

# *A story of paddling and place*



**PADDLES AND PEDAGOGY FIELD SCHOOL  
EXPERIENTIAL PLACE-BASED LEARNING & SEA KAYAKING  
COAST MOUNTAIN COLLEGE**

*at Isla Espiritu Santos, Mexico*

February 22 to February 29, 2020

**CHERYL SCHREADER**

## *Acknowledgments*

I would like to gratefully acknowledge the collegial and financial support of the Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences at Capilano University — Dr. Pouyan Mahboubi. Many thanks also to several colleagues who supported my participation in the field school.

I offer a tremendous amount of gratitude to the facilitators and guides for the trip — all of them super humans and I am deeply inspired by their skill, expertise, thoughtfulness and all round amazing character.

To all of the participants — it was wonderful getting to know you. Thank you for being so friendly, welcoming and supportive of a newcomer. I am certain that there are some lasting friendships there.

A heartfelt thank you to my family who were very supportive of my adventure, although somewhat disappointed that they weren't coming along.

A sincere thank you to my husband, Blaine, for his fine work designing and editing of this report.

And my sincere gratitude to Isla Espiritu and to the original inhabitants of the island, to those I know of and to those I don't yet know. Thank you for your teachings.

*This field school took place before the COVID-19 pandemic declaration, before travel restrictions, and the practice of physical distancing on a global scale. When you see faces covered in photos it is for protection against sun, wind, and sand, or we are acting a role as part of an activity.*

*Unless otherwise noted, photos are by Cheryl Schreader.*

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## Purpose & Scope of the Field School

The Paddles and Pedagogy Field School is hosted by Coast Mountain College, BC with the purpose of exploring experiential and place-based learning (EPBL) practice and pedagogy with a small group of faculty from diverse areas within the academy. Our group of participants spent 6 days immersed in the study and experience of EPBL while camping and kayaking along the west coast of Isla Espiritu Santos, Mexico.

My participation in the field school was supported by the Faculty of Arts and Sciences (FAS) at Capilano University where I have been a geography instructor for 23 years. I have some experience with EPBL through my career as a geographer, through teaching at Capilano University and also through various professional development training experiences in outdoor education and forest school pedagogy. While at Capilano University I have also taught in the Liberal Studies Program — a program with a focus on interdisciplinarity — and environmental courses in the biology department and in the Outdoor Recreation Program. I am currently working with a team of colleagues on developing a degree in environmental studies. It is in this context that I participated in this field school.

My goals with this report are to:

- share my learning, experiences and ideas around EPBL as related to this field school; and
- describe what it was about my experiences in this field school that were transformative

Beyond this report, I will focus on the following questions as they relate to the learning outcomes for this course:

- How can more of these elements and experiences be embedded into courses/programs at Capilano University?
- What additional tools and resources might be needed to achieve this?
- Is there a place for EPBL in online learning?

The Centre for Teaching Excellence (CTE) at Capilano University is an excellent resource for current scholarly thinking and practice in EPBL in addition to providing opportunities for engagement and support for faculty. There are many instructors at Capilano University who teach with elements of EPBL. I look forward to working with colleagues in FAS and in the CTE in continuing to support, promote and expand EPBL in our courses and programs.

A field school outline we received in advance provided important learning outcomes.

Upon completion of this professional development, you will be able to:

1. Propose new ways to incorporate EPBL in their courses and programs
2. Design, deliver and evaluate learning in accordance with EPBL principles
3. Advocate for the increase of EPBL in their home institutions
4. Exemplify adoption of EPBL

Our workbooks provided explanations of our course assignments, and are summarized below:

### *Daily Learning Logs*

Rationale: Learning logs provide the time and space to intentionally foster reflection.

### *Facilitation*

Rationale: Regardless of how much experience that we have as instructors, we all stand to benefit from new learning in facilitation which includes being confident, engaging and verbally articulate. In this exercise we are paired with another participant to facilitate an experiential, place-based learning activity with the whole group. In pairs we work through the stages of pre-facilitation and planning, facilitation of the activity, and post-facilitation reflection. As individuals, we are also asked to provide feedback to one other pair of facilitators.

The purpose of this activity is to play with concepts that we would be exploring, to provide a low stakes opportunity to take risks, even fail and learn and to practice the art of providing feedback.



## *Curriculum Development*

Rationale: In working with a course of our own, we are asked to apply what we are learning about EPBL. We will consider the design, deliver and assessment of this course in accordance with EPBL.

## *Conversation Partners*

Rationale: We often learn by articulating our thoughts and questions. We are paired with a different participant each day and provided with a question related to EPBL. We are asked to reflect, discuss and express our thoughts about the topic.



## PADDLES AND PEDAGOGY FIELD SCHOOL

In preparation for the course, we were required to read *Experiential Education in the College Context* by Jay Roberts which was provided to all participants. We had a group meeting (in person and by phone) on Feb. 14, 2020 to discuss the logistics of our travel and arrival, packing essentials and to answer questions.

Our itinerary and plan throughout the week was a part of the original course outline, but was edited somewhat in response to environment conditions that impacted kayaking.



Photo by Carrie Nolan

## *Itinerary*

<p>Saturday, February 22</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Arrive in La Paz (via Cabo or direct) and meet group, facilitators and guides. General welcome and introduction from facilitators and guides, including packing instructions for personal items. Stay night in hotel.</li> </ul>
<p>Sunday, February 23</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Travel to Baja Outdoor Adventures (BOA) to pick up our snorkeling gear and wetsuits. Head out by motorboat to National Park (Isla Espiritu Santos). Set-up camp on <i>Playa Dispensa</i>. Introduction to sea kayaking lessons.</li> <li>• EPBL Session 1: What is EPBL? Definitions</li> </ul>
<p>Monday, February 24</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Remained at <i>Playa Dispensa</i> for second night. Kayak trip to mangroves and frigate bird colony.</li> <li>• EPBL Session 2: Why does it matter?</li> </ul>
<p>Tuesday, February 25</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Paddled to second campsite at <i>Playa Coralito</i> and set-up camp.</li> <li>• EPBL Session 3: How to design for EPBL</li> </ul>
<p>Wednesday, February 26</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Remained at second campsite due to high wind conditions.</li> <li>• Guided beach hike: history of fishing on the island, current fishing practice, geology and cultural history; snorkelling.</li> <li>• EPBL Session 4: How to deliver EPBL – Facilitation and Principles.</li> <li>• EPBL Session 5: Assessment</li> </ul>

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Thursday, February 27	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Kayaked to next camping location on <i>Playa Candelora</i>. Camp set-up.</li><li>• Night hike and EPBL Session 6: Final reflections</li></ul>
Friday, February 28	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Pack up camp.</li><li>• EPBL Session 7: How to Share EPBL</li><li>• Boat to sea lion colony at <i>Los Islotes</i> and swim with sea lions</li><li>• Return by boat to La Paz and farewell dinner.</li></ul>
Saturday, February 29	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Depart from Mexico (La Paz or via Cabo).</li></ul>



# People

## *Facilitators*

The Field School was facilitated by Carrie Nolan and co-facilitated by Waylon Roy, both of Coast Mountain College in Terrace, BC.

**Carrie Nolan** is currently the Dean of Strategic Initiatives & Learning Transformation at Coast Mountain College (CMC). In her role as Dean she also contributes to the Centre of Learning Transformation (COLT) at CMC. She has a PhD in Education from the University of New Hampshire which focused on experiential education. Her list of outdoor education experiences and credentials is substantial as are her awards and recognition for her teaching excellence and service. This was the third time that she has facilitated the Paddles and Pedagogy Field School.

**Waylon Roy** is a Trades instructor at Coast Mountain College. He has participated in this field school before and was eager to share his experiences a second time and to expand his horizons as a co-facilitator. He contributed a wealth of experience from his previous learning with Paddles and Pedagogy and also from what he has learned from his EPBL practice over the past year with his classes.



