

The Conference Agenda

Autochthonous¹ Scholars:

Toward an Indigenous Research Model

University of Alberta, Edmonton, Canada

A Graduate-Level Education Conference

March 15-18, 1995

This International/Interdisciplinary conference brought together Autochthonous scholars from across North America. Until recently no graduate program anywhere in North America offered a doctorate in First Nations education. The scholars who attended this conference formed the adjunct faculty for the proposed graduate program (MEd and PhD) in First Nations Education at the University of Alberta in Edmonton (now established). The conference explored the need for Indigenous research models in mainstream institutions of higher learning.

Historically, Indigenous learning and teaching models have been virtually ignored in many universities. Uniquely different models for conducting and validating Indigenous research have also been neglected. This may be one reason why many universities, particularly at the graduate level, have had little success in attracting and retaining Indigenous students, and it may be the *key* reason why so few Indigenous people in Canada hold university degrees.

Because the program seeks to look at Indigenous knowledge from a global perspective, scholars from both the United States and Canada are involved. While maintaining and honoring their own separate realities, grounded in a unique form of inquiry and research, these Autochthonous scholars have succeeded and excelled in mainstream universities. They have kept their cultural roots intact and have gathered strength and assistance from their culture and their Elders.

Professors, students, and potential scholars gained new perspectives at the conference. Indigenous students were validated in their ability to succeed; instructors were exposed to new ways of teaching, learning, and working in a university setting.

Format of the Conference

Blessings and insights from the four directions were brought by Elders from the east, south, west, and north. Each day began with a traditional blessing ceremony. Indigenous scholars then presented their insights into Indigenous knowledge and expression. The audience comprised Aboriginal graduate students, senior undergraduate Aboriginal students

¹An original inhabitant/originating from the soil/from the land.

seeking insights into future graduate programs, and professors wishing to assess their abilities and gain new perspectives for working with graduate Aboriginal students. Elders were present throughout the conference and gave their assessment of both the content and the process. The ultimate purpose for the conference was to establish concrete support and input for a Graduate Program in First Nations Education.

Conference Site

Conference proceedings moved between a number of locations on campus. Pipe ceremonies and early morning traditional ceremonies were held in the Kiva, Education Centre North. Speakers were heard in the Map Room in Lister Hall on Wednesday and Thursday and in the Banquet Room at Lister Hall on Friday and Saturday.

Conference at a Glance

Wednesday, March 15

1:00 a.m.-3:00 p.m. *Opening Pipe Ceremony*
Local Elders Ralph and Regina Cardinal invited the Elder from the east to bring traditional blessings

3:00-4:30 p.m. *Opening Remarks*
Elder Tom Porter (Mohawk), Cornwall Island, Ontario

6:00 p.m. *Banquet*

Keynote Speech

Terry Tafoya, PhD (University of Washington), Taos Pueblo
"Finding Harmony: Balancing Traditional Values with Western Science in Therapy"

Thursday, March 16

7:00-8:00 a.m. *Traditional Ceremony*
Local Elders invited the Elder from the south to bring her blessings.
Elder Josephine Padilla (Isthleta), Albuquerque, New Mexico

9:00 - 10:15 a.m. *Presentation*
Carlos Cordero, MA (Harvard), Mayan, President, Alaska Native College
"A Working and Evolving Definition of Culture"

10:45 a.m.-12:00 noon *Presentation*
Beatrice Medicine, PhD (University of Wisconsin, Madison), Lakota / Sioux
"Prologue to a Vision of Aboriginal Education"

1:30-2:45 p.m. *Presentation*
Eber Hampton, EdD (Harvard), Chickasaw, President, Saskatchewan Indian Federated College
"Memory Comes Before Knowledge: Research May Improve if Researchers Remember their Motives"

3:15-4:30 p.m. *Roundtable Panel Discussion*
Ruth Norton, MEd (Carleton), Ojibway, Fort Alexander First Nation
Carl Urion, PhD (University of Alberta), Metis, Professor of
Anthropology

Evening *Mini Pow-Wow*
Sponsored by Aboriginal Student Council, University of Alberta
Friday, March 17

7:00 -8:00 a.m. *Traditional Ceremony*
Local Elders invited the Elder from the west to bring blessings.
Elder Margaret Gannon, British Columbia

9:00 - 10:15 a.m. *Presentation*
Stan Wilson, PhD (UCSB), Cree, Opaskwayak Cree Nation, Professor,
University of Alberta
"Honoring Spiritual Knowledge"

10:45 a.m.-12:00 noon *Harvard Graduate Student Panel*
Marcella Gachupin (Zia /Jemez Pueblo), Harvard Graduate School of
Education
Alexandria Wilson (Cree), Harvard Graduate School of Education
Andrew Lee (Seneca), Harvard's Kennedy School of Government
Nimachia Hernandez (Blackfeet), Harvard Graduate School of Education
"Meeting the Challenge: Overcoming the Odds"

1:30-3:00 p.m. *Roundtable Discussion*
Ralph Makokis, University of Alberta, graduate student in the
Department of Geography
George Sioui, PhD (Laval), Huron-Wendat, Academic Dean of
Saskatchewan Indian Federated College, Regina
Cora Weber-Pillwax, MEd (University of Alberta) Metis, Superintendent,
Northlands School Division

6:00 p.m. *Round Dance*
Sponsored by Aboriginal Student Council
Saturday, March 18

7:00-8:00 a.m. *Traditional Ceremony*
Local Elders invited the Elder from the north to bring her blessings.
Elder Gertie Tom (Ta'n Kwach'an), Whitehorse, Yukon

9:00 a.m.- 12:00 noon
Conference Elders, participants, and presenters broke into groups to
discuss the conference, implications of presentations, and hopes for the
future program

1:30-3:30 p.m. *Traditional Giveaway and Closing Prayers*