because it] enables us to engage anti-racism from our differing disciplinary positions—writing from where we stand as well as with an openness to change and be changed—even as we conjoin our voices in a single text. (278)

We appreciate this approach because it allows us to write together without overwriting one another or having to obfuscate our individual voices and perspectives into a single authorial “I” or even “we.” As Condon and Green further share, this approach has allowed us to “attend to one another’s stories with humility” (278), and this practice of humble attention has become the bedrock of our friendship-grounded approach to teaching. Finally, this genre of writing felt right because it invited us both to “sit with” one another’s words and thoughts (as Maynard and Simpson discuss in *Rehearsals for Living*). It allowed us to best capture the experiences we have when we are “just” talking and brainstorming together – the joy and excitement that we share in hearing one another’s thoughts and insights.

Before we move into the letters we wrote to one another, we have each written a letter of introduction to you, dear readers, to situate ourselves, the intersections of our backgrounds and social locations, and how those influence our relationships (Imani 2021). It is an Indigenous protocol to situate ourselves at the beginning of work being done (see Kovach [Nêhiyaw and Saulteaux]; Wilson [Opaskwayak Cree]; Vowel 2016, 9-20) so the participants – you – know who we are and why we are entering this space-time together.

Situating ourselves

Taanshi kiyawaaw!

Since we can't meet in person, I want to introduce myself to you all in writing. This way of being in our time together is meant to “foster connections” and encourage you to form your “own opinions of me and my motivations” (Fiola 7).

My name is Ashley Edwards, and I am a Métis, Dutch, and Scottish woman living on the shared territories of the səl ilwətaʔt (Tsleil-Waututh), Qayqayt, Stz'uminus, x^wməθk^wəyəm (Musqueam), and k^wik^wəλəm (Kwikwetlam) First Nations, colonially known as Burnaby, BC. My Métis ancestors come from the Red River Settlement area of Manitoba, specifically St. Francis Xavier, which is where my Vivier ancestors were given scrip. My family names include Vivier, Chalifoux, McKay, and Fitzpatrick. Due to my grandmother's experiences of racism and lateral violence, she didn't raise her children with much knowledge of their Métis culture, which in turn meant my siblings and I weren't raised with that knowledge. We grew up in Stó:lō temexw, in the Fraser Valley of British Columbia, and I am a citizen of Métis Nation of BC. While we were not raised in our Métis community, Dad did instill a sense of pride about our Indigenous heritage and during my reconnection I have come to realize he shared many Métis values, even if neither of us knew that at the time.

My career in libraries began in 2009 when I graduated with my diploma in Library and Information Technology from the University of the Fraser Valley. Shortly afterward I began working with the Stó:lō Research and Resource Management Centre (SRRMC) as the assistant librarian, a position that included working with archival and material culture collections. It was during my three years with the SRRMC that I began my learning journey on Indigenous topics, particularly those related to or about Stó:lō and the Fraser Valley. It was also the time that my understanding of libraries, their history, and their practices came into question as I realized both the lack of Indigenous voices in the profession as well as the offensive and oppressive nature of traditional library practices and policies. This realization sparked an interest in finding ways to do things differently. When I began my position at SFU in 2013 as a Library Assistant in the Learning and Instructional Services division, I didn't continue that interest right away. It wasn't until around 2018, after starting my Master of Library and Information Studies at the University of Alberta (UofA), that I began working more within what is known as Indigenous librarianship. This came shortly after receiving my Métis Nation of BC citizenship card in 2016, a process that required five generations of Métis heritage documented within the historic Métis homeland, including copies of the scrip given to ancestors, found on the Library and Archives Canada website.

In my current position as the Indigenous Initiatives and Instruction Librarian I get to support my colleagues in the library with their work on decolonization and Indigenization; support Indigenous students, staff, and faculty at SFU; and lead initiatives within the library, such as the Indigenous Curriculum Resource Centre. It's a role that gives me freedom to try things, collaborate on projects (such as writing with Julia), and continue my own learning on what it means to practice Indigenous librarianship. This work would look very different without the community I have become part of, within the library and outside it.

Writing these letters with Julia to explore our friendship, relationship with teaching and learning, and reflecting on our experience with staff and students at the Indigenous Student Centre (ISC) at Simon Fraser University has been a deeply rewarding experience. I hope you all enjoy our conversations.

Hello there!

Thank you for letting me share space and time with you in the unique relationship between writer and reader. My name is Julia Helen Lane and I am so grateful for the many ways that I get to connect with, learn from, and grow alongside my dear friend Ashley. I am grateful, also, to be sharing our thoughts and work with you.

I introduce myself as a mother first because I appreciate the way that role situates me in a relationship of familial care. It has been increasingly important to me over the years to bring that orientation of care and relationship-building into all aspects of my life and work. I have also developed a healthy skepticism of the way that care is framed, and at times weaponized, within hetero-patriarchal, racial capitalist, and colonial systems. I have recently been reading and learning about practices of radical care (see, for example, Hobart and Kneese) which I understand to be “the liberatory act of sharing power that comes with forging human connection” (Quiñonez, Nataraj, and Olivas 258).

I am a white settler with mixed European ancestry (English, Irish, Scottish) and family on both sides of the medicine line (colonially known as the Canada/US border). I live about a 15-minute drive away from Ashley in Burnaby and the area I call home is shared by the Hul'qumi'num Treaty Group, Stó:lō temexw, Tsleil-Waututh, Qayqayt, Stz'uminus, and Musqueam Nations. I am committed to an ongoing process of learning and unlearning so that I can be a better relation on these lands, and I strive for an ever-deepening understanding that, as Denise Findlay (Sḵw̓x̓ wú7mesh) shares, reconciliation is a whole being process that “demands change” of my “mind-heart-body-spirit” (2).

