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Listening with **šə**qa**č**ib: Writing Supportand Community Listening

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Abstract

This essay examines writing partnerships in 2016 and 2017 that invited community nonprofit volunteers and employees into šəqačib, which is a Seattle youth (middle school and high school) Native cultural literacy classroom community. As a white settler employed by the nonprofit during the events described, I emphasize the wisdom of šəqačib students who reflect on the collaboration. Drawing on Rachel Jackson's work on community listening, I find that šəqačib students demonstrate the importance of cultivating listening practices when community literacy practitioners enter identity-safe scholarly communities such as šəqačib. I urge academic and literacy supporters in similar contexts to center Native and Native youth voices in their own terms.

> *The name šəqačib means "raising hands" and I use the name to guide me in my work. I decided early on when this class was created to use it as a metaphor. Everything I do is to raise my students—to lift them up.*

> —Boo Balkan Foster, šəqačib Teacher,
> Jicarilla Apache and adopted Makah

Introduction

On a wet winter morning in 2016, I steer an SUV packed with volunteers from a nonprofit education organization located on the north side of Seattle to Chief Sealth International High School in the city's southwestern corner. The car wends through an urban landscape in flux—past Amazon's rapidly expanding corporate forest in South Lake Union, near homeless encampments in SODO and the Industrial District, driving finally over the Duwamish Waterway, a superfund site previously blighted by aviation manufacturing. We travel through unceded ancestral lands of Duwamish, Suquamish, Muckleshoot, and other Native peoples.

The volunteers and I, all of us non-Native individuals, work with The Greater Seattle Bureau of Fearless Ideas (BFI), and we are welcomed by Boo Balkan Foster, who is Jicarilla Apache and adopted Makah. Boo is an endlessly kind, intelligent, and energetic Seattle Public Schools teacher who leads šəqačib, a Native education classroom and a unique space of belonging and cultural literacy for Native youth. The word "šəqačib" can be translated as "raising hands" from Southern Lushootseed, a Coast Salish language from the Puget Sound region. We have come to assist the šəqačib

classrooms, which, as Boo outlines on the course syllabus she offers me, "promote school engagement and academic progress in a culturally sensitive environment… šəqačib is a place of community building and belonging for Native youth." šəqačib is offered through the Huchoosedah Native Education Department of Seattle Public Schools and is housed in Chief Sealth International High School, providing academic and cultural support to Native American, Alaskan Native, and Canadian First Nations students enrolled at the high school and the adjoining Denny International Middle School. Every day of the week, students in grades six through twelve receive a range of instruction in this affirming environment, including one-on-one academic support and direct classroom instruction. As a BFI programs manager, I coordinate volunteers and writing lessons for BFI, and I am a graduate degree-holding white male settler originally from Wisconsin.

The BFI volunteers and I have a seemingly straightforward support role for the road ahead in 2016, as well as for the second collaboration in the spring of 2017: students draft and publish autobiographical writing in line with pre-established themes, receiving extra classroom support and professional chapbook design and publication from BFI. Boo highly values the voices of Native youth—these voices matter and make change, and supporting these voices is the explicit reason for our being in šəqačib. The power of Native youth voice is being recognized beyond šəqačib—for example, The Center for Native American Youth's recent publication, *Native Youth Count: The State of Native Youth 2019*, is written in part by Native youth and celebrates voices of Native youth as they advocate for the protection of sacred sites and campaign for the elections of Native people. In many ways, Native youth voices are determining Native futures, and this is something to celebrate.

Yet, for community literacy practitioners like BFI, which is a primarily white organization, to support Native youth voices, it becomes crucial to *listen* in ways that honor self-determination rather than determining meaning or translating voices. This essay examines the 2016-2017 šəqačib-BFI collaborations because they attempt community listening in a complex community literacy partnership. Community listening offers a way to practice community literacy while resisting hegemonic Western understandings of listening and writing. Instead, community listening asks us to listen *with* communities in ways that activate complex relationships across difference. Like Rachel Jackson, who examined the practice as part of the *Community Literacy Journal's* 2018 special issue on community listening, I hope to highlight the stakes of decolonizing community writing, even as my positionality and experience differ from Jackson's.

I began the first draft of this paper in 2018, and Boo has been a constant scholarly partner as I have drafted and revised versions over two years. Early on, two goals emerged: to honor the spirit of the partnership and to honor the students and their voices. Boo's laser focus on supporting her students is distilled in an email she wrote to me: "Everything I do is to raise my students—to lift them up." As I continued researching ongoing discussions in community writing, it also became increasingly urgent for me to consider ways that the partnership could be said to decolonize community writing, which I feel directly concerns the futures of Boo's students. As I detail

in the below section, "Native Education and Identity Safety," a long and continuing settler colonial educational history wields English language literacy as a weapon, and I needed to unpack where the collaborations sit with regard to those histories.

