

Book Reviews

CJNE accepts reviews of recent publications about Indigenous issues. Book reviews should be 750-1,250 words in length; typed, double-spaced, and in 12-point font. If a book review is accepted for publication, the author will be asked to supply the final draft electronically with author's name and program used.

Please submit manuscripts to:

Karen Kutyn, Administrative Assistant
The Canadian Journal of Native Education
Department of Educational Policy Studies
Indigenous Peoples' Education Program
7-104 Education North
University of Alberta
Edmonton AB T6G 2G5

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Editorial: Mobilizing Indigenous Epistemologies: Re-visioning Reconciliation

Jeannette Sinclair

"Mobilizing Indigenous Epistemologies: Re-visioning Reconciliation"
March 25-27, 2015—Faculty of Education, University of Alberta

Conference Overview

"Mobilizing Indigenous Epistemologies: Re-visioning Reconciliation" was the fifth international Indigenous scholars conference hosted in Edmonton, Alberta by the University of Alberta's Indigenous Peoples Education (IPE) specialization within the Department of Educational Policy Studies (EPS).

IPE facilitates opportunities for Indigenous graduate students and faculty members to engage with distinct Indigenous knowledge systems



Figure 1. 2015 Indigenous Scholars conference space.

within the Western intellectual academy. In alignment with the Association of Canadian Deans of Education's 2010 launch of the Accord on Indigenous Education, this conference sought to attract Indigenous scholars and Elders, faculty, graduate and undergraduate students, Indigenous educators, researchers, professionals, and community members with an interest in advanced education relating to First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples in Canada.

The conference theme was developed by the innovative master's cohort of the IPE graduate program. The cohort included 10 IPE master's students who were registered in a graduate course in the fall 2014 term and who planned and organized the 2015 Indigenous Scholars conference. The course instructor, Dr. Cora Weber-Pillwax, carefully guided the students with their academic presentations, and assisted them in developing the conference theme and actualizing the conference itself, from fundraising to mentorship and all other aspects.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) hearings were underway across Canada at the time. Thousands of survivors of the Indian residential school system were sharing with the TRC commissioners their stories and experiences of abuse, and of the impacts left by the residential schools operating for over a century in Canada. Although the TRC's findings and *Calls to Action* report were not released until later that year, the issue of reconciliation was at the forefront of Indigenous peoples' minds across the country. The IPE students in the cohort had been engaging with courses such as *Indigenous Research Methodologies*, *Revitalization of Indigenous Languages*, and *Contextualizing Epistemologies in Higher Education: Theory in Action*. They had several discussions in class about what the concept of reconciliation meant to them in particular, while they were engaging with their own Indigenous epistemologies in their work.

The conference event was held over four days and divided into four sections, each of which offered unique areas of engagement: the pre-conference, conference, banquet, and post-conference. The pre-conference, held on March 25, 2015, was an opportunity for IPE master's and doctoral graduate students to present their work within the context of the conference theme to the Indigenous guest scholars, and to receive feedback from them as well as from the conference participants in the audience. The intention of the 2015 conference organizers was to publish the conference proceedings, as was done for the 1995 *Canadian Journal of Native Education* (CJNE) publication, resulting from the initial Indigenous Scholars conference held in 1995 under the leadership of the founders of the IPE specialization (formerly known as the First Nations Education Program), Drs. Stan and Peggy Wilson.

Conference Objectives

The 2015 Indigenous Scholars conference was planned and organized primarily by graduate students in the IPE master's innovative cohort, with the assistance of the conference lead and conference coordinator. The objective was to highlight Indigenous/Aboriginal thought, perspectives, and research approaches that aligned with the theme, and to reflect advanced educational studies being carried out across Canada and internationally. Faculty and graduate students from a wide range of disciplines were invited to register and actively participate in an agenda that included renowned Indigenous scholars and Elders. We anticipated that this four-day event would be an inspiration to Indigenous students, faculty, educators, and community members, as it has been for past IPE conferences.

Other conference objectives included:

- highlighting the work of the IPE specialization, and the profile of educational policy studies within Indigenous graduate studies and Aboriginal education generally
- enhancing and increasing the potential for recruitment of Indigenous/Aboriginal students, particularly at the graduate level
- providing opportunities for significant linkages with various levels of government, including municipal, provincial, federal, and Indigenous governance entities
- providing opportunities for academic connections between Indigenous students and faculty members across the various faculties and programs on campus (e.g., education, native studies, nursing, law, medicine)
- enhancing and supporting collaborative efforts between Indigenous/Aboriginal academics and Indigenous/Aboriginal professionals working in the fields/disciplines of education, social work, and other human and social sciences.