Waylon Roy. Photo by Carrie Nolan

## *Guides*

We had two very knowledgeable and supportive guides leading our expedition. They were **Tulio Gonzalez** from Baja Outdoor Activities (BOA) (La Paz) and **Tim Wheeler** from Black Feather Wilderness Adventure Company (Thunder Bay). BOA is a local Baja company with a 25-year track record of exemplary expeditions, skilled guides, with an environmental and community focus. Black Feather has been operating globally for 40 years with an outstanding record of skilled, professional guides, deep learning experiences and opportunities for travelers and respect for environment, community and local knowledge.



Tim Wheeler, Carrie Nolan, and Tulio Gonzalez.

## *Participants*

Including myself, there were 9 participants in our group. Most people were from Coast Mountain College, with one participant from Selkirk College and one from Saskatchewan Polytechnic. What was very interesting to me was the wide range in backgrounds and expertise of this group. Collectively we represent expertise areas from geography, education, forestry, criminology, correctional studies, business administration, health, trades, Career and College Preparation and Applied Research and Libraries and Emerging Technologies. In our

various roles at our institutions, we are instructors, coordinators, learning assistants, associate deans, deans and directors.

- **Carol Andrews**, Instructor, Forestry, Selkirk College (Castlegar)
- **Michael Brandt**, Instructor, Criminology, Coast Mountain College (Terrace)
- **Rich De Rooy**, Coordinator, Career and College Preparation and Learning Assistance and Accessibility Services, Coast Mountain College (Smithers)
- **Colin Elliott**, Director of Applied Research, Libraries, and Emerging Technologies, Coast Mountain College, (Terrace)
- **Brad Leier**, Associate Dean of Health, Coast Mountain College (Terrace)
- **Cheryl Schreader**, Instructor, Geography, Capilano University (North Vancouver)
- **Annette Sorensen**, Instructor, Business Administration, Coast Mountain College (Terrace)
- **Jonathan Stone**, Learning Assistance Specialist, Student Services, Coast Mountain College (Terrace)
- **Sue Zimmer**, Instructor, Correctional Studies, Saskatchewan Polytechnic (Prince Albert)



## Place: Isla Espiritu Santos

Isla Espiritu Santos is located approximately 25 km from La Paz and it is a designated UNESCO World Heritage site. This 102 km<sup>2</sup> island is a diverse coastal and desert region within the Sea of Cortés. I am very interested in doing some further research on this island, but for now my description is based solely on my observations, stories and conversations with the guides and some very general readings. In writings, Espiritu Santos is often described as a ‘treasure trove...’ or ‘jewel of biodiversity’. My experiences certainly support these monikers. We snorkeled at one campsite where various schools of fish flashed bright colours in the sun dappled coral reefs. While at *Playa Dispensa*, we did a short kayak trip to paddle a narrow inlet through a coastal mangrove forest. On this same trip we also visited a frigate bird colony. En route to *Playa Candelora* we kayaked with sea turtles, dolphins and watched, in astonishment, the fishing habits of pelicans.



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Map from Sea & Adventures, kayakbaja.com



Photo by Colin Elliott

Island vegetation is comprised of low shrubs and grasses, in many areas naturally recolonizing coastal dune systems. My favourite plant is the stately cardón (*Pachycereus pringlei*). It is sometimes referred to as elephant cactus and it looks like a saguaro. While at camp, we were only allowed within the beach area and could not freely explore the interior of the island – except where trails were noted. This is part of the successful conservation protocols of the island. We did one short guided hike at *Playa Candelora*.



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By kayak, we explored the western coast of the island which is marked with high and eroding headlands connected by large arcs of bays with white sand beaches and turquoise tropical water. Incredible rock formations and stratigraphy tell the story of an active volcanic history.



The island is not currently inhabited but there is evidence of pre-Hispanic occupancy by the Pericú people. Some of this evidence includes a burial site and rock paintings as well as pearl oyster fish hooks. European contacts with the Pericú began in the 1530s. Different encounters linked the Pericú people with a succession of European explorers, privateers, missionaries, and pearl hunters throughout the 16th, 17th, and early 18th centuries. Anecdotes describe European colonization of the island, with a focus on the famed Mexican pearls. Middens form the foundation of the coastal dunes, with the most recent shell layers being deposited during the

commercial pearl harvesting period approximately between the period 1893 – 1914; the timing of which coincides with the development of the first commercial pearl oyster farming operation and then its demise during the Mexican Revolution.

On various beaches of Espiritu Santos there are remnants of historical fishing infrastructure as well as locations currently used by fisherman. As in so many locations around the world, marine life was historically overfished, generally by the practice of overharvesting and fishing down the food chain. Today, there are very few fishing licenses issued within the area and there has been a rebound in the population of various fish species.



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## Paddling & Pedagogy

The general itinerary provides the main EPBL Session topics. Each of these topics served as a big idea and was comprised of several different types of explorations and provocations including:

- in-depth group learning opportunities,
- engaging group ‘tool kit’ activities (that can be used with students),
- participants-as-facilitators exercises,
- conversation partners,
- daily journaling and reflection
- and notes of appreciation.



## A STORY OF PADDLING AND PLACE

In addition to the session topics, camping, kayaking and place were fundamental to our experiences of EPBL and to the field school. I hope to establish that these latter elements were the ‘transformative’ pieces in my learning. The following will provide a brief overview of learning that attempts to weave the ‘learned’ information with my ‘experience’ of learning through various activities that we participated in.



Photo by Carrie Nolan

## *Session One Big Idea: What is Experiential Learning?*

We began this session by sitting in a circle on the beach under our shade tent. We were asked to complete a 3-2-1 Bridge exercise (tool kit). This exercise is helpful in getting students to think, to pre-assess where they are at, to post-assess learning and to make thinking visible. My answers are in *italics*.

**When it comes to EPBL, what are:**

**3 words/things that come to mind that you associate with EPBL?**

1. *Engagement*
2. *Some anxiety – what is this about? How will it go?*
3. *Endeavor - What will be the outcomes – both personal and academic?*

**2 things you wonder about EPBL?**

1. *Is it for everyone? For all learners? What about accessibility? And different learning styles? Can it go wrong?*
2. *How can it be scaled as an experience? Can you do something meaningful with your students in 30 minutes? In 1-hour?*

**1 thing you know to be true about EPBL?**

*It pushes one's boundaries. Requires risk/courage whether you are a teacher or a learner.*

Then we were asked the following question:

**Though no formal learning has occurred yet, the learning has begun. What has happened thus far on the trip and what does it have to do with learning?**

*I had some doubt that I was the best person from CapU for this trip and experience. I had to be **open-minded** and trust that the people who knew me and my expertise and also knew about this course, had confidence that I was a good fit for this field school.*

*I had to **prepare** for a kind of trip that I have never done on my own before, in a country that I had never visited before. I had some **trepidation** but moreover I felt **excitement** and **wonder**.*



*Upon entering the Customs area in the airport at Cabos, I was confronted with the reality that if I waited in the long line-up of people, I would miss my bus to La Paz. I had to **advocate** for myself with a Customs Official and at the same time come with a **contingency** plan if I didn't meet my bus.*

*I did not know any people on this trip. But after our first phone-call preparation meeting, I felt better. I **trusted** the history and success of former Paddle and Pedagogy*

*Field Schools and I **respected** the facilitation and guide team. Upon meeting the participants of the field school, I felt instant **comradery**.*



*As a group, we needed to **work together** in several important ways to ensure a good start to the trip for everyone. We needed to load the van together, we formed a zipper line to load and unload the boat, we had to set up camp together.*

*I had to **throw away everything I knew** about setting up a tent. I've done my fair share of tent camping but always in a forest. On loose, dry beach sand you must dig down deep and bury tent anchors to wind-proof your tent. (Note: This proved to be very important on the third night!)*



*We had to **respect** the rules of the camp as set out by our trip guides. These included rules about sanitation, food preparation, bio breaks and the use of our marine toilet, and access to the beach and island. To preserve the dunes and vegetation, we were not allowed to walk on the dunes or to explore any area other than the beach other than in specific areas and with the group.*

This had already been a very rich learning experience and we were only halfway through day one. We hadn't even been in the water yet. I found this a good time to reflect on risk and courage as related to experiential education. Parker Palmer refers to 'live encounter' in education — a pedagogy and practice that gets us beyond the script. Live encounters require both the educator and the learner to be courageous, to take risks, to be open to the emergent and the unexpected in encounters of learning. Where this is fostered within a well-designed and thoughtful experiential education framework, both educators and learners can flourish within a balance of design/structure and opportunity. There is an essential paradox between structure and risk that enriches learning.