In the discussions that follow, using notes from Boo, myself, volunteers, as well as feedback from šǝqačib students, I hope to highlight important context for the collaborations and demonstrate listening that was attempted. At the same time, I hope to avoid any suggestion that the collaboration provides an exportable prototype for partnerships elsewhere. Rather, my discussion suggests that the north stars of future community literacy collaborations in Native spaces are precisely Native and Native youth voices in terms of their own making. I urge community literacy workers and organizations to work toward decolonized listening practices that center these voices and the identities and relationships that matter to them in order to decolonize community literacy in spaces of complex interaction.

This paper is written as a celebration of šǝqačib and its students.

Community Listening in a Scholarly Community

BFI volunteers needed to listen in ways that honor student voices in their own terms, and Rachel Jackson's "Decolonizing Community Writing with Community Listening: Story, Transrhetorical Resistance, and Indigenous Cultural Literacy Activism" provides guidelines for listening with communities beyond the terms made available in settler colonialism. Written with Dorothy Whitehorse Delaune, Jackson describes Native literacy activism in a Kiowa community that reaches beyond academic understandings of listening confined by "a problematic settler colonial frame that has historically defined and restricted racial categories and suppressed otherwise far more complex relationships enacted across difference" (45). Jackson is a Native scholar with the Kiowatalk.org project, and Delaune is a Kiowa elder who is active in linguistic and cultural recovery efforts. Their article describes Kiowa literacy activism that resists Western academic logic: the article is composed as story, rather than academic analysis. Jackson proposes community listening as a decolonizing critique of Krista Ratcliffe's earlier, highly influential theory of rhetorical listening, pointing out the ways that Ratcliffe's thought emerges from a distinctly Western rhetorical practice. Jackson's decolonial community listening emerges from eleven years spent listening to and with Kiowa story that proved incommensurate with Ratcliffe's theory of dialogue and exchange between (typically, two) discrete subjects. People engaged in Kiowa story, writes Jackson, "listen differently, *with* a community rather than *to* a community or *for* a community" (42). The Kiowa community's highly relational, contextual, and active listening practices emphasize production while listening. For instance, Jackson mentions the Kiowa practice of listening to a story as "growing" a story. Kiowa community listening practices connect across generations and include Native people who are not Kiowa people in story, "[enacting] a collectivity that operates across traditional Indigenous cultures" in order to establish "storied connections" between people and to land (46). In contrast to western listening models that seek

to settle meanings, community listening activates relationships across difference and contributes to Native peoples' collectivity and self-determination.

Community listening offers a way for BFI volunteers to listen *with* šəqačib students as a scholarly community. At the same time, there are important differences to note as Jackson's concept travels to this paper: šəqačib is a public schooling space that includes diverse youth with Native ancestry. šəqačib is not at its core a project of recovery, certainly not one like kiowatalk.org (Jackson's paper emerges out of her work with this organization), which digitizes Kiowa language and culture from within the Kiowa tribal community. šəqačib is an instructional environment with English language as the medium of education, and in the collaboration with BFI, students create a textual (written, revised, and published) product. Moreover, Jackson and Delaune are Native women who offer vastly different positionalities than I bring to this article: I am a white male settler with a long road of delinking from settler colonialism ahead of me.

In šəqačib, storytelling and listening are important components of Boo's classroom community, where students explore the strengths of their individual ancestries and broader Native identities. I understand community listening as a theory that is relevant to the intellectual practices of the šəqačib community as well as BFI volunteer practices during the collaboration. šəqačib emphasizes the gifts of ancestry and connecting with one another across differences. šəqačib has been a scholarly community since before the arrival of BFI or the publication of this academic article, where listening is integral to the emergence of student voice. On our first day in the classroom, the volunteers and I witnessed student projects that emphasize the strengths, gifts, and futures of šəqačib students. After Boo welcomes us on the parking lot, we follow her into the šəqačib classroom. Posters and artwork blanket the walls, student beadworks-in-progress wait in stacked containers, and on the wall across from the school clock, a student-carved plaque spells out " šəqačib" beneath an eagle—the expertly crafted work of a high school student in the class, who gifted the object to Boo. We learn that this plaque hangs on the wall every day, and it exclaims Native pride. As the bell rings, a group of middle school students enter and shortly begin introducing themselves by name and ancestry. Eyes turn to me, and as I start to follow suit, my privilege manifests as a novel discomfort that comes with naming my ancestry, which is something that I am rarely asked to explain, and never before in a teaching capacity.

