



Winter 2020 Newsletter

We create educational opportunities in correctional settings where the experiences of teaching and (un)learning challenge assumptions, stigmatization and inequality.

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A Word from Shoshana



Hello W2B Network,

Just a brief word to thank you all for your enthusiasm, commitment, generosity and hard work in strengthening and expanding W2B programming and education. In Fall 2019, we expanded our course offerings to Abbotsford, BC, Edmonton, Alberta, and Paris, France, in addition to ongoing classes in Winnipeg, Manitoba and in 4 Ontario locations. Over the last year, we have taught 19 W2B classes, providing the W2B experience to 169 incarcerated students and 168 campus-based students. To date, 92 educators have taken the W2B five-day instructor training facilitated by the GVI collective in Kitchener, ON.

In addition to facilitating classes, several sites across the country have or are in the process of establishing their own W2B collectives in creative and exciting

ways. The GVI collective - the cornerstone of W2B Canada - is very excited and honoured to be able to support these emerging collectives and are involved in continuing efforts to strengthen our training and facilitation skills to ensure we can provide continued support as each geographical region develops their own unique collective visions.

In the coming year, please stay tuned for several W2B Canada initiatives in the works for which we will be requesting your participation!

Wishing you all a wonderful 2020!

In Solidarity,
Shoshana Pollack, Professor, Faculty of Social Work, Wilfrid Laurier University
Director, Walls to Bridges Canada

GVI Collective—Instructor Training June 2019



What do you get when you put 15 educators in a prison for 5 days and ask them to be students and listeners? Usually something messy and amazing. Year after year I see the Walls to Bridges pedagogy and embodied approach to learning and teaching transform both trainers and trainees. After a Walls to Bridges training is finished, I often sit back and dream about the potential ripples of change that are happening in hearts, minds, carceral spaces, and educational spaces all across Canada. When people and institutions join the Walls to Bridges community there is renewed energy given to a movement deeply invested in collaborative learning communities, education equity, and dismantling biases!

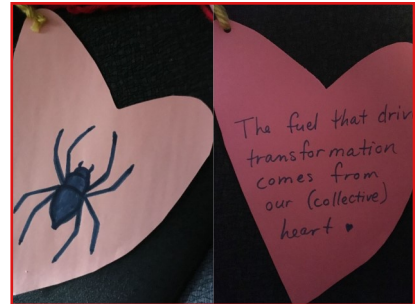
Instructor training 2019 was another reminder to me that Walls to Bridges is not only important, but necessary.

- Laura, GVI Collective Member

To keep you with me
The plane lifts off, heart trembles
The blackbird still sings

- Hannah (trainee), Instructor Training June 2019,
Final Project

This group of trainees really impressed me as I was beginning to question what else could be accomplished for the final project considering the limitations within a carceral setting. This year's group presentation of the final project was heartwarming and thought provoking; it expressed vulnerability, honesty and hope. I have never seen anything close to what they created! It was invigorating and motivating as it reenergized me to the many more creative endeavors we have yet to witness while being a part of this amazing process. As we continue this training experience, I've been meeting more like-minded educators who understand the value in our pedagogy and who understand the need for change within the institutions that surround us. I am grateful for the conversations and connections that occurred in this last training, and as with each training, I am hopeful for a better world.