Our first attempts at defining experiential learning began with this definition:

Experiential learning means engaging “... in direct experience and focused reflection in order to increase knowledge, develop skills, clarify values, and develop people’s capacity to contribute to their communities” ([www.ace.org/what-is-ee](http://www.ace.org/what-is-ee))

In my own words, this means that the learner is developing through direct or primary experiences, that there is a progression of self-development from student to citizen, that there is a sense of praxis and application of learning; that learning is authentic. In our schools, generally instructors have the primary experience of any given topic and students acquire a secondary experience from us. How can we provide more primary experiences for our students? And how can we value and elevate the primary experiences that our students already have?



The best metaphor for experiential education is that it is a landscape — encompassing varied practices and pedagogy including project-based learning, inquiry-based learning, active learning, case studies, integrative learning such as work-integrations, internships, co-curricular activities and community-based learning including place-based learning and service learning.

To envision experiential education as a landscape is helpful — Roberts refers to it as an ecosystem. (pg. 44) There is diversity and myriad connections, synergies, supports, and resources. Certainly, many of us are somewhere on the spectrum of experiential learning. Where education systems can miss out the full potential is when we see experiential education as only a tree. As instructors we sometimes see it as a tree, as one thing that we can add onto a class to make it more interesting. As Roberts points out, if not designed as experiential learning opportunities, field



trips, guest speakers, experiments and other hands-on activities can become activity for activity sake. (pg. 78) Administrations and governments often see it as a tree, as a single high impact practice that we should endeavor to enhance our lectures with or worse a gimmick, a marketing tool. But these narrow views undermine the full potential of EPBL and fail to see it as a learner-centered pedagogy that transforms students from being passive in their learning to active in their learning (head, heart and hands). Experiential education becomes more authentic when we place the student experience and learning at the center of the curriculum and design from there. At a higher level, experience education becomes integrated into all levels of an institution.

One of the first tools that we were introduced to is a classroom social contract or full value contract (tool kit). In a social contract, everyone (learners and instructor) in the class contributes what they see as important values of learning and a learning environment. Often Included in this list are values such as respect, communication, fairness but this list can contain very specific needs around expectations, course outcomes, accessibility, and feedback. It is a tool, but it is also more than a tool. It is an emergent, meaningful, inclusive agreement between learners and instructors that represents the values of all those involved and serves as a binding commitment to a safe learning environment for all. The contract is made available to everyone in the course and people are accountable to the contract. On the beach on the very first evening together, we created our social contract around the question of “What will make this the best learning experience ever?” It was empowering, liberating and it acted as a kind of compass for the duration of the field school.

### WHAT WAS TRANSFORMATIVE?

It was at this point in the day that I realized that my learning with this field school started with me — where I was at. My experiences were acknowledged and respected and I would design the path I would follow with EPBL. There were no prescriptions and no judgement. I was respected as an educator but I could comfortably situate myself as a learner. This felt liberating to me.



## *Session 2 Big Idea: How to do EPBL*

This session covered several thoughtful considerations regarding EPBL including a more detailed description of place-based learning, and conversations around indigenization.

### **PLACE-BASED LEARNING**

Generally, place-based education is an approach that attempts to connect learners with geography/place to create authentic and meaningful learning. For this field school, 'place' was Isla Espiritu Santos. But in other circumstances, place will be different. Any place can offer up opportunities for place-based learning. There could be myriad other natural environments and also built environments such as parks, neighbourhoods, central business districts, campuses, schools, institutions, malls, intersections, museums, galleries, libraries, cemeteries. The list is endless. The idea is that our connections with place provide a different well of meaning, engagement and interaction with how and what we learn. Because we are encountering place as well as curriculum, we have the potential for wholly engaging in the experience of learning. What can 'place' offer other than being a backdrop? How does it enhance the curriculum? How does it evoke emotion or engagement and does this have a positive or negative impact of learning? Can place be a teacher?

In place-based learning, we learn *for* place, *in* place, *from* place, and *about* place. (FIFA)

***For place: doing some good in the place you are learning while you are learning***

During our stay on Espiritu Santos, what we did *for* the island, was to follow the rules of preservation and conservation and to leave no footprint. Our guides ensured that we knew how to take care of the island. We were not allowed to walk/explore the island. Fragile dune systems were being successfully and naturally recolonized by vegetation. We followed strict etiquette when snorkeling — no touching the coral! We had to apply sunscreen an hour before snorkeling with the sea lions, not directly before. We relieved ourselves below the tide line and in a portable marine toilet. All organics were collected as well as other garbage. We left no trace. This was to respect the island as an ecosystem and also as a protected cultural site. I think that there is also power in sharing our story and the best practices of the field school to educate people about this island and our practices in field schools at other locations.



***In place:*** a classroom that extends beyond four walls. This concept is best understood when finishing the statement: “I’ve learned in place when I ...”

As a geographer, this was a very rich learning experience. I learned in place when I:

- observed the configuration of the headland/ bay coastline of the west coast.
- experienced, by kayak, the impacts of converging winds around the headlands and the higher waves that were there versus the diverging winds within the bays and the resulting calmer water.
- walked along the upper beach areas to explore the diversity of vegetation.
- had to set up my tent and anchor the base in loose sand
- snorkeled above the coral reefs of Playa Coralito
- survived a night of intense winds gusting down the valleys and pounding on our campsite
- witnessed bioluminescence in the water one morning when I was up before the sun
- altered my paddling stroke to make better headway in the wind and waves.

***From place:*** the place you are in teaches you something

I think that I love this aspect of place-based learning the most. It equalizes the teaching potential of place and people and both humbles and enlightens our experiences. What can place teach us? As a group, we discussed many different learnings from Espiritu Santos. Here are some of my own. I learned about the cycle of the

sun, the moon, the air temperature, the stars, the tide, the wind and the waves. I didn't need to be taught this information. It was just there. The loose beach sand, comprised of rock and coral, testimony to the erosional and depositional power of wind and water. I felt the pull of the current beneath my boat as I navigated a narrow channel in the mangroves — I didn't know that mangroves could eat kayaks! I felt a sense of long geologic history and power in the layer upon layer of rock and magma in the exposed headlands along the island. Geography and geology came to life for me. I could feel the energy moving in and between high swells in the ocean, my kayak gliding along on top. I could feel converging winds around headlands as my arms ached to keep slow and steady pace in the relentless winds.



***About place: the content of what you learn connects to your place***

Before: We learned a bit about Isla Espiritu Santos ahead of time through information and links provided in our course agenda and itinerary. When I looked up BOA – the expedition company, there was quite a bit of practical information about the island on their website. I was able to find out what the general weather would be at certain times of year and how to pack accordingly for both camping and kayaking. I also took the opportunity to search for it on Google Earth and to look up maps of the island. This research showed me the steep headland and bay configuration of the west coast. It was rocky, dry and with desert/shrub-type vegetation. From the images, I could also see that the beaches were beautiful with white sand and bright blue water. In some images, I could see tent set-ups so it gave me a sense of what our set-up would be like.