Boo later explains that self-introduction by ancestry and/or tribal affiliation is not a new, but a very old way of relating to a group as a Native person. Native scholar Bonita Lawrence explains that this ancestral practice continues in the present day, where multiple names and locations are often shared due to overlapping identities: "For Native people, individual identity is always being negotiated *in relation to* collective identity, and *in the face of* an external, colonizing society" (4). Naming practices exist in an ongoing history of colonization. Because identities in šəqačib are layered—on the individual and collective/tribal ancestry level—volunteers are invited, both implicitly and explicitly, to consider their own participation in larger and longer contexts.

As we learn about the goals of the šəqačib-BFI collaborations, it is clear that the writing we will do together is a project that is continuous with other projects in the šəqačib community. Boo's vision for the collaborations is for students to create a written response to the prompts, "What Lifts You Up?" and "What is Worth Fighting For?" for the 2016 and 2017 collaborations, respectively. Boo created both prompts: the 2016 prompt, "What Lifts You Up?", is a reference to the English-language translation of " *šəqačib*." The 2017 prompt, "What is Worth Fighting For?", calls on students to think about their enduring qualities in the face of struggle or to reflect on struggles that matter to them. The 2016 prompt question explicitly locates a singular "You," whereas the 2017 prompt implies one. Both place this embodied first-person voice in conversation with something beyond and exceeding individuality, yet continuous with identity. Two of the project's pedagogical goals, exemplified by the inclusion of non-Native volunteers in the drafting and revision process, are cross-cultural understanding and the ability to narrate personal experience to different audiences in a recognized genre. For šəqačib students to use language and genre in service of these questions, and to create a collective book, touches on scholarly elements in other student works like the plaque, which affirms connection to the classroom space and to one another, and even the daily introductions, which ask students to vocalize connection to ancestry, day after day. The šəqačib scholarly community has developed pathways to affirm difference within the classroom while cultivating positive self-image as Native people with bright futures.

To call šəqačib a scholarly community is to recognize the work being done there to imagine and build toward Native futures, even as student projects generally do not conform to Western academic scholarship, which tends to emphasize debate, single author publication, and detachment. In contrast, the šəqačib-BFI collaborations ask students to write their worlds and, in doing so, these students connect to conversations in Native scholarship. Linda Tuhiwai Smith's landmark *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* contains the section, "Twenty-five Indigenous Projects," what Smith calls a "research programme" consisting of projects that support the survival and self-determination of Indigenous peoples globally. While a number of the projects Smith lists are ongoing in šəqačib, her "Envisioning" is particularly salient: Indigenous people look to the future as a direct result of "knowing that we have survived and can only go forward" (152). In addition, writing about oneself, as the projects ask students to do, is a task that is rife with transformational possibility. bell hooks notes that to "make sense of everyday life experiences" requires "critical reflection" and even material change, constituting the "critical process of theorizing" (70). šəqačib students-scholars, with the aid of outsider volunteers, are thus tasked with theorizing their own lives, and potentially changing them. Ellen Cushman, similar to hooks, notes the possibilities involved in writing the Native self as a means to self-empowerment, in addition to connecting to and instructing possible audiences across rhetorical contexts, writing:

> A rhetoric of self-representation facilitates cross-cultural understanding between writers and their audiences: on the one hand, it offers writers a way of constructing these gathered narratives of self; while on the other hand,

it offers a way for various audiences to hear the cultural logics and rhetoric exigencies informing these constructions…By unfolding the cultural logics that imbue all Native scholars' identity constructions, a rhetoric of self-representation affords audiences of white scholars and scholars of color one way to engage in rhetorical listening. ("Towards" 327)

As "Native scholars," in Cushman's terms, students are asked to assemble a text of self-representation and in doing so, to address and re-present the cultural logics in their own terms—in other words, these students must locate and make use of a middle ground between writer and audience, using both the terms made available to them by the broader culture and their own terms. With guidance from Boo and volunteers, students in each classroom explore their memory banks for details and stories that speak to important issues, and they are given freedom to represent themselves in a genre of their choosing (i.e. personal essay, poem, short story). Narrating firsthand experience, students analyze and thereby value their lifeworlds as subjects of study. Simultaneously, Boo's framing in each prompt precludes autobiography as an act of isolation. When I worked with šəqačib students in 2016, students engaged deeply with the process of writing stories and poems that speak truth—of family memories, vignettes about pets and neighbors, mothers, and teachers.

