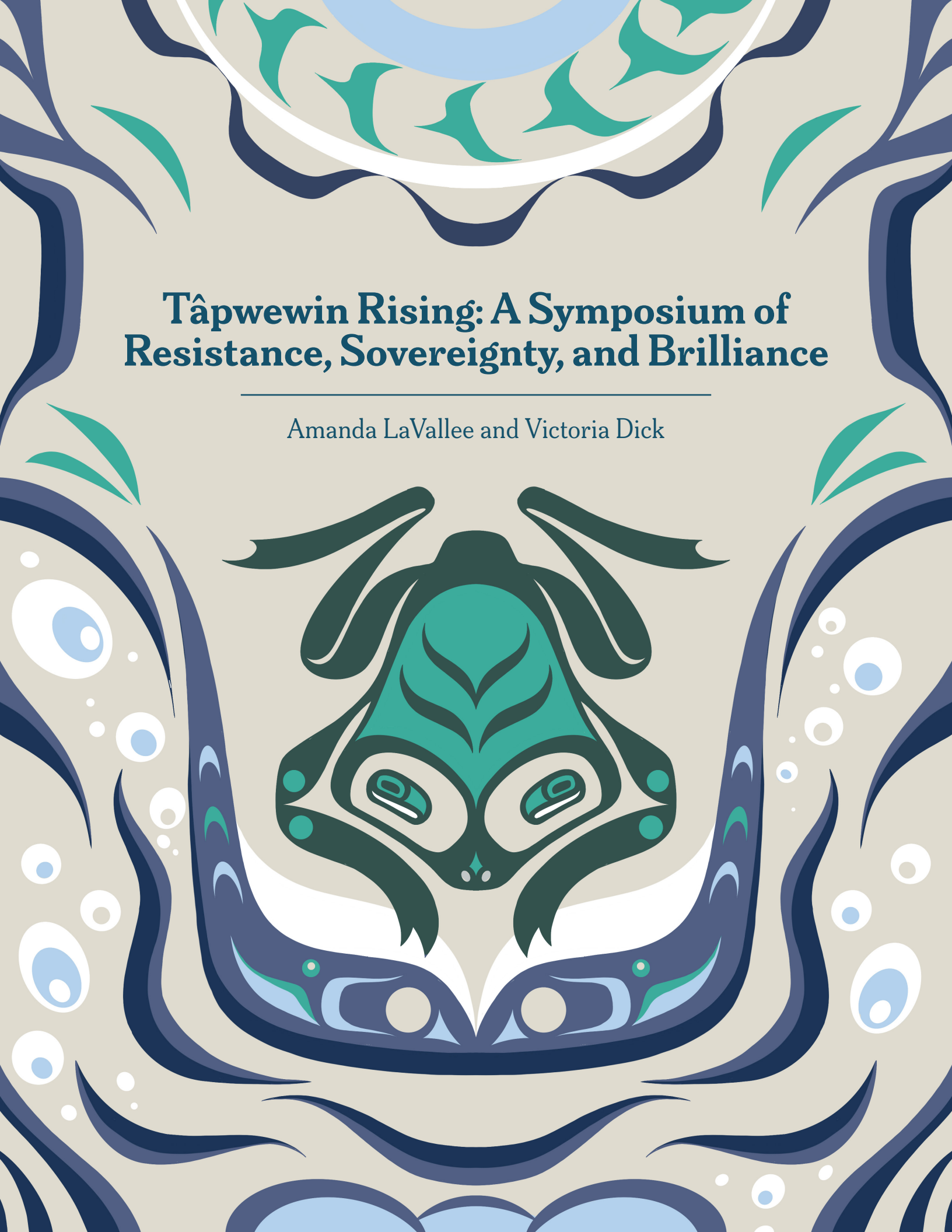


The background of the cover features a stylized illustration. At the top, a light blue sun with green rays is partially visible. Below it, a beaver is depicted in a symmetrical, stylized manner, facing forward. The beaver's body is primarily teal and dark green, with white highlights on its chest and around its eyes. It has long, dark green ears and a small, dark green tail. The beaver is surrounded by dark blue, wavy lines representing water. Small, light blue and white circles are scattered throughout the water, suggesting bubbles or ripples. The overall style is clean and modern, with a focus on geometric shapes and a limited color palette.