My career in libraries began in 2013 when I was first hired as a Graduate Writing Facilitator by the Student Learning Commons (SLC) at SFU, which is located in the university's academic library. Now that I work full time as a Writing Services Coordinator in the SLC, I regularly explain that I am a "non-librarian library person." In my role with the SLC, I have been intentional about building relationships and friendships with others across the library and developing my understanding of librarianship and its complexities. I have learned so much from my library colleagues, especially from those who are engaged in critical and Indigenous librarianship. This learning deeply influences and benefits my work as a writing coordinator and a student writing coach.

I look forward to sharing more with you through our writing,
Julia

Taanshi aen naaamii (hello my friend),

During the process of gathering my thoughts for our article, I started to reflect on our friendship, which is so central to our collaborations. Do you find it funny that we both started in the Library in 2013 but that it wasn't until 2018 that we met and began this relationship? I found some old notes, and in 2018 we hosted a conversation as part of being on the Wellness Committee about being vegan (you) and vegetarian (me). Maybe it was an excuse to eat yummy food and visit. Whatever the reason, I'm so grateful we volunteered to host that session for our colleagues. Out of it came a friendship I honestly cannot imagine being without.

It's oddly challenging for me to try and describe our friendship in words when we usually express it through a hug or acts of care, such as bringing each other tea or checking in when we know the other is having a tough day. Our collaborations tend to focus on decolonization and anti-racism work, which can be intellectually and emotionally heavy. To do this work with care, we needed to really know each other, and have shared so much about who we are as people outside of our workplace (like how we introduced ourselves to the readers of this article). In working on edits of this paper, I realized we were in a "power with" relationship before I had the words to describe it (Quiñonez, Nataraj, and Olivás 251). To do the work we both care about and feel passionate about means we need to be in relation with each other in a way that sometimes feels counter to what academia expects or wants. This has meant, and continues to mean, sharing celebrations, stories about children and partners (and cats!), and mostly being there to listen. It's going through experiences of our own learning, unlearning, and relearning, either together like participating in the Moving

Together in the Ways of the People program, or separately and sharing our thoughts and resources.

In reading an article for a course I'm currently taking, I came across this quote that reminded me of our friendship: "our friendship developed through undertaking collaborative action to foster cross-cultural conversation about colonialism, violence, gender, and space, rather than just acknowledging these shared interests on an intellectual level" (Hunt and Holmes 161). The article is about decolonization in everyday life, and the importance of friendship and active allyship in this work and way of being. Skwxwú7mesh scholar and educator Denise Findlay writes about being an imperfect friend which I think is what Hunt and Holmes are describing. Findlay describes the imperfect friend as someone who engages in "conviviality, honesty, caring, and compassion" (4). Similarly, Jordan explains relational cultural theory (RCT) as being about the "inevitability of needing one another throughout our lives" (231) and how this isn't a sign of weakness. RCT scholarship centres the importance of connections, a concept that is integral to Indigenous worldviews and ways of being. The difference is a body of literature coming out of a developed theory by academics, and a way of seeing the world through relational accountability (Wilson 2008). While I may continue to engage with RCT in these letters, it is important that I centre the work of Indigenous scholarship that informs my thinking on these topics. In her article, Findlay presents the imperfect friend and imperfect friendship as being grounded in the Skwxwú7mesh understanding of eslhéha7kwhiism, a worldview centred on "how we are all related, and we are all one" (6). Which, in turn, brings to mind, for me, the Cree-Métis value of wâhkôhtowin as shared in Jessie Loyer's (Cree-Métis) work. Wâhkôhtowin is about how we are all connected, and Loyer adapts it into a framework for information literacy instruction, based on accountability, relationality, and responsibility. While coming from different communities, both eslkêha7khiism and wâhkôhtowin articulate the ways we need one another and encourage a focus on relationship-building as core to "what we think, feel, say, and do" (Findlay 6).

You bring so much joy and light to those around you and are so incredibly thoughtful in everything you do. I'm already looking forward to our future collaborations and conversations. It's a privilege to share our conversations and friendship with our readers.

Kanawaapamisho (take care),
Ashley

P.S. The Moving Together in the Ways of the People cohort was an initiative that Denise Findlay and an advisory circle composed of Skwxwú7mesh Elders and Knowledge Keepers, community members, and SFU staff members brought to life

through SFU's Centre for Educational Excellence in 2022 and 2023. Julia and I were both involved as participants and, through the cohort program, were able to learn and grow through ceremony, traveling in an ocean-going canoe, carving cedar paddles, reading, and sharing in circles. The cohort program is described in more depth in Findlay's article "Becoming the Imperfect Friend."

Dearest Ashley,

I do find it funny that we both started in the library in 2013 but didn't become friends until 2018. But I also find it a bit sad, mostly because our friendship is such a great part of my life and we could've had 5 "extra" years! I also find it sad because it makes me reflect on the ways that I have been able to become a part of the wider library community now that I work in a full-time continuing role, but that weren't available, or at least weren't obvious, to me when I was in a graduate student contract. I am a person who always seeks out and tries to create community, but I struggled for a long time to feel that at SFU. Even though I loved my work as a Graduate Writing Facilitator, I really didn't feel connected to the larger Student Learning Commons, let alone the library. Jordan's writing is relevant here, as she explains that RCT stands in stark contrast to earlier forms of psychology which focus on "the separate self" (228). Societies built on this separate-self ideology condition us to live in a "culture of separation" (236), which is how post-secondary institutions seem to be set up with siloed departments, faculties, and programs and little attention or effort given to connection. I am so grateful for the ways we have been able to go "silo hopping" together through our collaborations. It really is the case that as we each take on different projects, we give each other opportunities to connect with others across the university, building a relational web!