The community listening that took shape in the collaborations looks quite different than Jackson's examples, but we share an attempt to refigure listening away from a one-way transfer of information, and toward the building and affirming of connections across difference. Community listening offers a way to frame šəqačib as a decolonizing space, revising terms of connection and scholarship within its school and the other communities that it exists within, and the collaborations ask BFI to participate in that decolonizing activity by listening. Jackson writes that these practices may offer tools for "sustaining Indigenous knowledges, languages, and literacy practices that nourish the cultural continuance of Native peoples to whom this land belongs" (52).

Native Education and Identity Safety

In šəqačib, recognizing difference is a prerequisite to participation, which creates an environment of identity safety. This identity safety is evident in daily introductions by name and ancestry that the volunteers and I experienced on our first day in šəqačib, as mentioned above, and listening and being heard are integral to šəqačib's central component of identity safety. In an email, Boo writes that her students learn about histories of Native-settler interactions and, through identity-safe teaching practices, feel affirmed and safe in their own identities:

Identity safety is a term that can be interesting and challenging to define. I concentrate on two things. I remind my students I know about them: They are smart and they are strong. Sometimes, students pause and look at me like they are not sure they believe me; however, I remind them we are here. An entire government, OUR government tried to wipe us out and were unsuccessful. To survive, our ancestors had to be strong and smart and those things exist in us. We are the prayers of our ancestors. Identity safety means

I meet and welcome students where they are now. Identity safety means I see their stories as strengths in the classroom (Balkan Foster).

Boo's words connect identity safety to survival. In Boo's words to students, "OUR government tried to wipe us out and were unsuccessful," conveying the strength that is evident in Native survival and the resources and resourcefulness that come with being Native. Identity safety does not ignore historical trauma and does not undo it. Rather, it opens a classroom space to understanding, healing, and even celebration. The actual, embodied presence of Native students learning together and exploring one another's present cultures and identities is an act of perseverance amid an oppressive culture. It is also a significant connection to ancestry—"we are the prayers of our ancestors," a phrase Boo relays to her classroom on occasion.

Identity safety is especially important in Native education because language and culture classrooms have functioned as weapons in past and ongoing Native American cultural devaluation. Literacy education administered by (in general, white) educators has been a source of harm and theft for Native peoples for a long, long while. David Wallace Adams, who reflects on Indian boarding and assimilation schools, describes classroom education as "yet another deplorable episode in the long and tragic history of Native-white relations" (336). Native culture and ways of knowing are at stake in classroom instruction, and classrooms have functioned historically as sites that eliminate Indigenous culture by enforcing participation in the dominant white culture. Indian boarding and assimilation schooling operated for generations in the US, first run by Protestant and Catholic churches, and later the federal government, in a system that reached its zenith in the early twentieth century and lasted at least into the late 1960s. This system enforced participation in Eurocentric learning that devalued and threatened Indigenous culture. Historical accounts of such assimilation education abound from Native people such as Ponca Chief Standing Bear (c. 1829-1908), whose memoirs record a richly detailed experience of childhood renaming, demonstrating how language learning can threaten a Native culture. He and other students learned their first English words, their new, *European*, names: "Soon we all had names of white men sewed on our backs" (137). Washington State has an especially fierce history, where across many schooling institutions, it has been unsafe to be Native. Local outlets including *The Seattle Times* have occasionally reported on life after the traumas experienced in Indian Boarding Schools: for instance, the father of state Rep. John McCoy, D-Tulalip, "was fluent in the tribe's language but refused to teach it [to his son], saying 'they beat it out of me' at boarding school" (King). Rep. McCoy's father speaks directly to the erasure and eradication of culture through violence, including the forced adoption of English as the basis of legitimate cultural practice (see also Wyman). Most recently, Lajimodiere documents survivor stories in their own words. Lajimodiere, an enrolled citizen of the Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa, understands these histories as continuous with personal trauma inherited from ancestors' experiences in boarding school—for Lajimodiere, trauma is intergenerational, and healing begins with listening to and learning from firsthand histories.