Tâpwewin Rising: A Symposium of Resistance, Sovereignty, and Brilliance

Amanda LaVallee and Victoria Dick

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Opening Remarks	3
<i>Resilient Truths: Reclaiming Space and Transforming the Academy through Tâpwewin</i>	3
<i>Tâpwewin Symposium</i>	4
Day 1: Lifting the Canoe: Centering Indigenous Leadership, Resistance, & Relational Truths in the Academy	6
Day 2: It Needs to Be Said: Truth, Identity, and Resilience in Indigenous Scholarship.	12
Day 3: Extending the Rafters: Confronting Institutional Racism & Centering Indigenous Brilliance in the Academy.	16
Closing Remarks	20
<i>Carrying the Songs Home: Truth-Telling, Relational Accountability, and the Long Journey Through the Academy</i>	20
Next Steps.	22
<i>Tâpwewin in Action: Advancing Truth, Reconciliation, and Sovereignty in the Academy</i>	22
Acknowledgements.	23

OPENING REMARKS

Resilient Truths: Reclaiming Space and Transforming the Academy through Tâpwewin

The Tâpwewin symposium marked the culmination of a three-year journey rooted in Indigenous-led research and resistance to systemic racism within academia. Held over three days at the University of Victoria and the Songhees Wellness Centre, the gathering welcomed Indigenous scholars, students, Elders, community leaders, and allies from across Canada. It was a space for truth-telling, deep listening, and imagining transformative futures.

Grounded in *Tâpwewin*—walking in relational truth—the symposium began with Spirit-led reflection on the emotional toll of speaking truths long silenced. Powerful keynotes and panels peeled back the layers of colonial systems that continue to shape classrooms, healthcare, universities, and research institutions—systems “perfectly designed” to uphold settler-colonial power. Speakers challenged the framing of Indigenous peoples as a race, emphasizing that such labeling erases lands, governments, and sovereign identities. Stories emerged of identity fraud, institutional neglect, and how real change only occurred when students demanded accountability. Indigenous brilliance, often seen as a threat, was reframed as a gift essential to reimagining the academy.

Resurgence echoed throughout. Scholars rooted their work in Indigenous languages, protocols, and worldviews. Elders and Grandmothers served as living archives. Community-based methodologies defied sanitized data and upheld relational knowledge. Solidarity with students stood out as critical for transformation. While gaps persist—tokenistic equity statements, opaque data collection, credential gatekeeping, and institutional processes weaponized against dissent—so too did the strengths: the courage to name harm, a shared vision for change, and collective power built on community and care.

A bold roadmap emerged: transparent Indigenous data collection, Indigenous-led publishing and funding, mandatory anti-racism training, and structural reforms that move beyond performance to genuine partnership. In weaving together lived experience and research, the symposium did more than confront the academy—it reshaped it. Each story shared and each teaching offered became an act of resilience and reclamation. Together, participants turned institutional spaces into fertile ground for Indigenous brilliance, collective liberation, and a radically honest future.

Tâpwewin Symposium

Over three days, Indigenous scholars, students, Elders, and allies gathered in a space intentionally shaped by Indigenous ethical frameworks and protocols. From the earliest planning stages to the final closing circle, every element of the symposium was guided by principles of **cultural integrity, relational accountability, and respect**. Tâpwewin was more than an academic event—it was a gathering of hearts and minds, a place where **stories were shared, truths were spoken, and futures were imagined**. It prioritized student engagement and capacity-building, creating opportunities for emerging scholars to lead, learn, and contribute. It fostered interdisciplinary collaboration, bringing together voices from across the country and across fields. And it generated knowledge not just for publication, but for uptake by institutions, governments, and public organizations committed to dismantling Indigenous-specific racism.