Official Greetings and Ceremonies

Dignitaries were invited to bring greetings from Treaty 6, the University of Alberta, the City of Edmonton, and the Province of Alberta. In keeping with the conference theme, Mayor Don Iveson was asked to address the audience in recognition of the declaration from March 2014 to March 2015 as a year of reconciliation with Aboriginal people.

Ceremony was integral to the conference. Throughout the four days, the morning pipe ceremonies were led by Elder John Crier. John has been

working with the IPE specialization since 2006 and was called on to provide the spiritual guidance that was needed prior to the event as well as throughout the four days. Elders who had provided guidance and support to the IPE specialization over the years were honoured at the conference banquet.

The founders of IPE, Dr. Stan Wilson and Dr. Peggy Wilson, were honoured at the pre-conference event with an honour song led by Dr. Sockbeson, assisted by her peers and the graduate students. They were wrapped lovingly in a beautiful Pendleton blanket, acknowledging their work and commitment to create space in academia for Indigenous graduate students to study within an Indigenous paradigm. IPE doctoral alumni were honoured with song and presented with eagle feathers for attaining their PhDs in Indigenous Peoples Education at the University of Alberta. The stems of the feathers were beautifully beaded by one of the men working with Elder Crier at the Pê Sâkâstêw Centre, who chose to remain anonymous but who expressed his honour to be able to decorate the feathers for the IPE doctoral alumni. Elder John Crier shared with the alumni that when people are given eagle feathers it's a reminder of the storm that the eagle must weather to get to its destination.

Following the pre-conference graduate student presentations, an evening event hosted by the IPE master's cohort, *Story Night*, was held with Indigenous poets, authors, and storytellers who shared their work with conference participants and the general public. Noon hour cultural performances were offered over three days by booksellers, Indigenous artisans, and craftspeople present for the duration of the conference. Dr. Cindy Blackstock delivered an inspiring keynote address at the banquet held on March 26 at the University of Alberta's Faculty Club. The post-conference event, "*Expressions of Reconciliation: Creating Bridges of Understanding*", was aimed at youth and held on the evening of Friday, March 27 and on Saturday, March 28, 2015. The workshops concluded with a circle of friendship round dance in memory of our late sister Lorraine Sinclair *Asani Waciwiskwew*, who passed on ten years prior to this event on March 28, 2005. Elders Jean Aquash, John Crier, Margaret and Eric Cardinal, and the late Jerry Wood shared stories and traditional songs with the audience. The drum group singers Cree Confederacy, led by Dallas Waskahat and Fawn Wood, provided a perfect round dance ending, completing the four-day event with the participation of Elders, scholars, youth, family, and community.

Additional information about the *Story Night* event, the post-conference workshops, and other aspects of the conference is included in Rochelle Starr's *Afterword*.

Conference Acknowledgements

Thank you to the conference donors and to the funders of the youth bridging workshops whose names are listed on the back pages of the conference program included in this publication. Your generosity is most appreciated. We could not have done this four-day event without you.

University of Alberta staff supported the conference in many ways. Thanks are extended to Dr. Fern Snart, Dean of the Faculty of Education; to Dr. Jennifer Kelly, Chair of Educational Policy Studies; and to EPS administrative staff members Mr. Stu White, Ms. Joan White, and Ms. Rita Veldkamp-Nyman. The support of Interim EPS Chair, Dr. Dianne Oberg, and current EPS Chair, Dr. Larry Prochner, allowed me the time to complete the work needed to finish this publication.

Thank you to Information Services and Technology at the University of Alberta who provided videotaping and video editing of the academic presentations, follow-up discussions, banquet, and *Story Night*. The academic presentations and multiple conference discussions were meticulously transcribed by Lisa Panepinto, including the portions of presentations that drew on various Indigenous languages. The video presentations and transcriptions were then provided to the individual speakers at the end of 2015 for their review and editing. Thank you to Ashley Sykes Photography and Kennymak Websites and Graphic Designs for capturing the essence of the conference in their beautiful photographs.