Since the early 2000s, identity safety has provided a framework for positive interactions with difference in various settings, such as a classroom. In a multidisciplinary

article by Hazel Rose Markus, Claude M. Steele, and Dorothy M. Steele, the authors critique what they describe as the dominant, faulty mode of American inclusion, "the colorblind/one-way assimilation model," that seeks to include by ignoring and thereby subsuming difference (242). They write: "We propose an alternative model of inclusion, one that … acknowledges group differences in status and lived experience … Its goal is to acknowledge differences attached to group identity and to create a setting that is accepting of differences as non-limiting and as a basis of respect" (235). This founding definition, as a process of making explicit one's connection to ancestry and groups "as a basis of respect," or in order to be heard, parallels the self-naming practices of Native culture in general described by Bonita Lawrence and practices of šəqačib in particular. Clearly, identity safety by other names has long been a feature of Native cross-cultural interaction and learning.

Boo's classrooms approach group identity and ancestry as a prerequisite to participation and encourage volunteers to do the same when they enter. The classroom encourages connection and belonging over isolation, provides middle and high school students with relevant representations and models, uplifts them, listens, and inspires self-love as a triumph that finds possibility in the face of troubling history. A space such as šəqačib provides students with a special access point to celebrate the many gifts of their ancestries—gifts that the students already possess. Their stories are, as Boo suggests above, directly a result of innate strength and intelligence. Writing and storytelling, even with the inclusion of non-Native volunteers, actively contribute to šəqačib's classroom culture of positive identity and student success, and moreover, they feed back into classroom identity safety.

Diana's Silence

My field notes contain a student-volunteer interaction where a volunteer listens and focuses on the process of writing over the product. In the third week of the 2016 BFI-šəqačib project, seventh grader Diana hasn't made much progress on her story and avoids making eye contact with her volunteer, CC—a white, middle-aged woman—while remaining noticeably silent when asked about her ideas. I notice that Diana and CC seem contented at the moment, but the clock is ticking on Diana's draft, and most other students in the class have put pen to paper. Some have already committed to an idea and loaded their first draft with sensory details and sketched-in memories. Another week of volunteer visits goes by for Diana, who remains quiet. Whereas it is clear to me the ways that Boo's classroom has provided Diana with a learning community that values different experiences, identities, and learning paces, Diana's silent encounter with a volunteer makes it unclear what will happen next. CC tells me in an email that Diana continues to be silent despite remaining present, and CC continues arriving to class for every day of the collaboration, continues greeting Diana, asking her questions, and offering to write Diana's words and ideas down for her. In an email, CC reports that during these initial days, other volunteers helped her gain confidence and patience with the process of assisting a student who is working at a slower than average pace: "Fellow seasoned volunteers with BFI also provided guidance and

positive examples of listening in both one on one situations and in the classroom setting" (CC). CC was a BFI volunteer prior to her time with šəqačib, and she mentions that she "grew up on a farm in Ireland and studied computer science and communications before arriving in America to work in the high-tech industry."

Many scholars argue convincingly that silence is often perceived by teachers to conflict with white, mainstream ideals of classroom participation (Schultz). Due to distortions of power from a dominant cultural gaze, perceptions of silence can run antithetical to a student's intention. As Melanie Price et al. explain, "Oftentimes a teacher will mistake student silence or failure to make eye contact for a lack of knowledge, participation, and/or respect, when in fact, the student is displaying behaviors that were meant to show the highest levels of respect and attention" (39). It is important to consider the multiple meanings student silence may contain, and dismissing a student for their silence may come at the cost of that student's future success. Huey Li Li argues that the experiences of silent minority students also includes going unheard, writing, "Teachers often enlist 'participation' as an evaluation criterion. But, they do not recognize 'silent active listening' as a legitimate form of participation" (82). This all too often means that a quiet student will not be heard later on. Though the positionality specific to writing volunteers in classrooms is less explored in education research, the stakes of Diana's interaction with a volunteer are important to the development of Diana's writing during and beyond the writing project at hand.

Throughout future sessions, I observed CC remaining physically and emotionally present during class, without correcting or shaming Diana's silence, and without "feeding" Diana any words or ideas. Despite initial doubt, CC felt that Diana's reaction to her presence indicated that Diana was comfortable around her, and after time there came small talk. Diana mentioned her love for her dog and drew a picture of him. When Diana spoke, CC listened attentively, writing down Diana's words during pauses. At this point, CC describes her role as a partner who listens and records Diana's ideas, as "staying positive and reminding the student of what we'd already discussed the previous week and what had seemed like an idea to explore." CC does not tempt or guide Diana with the promise of the final printed product, and instead focused on the process of telling a story. Diana wrote and revised a successful—indeed, riveting—autobiographical story about her dog and family. CC remembers, "once [Diana] found the magic in describing the colors and the smell and the feel of her couch and her home and her dog, she threw herself into the assignment." Diana proudly read her story at the 2016 book publication celebration, where friends and family gathered over food to hear Diana and other šəqačib students read their work aloud.