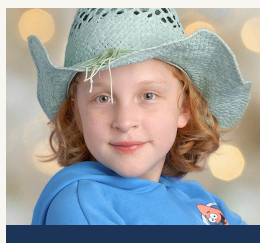
The symposium was a convergence of voices, experiences, and visions, held in a space intentionally shaped by Indigenous values and protocols. Participants engaged in critical dialogue, heartfelt storytelling, and collaborative planning, weaving together threads of resistance, resurgence, and relational accountability. The gathering became a living expression of Indigenous knowledge in motion—where ideas were exchanged not just through presentations, but through shared meals, ceremony, laughter, and collective dreaming. This symposium was not an end point—it was a continuation of generations of resistance and resurgence, and a call to carry the work forward.



Symposium Team Members: Tâpwewin team members and students met together in Victoria to prepare and support across all three-days of the Symposium. Tâpwewin team members who attended in person included: Amanda LaVallee (Project Director); Raven Sinclair, (Project Co-Director); Mike (Michael) Cappello (Undergraduate Student Mentor); Hanah Molloy (Project Manager); Priscila Tayná (former Project Manager); Cecilia Elizabeth Best (Project Researcher); Charlotte Davis (Project Researcher); and Jasper Pettman (Administration Assistant, School of Social Work, University of Victoria).

Student Mentorship: The symposium provided numerous opportunities for mentoring and training students, intentionally positioning them within a national network of scholars, researchers, and subject-matter experts. In total we supported ten undergraduate, graduate students and researchers: Noah Crossman, Bachelor of Science, University of Manitoba; Braxton Anderson, Bachelor of Arts, University of Manitoba; Christina Tsuil-menak, Bachelor of Science in Nursing University of Victoria; Rose Patterson, Bachelor of Arts, University of Victoria/Camosun; Ava Pettman, Bachelor of Arts, University of Victoria; Everett Willier, Master of Social Work Indigenous Specialization Program, University of Victoria; and Victoria Dick, PhD Nursing student researcher, University of Victoria + her daughter Shiloh Sam (photographer).

Symposium Report Designer: Bayja Morgan-Banke, Toquaht (Nuu-chah-nulth) and Secwepemc Nation. Bayja was hired by the RGD Tâpwewin Project to support the creative processes and shape the graphic design of the final Symposium report. She immersed herself in the Symposium, capturing notes, reflections and imagery to be used in the design.



Symposium Photographer: Shiloh Sam, *cišaaʔath*, age 10, was brought on to support Symposium visuals, capturing

photographs and videos of team members and presenters over the three-days. She supports many UVic School of Nursing events, loving to be around and learning from students, Elders and academics.

Symposium Sponsors: Sponsors for our symposium included Waakebiness Institute, University of Victoria, CAMH, Royal Roads University, Canadian Race Relations Foundations, Gabriel Dumont Institute, San'yas Anti-Racism Indigenous Cultural Safety Training Program, College of Law at the University of Saskatchewan, and the Indigenous Circle, School of Social Work.

Symposium Attendees: The symposium audience consisted of both Indigenous and non-Indigenous students, educators, subject-matter experts, university administrators, staff, faculty, and individuals that had a vested interest in anti-racist education and addressing Indigenous-specific racism. We extended invitations to numerous nationally recognized experts in the field and leveraged our extensive Indigenous, academic, and research networks to promote the event widely. The symposium was also open to the public, as well as to institutions and organizations seeking to engage with cutting-edge research, knowledge exchange, and critical discussions on systemic racism in academia. In total we had 125 registered attendees (41 established scholars, 34 emerging scholars, 35 community members, and 15 Elders), with 111 of those attendees at the three-day symposium.