During: During the field school, we learned a lot *about* the island through personal observation and experience, whether it was the temperature pattern throughout the day or how wind affects the waves and our kayaking choices. The guides also brought along a small library of reference books that provided different kinds of information about the island. We were able to look up the names of plants that we saw and identify fish that we saw while snorkeling. We learned cultural and historical information about the island from our guides.

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Afterwards: I am now taking the opportunity to look up more information on the island. I am very interested in furthering my knowledge of the biologic and geologic aspects of the island in addition to the cultural history. I'm finding that I'm very interested in the relationship between the indigenous peoples and the natural environment and also committed to knowing how that transitioned over time to a colonial dominance based on resource exploitation. The island plays a large role in ecotourism for La Paz — what is the contribution to the economy? To supporting local cultures? Is there an impact on Espiritu? I have a lot of questions that I will continue to explore.

### *Wind Storm*

It became very windy in the late afternoon of the third day. By dinner, we were having trouble keeping the food from blowing off our plates and the sand from scouring our faces. We ate standing up, our bodies huddled over our plates and braced against the wind. Many of us went to bed checking the anchors of our tents. What followed was a night filled with increasing wind velocity, with estimated gusts of approximately 25 knots that seemed to occur every couple of minutes. There would be a lull followed by a tremendous burst of wind that would send sand scouring the tent walls, finer sands filtering through the tents and coating everything. The sound of the wind and the flapping of the tent fabric was deafening and startling — like roaring and tearing at the same time. This continued well into the next morning. At first I found it novel and quite interesting. I tried to think of the process that would be causing these winds. They were coming down the slopes of the surrounding hills — were they katabatic winds? Then my mind fixated on what the conditions must be like outside the

tent. Surely sand was building up around my tent walls and I'd likely be buried by morning. At some point, I began to personify the wind — it was relentless. After a couple of hours I began to focus on how I could support my tent from the inside so that the tent poles didn't collapse. During gusts when the tent walls were billowing inward, I would put my hand up to brace the fabric. I would also lay on my back so that when a gust happened, I simply had to put my feet up against the tent pole to prevent it from bending flat and potentially snapping. I came up with several different ways to support the tent poles from the inside. At some point, I noticed that the inside of my tent was bioluminescent — the tiny particles from the water had been blasted right through my tent and were sparkling all over my sleeping bag. It made for a very surreal moment. A couple of times, I heard footsteps outside — it was reassuring to know that someone was doing a walk-about to ensure that everything was OK. My thoughts turned to what I would do if my tent did in fact collapse around me. I could likely join someone else in their tent — but I thought that might be awkward. In any case, I got all my clothes on, readied my shoes and my headlamp and crawled back into my sleeping bag — ready to escape if need be. It was now about 5:30 a.m. Sometime shortly after this, I drifted off to sleep. I likely relaxed knowing that if my tent had made it this far, then it would at least last until everyone was awake. It did last. I awoke about 7:00 a.m. — most other people were collecting around the kitchen area drinking coffee and sharing their stories. I wasn't the only one who didn't sleep. At around 10:00 a.m. one of my tent poles finally snapped and ripped through my tent flap. I wasn't in my tent when it happened. The guides noticed it first and were well into fixing things before my incredulous exclamations.

What did I learn *for, in, from,* and *about* place that night? The experience certainly offered diverse learnings of place — I am still processing many aspects of this experience. It also offered learnings about myself — a glimpse of my connection with place. I had an overwhelming feeling of vulnerability, despite my rationale, knowing and inquisitive mind. Throughout the entire night, I felt as though I was troubleshooting, being resourceful — in a practical way. I also felt open and exposed to possibilities that I may not have reasonable solutions to. Emotionally, I came to feel vulnerable and very tired.



### WHAT WAS TRANSFORMATIVE?

I found this to be a stressful situation. I was in no real danger although the element of risk was certainly present. I felt vulnerable and somewhat nervous but I remained resourceful throughout the night. How could I help myself? I had to remind myself that we were all experiencing the wind — although I doubted my wisdom in selecting the beachfront tent property. Maybe others farther back were shielded a bit better. Ultimately, I had to both let go of my fears a bit but also persevere through the conditions. In the morning, somehow I had the feeling of accomplishment — like I had spent the night working hard at something. How do we persevere through stressful circumstances? In what ways are we vulnerable? What systems/supports do we use to help ourselves? Can we help others? How are we resourceful? How do we build resilience? How do we help our students manage stress and build resilience?

I also came to respect place as an entity of its own. Place has its own processes, rhythms, history and offerings of knowledge.

## *Indigenization*

In our field school note book, we were introduced to indigenization in the following way:

When we talk about the power of place, we are, in part, talking about the power of Indigenous cultures, communities and languages. What does this mean?

We discussed territory, traditional territory, ceded and unceded territory as essential awarenesses when practicing place-based learning. Situating the learning and learners in relation to territory and what that means is very important. We explored the importance of knowing the history of a place. What is the natural history? The cultural history? What have been the main forces that have shaped both the landscape and the communities? How can these stories be represented or acknowledged in the learning? How can both territory and history contribute to the possible ways of knowing and being?

In the context of Isla Espiritu, we learned from our guide both the natural, cultural, and colonial history of the island in addition to the trajectory by which it became a conservation area and designated as a UNESCO World Heritage site.

We also discussed various definitions of and approaches to indigenization within the context of post-secondary education. We noted that some definitions remain centered on the Academy and colonial structures of education. The most helpful definition we saw came from the Indigenous Advisory Council, University of Regina.

“Transformation of the existing academy by including Indigenous knowledges, voices, critiques, scholars, students

and materials as well as the establishment of physical and epistemic spaces that facilitates the ethical stewardship of a plurality of indigenous knowledges and practices so thoroughly as to constitute an essential element of the university.”

We discussed at length the connections that our schools had to the Indigenous peoples of the respective territories. How are we and our institutions working to indigenize our schools, our curricula, our campuses? How are we working with local Indigenous communities to ensure that our schools are meeting the needs of their communities and facilitating access to their youth? Beyond territorial acknowledgements and curricula, there seemed to be recognition of ‘this is something that is necessary and urgent’ and also ‘we are fumbling around — sometimes getting it right and sometimes getting it wrong’. There was certainly a spirit of willingness to learn, to listen and to continue to try and a strong commitment to reconciliation.

If institutions want to pursue place-based learning that is more closely aligned with indigenization, then they should explore and adopt land-based pedagogies which more specifically aim to involve forms of education that connect to ways of being and knowing that arise from the land and that are guided by Indigenous peoples from the territory (example: Wildcat et al, 2014).

### **WHAT WAS TRANSFORMATIVE?**

As a geographer, it was both validating and eye-opening to explore place-based learning on Isla Espiritu. I could immediately recognize natural processes and features that I had learned

about in my own education and had taught students about. I was in awe of the surrounding landscape all of the time. I was also humbled in moments when I simply let myself learn from Isla Espiritu. I found the idea that we could learn *for* place very empowering. Rather than simply learning in place or about place, place-based learning creates opportunity for curriculum to enhance place not just the learner.

As a visitor to Isla Espiritu and a settler in my country, this part of the learning experience helped to stretch my thinking about the impact of colonialism worldwide and what my role can be as a learner, as an educator, a geographer and as a traveler.



## *Session 3 Big Idea: Designing for EPBL | Paradigm Shifts and Learning Outcomes*

“A ship is safe in the harbor, but that is not what ships are for.”

– William G.T. Shed, quoted in Shapiro, 2006). Roberts pg. 67

Before discussing paradigm shifts in teaching and learning, we explored the concept of ‘safe harbour’. We were invited to think about what our known experiences were and then explore how we have ventured beyond them in similar or new experiences. This was a particularly helpful conversation as we headed into not only contemplating change in our approaches to education – some of us having been teachers for decades – but also discussing altering foundations of education that have been institutionalized for hundreds of years.