The volunteer's actions in the face of a silent student owes much to the adoption of the classroom culture that was both a choice (of the volunteer) and a consequence of Boo's classroom norms that were communicated on our first day together—listening to and with students in their own terms. CC listened to Boo's classroom culture in order to listen to Diana's ideas. Outside of šəqačib's identity-safe classroom culture, this interaction might have ended otherwise. šəqačib's classroom of co-affirming students can—and in this case, did—provide cues for incomers, and these cues contrib-

uted to how the volunteer decided to proceed when faced with a student's silence. Diana's writing process begins with silence, a silence which should not be understood as a lack of meaning that was overcome by a volunteer. Instead, Diana's silence is full of inherent, complex, and multiple meanings. Kennan Ferguson theorizes the political and creative salience of silence: "If silence, as such, cannot be reduced to determinate purpose, it must be rethought as not only a site of repression but also a nexus of resistance or even as a potentiality for creation" (65). Diana's silence indeed led to creative acts—the emergence of her voice in a community celebration lifted her up.

Hearing Student Feedback

In 2017, I visited šəqačib and asked students to provide feedback in an attempt at community listening. I took care to consider how I asked for this feedback and what restrictions I would put on it, since this communication and framing would directly impact the quality of listening. For instance, if students were asked to rate their experience using a pre-determined set of terms and numbers, as with multiple choice, that would demonstrate listening for a specific outcome rather than listening with members of the šəqačib community. A few weeks before students finalized their pieces on the theme, "What is Worth Fighting For?", I asked all students present on a spring afternoon to fill out an optional and anonymous project feedback form. This form sought open-ended and creative feedback, offering students a range of response choices. Students who agreed to participate in feedback completed one or more of the following options: writing fill-in-the-blank word responses, drawing anything of their choosing in a blank square, and making use of lines for free response writing in a section marked "creative writing encouraged."

Here are several student responses to the fill-in-the-blank questions.

Question: "Working with BFI volunteers makes me feel ____ about writing,"

Replies include: "safe," "nervous/excited/social/happy," "sad," "encouraged," "superb," "creative," and "inspired."

Question: "When I Think About What It's Like to be a Published Writer, I feel ____."

Replies include: "people get to know how I feel;" "like people are getting to know me;" "happy that a lot of people will read it;" "great—like I can do it again;" "happy that a lot of people will read it;" "it strikes me as shocking."

Several students composed poem responses—doing so ad hoc and in real time. Here is a selection of them:

I.

I was there and now I'm here
life is crazy
but why does it matter?

II.

I see myself waking on my land
proud and strong for my people

III.

water is water and from the sky
down low and up high

IV.

ink dark as thunder
paper, a break in the clouds
emotion steadied, a penned spark,
this is the part you love most

V.

I like bfi
It is nice to have some time
and I like it, yeah

Student drawings include the following:

A smiling person with the caption, "I am proud to be Native."

A cow getting abducted by an alien with the caption, "this is a drawing of a cow getting abducted by an alien."

A face with "CON" over the eyes and "FUSED" over the mouth, next to the caption, "if you could only read emotions."

A Dakota Access Pipeline protest: stick figures at left hold two protest signs, "Water=Life" and "No DAPL," stick figures at right are police with shields and three words: "Death Destruction Terror" written above them. A caption reads, "Natives rise against DAPL."

My intention was to provide a space for open feedback in order to listen with students as they reflect on the collaborations. As the above examples show, students were given expository and creative options, as well as a nonverbal option with drawing, such that writing was not necessarily required. The above examples indicate that many šəqačib students took hold of the form in their own terms and in doing so offer a tremendously wide range of ideas and terms. These responses vary across format and affect, such that they do not lend themselves to quantifiable scoring. This useless-

ness as quantitative data, however, is nonetheless valuable to rethinking the collaboration in terms offered by students. These notes, poems, doodles, and words reflect a wider variety of possible expressions and open up more ground for listening than multiple choice might. In addition, the responses may also convey how a given student was feeling that day and moment, how they felt expected to answer, how they felt about me or other BFI affiliates. With these factors in mind, a piece of feedback accrues multiple possible meanings. For example, the "CON…FUSED" drawing is a likely a critical representation of a student's experience of the partnership—words cover up a face, and all that can be read is confused. This drawing combines an image with a word that is broken into two syllables, and in doing so resists rules of expression (writing in straight lines, left to right orientation, proper spelling) that are typically enforced in school. The caption for this piece of feedback addresses an unspecified "you" as an audience: "if you could only read emotions." The meaning of this comment is not fixed or settled—Are they confused about how this feedback form will be used? About what paper I will write?