DAY 1

Lifting the Canoe: Centering Indigenous Leadership, Resistance, & RELATIONAL Truths in the Academy



Prayer: Elder Hiislacinxw (Faye Martin), Fireweed Clan, House of Dawamuux, Gitxsan Nation, opened the first day of the Symposium with a welcoming prayer. Faye is a long-time visitor in Ləkʷəŋən territories, retired Advisor and Indigenous coordinator for students and faculty with Eyē? Sqâ'lewen: Centre for Indigenous Education and Community Connections at Camosun College, School of Health and Human Services. Hiislacinxw's opening prayer set the tone for the Symposium in a gentle, humble way that called for truth-telling, relational accountability and continuing to do this work deeply rooted in First Nations, Métis and Inuit ways. Following this was traditional drummers



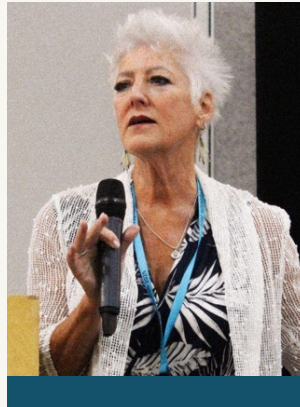
and singers **Scott Sam, Toby Joseph, and Brandon George, Tsawout First Nation, Ociem Drum Group**, grounding the gathering in Indigenous ceremony and protocol. These opening elements were not only ceremonial but also deeply meaningful, setting a tone of respect, inclusivity, and relational accountability that carried through the entire event.

Opening Remarks: Director Dr. Amanda LaVallee and Co-Director Dr. Raven Sinclair, provided opening remarks sharing about the project, Indigenous-Specific Racism in the Academy.” Raven, is a member of George Gordon First Nation with strong Young Dog Assiniboine and Red River Métis roots, shared a story about running into a mentor of hers and one of the most brilliant thinkers of our time,

Willie Ermine. Willie reminded her to engage in “slow, deliberate thought” about racism, a struggle she’s navigated since childhood **in overwhelmingly white spaces**. Earning four degrees and rising to full professor did not shield her from subtle exclusions, so she returned to ceremony, fasting, and spirit-led listening to ground herself in **relationality, love, and learning**. Amanda, a Red River Métis



Dr. Raven Sinclair and Dr. Amanda LaVallee



Skye Sinclair



Dr. Robina Thomas (Qwul'sih'yah'maht)

born and raised in Alberta and Saskatchewan co-directed this SSHRC project using community-based methods, naming strategies to survive racism's cycles and honouring the unrecognized labor of Indigenous scholars while celebrating a **spirit-driven** research team. After which, Skye Sinclair, our symposium counsellor shared gratitude for **sharing space** with so many beautiful humans and that the invitation for her in this space was to support, one of the ways she sees things is through imagery, *"the image I'll share with you about this space, is this gentle breeze, it's holding us all... and it represents unconditional love."*

Welcome: Dr. Robina Thomas (Qwul'sih'yah'maht), a member of the Lyackson First Nation with Snuneymuxw and Sto:lo ancestry, is the **Vice-President Indigenous** at the University of Victoria and a professor in the School of Social Work. In her opening remarks, Dr. Thomas spoke with quiet intensity about the **emotional weight of Indigenous leadership** in institutions built on colonial foundations. She reminded the audience that truth-telling about racism is not just

intellectually difficult—it is **spiritually and emotionally exhausting**, often accompanied by grief, trauma, and resistance.

Over the years, she has learned to **choose her battles wisely**. *"Some people are ready for courageous conversations,"* she said, *"but many are not. I've learned to direct my energy toward those who are."* Her words reflected the hard-earned wisdom of someone who has spent a career navigating institutional hostility while holding space for truth and transformation.

She shared a teaching gifted to her by Elder Dr. Skip Dick of the Songhees Nation—one that has become part of her daily practice. Each morning, she puts on a **"shield"**—a pair of earrings, a bracelet, or a pendant—to protect her spirit from the harm she may encounter in the academy. *"You have grandchildren now,"* Elder Dick told her. *"Don't bring that pain home to them."* This act of spiritual protection is not just about survival—it is about **breaking the cycle of intergenerational trauma** and ensuring that the next generation is not burdened by the same harms. Dr. Thomas's reflections

offered a profound reminder: **Indigenous leadership is not just administrative—it is sacred, relational, and deeply personal.** As she prepares for retirement later this year, she concluded with quiet resolve: *“If one thing I can do leaving this institution is knowing that I speak the truth, I’m okay with that.”* Her words echoed the broader struggle of Indigenous scholars who are often asked to lead reconciliation efforts while being denied the support, recognition, and safety they deserve. In this context, **truth-telling becomes both an act of resistance and a form of care**—for herself, for Indigenous communities, and for future generations of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit students.

