

Afterword

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Conference Coordinator

In my role as the conference coordinator, guided by Dr. Cora Weber-Pillwax, Dr. Jeannette Sinclair, and the IPE master's cohort, my work was to bring to life the vision behind the conference theme, *Mobilizing Indigenous Epistemologies: Re-visioning Reconciliation*. As a Cree woman from Little Pine First Nation, I saw the theme as an opportunity: an opportunity to create a space for Indigenous visionaries, philosophers, community members, Elders, and ceremonialists to come together and discuss how we, as Indigenous peoples, can live out our Indigenous knowledge, support students in their ability to access Indigenous knowledge, and to think of ways in which the university could support that access. Re-visioning reconciliation was grounded within our ancient knowledge systems, and we as Indigenous peoples were and are guided by our teachings and values. Creating a space where coming together and discussing could happen meant laying down a spiritual foundation for this convergence to occur. This was done in ceremony prior to the conference proceedings, creating a spiritual space where our ancestors were also invited into these important discussions. The spiritual foundation was embedded in every aspect of the conference.

The conference agenda was designed to nourish the wholeness of our beings as Indigenous peoples, and our intention was to ensure that all participants would be nurtured mentally, spiritually, emotionally, and physically. The scholars were given tobacco to share, along with not only their academic knowledge but also the sacred teachings they held. Each was presented with a gift and a ribbon from the trees in the conference space as a memento of the conference. We began each morning with a pipe ceremony. We had workshops that supported participants to think from their hearts. The food was also very important: we served Indigenous cuisine, such as buffalo, salmon, bannock, and berries. Another important aspect of this conference was that we were a team: we came together as one for the sake of our people. We laughed together, we prayed together, we sang together, we cried together, we thought a lot, and we all had a voice. All of this supported relationship building, community building, and visioning—and, in essence, we mobilized Indigenous epistemologies and we re-visioned what reconciliation means to us.

During the evening of the pre-conference, entertainment and education were provided for our guests. *Story Night* was a venue to share traditional ways of being in this contemporary arena. Aaron Paquette, Tanya Lukin-Linklator, Fawn and Dallas Waskahat, Dawn Marie Marchand, and our own IPE singers captivated the audience with their stories, songs, and dance. Conference guests were exposed to Cree, Métis, and Inuit experiences that brought them on a journey towards another way of understanding the world.

The official conference began on Thursday, March 26, 2015. Our Elder, John Crier, opened the conference with a prayer. Many other dignitaries were present and brought greetings: Chief Randy Ermineskin of Ermineskin Cree Nation in Maskwacis; Don Iveson, Mayor of Edmonton; Dr. Roger Epp, Deputy Provost, University of Alberta; Dr. Fern Snart, Dean, Faculty of Education; Dr. Jennifer Kelly, Chair, Educational Policy Studies; IPE faculty Dr. Cora Weber-Pillwax, Dr. Evelyn Steinhauer, and Dr. Rebecca Sockbeson; and Dr. Jeannette Sinclair, Academic Director, IPE innovative master's cohort and conference lead. Following the opening of the conference was a recognition ceremony for IPE doctoral alumni. Each of the alumni was gifted with an eagle feather, honouring their perseverance, diligence, determination, and integrity—all needed to earn a PhD in Indigenous Peoples Education.

As the conference continued, Indigenous scholars provided insightful and meaningful ways to understand the conference theme, *Mobilizing Indigenous Epistemologies: Re-visioning Reconciliation*. Exploration of the conference theme continued at the banquet, held at the University of Alberta's Faculty Club on the evening of Thursday, March 26, 2015. Dr. Cindy Blackstock delivered a powerful presentation on the role of reconciliation and Indigenous children. Many were deeply inspired and enlightened. Following the meal, there was an honouring ceremony for all of the Elders who have guided the IPE program over the years. Dr. Cora Weber-Pillwax was honoured and recognized for her lifetime commitment to Indigenous peoples education and her enduring love for her students. The Wabasca drum group sang an honour song for her that uplifted us all. The night was capped off with a musical performance by Carl Quinn, a Cree musician from Saddle Lake, Alberta, followed by a round dance. The evening provided an opportunity to further engage with our theme; honouring and recognizing those who have paved a way for our future generations is one way to understand reconciliation.

The conference concluded on Friday, March 27, 2015. On Saturday, post-conference workshops created many opportunities for self-reflection by participants, as well as for positive interactions between various com-

munities who were in attendance.

The workshop facilitators included:

- Tanya Lukin Linklater: Her workshop "Awa! Move!" comes from the foundation that Inuit games are ancient movement forms from the land. Tanya taught two games to invigorate participants followed by improvised movements rooted in land-body connection.
- Dawn Marie Marchand: Her workshops were "Visual Storytelling" and "Word Plays." "Visual Storytelling" is based on lessons learned by understanding oral history through pictographs and ledger drawings. Dawn Marie's interactive drawing workshop gave participants hands-on practice and experience with creating a visual vocabulary to remember key points and concepts. "Word Plays" started with warm-up drama exercises to get the group thinking abstractly about words and how they associate with each other. Using nine pre-determined words, participants strung the words together into a play.
- Aaron Paquette: Aaron taught participants that creative expression is an essential component to their own story and that when they find that space in which they are in mastery, they will have found the keys to understanding their own identity. In this way, coming from a place of strength and knowledge of their own character, participants were able to bridge the gap to communicate and connect with others.
- Vanessa Andreotti: Her workshop "Tapping Unlimited Vision and Weaving Stories Together" imagined reconciliation "otherwise." Using Indigenous wisdom, Vanessa taught participants to acknowledge our "sense-ful" entanglement with each other by being present, seeing with our heart, touching with our eyes, speaking with our souls, smelling with our memories, and listening with our guts.

Those who participated in these workshops left with a feeling of hope and refreshment, realizing that reconciliation begins with self, truth, integrity, and action.

MASTER'S GRADUATE STUDENT PRE-CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

In March 2015, the presenters were all completing their graduate programs as members of the Indigenous Peoples Education innovative master's cohort in the Faculty of Education at the University of Alberta. Five members of the cohort convoked in fall 2015 and five convoked in fall 2016.