I love the quotation you shared from Hunt and Holmes, and I think it connects super well with what we learned in the Moving Together in the Ways of the People cohort. Since the documentary film premiere was just this week (keeping us both out well past our bedtimes on a Monday night!), it is especially top of mind for me. There are so many things that we can understand on the level of experience, action, engagement, and embodiment that we can't just intellectualize. I am thinking about what Splash (Aaron Nelson-Moody [Skwxwú7mesh], March 27, 2023) said at the film premiere: "talking about ceremony with those who haven't experienced it is like trying to describe a colour to someone who has never seen it." Being a part of that cohort with you and getting to experience the power of "pulling together" in an ocean-going canoe while connecting with the Squamish canoe family has certainly felt like an experience of "collaborative action" (as Hunt and Holmes write). It has also been deeply vulnerable heart work. One of the things I love most about Findlay's concept

of “the imperfect friend” is the way she contrasts it against “the perfect stranger.” The perfect stranger is one who allows themselves to stand at a cold and critical distance, holding tight to their ignorance and their denial (Findlay 3). The imperfect friend, by contrast, is vulnerable and willing to change. Through this vulnerable willingness, the imperfect friend has the possibility of both healing and connection (Findlay 6). I am so deeply grateful for our friendship and the space we are able to make for one another to be imperfect because we are willing to try things together, take risks, make mistakes, and lift one another up.

As I was trying to fall asleep the other night, I had a brainwave about a connection that I want to make in this letter. I was thinking about the reading I’ve been doing recently about radical care. Specifically, two quotations from two different articles. First, in a special issue of *Social/Text*, authors Hi’ilei Julia Kawehipuaakahaopulani Hobart and Tamara Kneese frame radical care as a “set of vital but underappreciated strategies for enduring precarious worlds” (1). Second, in the “Radical Caring” issue of *Shameless* magazine, Khadija Aziz writes, “radical care means finding solutions using the resources currently available to solve big problems” (20). In reading both quotations, I see imperfect friendship as an important manifestation of radical care: our friendship is definitely one of the places I go to find solutions to problems and, as such, it is vital for my ability to survive and thrive in the (always) precarious world.

The connection that I want to make is that, like hope, radical care is about believing things can be different. Perhaps what distinguishes it from hope is that I think radical care demands that we have enough engagement and investment to act and make changes where we can. One of the early workshops we did together was focused on supporting library colleagues to think about and act within our “spheres of influence.” To me, that is what radical care is all about. It is caring enough to believe that things can be different and pushing ourselves to live that difference into being, even when we “don’t feel ready,” because we recognize our own imperfections, and we exist in systems that are designed to make us feel powerless. This impulse of radical care, then, is also at the heart of teaching and learning, I think, because learning is always a process of transforming from how we are/how we see/how we understand to something different.

The “ask me anything” discussion we hosted about veganism/vegetarianism might seem like it is not a part of this larger picture of radical care, friendship, and teaching, but I think it is. From that initial connection we made, we embraced our shared ethical orientations and sought to bring others into that conversation with us. I remember distinctly while we were planning for that event we discussed how often people are curious about vegetarianism and veganism but feel overwhelmed about making that kind of a change to their diet/lifestyle. We wanted to create a space

where people could bring their curiosity and lean into the potential discomfort of change. I think our collaborations from that one until today have shared that same ethos, and I see it as radical care. As our collaborations have focused more and more on decolonization, another layer has been added; decolonization is, for me, about realizing that not only is a different way possible, it has been here all along, resisting the powerful lie that only one way – the colonial way – is possible.

Here I have to take a moment to add a reflection on the peer review process for this article, which was special. It strikes me as an enactment of the reality that we aren't constrained by one way of doing things, despite the powerful forces that act on us all the time to keep us feeling those constraints. The experience of working on this article has shown me that taking small steps to do things "differently" can have ripple effects that nurture change. The special issue editors recognized that this article wouldn't be well served by a conventional peer review process and invited us into an open review. Both reviewers who engaged with our work did so with generosity and kindness and I want to particularly thank David James Hudson for being the best possible "second reviewer" and for taking the time to meet us in advance of reading our paper. Dave also recommended that we engage with Sandy Grande's article "Refusing the University" (2018) to consider the ways that institutions can co-opt, undermine, and ultimately come to "own" language like decolonization. Grande draws on Audra Simpson's work to frame her articulation of a "politics of refusal" in university contexts (50). It is generative for me to think about refusing the persistent myth that there is one right way to be and do and, through this refusal, open up more possibilities for doing and being that are not dictated or owned by the institution.

I am reminded of the beautiful quotation from Arundhati Roy, "another world is not only possible, she's on her way [...] on a quiet day, if I listen very carefully, I can hear her breathing" (75). I think what binds us most deeply in friendship is our shared care about that other world and her ability to breathe.

With a deep breath,
Julia

Boñ mataeñ Julia (Good morning, Julia),

As you know, I've been reading a book chapter by Quiñonez, Nataraj, and Olivas, which connects relational cultural theory with critical race theory and librarianship. The authors describe relational cultural theory as "creat[ing] "power with" connections with colleagues and students, rather than imposing "power over" them" (Quiñonez, Nataraj, and Olivas 249). They are drawing from Jordan's work on RCT, and its emphasis on the strengths that connecting with others provides. Immediately

I thought of our work as colleagues in conversation about what it means to teach, and our time spent at the Indigenous Student Centre. They go on to explain that in “power with” relationships vulnerability is a strength, since it focuses on well-being, disrupting the notion of the expert, and is about empowerment (251).