Keynote: Dr. Cheryl Ward, a Kwakwaka’wakw scholar from the 'Namgis First Nation and founder of the **San’yas Indigenous Cultural Safety Training Institute**, delivered a compelling keynote titled **“What is in Your War Canoe.”** Drawing from her work revising anti-racism training in Indigenous child welfare, Ward exposed how Canadian institutions perpetuate anti-Indigenous racism. Opening with, *“Trauma from racism lives here in this room,”* she urged a compassionate approach to difficult truths. She emphasized that racism is not accidental but systemic: *“Every system is perfectly designed to get the response it wants.”* Institutions like education, healthcare, and child welfare were created to preserve white property and privilege. *“If we are still addressing racism in 2025, it means the people fighting to maintain the racist structures are upholding them well.”*

Drawing on Cheryl Harris’ **“Whiteness as Property,”** Ward critiqued how institutions exclude Indigenous knowledge through Eurocentric curricula and structural dominance. She traced the colonial roots of universities and hospitals, highlighting policies like residential schools and forced sterilizations. Racism, she argued, is embedded even in the *“null curriculum,”* or what institutions choose to omit. Citing **Marie Battiste**, she challenged how institutions delegitimize Indigenous knowledge while normalizing colonial violence. On a personal level, Ward reflected on the emotional toll of resistance—especially for Indigenous women who endure tokenism and racial battle fatigue. She offered tools for survival: journaling, contractual protections, and knowing when to *“set the paddle down.”* Closing with her War Canoe metaphor, Ward urged reflection: *“Who is in your canoe?”* and *“I am standing on the shoulders of greatness,”* honoring the matriarchs before her. Her final call to action: *“courage, clarity, and collective accountability.”*



Dr. Cheryl Ward



*Dr. Amanda LaVallee, Charlotte Davis,
Cecilia Elizabeth Best*



Dr. Amanda LaVallee



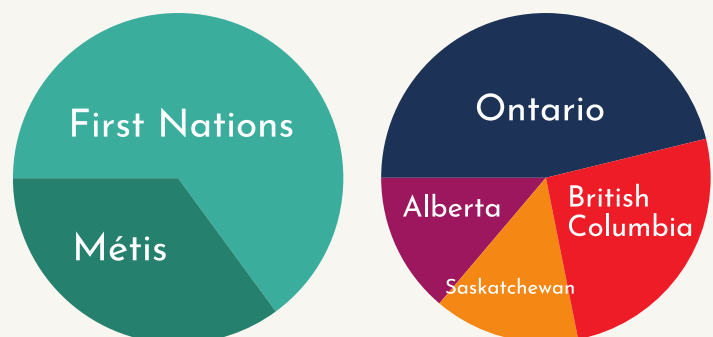
Raven Sinclair

Panel One: Panel one featured **Drs. Amanda LaVallee, Raven Sinclair and two student researchers Cecilia Elizabeth Best and Charlotte Davis.** Together, they presented findings from their Race, Gender, and Diversity (RGD) project in a session titled “**Unveiling Indigenous Racism in Academia: Project Insights and Future Plans.**” The panel shared key research outcomes, including patterns of systemic exclusion and resistance within academic institutions, and outlined future directions for research and action.

Raven described the long, difficult process of getting RGD research ethics approved. After submitting the initial application, months of silence and pushback from the University of Regina stalled progress. Feedback questioned basic Indigenous Research Methodologies and the team’s capabilities, revealing resistance to the topic of race, gender, diversity, and anti-Indigenous racism. Amanda stepped in, navigating multiple rounds of tedious revisions during her transition to the University of Victoria. She adapted the application to UVic’s standards and submitted it, receiving approval within two

weeks—without revisions—highlighting the contrast in institutional support for critical Indigenous research.