- Nicola P., GVI Collective Member

GVI Collective—Winnipeg Collective Training Fall 2019

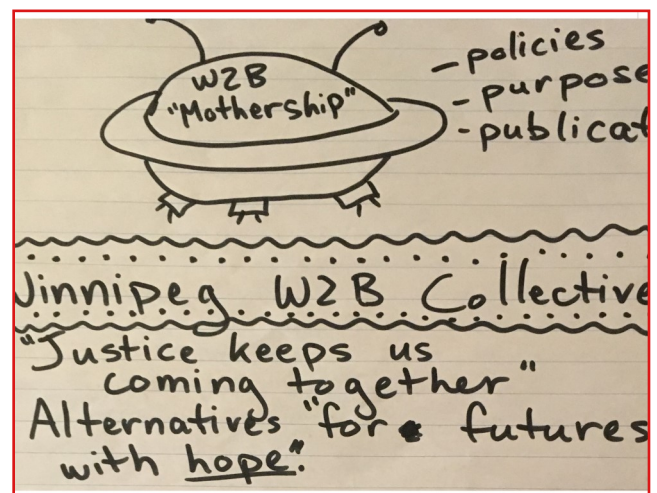
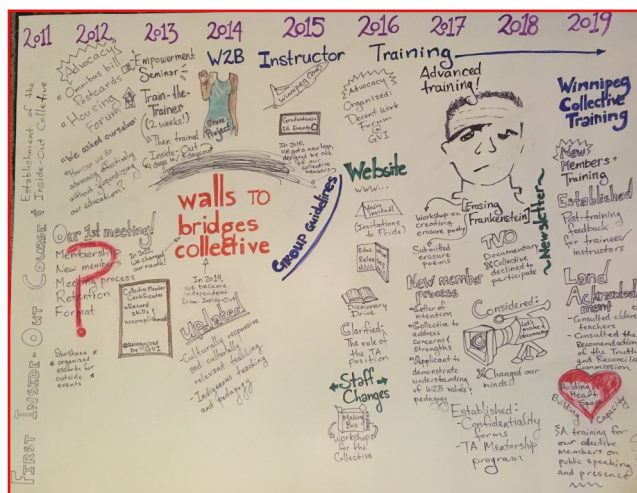
This fall we had an amazing opportunity to meet up with members from the Winnipeg Collective. The Grand Valley Intuition for Women (GVIW) Walls to Bridges Collective was excited to plan and facilitate a 'collective' training and grow with another circle. We came together on October 16th and 17th, 2019 to share our collective experiences and to continue to expand the Walls to Bridges capacity.

In preparation for this training, the GVI Collective got together to finally put to paper, some of who we are and what we do as a Collective. We created a timeline outlining our collective journey which began after the first course in 2011. This was a great opportunity to be able to recount our history with each other, as we have all come to join this amazing circle at different places in our lives.

On the first day of the training, we started with a fire alarm! Despite our late start with this unexpected event, we began linking the experiences of the two circles. One participant said “I, however, grew very comfortable very quickly”. On our second day with each other, Tiina from the Community-based Collective was able to join us, and this was a great way to have the Community Collective intersect with the GVI collective. It was an important dialogue uncovering why we have both the GVI Collective within the prison and the Community Collective outside the prison. These collectives provide spaces for voices to be heard and to have diversity in experiential knowledge. We also discussed collective possibilities and barriers. Some barriers for collectives forming outside the prison include lack of supports for W2B student alumni, transportation issues, funding, and maintaining communication. However, the possibilities keep the vision strong to come together to strive for continuing education, developing new programs or workshops, and creating a space where everyone’s lived experiences is heard as knowledge. These two days highlighted that we each have our unique abilities, and how we complement one another. We shared great memories, amazing conversations and laughter.

We engaged in activities and discussions that expanded not only our Walls to Bridges family, but all of our knowledge. Another participant wrote, “I really enjoyed my time here and am truly grateful for inviting us into your space and sharing your knowledge. Meegwitch.” This was a lived experience that called us to bring our whole selves. We wish continued success to each other, within our circles.

- Jennifer, GVI Collective Member



My experience with our recent and first time Collective Training was absolutely amazing. To be able to share space with a group of individuals that share similar foundational values and visions, and are interested in exploring them and watching the transformation is an experience that cannot be compared to anything else. Learning and un-learning, sharing and teaching; the circles we, as Walls to Bridges and as a Collective, get to experience and share with others is so fruitful and should be shared everywhere. I am so grateful for this experience and to be able to share my experience in W2B with others, and I am looking forward to sharing more. I am so proud of everyone! Way to go W2B Collective!

- Terri, GVI Collective Member

Announcement

Walls to Bridges is excited to announce we are planning an Advanced W2B Instructor Training in Spring 2021!

Stay tuned for more information!

A Word from the Community Collective

November 15, 2019 proved to be well worth the journey (not to mention prep time and effort) to Kingston, Ontario as we were greeted with enthusiasm and much anticipation from folks at Queen's University.

As we began our introduction spiel, the circle palpitated with positive energy and eagerness and did not let up throughout our delivery of the art of letting go of traditional teaching in the classroom. Paulo Friere and Parker Palmer provided reinforcements as well.

