Notice of the Final Oral Examination
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

of

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MA (Simon Fraser University, 2005)
BSc (University of Victoria, 1994)

“Small Museums on Vancouver Island as Agents of Change”

Department of Educational Psychology and Leadership Studies

Tuesday, May 25, 2021
9:30am
Remote Defence

Supervisory Committee:
Dr. Darlene Clover, Department of Educational Psychology and Leadership Studies, University of Victoria (Supervisor)
Dr. Catherine McGregor, Department of Educational Psychology and Leadership Studies, UVic (Member)
Dr. Kathy Sanford, Department of Curriculum and Instruction, UVic (Outside Member)

External Examiner:
Dr. Janet Groen, Werklund School of Education, University of Calgary

Chair of Oral Examination:
Dr. Margo Matwychuk, Department of Anthropology, UVic

Dr. Stephen Evans, Acting Dean, Faculty of Graduate Studies
Abstract

This study explored how workers in two small museums on Vancouver Island were responding curatorially and pedagogically to the social issues of our times. It was inspired from my own work in a small museum, as well as the idea that museums can be agents of change in our deeply troubled world. Specifically, I investigated how these small museum workers integrated new critical and creative practices into their daily work and the challenges and constraints they faced. Adopting institutional ethnography as inquiry, I used interviews, participant observation and focus groups to explore how the study participants navigated community relations, historical discourses, exclusions and institutional restrictions. My findings show the participants tackling issues of power and privilege by enacting cultural democracy through shared curatorial authority; actively engaging with a diversity of communities; integrating women’s lives and issues in the exhibits; using the archives to share lesser-known histories; and employing a variety of aesthetic and embodied practices to raise awareness and engage community. While some visitors and members were resistant to the changes, my study suggests that most welcomed the new stories and practices, which speaks to how the participants mobilised pedagogies of challenge and care. Challenges remained in the forms of a gendered bureaucracy; lack of funding; and job precarity. I conclude this study with recommendations for how small museums might be further supported in this important curatorial and pedagogical work. These include the development of regional and collaborative learning frameworks; the re-imagining of governance; and the adoption of ‘decent work’ principles in these institutions.