It brings to mind the importance of consistency with our ISC hours, and how being there is not about increasing the statistics we track but about building relationships with both the staff and students in the space. Even when there isn't a question being asked, it's important that we show up each week so that students know when they do need support, we'll be there, and so that we can build our relationships with them and become familiar to one another. The flip side to this is something we've talked about, and that's the tension or awkwardness of coming into the space when students are either in conversation or in deep concentration. Do we interrupt and introduce ourselves? Should we be wearing name badges? Do we sit quietly, and wait for the “right” moment to speak?

It was different when everyone was working and studying from home during 2020 and the first half of 2021. We held drop-in times over Zoom and knew that when students entered the space it was to speak with us or to use the space as a quiet study room and schedule for working on assignments. People said hello when entering the space, or we shared information in the chat including links to musicians we were listening to, recipes, and vocabulary when a student and I were both learning our language.

In person there's more vulnerability since we're in the students' space. We're invited, and what does that mean for us? Should we host workshop-type lectures each week? Should we sit quietly and wait for someone to ask a question? What is our place in this space? I sometimes feel like an outsider, like I shouldn't be taking up space or imposing myself on the students. It's an honour to be invited in and asked to share my knowledge and skills with the students to help them succeed.

The articles by Denise Findlay (2023) and Jessie Loyer (2018) share a philosophical concept about interconnectedness: *eshélha7kwhiws* and *wâhkôhtowin* respectively. These concepts go beyond a transactional connection made in the moment to express a way to understand how we're connected through relationality and accountability. Relationality, as I understand it, means caring about one another's mind-body-heart-spirit/soul, which to me is about seeing the person in front of you and honouring all of who they are.

Our readers might be wondering what this has to do with teaching. The more I read about Indigenous ways to teach and learn, and the more I'm involved with my Métis community, the more I understand that learning and teaching is most

successful in community and through relationships. The connection between learner and teacher is sacred, and that isn't necessarily the case in most classrooms today. The "sage on the stage" or expert approach creates this false sense of superiority. How can I presume to know everything when I am still learning? Métis author Chelsea Vowel shares the teaching of *tapahhtëyimisowin* (Vowel 2022, 167) and describes it as the Cree-Métis term for humility, a way of thinking about yourself not as better or less than anyone, but recognizing that there is no hierarchy since we are all part of Creation. She writes that "[t]o look down on any being, to view that being with contempt, is a violation of the sacred within us all" (167).

That's what education should be about. A sharing of knowledge, recognizing that everyone has something to add that someone else can learn from. Cree educator Verna Kirkness wrote about reciprocal relationships in a 1991 article with Ray Barnhardt. They write that teachers and learners are in a "give-and-take" relationship, which "open[s] up new levels of understanding for everyone" (10). What they mean is that we as educators can also learn from those we're teaching, and those we're working with. Going back to RCT, this two way learning couldn't be possible in a "power-over" relationship, only in a "power-with" relationship (Jordan 229; Quiñonez, Nataraj, and Olivas 251).

Kanawaapamisho (take care),
Ashley

Dear Ashley,

I totally share your sense of being an outsider in the ISC space, though for very different reasons. As a non-Indigenous person, it is important to me to practice cultural humility. I'd love to add Métis scholar Warren Cariou's voice to the powerful articulations of humility you've already shared. Cariou describes cultural humility "as an openness to learning. As a mode of listening. A way of showing respect, to the world, to the people speaking, and to the gift of the universe itself" (6). He elaborates that practicing humility is a commitment to listening, to "put[ting] your own thoughts out of your mind, to make that effort to follow the thoughts of another person in a sustained, respectful, and engaged way" (6). I am doubly an outsider in the Indigenous Student Centre: both because I am no longer a student and because I am a settler. I am so grateful for the invitation to be in the space, and I strive to never take that invitation for granted. Actively practicing humility is especially important because, structurally, the university sets me (as a white, doctorate-holding staff member) up as an expert. While I am in the space to support students with the knowledge that I have, I always want to be clear that I, too, am a learner, especially in an Indigenous context

where I am an outsider. I do not want my position or credentials to make anyone feel that I am “looking down” on them or would position myself above them in a way that could violate the sacred in us (Vowel 2022, 167). But, the university is structured so hierarchically that rejecting that “power over” relationship (Jordan 229; Quiñonez, Nataraj, and Olivas 251) requires active work, time, and the building of trust. It can never simply be presumed.

I am not sure if I shared this with you, but I wrote a letter to the ISC staff and students after my first semester in their space. Here is an excerpt from that letter:

Dear Students and Staff at the ISC,

Huy ch q'u, thank you, for hosting me in your space this past semester. It has been lovely for me to spend time with and begin to build friendships with you. I am grateful for the welcome you have extended to me. To those of you who have worked with me on your writing, I am also grateful for the trust that you have placed in me, as I know that writing and talking to others about your writing are vulnerable acts.

[...] Sometimes I have been like a fly on the wall in the ISC, and, as a result, I have gotten to overhear and to see bits and pieces that speak to the energy, knowledge, creativity, and patience that you bring to the many different facets of your work here. It is truly impressive. Thank you for everything you bring to SFU – it is a better place to be, thanks to you all.

I raise my hands in gratitude and appreciation for you.