All activities were well received; in fact the icebreaker was so boisterous, and could be heard in every corner of the 5th floor, that the doors to the workshop were mysteriously closed - no doubt by an irritated staff in a nearby office. The icebreaker was followed by a very intense, detailed small group discussion. After a brief break, the participants were divided into 3 groups for tableaux - it seems this group are all natural born performers - they absolutely nailed both depicting barriers to participating in post-secondary education while incarcerated, and a vision of what a W2B class might look like. We closed with a one word go-around then Q&A for folks who could not get enough of what W2B offered. Another success owed to all in attendance both in person and in spirit!

- Lorraine has been part of the W2B student alumni since 2011 and continues to be a phenomenal W2B community collective member through workshop development and facilitation.



W2B Across Canada

University of Guelph

In the Fall 2019 term, I had the honour and pleasure of teaching a new course through the Walls to Bridges program: an undergraduate memoir writing course offered by the University of Guelph at Grand Valley Institution for Women in Kitchener.

It took more than a year of planning and organizing to line up the course. After the five-day training course put on by the W2B collective inside Grand Valley Institution, in June 2018, I had to pitch the idea to the director of the School of English and Theatre Studies at the University of Guelph, where I am a professor of creative writing. I also had meetings with the dean of arts, the university registrar, the university legal counsel, and the fundraising person in the College of Arts to line up the paperwork and secure the funding. This entire process took about 15 months. Another important step in preparing to teach the course was to secure funding to hire a graduate student from the U of Guelph and an educational assistant at Grand Valley Institution.

Finally, I interviewed inside and outside students who wished to take the course. Ten incarcerated women and eleven traditionally registered University of Guelph students enrolled in the course. The course unfolded very well.



Photo: Lawrence Hill participating in the Spring 2018 training along with other instructors.

I had a feeling that the inside and outside students would bond with each other, and this instinct was confirmed in our second class. My brother, the singer-songwriter Dan Hill, was in class to speak about his life as a memoirist and songwriter. He was playing the guitar and singing a sad song. A student in the class - someone who had experienced a family tragedy in the recent past -- began to cry. Another student immediately and naturally gave her a big hug. It was a tender and lovely moment, and it foreshadowed all the ways that the inside and outside students would support and learn from each other over the next weeks.

Students took great risks, and told deeply personal stories, which revealed stress, pain, tragedy, loss and love in their lives. The level of intimate sharing on the page astonished me, and the tenderness and respect which peers received each other's stories left me feeling deeply gratified. This sharing was made possible by successful efforts in our first class to formulate a privacy plan. Students agreed to respect the privacy of

others who shared their stories in class. Students agreed that outside of class, they would not name or otherwise identify their peers, or tell their stories. We agreed that it was up to each individual to decide if they wished to share their own story outside the classroom. Many students said that they were writing for the first time about their personal lives, and finding it the experience both painful but transcendent.

Because of the nature of the class in circle, with virtually no lecturing or traditional teaching, I complemented the in-class activities by providing detailed, written notes to each student for each work they submitted. Students also provided one-on-one feedback to their peers. Students told me that this process of writing, sharing, giving and receiving feedback was one of the richest aspects of the course. I felt that students and course assistants were profoundly moved, motivated and stimulated by the course, and I certainly was too. I certainly learned as much from the students as they learned from me.

-Lawrence Hill

In addition to being an avid supporter of Walls to Bridges, Lawrence Hill is a professor of creative writing at the University of Guelph, and is the author of ten books, including *The Book of Negroes*, *The Illegal*, and *Black Berry Sweet Juice: On Being Black and White in Canada*. He can be reached at lhill03@uoguelph.ca, or through his website: www.lawrencehill.com

University of Alberta

After years of relationship building and months of grant writing and preparation, the University of Alberta and The Edmonton Institution for Women (EIFW) launched their first Walls to Bridges course in the Fall of 2019. Hosted by The Faculty of Native Studies, NS280 Indigenous Resilience boasted 30 students total. With support from our Provost's Office, The University of Alberta is committed to funding four years of Walls to Bridges courses. In the meantime, we'll be creating new courses and looking for long term financial support!