Answering the questions ‘What’s the big idea?’ and ‘What’s the big deal?’ we worked through the following paradigm shifts:

### **The Instruction Paradigm:**

from teaching content to ...



a Learning practice with a focus on teaching people.

**The Seat Time Paradigm:** from learning that happens only in fixed places and times to ...



a 'Less is more' paradigm where there is more time for exploring and constructing.

**The Teacher as Expert Paradigm:** from teacher at the center of expertise and process to ...



a 'Learning alongside' paradigm where teachers learn alongside students.

**The Primacy of Content Paradigm:** from content as king where 'experiential' is often an add-on to ...



an integration with experience (do, watch, listen).

Each of these shifts requires careful thinking about our teaching, the courage to trust our expertise not only as specialists in our field but also as educators and the willingness to be open to the wide landscape of experiential education. These changes seem to be monumental and possibly overwhelming to contemplate. In talking with others, several concerns were shared:

- we are educated in our field — we are not trained facilitators;
- if we don't cover all the content, how will courses be transferable to other institutions?;
- some courses and programs have professional affiliations that require specific knowledge and skills;
- our institution can't accommodate the time and space that would allow for teaching and learning in this way;
- what kind of resources would be required? and;
- how will students perceive these shifts?

I think that on a personal/professional level, changes can be small and incremental and still be effective in moving along a trajectory to a more EPBL approach. Institutions also need to support these shifts and create a teaching and learning environment in which teachers and learners are supported in EPBL.

Roberts writes about waves of EPBL education on campuses.

- Wave One — there are early adopters of EPBL but it is isolated and separated.
- Wave Two — EPBL is more coordinated and connected
- Wave Three — EPBL is integrated across many if not all aspects of the institution. It is deep, pervasive and unavoidable for students and faculty. It is aligned with a university's mission and strategic plan.

This is a big foundational topic and this introduction provides opportunity for continued exploration beyond this report. Given the description above, it would seem helpful for an institution to identify what its goals and commitments are regarding EPBL, where it is at and to plan and develop accordingly.

We were brought to learning outcomes as a very practical way to embed some of these paradigm shifts.

Well-designed learning outcomes shape the whole direction of a course and they are:

- active;
- measurable in some way (is there an artefact of learning?);
- achievable and;
- they are balanced across the various domains such that they address the whole person.

We reviewed affective, cognitive, psychomotor and ontological learning domains in the context of a course outline of choice that we brought to work on. I brought two course outlines with me: GEOG 316: Climate Change and GEOG 210: Natural Hazards. In my mind and on paper these courses are very dynamic, they deal with critical issues of our time and learning is framed around case studies and solutions – therefore they must be ‘experiential’. However, when I looked closely at my learning outcomes, I realized that they were almost all cognitive and barely supported experiential learning in meaningful ways.

We were given time to rework learning outcomes for one of our courses – I chose the GEOG 316: Climate Change course. This is always a humbling experience and reworking learning outcomes can seem like an arduous task. Perhaps what contributes

to my mind blocks around learning outcomes is not the thinking process itself but where I am doing the thinking — generally in my office or in front of computer. Could ‘place’ have a role? Here, I was sitting on the ground with colleagues, with desert hills behind us, coastal dunes around us and the ocean just beyond. It was sunny and hot. Can we more actively put ourselves into the role of learner when we are in ‘place’? When we are also learning from ‘place’? Can we more intuitively imagine whole person learning when more of our senses are being engaged by the characteristics of ‘place’? This might be specific to me being a geographer, but I was quite engaged both physically and mentally in this landscape. I was observing the hills, the vegetation and looking for island goats. I was so excited to observe desert pavement that I asked if I could explain it to the group. It was very hot, still very windy and we had to intermittently shield our faces from the blasting wind and sand. Sitting on the ground was beginning to be uncomfortable. In the heat I could smell the baking ground. The wind was carrying the salty smell of the ocean over the dunes. I was fully engaged in everything and ideas for my learning outcomes seemed to flow more easily.



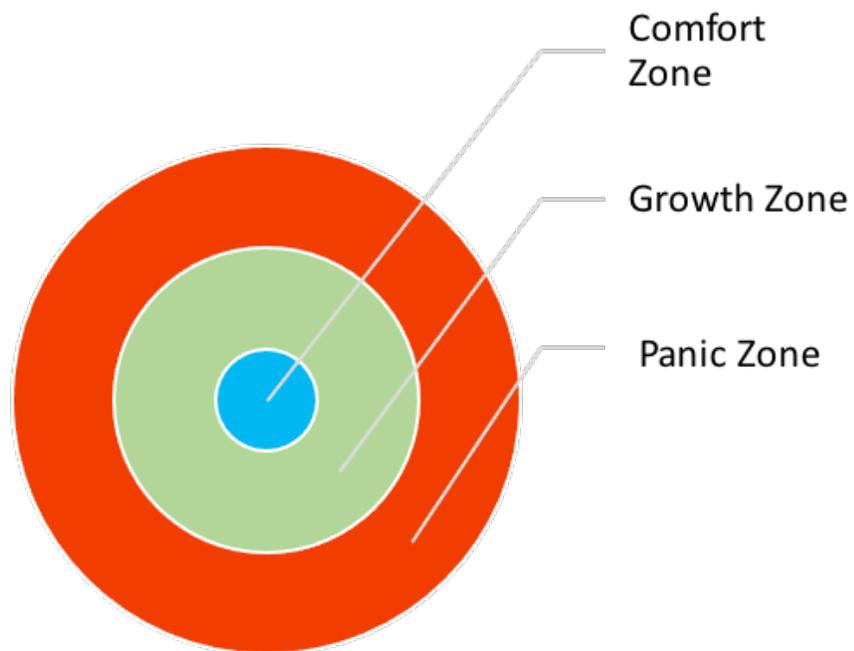
## WHAT WAS TRANSFORMATIVE?

Can ‘place’ help us get beyond our mental blocks? Can it help us think more openly and creatively? Can it connect us to our content in deeper ways? Can it engage us (our senses) more fully so that we can imagine learning more wholly? The answers to these questions is obviously ‘yes’. Learning in ‘place’ also provides our students with the potential to be more creative, imaginative, connected to content and to explore and learn more wholly. I know that by thinking and writing in a place that I felt inspired by and connected to I was more easily able to think and write openly and creatively. Yet most of our teaching and teaching work is done in classrooms and offices. And students are expected to learn deeply and be engaged and creative in these same spaces. Connecting with and immersing ourselves and our students in place might be the most transformative shift that we can make in education — yet it also one of the most challenging in terms of spaces, timetable grids and schedules, access and so on.

## *Session 4 Big Idea: Facilitation and Principles*

We were invited into this session by doing a Comfort Zone Activity (tool kit). The purpose of a comfort zone activity is to make us aware of situations in which we are comfortable, in which we are growing and in which we are panicking. We can use everyday kinds of scenarios and also include teaching and learning scenarios.

We stood on the beach and situated ourselves in concentric zones that were drawn out in the sand. Different scenarios were called out and we placed ourselves according to our experiences. Then we were invited to share our own scenarios. We discussed that the most engaged teaching and learning happens in the growth zone. How can we situate ourselves there as educators? How can we make this place safe and productive for our students?



## *Water Entry and Wet Exit*

I was not worried about camping, being outside in nature, being in the water or kayaking. These are all things that I am familiar with. But I was keen to learn more and to challenge myself in this new environment.