In 2016, during her term as Interim Chair for the Department of Educational Policy Studies, Dr. Dianne Oberg provided a pivotal role in editing the manuscripts, offering much needed guidance and support throughout the editing process. In 2018, Dr. Oberg continued to provide hands-on editing expertise to further the journal's completion during the summer and fall of 2018. Her commitment to help see this through is deeply appreciated, particularly considering her Professor Emerita status and the length of time it took to bring the publication to completion.

I am grateful for Angela Wolfe's vision of the conference room as ceremonial space, which created the essence of ceremony for the event. She guided her peers in the cohort to assist in decorating the space with natural earth elements from our mother earth, coloured prints in the four directions, and blankets with Indigenous designs. I want to sincerely thank the IPE faculty for their guidance, participation, and support of the conference and this publication: Dr. Cora Weber-Pillwax, Dr. Rebecca Sockbeson, and Dr. Evelyn Steinhauer. A special thank you is extended to Cora for entrusting me with the role of conference lead, and for providing ongoing guidance and support in so many ways. Thank you to all the IPE doctoral

alumni and faculty who skillfully took on the role of discussants following the academic presentations.

I want to express gratitude to our Master of Ceremonies, Lewis Cardinal. In his opening remarks during the pre-conference, in acknowledging the land on which Edmonton is located, he reminded us that, even before the forts came, this was: "a great gathering place of Indigenous nations who came here to trade, celebrate, exchange knowledge, to learn from each other, and to do ceremony. And that's the kind of spirit that I already feel in this room. We've come together as Indigenous people, Indigenous scholars, to exchange with each other from the heart, and from the mind. The work that we're doing and the spirit of our ancestors made this place what it is."

I am also very grateful to Elder John Crier for his wealth of wisdom, his openness and generosity in sharing his knowledge, his family, his community, and those with whom he works. Prior to the opening prayer, John invited the audience to pray in our own way, in our minds, in our hearts, that we have more of these gatherings, "And when we gather together, we strengthen each other. We take, and we offer each other life. We continue what our ancestors wanted for us. We are the evidence that their prayers were answered. So we'll pray also for our children, our grandchildren, and the ones yet to come, that our prayers will also be answered."

I am deeply grateful to each of the presenters—the graduate students and the Indigenous scholars, those who were local and especially those who travelled from afar—and to all members of the community who contributed to the collective learning, sharing their hearts, their minds, and spirits with everyone. Your brilliance will continue to lift and inspire us. Building on Indigenous scholar Shawn Wilson's text, *Research is Ceremony* (2008), I would like to suggest that, for many of us, *this conference was ceremony*.

I want to offer a special thank you to the conference coordinator, Rochelle Starr, who truly was a star in the organizing of this event. She was my right arm throughout the conference. We both missed most of the academic presentations and discussions in order to stay on top of the multiple tasks needing attention, including a few late nights on campus to ensure that we were on target with our funding. Our reward is this publication and all that we learned along the way. I look forward to hearing her presentation at the next Indigenous Scholars conference, which we hope will not be too far in the future.

A special thank you goes to the IPE master's cohort for their patience and trust in my role as Academic Director of the IPE master's innovative cohort. The cohort included Eileen Marthiensen, Jenna Weber, Karen Delver, Pamela Quinn, and Vivian Wirth who convoked in fall 2015; and

Angela Wolfe, Harley Courtoreille, Janine Laboucan, Kelsey Reed, and Toni Warrior who convoked in fall 2016. Our collective learning experience was enriching and life-giving for us all. It was an honour to walk with all of you on your journey to attain your master's degrees (2013-2016).

I take responsibility for any mistakes that were inadvertently made in the publication of the conference proceedings. In hindsight, it would have been ideal to capture some of the gems of wisdom that were shared by community members, scholars, and Elders in the discussions that followed the academic presentations. The wisdom of lived Indigenous experience and ancestral presence filled the space in the room and in our hearts. It was an uplifting event that fed us all, and perhaps, even our ancestors.

Dedication

This issue of the *Canadian Journal of Native Education* is dedicated to the memory of our friend and colleague, the late Dr. Jo-Ann Episkewew, who presented at our 2015 Indigenous Scholars conference. We were blessed with her presence, her wisdom and humour, and the openness in which she embraced us all.

With deep gratitude,
Kinanâskom'tinawaw
 Jeannette Sinclair
 Guest Editor