The Walls to Bridges team at UAlberta is a collective of women including Tracy Bear, Sara Howdle, Jen Ward, Allison Sivak, and Lisa Prins. The collective has been offering informal classes and building relationships with women and Elders at EIFW for the past two years. This relationship is centred around increasing support for incarcerated Indigenous women and making post-secondary education more accessible. Our work has culminated in launching a Walls to Bridges program, as well as developing a post-incarceration education support program where women from Buffalo Sage Wellness House can take free courses on-campus, either to audit or for credit.



Photo: Student art from the Indigenous Resilience course - week of exploring Indigenous Sci-Fi and Futurisms

It's been an incredible whirlwind experience. We're particularly grateful for the relationships we've developed with Elders who work inside EIFW. In western Canada, prison populations range from 70-80% Indigenous. The historical and contemporary impact of colonization is not only dealt with in our course material, but the way our students, inside and out, navigate their lives. Elders participate in class discussions and bring a wealth of knowledge to the program. As we approach the closing celebration, we can't wait to thank the students, Elders, and staff that help make this program possible. Our next class is a Women's and Gender Studies course titled "Indigenous Women, Autobiography, and Life Writing." It's scheduled to begin January 2020.

Tracy Bear, Faculty of Native Studies, Women's and Gender Studies

Sara Howdle, Faculty of Native Studies

Jennifer Ward, Centre for Teaching and Learning

Allison Sivak, Libraries

Lisa Prins, Community Service Learning

Capilano University & University of B.C.

The 1st Walls to Bridges class in British Columbia's Fraser Valley was a great success. Capilano University and the Fraser Valley Institution held the course "Human Geography through a Carceral Lens" and faculty from several universities came to witness our graduation, as well as W2B Kitchener collective member Shay. During our Human Geography course, facilitated by Kirsten McIlveen, students quickly fell in love with the program and within the first few weeks of class, were envisioning ways we could continue our work after the semester's end. The class decided to develop a collective in B.C. for our final project. The collective's 1st meeting is on January 14th and we are hopeful to build a strong collective to support the program in B.C. The Fraser Valley is home to a cluster of penitentiaries in close proximity that we will be seeking partnership with. Pacific Region is fully supportive of our B.C. collective and will enable inside students from various institutions to participate.

2020 is set to bring further courses to FVI through Capilano University, including the 1st class offered through the University of British Columbia. UBC has even developed a certificate program for inside students who successfully complete three classes. The University of the Fraser Valley (located two blocks from the Matsqui prison complex where FVI is located) are also developing their partnership with Walls to Bridges and will be graciously hosting the space for our collective meetings. In the meantime, we are looking forward to supporting Reg, our newest W2B facilitator, as he plans a literature course through Capilano in the spring at FVI!

With love and solidarity,
Walls to Bridges B.C.



American University of Paris

The Prison Education Workshop at The American University of Paris, taught by Hannah Taieb and Albert Wu with the participation of Michelle Kuo, was a truly special experience. We met once a week at La Santé prison. After the semester ended, the AUP students were all hopeful and enthusiastic to continue the project. I think I speak for all of us when I say that this was a very positive learning experience and the projects of Walls to Bridges are just beginning in France.

We read texts that were engaging and everyone could relate to, including Malcom X, Azouz Begag, and Rigoberta Menchu. Writing literature on our personal stories based on these authors' work was a very intimate process. There was a very good ambiance in the classroom and the inside and outside students got on very well. It was a really good group and I already miss spending Wednesday afternoons at La Santé.

The inside and outside students developed a unique relationship and it was an excellent opportunity to study languages for both groups of students as the class was mainly taught in French and most of the outside students and some inside students were not native speakers. I think we all learned a bit more about ourselves as well as each other. We had a really special environment in the classroom without any problems or disputes and I hope to continue to be a part of projects such as these in the future.



Photo: Cover of the booklet that the class produced of their writings, in French and English (with one text also in Icelandic and one text in Spanish). The image on the cover is by Alayna Amrein.

-Vera Jonsdottir, outside student

Thank you Kitchener Waterloo Community Foundation (KWCF) for your support & all other folks who have given generously to the W2B program!



Check out our website www.wallstobridges.ca for W2B publications, articles and the recent TVO video clip for further information.

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