Before we even got to paddling, we had to demonstrate a wet exit from our kayak. This is a required skill that everyone must successfully demonstrate. If your kayak should capsize, you need to know how to get out. In the late afternoon of the first day, we all went into the water and each of our guides had a kayak. We were not given any instruction while on the beach — only through demonstration while we were in the water. Several people were anxious, as they hadn't put their head under water before or even been in a kayak before. Also, everyone was eager and keen to learn this first and important skill. It was a great way to start off the week. I was not worried about this. It was a new skill for me but I was comfortable in the water and I was comfortable with a kayak. However, when I saw the technique that we had to use to get into our kayaks from the open water — I became very aware of the physicality of my body. I was anxious now. I thought "This is definitely not going to be graceful." And it wasn't. When it came to my turn, I nearly filled the kayak with water twice before I got myself into the kayak. With excellent instruction, patience, and support from our guides, I went on to accomplish the wet exit without a problem. Everyone in the group was successful. There were lots of encouraging words "you got this!" and lots of cheers when we finished.

### WHAT WAS TRANSFORMATIVE?

I thought that I would be in my comfort zone. It is interesting that the introduction of one unexpected element, can move us very quickly into either the potential for growth or into panic. What allowed this to be a growth opportunity for me was that the activity was *in situ*, guided by experienced people, very well organized and that both teachers and learners in this case were exceptionally patient and very supportive. Learners were set up for success and in this way, the unexpected did not become a hindrance. There was great power in the encouragement and celebration of each individual's achievement.

Can we think of and design our learning outcomes and assessment in the same way? Can we see each learning outcome through to assessment such that every student has the opportunity for success? How do we observe our students to know if they are comfortable, growing or panicking? What aids and resources are available for students who might find themselves in a panic zone and unable to find success?



## *Facilitation Skills*

In an educational environment, facilitating learning can be organized in the following ways:

- **Having the Eyes to See:** ability to ‘read’ what is in front of you. How do you do this? How could you do more of this?
- **Setting the Tone:** creating a hospitable learning space. How do you do this? How could you do more of this?
- **Differentiation:** providing different means for students to learn and represent their learning. How do you do this? How could you do more of this?

In the context of this field school, it is interesting to consider how our facilitators and guides were supporting us and ‘making easy’ this experience?

Our facilitators:

- Early on, email communications were encouraging and welcoming.
- The facilitators provided logistical help with travelling.
- Together with the guides, they organized a welcome dinner which served to provide an opportunity to set the tone for the week, share some important details, to teach us how to pack our wet bags. and to allow us all to meet one another.
- Our facilitators provided careful preparation for the trip – organizing a meeting in advance so we knew what to expect. They also provided all the course materials including the text book and they created a field school workbook and journal.

- They prepared and provided lessons and all materials for activities.
- Each day they shared information and expertise, guiding us through material and thoughtful discussions.
- Our activities as students such as conversation partners and facilitation activities were organized and carefully prepared. They provided an insightful debriefing after each activity.
- They ensured that people understood what was expected of different activities and also gave people freedom to adapt activities as appropriate.
- They regularly checked in with people to offer encouragement and ideas and to gauge how people were doing.
- They collaborated with the guides to plan kayaking for each day.

Our guides:

- Our guides taught us content/skills related to many aspects of the field school such as the loading and unloading of boats, setting up camp, pitching tents on a beach, rope tying, packing kayaks, kayaking skills and kayaking as a group (formation and communication), navigating wind and waves, cultural history of the island, fishing practices, and much about the biology and geology of the region.
- They were responsible for the travel plan for the week, the gear, and the supplies.

- They also ensured that we knew what was expected of us in terms of the next activity on the schedule eg giving us notice of class in 15 minutes, where we had to be and what to bring.
- They made all of the meals, ensured that we ate well, constantly reminded us to drink water, even kept our water bottles filled while we were in sessions, reminded us of sun protection, asked us how we were sleeping – essentially making sure that we were keeping healthy and safe. Taking care of oneself and others was all very vital to our own EPBL.
- They set the tone for the week by clearly going through rules and procedures for the camps. When some conversations might have been challenging e.g., using the marine toilet, or overuse of our phones and other technology, they approached the topic with clear instruction, inclusiveness, professionalism and humour.



### *Kayaking: On a scale from 1 to 10*

The first couple of kayak trips out on the open water, I struggled. First I struggled with sore wrists and forearms. I was surprised and disappointed and I wondered how I was going to continue with kayaking for the rest of the week. I shared my experience with a couple of people and they reminded me about technique — keep a loose hold and put more effort into pushing the paddle rather than pulling the paddle. A simple reminder and it worked like a charm.

Next I struggled with keeping up with the group. I was in a single kayak — because I said I had kayaked before and here I was - last in the group. When there were swells and wind, I had a hard time keeping up with the group. I was not challenged so much physically, I just kept my paddling at a steady pace. However, I was really frustrated mentally by not being able to keep up. I wrote in my journal that night: ‘I don’t like being behind — it took me back to parts of my early life and it was so uncomfortable.’ Several key aspects of support were very instrumental: I was given more paddling advice by one of the guides and I was given a shorter paddle. This was really helpful — I was able to improve my skill and paddle more efficiently and with more confidence. Also, there was always someone paddling with/ near me either quietly or enjoying an easy conversation. At one point a guide asked how I was doing on a scale from 1 to 10. He said he was trying to read my facial expressions to assess how I was doing. I laughed and replied “I’m not angry I’m just working hard.” I was also provided with options so that I didn’t feel as though I had to continue to struggle if I didn’t want to. I chose to keep on paddling and was able to join the group when we reached calmer waters.

## WHAT WAS TRANSFORMATIVE?

Some of the key lessons from this experience were that I could ask for help and receive it, that my progress and well-being were being noticed and I was being supported both directly eg try this paddle and indirectly eg someone paddling with me. I was given options but I was in control of my choices. Because I was being supported, I was able to choose to keep going, to refine my skills and increase my stamina. I was able to choose growth rather than panic.

I can't say enough about the importance of our role as facilitators of the learning experience for our students. If we are indeed teaching people and not just content, then we have to gauge how our students are doing. How do we 'make easy' the learning for our students? Do we observe closely so that we can gauge their interest? Their progress? Their challenges? Are we able to create a learning environment that is safe? That sets learners up for progress and success? That is flexible enough to provide options to meet the needs of diverse learners?

A group activity called 'The Helium Stick' was facilitated by two participants. The simple instruction was that we had to, as a group, lower a stick to the ground. I won't divulge the challenges of this operation nor the secret to success but I will say that it was a complete gong-show and it perfectly exemplified the following characterization of group formation and group work.

A STORY OF PADDLING AND PLACE



Photo by Carrie Nolan

### *Tuckman's Stages of Group Formation:*

- **Forming:** individuals come together, each learning about the nature of the task for the group
- **Storming:** individuals assert their ideas, some ideas conflict, there might be heightened emotion.
- **Norming:** group settles and gels around purpose of the exercise
- **Performing:** the group activity becomes the focus and individuals perform as necessary to accomplish task
- **Adjourning:** task is complete and group members are moving on. Often the well-being of the team is considered at this stage.

How can we consider this when we are designing group work for our students? Are there other group dynamics to consider? How do individual students fare within a group environment? If group work is essential, how can we support the individuals and the learning?

#### WHAT WAS TRANSFORMATIVE?

This group activity immediately situated me as a learner, as a student and brought to the surface the possible frustrations with group work. Our forming quickly transitioned to storming and during this time I found that the group was in such a frenzy that my voice could not be heard. This was very frustrating as I couldn't contribute to the activity in a positive way. I realized how important it is for me to be able to communicate and be heard. Knowing these stages of group formation can inform how we prepare and facilitate group work for learners.

## *Principles of Experiential Design*

Within a larger discussion of designing for EPBL, we explored various important principles within the context of this field school.

- **Framing:** make the invisible visible. How to you set up experiences for your students?
- **Empathy:** “theirs to ours to theirs”; start in their world, how is this learning relevant to them? Invite them in and acknowledge their previous learning and experience; ‘our world’ means collaborating with them as they learn? Is there room for their voice and choice?; back to their world mean paying attention to the application and transfer of their knowledge.
- **Chunking:** the art of beginning and endings. Arranging learning experiences in a meaningful way.
- **Chewing:** the art of ownership: how can students actively work with and reflect on learning?