Sincerely,

Julia

Whoa, I know, a letter within a letter within an article – what is happening?! It was nice for me to revisit that writing because it encapsulates the sense of honour I have at being invited into the ISC space, and the ethic of care and humility that I strive for as I take up that invitation. I think maybe that combination of care and humility is part of what it means to be an imperfect friend. As a settler, it is part of my responsibility to carry that sense of humility and honour with me more strongly in my day-to-day life, recognizing that all of this place is unceded Indigenous land and that I am always an outsider here. That is how Findlay describes reconciliation for the imperfect friend: “a learning process in which they are personally implicated” (2). I have long-felt my personal implication and our shared work in the ISC has helped me to uncover more layers to responsibility of being implicated. I need to practice humility so that I can be open to better ways to live here – becoming a better neighbour, relation, friend and, ultimately, ancestor.

Your description of “power with” rather than “power over” (Quiñonez, Nataraj, and Olivas 249) reminds me of another aspect of Hobart and Kneese’s definition of radical care, namely that it is “feeling with” rather than “feeling for” (1). This is

sometimes explained as the difference between sympathy (feeling for, power over) and empathy (feeling with, power with). It is worth remembering, I think, that very often students feel like outsiders in the university. I increasingly recognize that this is true for *all* students, because the university is a place where students regularly have power exerted over them. However, it is not felt by all students *equally*. This sense of being an outsider is more acute for Indigenous students for a variety of complex socio-cultural reasons including both the high degrees of (warranted!) educational distrust that are the legacy of residential schools and the reality that universities uplift white colonial knowledge in ways that directly contribute to the erasure of Indigenous Knowledges and lifeways (Grande). So, when we experience the humility of being an outsider in the ISC, I think it supports us to feel with, and enact power with, the students who are often feeling like outsiders at the university. Quiñonez, Nataraj, and Olivas write, “the same tools that we use to empower students help us to empower each other” (242). I agree, and I think that the flip side is also true: allowing ourselves to feel vulnerable as staff and faculty members can support us to be more effective accomplices for students.

I am thinking, too, of Grande’s discussion of the problematics of “recognition” in university settings. As she explains, “CIS [critical Indigenous studies] scholars argue that ‘recognition’ - as an equal right, a fiduciary obligation, a form of acknowledgment - functions as a technology of the state by which it maintains its power (as sole arbiter of recognition)” (49). I wonder if part of what it means to be *in* but not *of* the university (Grande 49) is to become more familiar to one another as people -- perhaps even as friends -- so that we can seek recognition from one another, instead of from the institution, thereby challenging its “sole arbiter” status.

With recognition of all you are and all you do,
Julia

Hi again Ashley,

Concision has never been my strength, eh? But, I had some more thoughts about imperfectionism and friendship that I wanted to share, even though I haven’t given you a chance to respond to my last letter yet. Sorry about that!

In articulating the concept of the imperfect friend, Findlay argues that perfectionism “is part of the violent legacy of colonialism” (2). This argument strikes a powerful chord in me because, working in a writing centre, I am often witness to how deeply ingrained and destructive perfectionism can be in students. I frequently encourage the people around me not to let “the perfect be the enemy of the good,” a perspective that is all about recognizing the strength in “good enough” ways of being

and doing things. But, thinking about Findlay's writing alongside you has inspired me to take this even further and to consider the power that might lie in *im*perfectionism. I have heard you say before that "only Creator is perfect," as a way of embracing mistakes or "flaws" in beading and painting. I wonder if this Indigenous practice of intentionally embracing mistakes as what makes us human and as part of the beauty of things that are made by hand can be thought of as practicing imperfectionism? As I write this, I think about what a difference it would've made for me as a student to have that kind of encouragement of imperfection and have it feel genuine. Where imperfection is embraced as part of the goal, I think it can make space for us to be actual learners together — striving to learn something we do not yet know and cannot quite yet grasp. Instead, we have systems that foster perfectionism and reward us for always sticking with the tried and true, even if we never really learn from them. Perhaps one of the deepest values of a friendship-grounded approach is that it can help us to be safe enough to be imperfect and to journey together into spaces and experiences that are not yet known and where we do not yet understand what we will become.

That way of framing things makes me think about our friendship with Matt, in particular. Matthew Provost is from the Siksikaitsitapii Piikani Nation, Blackfoot Confederacy. Matt was one of those extraordinary students who got involved and built community wherever he went. In addition to serving as a Peer Cousin and a board member for the First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Student Association, Matt is a singer, drummer, and talented "maker" of many things. For Orange Shirt Day in September 2021, Matt created his own unique "every child matters" logo and *built* a screen printing frame (!) so that he could make cloth signs for units across the university to display.

I first got to know Matt the way we get to know many students through the ISC: he was around and so was I, and so we had the opportunity to chat together. I recall an early Communications paper that Matt was working on about queer representation in the media that he asked me to look at with him during the Thursday drop-ins. We had already developed a friendly rapport between us, even though that was the first time I performed the function that is technically my reason for being in the ISC, from the institutional perspective.

I know you remember when the Decolonizing the Library Working Group reached out to Indigenous students, faculty, and staff from across the university in December 2019. We invited them to spend time with us discussing our action plan and to take a tour of the soon-to-be-open Media and Maker Commons (MMC) in the library. Thanks to our time in the Indigenous Student Centre, we knew that this was going to be a second "maker space" on campus, because so much making

already happened on a regular basis in the ISC. We wanted to ensure that Indigenous students, staff, and faculty were intentionally welcomed into the MMC so that it could serve as a resource for them and so they could “repurpose [this] university [resource] toward their own needs” (Grande 49).

I was deeply touched by what Matt shared during that day. He stood up, introduced himself to the group, and said (I am paraphrasing):

I didn't used to come to the library. But, because I know Ashley and Julia from the ISC, I knew that I could come and check it out. I was here last week. Did you know that they have books here that aren't even related to the classes? I checked something out just because I've been wanting to read it!