From what I can tell, many šəqačib students used the form to convey positive thoughts and ideas. In poem V, a student writes a haiku that reads well as a song. Its longest line, "it is nice to have some time," implies that the writing partnership offers this student an opportunity to develop voice and ideas rather than being handed ideas. One student writes a poem that ends, "I am proud to be Native," marking their experience of the collaboration as a success. Another student writes the word "safe" in describing how working with BFI volunteers makes them feel. There is an excess of expression in a number of responses. By this I mean that the contribution exceeds the request (to be sure, this excess is a gift). The humorous responses (such as the alien abduction and extravagant diction such as "superb"), the comics, and the allusions to Native activism (poem III and the DAPL drawing) each offer a field of meaning that is useful to rethinking community literacy across difference.

Many responses may also indicate confusion or mistrust in me and the way that I framed this feedback activity to students, which was not guided by a community listening practice. As I gathered feedback from students in 2017, I relayed to classrooms that I wanted to write a paper about them. While I cannot say what students felt as I entered and communicated this plan, responses from student feedback forms, which were completed after I communicated my scholarly plan, likely reflect some of these feelings. Whereas some students indicated pride and satisfaction as they considered how they felt to be writing for an audience, it is likely that the audience these students imagined is a somewhat closed community of family members and šəqačib supporters who would eventually read the printed books produced in partnership with BFI. Perhaps it is fair to say that I did not adequately explain the new (academic) audiences—crowds that may be very strange to them. Perhaps some students indeed realized that their words would be put in print contexts such as this journal, and perhaps this explains why one student feedback-poem invokes an utter lack of control over placement: "I was there and now I'm here / life is crazy / but why does it matter?" To announce that I would be recontextualizing student writing elsewhere may have exacerbated a lack of agency that some šəqačib students had been feeling—"but why does

it matter?" If I could begin again, I would instead negotiate a way forward alongside them, rather than proclaim my plan as I did. To do so would recognize their wisdom as scholars and attempt to see them eye-to-eye.

A final moment of expository feedback comes from a high school student, Davis, who provides by far the longest response, which details his reaction to the presence of the BFI volunteer in the šəqačib classroom:

> "I'm not gonna lie, I get uncomfortable, like there's a lot of people and everyone seems overly friendly, like they're pretending almost. They always talk to me and want to read what I'm writing…I just might not have motivation, and being pressed to be motivated doesn't help, I'm sorry, Idk."

Davis's words deserve open ears. It is possible that he feels prompted to apologize—or rather, that he writes in response to a perceived expectation to be grateful for the presence of volunteers. It is possible that volunteers or I had subtly and inadvertently communicated that students ought to understand themselves as fortunate to be in the presence of BFI. It may be that the "why" of our being present, week after week, may have not been well-communicated, or perhaps not often enough. Clearly, Davis did not find the volunteer interactions to be genuine—he characterizes them instead as obsequious and eager, "overly friendly, like they're pretending almost." Davis's comments suggest that the rhetorical affordances or opportunities of the writing assignment had been undercut by the presence of volunteers whose approach failed to open opportunities to listen to Davis in his own terms and work with Davis in a manner that made him comfortable. In addition, Davis cuts to a core conflict of prompted writing—it needs to be authentic but needs to happen on someone else's schedule and in accordance with another's expectations; it requires motivation, but "being pressed to be motivated doesn't help." Davis highlights aspects of the collaborations that failed to practice community listening. Some volunteers were at times "almost pretending," in the words of Davis, whose sentiment may reflect unwritten thoughts from other students. Davis describes the presence of volunteers as disingenuous and also freighted with narrow expectations around writing process.

It is imperative for nonprofits and other forms of community literacy support in Native learning communities to cultivate listening practices. Listening with all of the feedback gathered from students—dwelling in the contradictions and excesses of expression of the feedback forms—the BFI- šəqačib collaboration may center student words in future organizational revision processes that rethink how the work and timeline, for instance, are framed to both the volunteers and students. In addition, the feedback may provide material to rethink the very process of feedback, moving toward feedback as a community negotiation rather than an assignment. More buy-in as well as more communicative options for students opens paths to both celebratory and critical feedback that may inform a better approach to communally negotiated goals.

