A Message from the President of STLHE: Witnessing Harmony Achieved at STLHE 2015

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STLHE's 2015 Conference in Vancouver was unforgettable for many reasons, not least the Ut'sam or Witness Ceremony with which it began and ended. The selection of peer-reviewed articles in this volume of CELT bear witness to the proceedings of the conference, and will help bring back some of the richness of research, experience, and sharing that characterized the many concurrent sessions. In these few words of introduction, I'd like to recall my role as a different kind of witness to that event in order to conjure the larger context within which this scholarship first unfolded as papers in face-to-face sessions.

The conference was opened by Musqueam Elder Larry Grant of the University of British Columbia, who gave the traditional First Nations welcome, after which Dr. Rudy Reimer/Yumks of Simon Fraser University provided an Ut'sam, or Witness ceremony. I was honoured to be called forward by Dr. Reimer as one of the four witnesses who were commissioned with the responsibility to remain constantly mindful of my own experiences of the conference, and in this way to develop and remember my own perspective on what I would see and hear. We were asked, in effect, to become the eyes and ears of the meeting, and at the end we were to stand up and speak about what we had heard, seen, and learned. Differing perspectives are always necessary to understand the whole of any human event, and such witnesses can be called upon, should there be any future disagreement about what transpired, to offer perspectives for everyone else to consider. As a symbolic reminder of this

responsibility I was given a gift of several coins to carry with me throughout the conference.

At the end of the conference those coins gave me the courage to speak what I had indeed seen and heard. That same opportunity arises again here, so I offer a transcription of the witness I bore in the final moments of the conference:

- At one of the coffee breaks, I overheard a STLHE delegate exclaim, "I can't believe I'm at a place where everyone cares about teaching!"
- Early one morning, I attended the Annual Meeting of one of our Special Interest Groups, where the Chair was ecstatic: "I only expected 20 to attend, and there are 80 people here ... no, wait—90!"
- On the last night of the conference, I caught out of the corner of my eye the trickster at work! After all, we move and breathe in a field of radical creativity—of messy, unpredictable, uncontrollable creativity. From this angle, I saw actors presenting uncomfortable truths, made bearable by humour. I saw skepticism and even deep suspicion broken down by open, risky dialogue. I saw mistakes made and forgiven; I saw imperfections met with compassion.
- And lastly, especially among the Student Fellows, I saw brave defiance of cultural norms and stereotypes—and the expression of unfettered joy!

The articles that follow are all written by people who, like the coffee-break delegate, genuinely care

about teaching. The authors are among those whose appearance in person at our conference last summer contributed to the rising memberships in all sectors of our Society. To the work of STLHE they bring the courage to speak uncomfortable truths, to engage in risky dialogue, to deconstruct stereotypes in order to create space for new growth, and to greet the inevitable messiness of human endeavours with humour, compassion, and, in the end, joy.

I still carry the coins in a pouch I designed for the purpose. It is an honour to carry the gift of the Ut'sam on your behalf.