We had hoped that our presence in the ISC could serve as a bridge to the Library and Matt expressed so eloquently what that relationship-building can accomplish, when it works.

A few weeks later, a group of Indigenous students brought their sewing supplies to the MMC and made regalia for their entire drumming group, as well as a ribbon skirt to gift to the then director of the Indigenous Student Centre.

The early COVID-19 work from home days are marked for me by the regular Zoom check-ins we had together with Matt to work on his papers for his directed reading course. Those check-ins were a mixture of friendly catch up, book and media recommendations, and silent accountability for getting work done (for all of us). During one Zoom session, Matt sheepishly told us that he had a bunch of books out of the library that he had been holding onto. He explained that they had information about Blackfoot ceremonies, spirituality, and culture that should not be shared broadly and that had not been documented according to the proper protocols. You assured Matt that if he returned the books to you, you would take care of them and would not return them to the shelves. You were clear that he didn't need to carry this responsibility (or the potential library fines if the books were recalled!) on his own. This was a powerful moment of reciprocity for me to witness: we (us personally, and the library) benefitted from Matt's cultural knowledge, and you were able to use your positional power to act. The ultimate outcome for these books remains unknown, as it is connected to broader library discussions about extractive research and harmful publication of Indigenous Knowledges. But, thanks to Matt and the trust he had with us, the books have temporarily been removed from circulation.

Matt graduated in 2022 and it was special for us both to attend and help with the Honouring Feast that celebrated him and his cohort of graduates. Matt is continuing to work in the post-secondary context, and we maintain an ongoing relationship with

him, which is what allowed us to reach out to him and ask if we could write about our shared experiences in this article.

In some ways, this story is like the story of any relationship we build in our lives: we begin as strangers and, when things are good, can work our way toward trust, connection, and reciprocity. Perhaps we can become imperfect friends and develop what Jordan calls “growth-fostering relationships”: relationships where “both people are open to being touched, moved, and changed by each other” (231). This is not always the way we understand our work as teachers, especially when our focus is on the content we must deliver. The context of care, humility, and friendship that frames our experiences in the Indigenous Student Centre helps us to understand our teaching in this way.

On Monday, I was in the Out On Campus lounge working alongside some students there. I had prepared some writing exercises to mark the Trans Day of Visibility (March 31st). I asked the students there if they wanted to do some writing together. They all politely declined, stating that they were busy working on urgent assignments for their classes. I felt a tiny bit disappointed, as I had worked quite a while on gathering my inspiration for this writing session. Then one of the students who I work alongside regularly in the space said to me, “I can’t write with you now because I am preparing for a presentation that I have to give in half an hour, but I really appreciate your presence here. I find it nice just to work beside you.” Disappointment gone! It can be easy for me to feel like I am “not doing anything” or “not doing enough” when I am in the student spaces that I visit every week, especially on the days when no one asks me a single question. But this student’s words made me reflect on how it feels for me to work alongside my friends, including you. Even when we do not speak and don’t need anything specific from one another, it is a qualitatively different experience to work alongside someone I trust. It feels like a community. It feels like friendship. And, on the best days, it can make things that could feel impossible feel possible for me.

Thank you for being that kind of a friend for me, Ashley, and an even bigger thanks for the ways that we bring our friendship outward, allowing it to radiate into new possibilities for others, too.

With love,
Julia

P.S. When we began talking about this article, we reached out to Matt about sharing these experiences and our friendship with him. He was supportive, and happy to have his name included in our writing. Doing so honours our relationship with him, as it would be unethical to share about our friendship without his

permission. We have also provided Matt with a copy of this article. For those readers still learning about Indigenous research ethics, research reciprocity means making sure Indigenous community members are given copies of the research outputs. For generations, non-Indigenous scholarly research has been conducted in extractive ways, with researchers going into communities and treating knowledge as a resource. The books that Matt brought to our attention are a result of these extractive practices.

Taanshi aen naaamii,

Reading your letter, what you shared about the student in Out On Campus made me smile. It is such a joy to work alongside a friend. To our readers, Julia and I are working collaboratively over Zoom on this article (one way of working alongside each other) and then writing these letters individually (another way of working). Over Zoom we share resources or ideas, and then take time to reflect and share our thoughts through letter writing.

This way of working together is something I see happening at the ISC. Students, friends, from different subject areas work beside each other and will glance up to ask a question. Sometimes the question is for us, which is always exciting. Like that time a student came in and said, “what is the *deal* with Chicago citations?” It was more casual than any interaction I’ve had at the Research Help Desk because the student and I interacted as peers. It wasn’t our first conversation, but I think it was our first conversation about research support. It was a “teaching moment” that became a statistic, but really it was more than that. When interactions are statistics, like they are at the Research Help Desk, there’s no relationship. No follow-up asking how the assignment went, or asking how someone’s weekend was. I don’t want to say there’s no care at the desk, but it’s a different type of care because of the transactional nature of most reference desks. There isn’t (always) the opportunity to enter into growth-relationships (Jordan) or friendship with the students .

In the ISC we get to know students by name, by Nation or community, by their faculty, and their interests outside of school. Doing that means we also get to share who we are, and eventually that means we stop being viewed as representatives of the institution and become seen as people. While we may not spend time with the students outside of the institution, this sharing of who we are shifts our interactions into a type of imperfect friendship. In contrast to the perfect stranger that Dion writes about (as cited in Findlay) where people are kept at a distance, we close that distance by welcoming more personal conversations. We even get to celebrate successes by being in the space each week and at the yearly Honouring Feast.