Where has this learning adventure upheld each of these principles thus far?

**Framing:** *Outlines, readings, phone meetings, email communications regarding our learning and our camping/kayaking experience in advance all provided framing for the course and for our expectations.*

**Empathy:** *All of our learning, whether within the EPBL sessions or kayaking started with thinking about and/or sharing our own experiences. From there we expanded upon our ideas and learning to our larger group through various discussions, activities and exercises. We then discussed ideas in the context of our students, our courses and our institutions. Then we brought the discussion back to ourselves as educators. What one idea could we try, could we share, what one change could we initiate, could we commit to personally?*

**Chunking:** *The organization of different study sessions and group exercises, including kayaking, was very interesting. Several times a day as we gathered as a group with our facilitators and guides, we were informed of what we would do next and in the next couple of hours. As participants, we never had to consider the plan for an entire day. In one way, this was very practical. We had to plan our kayaking trips based on the weather and water conditions which was always changing. Our guides made these decisions – we did not have to. In other way, this practice had a very interesting psychological and*

*pedagogical impact. As participants, we didn't need to worry about time. Guides always provided us with a heads up as to when learning sessions were about to begin, where and what we needed to bring. We didn't need to burden ourselves with decisions about whether we would kayak or not. Nor did we have to think about what we were going to do for the whole week or the whole day. The facilitators helped us move through learning material in bite size chunks effectively interspersing learning/ dialogue time with various tool kit activities where we were thinking, discussing and moving around. The facilitators and guides together gauged the weather, gauged our groups learning dynamic (we did better with morning sessions than afternoon sessions) gauged our energy levels and allowed the learning and activities to unfold accordingly.*

**Chewing:** *Our daily journaling and conversation partners were designed to encourage reflection and this worked really well. Some of the best discussions I had simply emerged from the energy of the group and ideas, taking place sitting on the beach, enjoying a meal together, or at the end of the day.*

### WHAT WAS TRANSFORMATIVE?

Of each of these design aspects, chunking and chewing were the most effective for me. Chunking information and learning will be different for each class, but in this field school I experienced how well-planned delivery and activity can be effective. It makes not only the content but the learning manageable for students. At any given time, they know what is expected so they are able to focus. The pacing of new material with activities and reflection allows great engagement with the content and learning.



## *Session 5 Big Idea: Assessment*

In this session we discussed assessment as related to EPBL. We described goals of assessment as:

- establishing and communicating clear outcomes for students,
- gathering and analyzing and interpreting evidence of learning based on outcomes,
- and ultimately to improve learning.

In my own experience with course assessment and with discussing it with colleagues, there has always seemed to be a tension. People wonder — is it necessary? What does it accomplish? Is it part of some neo-liberal agenda to commodify education? It's so much work and I don't have the resources to do it properly. If we can't do it fully, what do we learn? Given this, I really appreciated our open discussions around assessment and I have learned different ways to view it. Some different statements were provided to us to think about:

- Learning is unseen, so assessment is not an exact science.
- Assessment should be tied to our teaching values.
- Assessment is where the power relationship inherent in teaching becomes public and undeniable.

Why assess? To:

- compare performance to the goals of the institution.
- assess the effectiveness of teaching methods.
- check a learner's background knowledge, strengths and weaknesses.
- determine learner satisfaction.

- develop self-regulation and ownership in learners.
- develop our skills of assessment.
- provide feedback for students.
- motivate
- generate marks and data for reporting.
- assign value to a task.
- provide accountability as an instructor.

Thinking about assessment in different ways allowed me to see it as an integral part of the design of a course, as part of an effective teaching pedagogy that is connected to my values around teaching and learning — rather than an added task that always seemed to be looming on my to-do list at the end of the term. In this way, I became more open to thinking about my courses in the context of assessment.

We explored both formative and summative assessment and put our new learning outcomes to the test. We spent time developing ways to strengthen the link between our new learning outcomes and formative and summative forms of assessment.

Here’s an example of one learning outcome from GEOG 316: Climate Change.

<i>Linking Learning Outcomes to Assessment</i>		
If this is your learning outcome ...	Then you can see how learners are doing by doing this <b>formative assessment</b> <i>en route</i>	And you can see if they have accomplished the learning outcome with this <b>summative assessment</b> at the end.
• <i>Design an action plan for three behavioural changes (psychomotor).</i>	• <i>Follow along with their ePortfolio documentation.</i>	• <i>Summary report, including rationale, plan, documentation, sharing out, and sustainability.</i>

### WHAT WAS TRANSFORMATIVE?

Upon reflecting on our learning on assessment discussions and work, I can see more meaningful and positive ways for me to approach assessment in the future. I will center assessment on student success and then build it into the design of my courses. I will allow the outcomes of assessment to continually inform future iterations of the course in terms of curriculum, assignments and activities such that I am always building to meet the needs of students.

## *Session 6 Big Idea: Sharing*

We worked on this topic the very last morning of camp. What were our ideas about how we would share our experiences of this field school? How would we champion it at our institutions? How would we build EPBL into our courses and programs.

A headline activity (tool kit) was a fun way to explore ideas and to distill lasting experiences. We played with headlines that could capture our experiences with EPBL. My own ideas reflect place as I found that to be such a transformative element in learning.

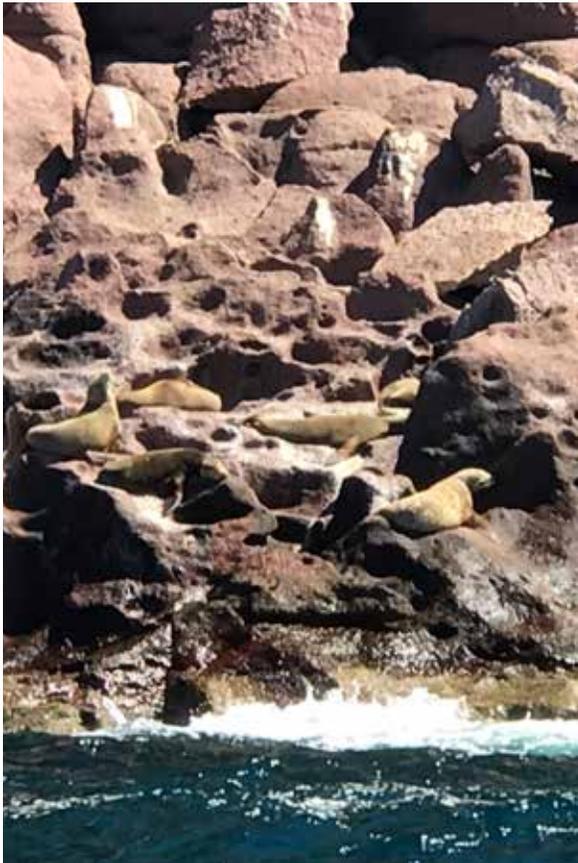
- *Headline #1: Students Empowered by Place as they take their learning outside*
- *Headline #2: Higher Places of Learning: Beyond the Classroom*

## *Trust and Oreos*

We were asked to gather around the guides in 15 minutes. We stood around in our bathing suits and wet suits and our guide began to talk to us about trust. It immediately felt like a serious conversation. He said that what we were about to do we had to commit to and that we had to trust him implicitly during the activity. We were just about to go snorkeling with the sea lions and as a group we hadn't been briefed on the activity yet, so I'm fairly certain that we all thought that he was talking about that. So when he talked rather emphatically about no turning back, I sensed that some people were uncomfortable. Then he passed around a package of Oreo cookies. The mood lightened somewhat — cookies? We were given careful instructions about separating the cookie from the filling, how to lightly moisten the filling before pressing it on our foreheads — but not too hard. Then the object was to move the cookie from our foreheads to our mouths — without touching it. What ensued was about 20 minutes of astonishment, laughter, goofiness, lots of funny faces and some successes with the cookies. What we got was a big release of some anxiety — especially for those who had never snorkeled before, let alone in the open ocean and with sea lions — and the message of trust. On the boat, we were all relaxed as we headed to the sea lion colony. Some people chose to watch from the boat, the rest of us were provided with instructions before we entered the water, we snorkeled as a group and people who wanted more support had a guide near them at all times in the water. The experience was incredible.