Conclusion: Permission to Listen

Future community literacy practice and scholarship needs to continue supporting Native/Indigenous spaces. At the same time, knowing when *not* to be present in order

to best support Native self-determination, by entirely removing oneself or by knowing when to decenter oneself, often takes precedence over the call to actively listen with communities. This is especially true for white educators like me and primarily white organizations like BFI. I mention this as a call to recognize and resist toxic whiteness in community literacy and to underline the importance of invitation and permission. In 2015, Boo and BFI's executive director mutually sought out the collaboration, and Boo arranged for and formally extended an invitation to BFI. This invitation by Boo, with the support of administration at Huchooseedah Native Education, was the sacred tie that enabled BFI's presence with Native youth as they drafted and published pieces of writing. There are myriad complexities inherent in the collaboration, and without Boo's invitation and continual permission there would not have been a relationship.

It is not only the collaboration that is predicated on šǝqačib's permission: this paper represents an extension of Boo's invitation to BFI, and it is with Boo's permission that I write this paper and with Boo's generosity that it has moved through stages of peer review. Boo's active feedback has been invaluable to me as a young scholar who seeks to understand how to pursue justice amid settler colonialism. And I have a long way to go—for instance, drafting this article exposed me to a matrix of privilege related to my power as the single storyteller of complex events. The first draft inadvertently positioned BFI volunteers as the catalysts and enablers of student voice, and in doing so, I reinscribed a dangerous narrative that positions white people as a solution to Native literacy education—the very same problem I sought to oppose (so much for my good intentions!). This first draft also said little of my identity or positionality, including a total foregoing of the first-person voice. I learned that I had defaulted to the voice of a "master narrative," speaking from an imaginary nowhere that is actually a specific site of power (i.e., whiteness, the middle class, US academia). The paper's first reader, Boo, helped me recognize the importance of locating my positionality. Peer reviewers pointed to work by other scholars that helped me understand the value of positionality. Absolon and Willett write, "Identifying, at the outset, the location from which the voice of the researcher emanates is an Aboriginal way of ensuring that those who study, write, and participate in knowledge creation are accountable for their own positionality... We begin by putting ourselves forward. The only voice I can represent is my own and this is where I place myself" (97-99). These scholars, and especially Boo, helped me to understand the importance of methodology in decolonial scholarship.

Permission and invitation are essential to future community literacy collaborations between Native and non-Native people, and the trust that underlies invitation cannot be established without listening. Community listening is a call to recognize different and complex relationships as well as to deeply consider the places where we listen—whether that is a scholarly community in a public school or within other publics—and in doing so it becomes necessary to reflect on the complex interactions between indigenous and settler understandings of place. Whereas land recognitions, such as the one in this paper's opening paragraph, provide one way to do this, listening may open even more ways to resist and rewrite our understanding of the present

and futures of places of mutual habitation—land that is occupied and thefted, storied and contested, and home to many. In the words of Rachel Jackson, "Land, story, and identity intertwine in Indigenous epistemologies, so that a particular location presents layered narratives and storied connections that comprise the present landscape" (46). Projects such as the šəqačib-BFI collaboration offer ways to further open and amplify voices of Native youth as we rethink shared places and communities. Native youth are the experts on lived realities that are too rarely included in broader communal stories. When invited, supporters of writing need to creatively and actively listen *with* communities of Native youth in order to amplify and celebrate these voices.

Notes

1. This characterization of BFI volunteers (i.e. "non-Native") pertains specifically to the 2016 collaboration. In an email, a BFI staff member who supported the 2017 collaboration writes, "I identify as Latinx and Yaqui Indian, and claimed that in our introductions…[A]nother BFI staff member with Native ancestry chose not to identify as such with the group, as he has/had a complicated relationship with his indigenous identity" (BFI Anonymous).

2. The role of volunteers in boarding and assimilation schooling history remains under-investigated, although the Carlisle Indian School Digital Resource Center contains a number of examples (see: http://carlisleindian.dickinson.edu/).

3. In this article, all listed student names are pseudonyms.

4. In order to document the wisdom and voices of šəqačib students, I required great amounts of additional labor (uncompensated, unplanned-for) from Boo, who marked multiple drafts with great care. Boo's words continue to frame my growth as a writing teacher and community member, and I am grateful.

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Joe Concannon received a BA in Religion from Carleton College and an MA in English from the University of Washington, where he is currently writing a doctoral dissertation on everyday readers of poetry in the 1990s. He lives, teaches, and works on the ancestral lands of Duwamish, Muckleshoot, and other Indigenous peoples. He was an employee of BFI during the project period and continues to volunteer there on occasion. Connecting literature to the work that happens in communities is at the core of his work because community members often make use of literature and language in unexpected and transformative ways.