I remember during the first in-person research drop-in hours I had, I introduced myself to the students and we ended up chatting more about life: Finishing degrees as adult learners, raising younger siblings, growing up outside of our communities and what that meant. The students expressed how much having someone Indigenous in the space meant, and one said, “we don’t need to explain things to you, you already know.” When one or two students in the space voice appreciation for having us there, I think it helps those who are new to the ISC feel comfortable asking questions or chatting about things that may not be research or writing-related, like where to find great dresses or what gluten-free bread is like. Earlier this year I had a conversation over lunch with a student who was preparing to present at a conference. We talked about positionality and how best to introduce yourself, what’s culturally appropriate and what’s comfortable for them. I was able to give examples from my own introductions, and some ways I approach things, while also reminding the student that their comfort is the most important. We talked about the tension of having mixed heritage (I.e., Indigenous and settler) and having people see us in certain ways.

Because we’ve taken the care to build relationships, students are comfortable which creates a space where they can be vulnerable, again coming back to being imperfect and how vulnerability is a strength, even though it is often viewed as weakness (Findlay; Quiñonez, Nataraj, and Olivas). This means we talk with them about how to respond when they point out a class reading contains harmful information and the instructor responds by asking the student for a better article, or when a student shares their group members won’t let them contribute to a project. Or when Matt reached out about the books that contain culturally-sensitive information that shouldn’t have been published or made available outside the community. He was concerned about people outside his community having access to the knowledge, and because of our relationship, Matt trusted me with the books and his concerns.

Sometimes I wonder how being an imperfect friend (Findlay) and practicing cultural humility (Cariou; Vowel) can influence larger structures. Findlay writes about how reconciliation is a “sacred right of passage” that starts with moving “beyond the familiar territory of intellectual learning into the terrain of deep heart healing and transformation” (Findlay 2). There is a humility needed for that work, expressed by Cariou as “an openness to learning” (6). I know that by engaging in relationships as imperfect friends we are engaging in a form of humility that allows us to be open to new possibilities (Cariou 8). I think structural changes need to be approached this way, too — through imperfectionism and humility, by being open to learning from others, making mistakes, learning, and trying again. Often in institutions, reconciliation (a type of relationship) is navigated through documents, such as the ARC report at SFU, but as Findlay writes “distance, performance and

perfection” (7) are still what’s being rewarded and seen as the standard. While reading Grande’s (2018) chapter I got to thinking how the refusal she writes about is a demand of being imperfect friends or colleagues.

A question we both have wrestled with, and will probably keep bumping up against, is whether or not a colonial institution such as a university or library can ever be decolonized? These institutions are inherently colonially based on their creation and concepts, and that’s upheld by hierarchical thinking, capitalism, and curriculum (content and practices). Essentially, colonialism is built into structures, and to decolonize is to change those structures. Grande criticizes the focus on EDI by pointing out that inclusion doesn’t mean change (2018). Change, she writes, gets sidelined by recognition initiatives that “impede Indigenous struggles for decolonization” and “placate dispossessed people while evading any effort to change the underlying power structure” (56). In this, the institution maintains its position of the perfect stranger by “avoid[ing] being personally implicated in the problem and does not wholeheartedly participate, nor feel moved to participate, in anything that would risk changing their heart” (Findlay 3). The concepts of *eshélha7kwhiws* and *wâhkôhtowin* aren’t present, there’s no opportunity or space to be imperfect friends or colleagues.

With love,
Ashley

Dear readers and Ashley,

Yes, Ashley! You’ve got me wondering about how we can be imperfect friends to the institution itself, acting with “conviviality, honesty, caring, and compassion” (Findlay 2) to be in a growth-relationship with the university. Jordan cites Jean Baker Miller stating, “in order for one person to grow in a relationship, both people must grow” (231). I wonder what happens if we think about SFU as being a person who must grow with us (perhaps not such a ridiculous premise, since corporations are legally persons). As we grow through our imperfect friendship with one another and our teaching and learning experiences with the students, we must also ask that the institution grows so that we can stay in relationship with it. Or, I suppose, when we realize it is incapable of growing alongside us, we can choose to leave our relationship with the institution and instead choose to focus on the growth-relationships and imperfect friendships that we might make *in* but that are not *of* the university (Grande 49).

I love Deanna Zandt’s webcomic (and I know I’ve shared it with you before) “The Unspoken Complexity of ‘Self-Care’” that unpacks the differences between

self-soothing (things like taking a bath), self-care (things like going to therapy), community care (things like friendships!), and structural care (things like advocating for liberation). I think my own current working definition of radical care is accounting for and engaging each of these forms of care, recognizing how they are interconnected. In our particular example, I think of it this way: I am responsible for taking care of my self-soothing and self-care needs to ensure that I am able to show up for my friends (you!) and the students I work with as a person with capacity to care outwardly. Then, through our friendships and our connections with one another, we are able to create and advocate for community care that ripples out to our wider communities. As we nurture those communities, we are better positioned to take up the work of structural care, looking for opportunities to challenge the institution to grow and transform – to be the different world that has always been possible – or to be left behind as we repurpose its resources to meet our own needs (Grande 49).

As I write this, I'm thinking about the double audience for this letter and for all of our letters in this piece: we were writing to each other, but we always knew that there would be more readers, eventually. What's interesting is that duality also reflects one of the ways I think about our "teaching" in the Indigenous Student Centre together. Often when we are there, we are visiting and connecting with each other at the same time as we are there to connect with and support the students. I really think that when the students can see us being real, imperfect humans and friends together, it can make it easier – more comfortable and natural – for them to chat with us, ask questions, and ultimately be vulnerable enough to share their research and writing with us. When we sit at our laptops side by side and discuss the work we are doing, it is a way of embodying that uncertainty, discussion, messiness, collaboration, and imperfection are parts of the research and writing process, for everyone. This opportunity to be in process together, and be witnessed by others, is an important part of what makes up a friendship-grounded approach to teaching.