### WHAT WAS TRANSFORMATIVE?

I still look back at this activity and am awed by how a simple, fun and unexpected activity could be so effective at both diffusing some nervous energy and also drawing us into a collective trust in what would be our last activity together on the field school. Snorkelling with sea lions is a fairly big adventure and we needed to stay focused as a group. I think that a skilled and experienced facilitator can ‘read’ the energy of a group and be able to direct or pivot that energy by the use of activities whether it’s a silly game such as this or something as simple as getting up to stretch.



## *Session 7 Big Idea: Reflecting*

### *In and Out of the Dark*

The last night that we would be out on the island, we had an activity after dinner that we weren't told about ahead of time. We were told to meet in 15 minutes with our headlamps, a water bottle and walking shoes. Upon meeting we simply followed our guide as he began to walk inland. A trail narrowed. I followed our guide and everyone else followed the person in front of them. Headlamps on the trail as we navigated the narrow path, sometimes ducking beneath or around thorny vegetation, sometimes reaching and scrambling over boulders, sometimes awed as the rock sculpture was illuminated around us. It was dark, but we could tell that we were walking along a narrow boulder path that was ascending the side of a steep wall. We climbed for about 30 minutes. No one asked where we were going. No one asked "are we there yet?" Yet everyone was chatting amiably and there was a sense of excitement. One person stumbled, went over on their ankle. People offered assistance and we kept going. Someone asked "Cheryl can I take your water bottle so you have two hands to climb?" A guide pointed out a baby scorpion between two rocks. We knew we had arrived at our destination when we saw our facilitator sitting on the ground, amongst a glow of little lights. We all sit down around her and we gathered for the last session of the day — appropriately on reflection. Our guides somehow disappeared into the darkness — as if to give our group some privacy, to not interlope, allow for intimacy around our learning experiences. We were sitting high up on a hillside, on a wide ledge that also seemed like a cave that the elements had eroded over thousands of years. We could see nothing of the island except for the ledge that we sat on and the rock that sloped over our heads. We could not see the vast valley that lay steeply beneath us, we couldn't tell how high up we were. We could not know any more of this place other than our place it in at the moment. And out of the darkness came our reflections.

## WHAT WAS TRANSFORMATIVE?

Two aspects of this activity really grabbed a hold of me. The first was that it seemed to us to be unplanned — to be spontaneous. And in being so, there was an element of excitement and of joy. Where were we going? What were we going to see? All of the other supports within our group had already been established throughout the week — supporting one another, trusting one another, safety. This allowed a spirit of curiosity and imagination to fill the space as we hiked an unknown path, our path dark and illuminated only by our headlamps. When we reached our destination — it felt so rewarding to discover our facilitator there having prepared a serene, circle of light for us to enter. The second aspect was the depth and openness of our reflections. Our facilitator guided us through several exercises where we were asked to reflect on the course, on ourselves as educators and to give of ourselves in sharing thoughts from our reflections (tool kit: Give at Little, Get a Lot).

The next day we took down camp, had our last session on sharing and we snorkeled with the sea lions (see above). Taking down camp was a collaborative effort as were all of our camp efforts. But it seemed fast and it felt like we were not only taking down but closing down an experience. We were bringing something to a close. One last kind of reflection that we were invited to do was to write notes of appreciation in everyone's workbook. All of our workbooks were put in a circle and one by one we selected each book and in each we shared messages of appreciation for one another (tool kit)

## Summary | Elements of Transformation

My learning with this field school started with me — where I was at. I was there as an instructor but I could comfortably situate myself as a learner.

Even though there were situations in which I felt physical and mental stress, the supportive systems of the field school allowed me to remain in control of my choices and to see these situations as opportunities for growth and for building resilience.

Unexpected elements can quickly move people from their comfort zones, either into possibilities or panic. Instructors, through meaningful activity design and practice of good facilitation skills, can set students up for success. Growth and learning can occur and the unexpected need not become a hindrance.

Learning *in place* provides students with the potential to be more creative, imaginative, connected to content and to explore and learn in a more fully engaged manner. When students, through their learning and work, can contribute *to a place* or learn *for place*, then that is a profound experience.

As a learner in this group, I felt both seen and heard in terms of my contributions, my progress and my well-being. Because of this support, I felt that I could always lean in to a challenge, to choose growth.

I learned about myself — how I learn and how I teach, how I interact socially and professionally, how I meet challenges, what is my comfort zone. I felt confident and assured in many circumstances and was also able to recognize other vulnerabilities and potential for learning

in other circumstances. When we are learning content or about a place as we are personally being transformed by the experiences, then a deep form of learning takes place.

Understanding a student perspective is imperative for effective teaching. We must continually center our students' in terms of the design, content and delivery of our courses. We must refocus our energy from teaching content to teaching people.

As skilled facilitators, we can shape not only the learning, but the learning environment for our students.

Imagination, joy, curiosity and humour are elements that can elevate us to a place of openness, security and new possibility in learning.

Reflection allows us to connect more deeply to our values of learning and our roles as teachers. It is also important for students to reflect on their learning in a way that contributes to their success in class.

## Ideas for Moving Forward

Below is a list of ideas that I put forth as possibilities for consideration. I look forward to working with others in FAS and within the CTE on bringing shape to some of the ideas and moving forward on expanding EPBL at CapU.

### *General*

- Build on the practice and pedagogy of EPBL that is already occurring at CapU by working with the CTE on resources and ideas.
- Expand on this potential by establishing EPBL as priority within FAS and the larger institution. Build on place-based learning and regionally-integrated learning as a pillar in FAS.
- Meaningfully Integrate EPBL practice and pedagogy throughout the campus — recognizing where it is already occurring and where there is potential for growth.
- Consider both the possibilities and the challenges for EPBL currently eg resources, expertise, time-tabling grid etc.
- In this time of increased online teaching and learning, discover and create meaning and practice for EPBL.

## *Specific*

- Create opportunities for faculty to experience first-hand (as learners) the benefits of EPBL either through smaller workshops or intensive field schools.
- Connect CapU faculty with faculty and EPBL initiatives at other institutions.
- Work with the Work-Integrated Learning Hub to align WIL opportunities with EPBL design and practice.
- Work with faculty on the design elements of new and/or existing courses to integrate EPBL learning and practice.
- Create a way for faculty working on new program development and/or program reviews to share and develop ideas for how to integrate EPBL into their program.
- Design EPBL with our program partners to establish strong and informed partnerships and greater success for our students.
- Create opportunities for student input into what they perceive to be EPBL success and challenges.
- Create a story hub where student and faculty EPBL stories are shared.

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## Appendix

Each of these tool kit exercises was used during the field school. The activities marked with an asterisk were described in this report.

- 3-2-1 Bridge\*
- Rodeo Rounds
- Chair Activity
- Social Contract\*
- Burning Question
- Categories
- Metaphors
- Think/Pair/Share
- Jigsaw
- Mapping Diversity
- Quote Walk
- Acronyms
- Ticket out the Door
- #Hashtag\*
- Silent Walk
- Find Your Rock
- Comfort Zone Activity\*
- Ordering/Organizing
- Creating Groups: based on different criteria
- Voting
- Headlines
- Give a Little, Get a lot\*
- Appreciation Notes\*