I think sometimes students are given the impression that the uncertainties and challenges they face are simply because they are "still students" and haven't "become experts" yet – that these are things that they will "outgrow" and shed along with the title "student." Maybe that is true for some researchers and writers, I am not sure. But it definitely hasn't been true for me. If anything, I am less certain and messier now when I try to approach research and writing than I was when I was a student. I hope that's just because I've gotten better at recognizing complexities and not because I am actually getting worse at researching and writing! In any case, this all reminds me of a teaching I received from Leanne Betasamosake Simpson (Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg) when I was a master's student at Trent University, and she was still teaching there. I return to this teaching a lot when I think about what it means to be "student-centred"

in my work. I remember so clearly that she spoke about honouring and respecting the role of the student as its own contribution to a community. She noted that the contemporary conception of students in universities is a transitory one: a means to the end of becoming the kind of person who can contribute meaningfully to society. She was clear, though, that that is not an Indigenous understanding of what it means to be a learner, because communities need people who are willing to commit themselves to the hard work of learning. That commitment is, in and of itself, a meaningful contribution (Simpson, "Indigenous Intellectual Traditions" 2009).

I think it is such a good thing that we get to work alongside the students and one another in the ISC. We are there to offer support and that can immediately set us up (and set us apart) as "experts" -- something that our job titles, credentials, and even age can also do. Students rarely, if ever, get to see those who the institution positions as "experts" *in process*. So, the fact that we actually collaborate on our research and writing alongside the students in their space is a special and unique part of a friendship-based approach. It allows us all to be learners together in a really grounded way.

Your imperfect friend,
Julia

Taanshi readers and Julia,

It's Easter long weekend, and I'm at my mom and stepdad's house in the Kootenays. Looking out the windows, I see the sun peeking between the mountains and the wind making the tree branches dance. I can hear birds and little critters (gophers I think) letting us know spring is arriving. It's such a nice change from the urban environment I live in; I feel incredibly grateful to have this mountain getaway.

Being in this space has provided an opportunity to reread and reflect on our writing. I keep coming back to something you wrote earlier, Julia, about how "radical care is about believing things can be different" and how that describes our time in the Indigenous Student Centre. It's a different way to provide writing, research or reference support, and to engage in point-of-need teaching. This is because, I believe, of the friendship we get to both model and nurture there. I'm thinking in particular of an interaction we had this week with a student. We've both chatted with this student in the past, and like other interactions with other students, it's often a mix of getting to know someone and some small pieces of advice. The student and I talked about the complexities of citational practices and community knowledge, and how it's challenging to respectfully cite community knowledge. This past week they shared their knowledge with me by asking if I was familiar with Wise Indigenous Knowledge

Translation Practices, which are similar to the OCAP® Principles. They then shared a resource with me, so I could continue my learning on the topic. To me, this exchange illustrates a relational way we interacted: as peers, with similar interests though in different areas of study. I have shared my knowledge with them in the past, and they shared their knowledge with me.

This is an example of how things can be different. Library services can be about relationships with our communities, and I think we – all library employees – can learn from the people we interact with. This is a way to practice the teaching of *tapahtêyimisowin* that Chelsea Vowel shares (2022). We interact with people all day who have knowledge that we don't have. It doesn't make either of us "better" than the other but it offers an opportunity to continue our learning. I can only share with people the knowledge I have up to that point and acknowledge that I am still learning, as we all are. We have joked to one another that this is the article that doesn't end, but that's because our thinking, connection, and engagement on these topics isn't ending. So, with that in mind, this may be our stopping point for this writing but it isn't an ending.

That's what I hope you, dear readers, are taking from these letters -- an invitation to never-ending and imperfect learning, engagement, connection, and, hopefully, friendships. Teaching, writing and reference support can be done with a relational, friendship-grounded framework where we recognize one another. This approach is possible even, or maybe especially when this framework (and the people enacting it) are imperfect. The interactions with learners in the classroom or at a desk or, as in our examples here, in a specific student space, offer opportunities for us to continue our learning and deepen our practices and relationships.

All my relations,
Ashley

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Ashley Edwards is a Red River Métis, Dutch, and Scottish librarian living on the territories of Kwikwetlam, Qayqayt, Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), səl ilwətaʔt (Tsleil-Waututh), and x^wməθk^wəyəm (Musqueam) First Nations. Her Métis family comes from St. Francis Xavier, which is where they were given scrip, and she is a Métis Nation of BC citizen. Ashley has a Library Technician diploma (2009), BA in Adult Education (2015), MLIS (2020), and is currently a PhD student in the Faculty of Education at Simon Fraser University. Her research interests include LIS education, decolonization, and information literacy.

Julia Lane is a white settler with English, Irish, and Scottish ancestry. Her mother (Dawn) was born in the USA and her father (Stephen) in Canada. She now lives on Qayqayt, Stó:lō, Tsleil-Waututh, Musqueam, and Stz'uminus shared territories with her husband (Hoang) and their son (Felix). Julia holds a BA specialized honours in theatre studies (York University), an MA in Canadian Studies and Indigenous Studies (Trent University), and a PhD in Arts Education (Simon Fraser University). She works as a Writing Services Coordinator with the Student Learning Commons in the Library at Simon Fraser University.

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