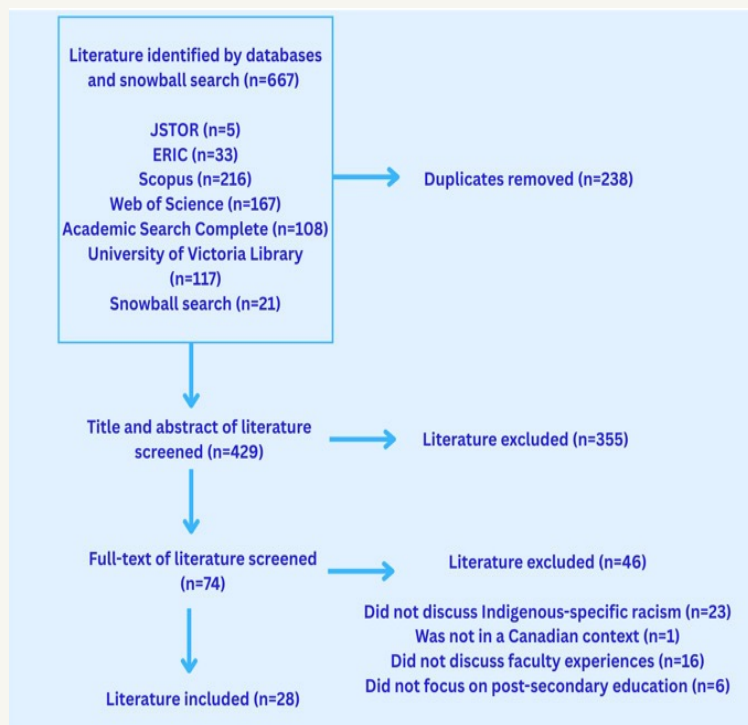
Amanda shared that the team conducted **100 interviews, seven focus groups, and 190 surveys**, with most participants identifying as **First Nations (54.97%) or Métis (29.84%)** and deeply connected to Indigenous communities, with many participants coming from **Ontario (37.37%), British Columbia (21.05%), Alberta (11.58%), and Saskatchewan (11.05%)** —provinces with larger academic institutions and populations. Survey data revealed that most respondents were **early-career assistant- (40%) or associate-professors (27.37%),** with **women**



composing (68.95%) of participants. Raven spoke to the emotional cost of this reality: *“I know so many young Indigenous scholars, and I tell them to just say no to committee work. We’re tokenized on a multitude of committees and roles, and I see the burnout earlier in their careers.”* Amanda echoed this, describing the **emotional toll of being overextended and under-supported:** *“On the outside we have our colleagues supporting us, to save face, they present themselves having full support of us, but behind the scenes it’s a different story.”* She explained how many Indigenous women begin their academic journeys later in life (35-44 25.40%; 45-54 31.22%), which delays tenure and promotion. Although holding PhDs

(65.79%) and being highly qualified, many Indigenous faculty face **systemic barriers to tenure and promotion.** Amanda described how they are often **tokenized to teach mandatory courses** and subjected to both **subtle and overt racism:** *“We get racism in subtle ways but also in obvious ways. This hostility includes denial of promotions, or they do not look Indigenous enough, or the research is not Indigenous enough.”* She underscored the disconnect between **institutional rhetoric and reality:** *“There is a disconnect between universities’ public comments to reconciliation and EDI, and the discriminatory practices occurring behind closed doors... behind the scenes are evil people... evil institutions.”*

Charlotte Davis (Ally), a Dalhousie PhD student, and **Kyle Cook** (Mi’kmaw), a UVic master’s student, led a sweeping scoping review. Together, they sifted through 429 documents and distilled them to 28 key sources. *“Grouping them into discrete categories was not easy,”* Charlotte shared.



“They’re all intertwined.”

Using Indigenous conceptual frameworks and hybrid coding, they surfaced six core themes: systemic racism, Eurocentrism, white ignorance and tokenism, impacts on wellbeing, resistance through Indigenization, and racial-gendered oppression. *“There’s a lot of overlap with the interviews,”* she added, “but we settled on six themes.” Charting demographics and narratives, they mapped overt and covert racism, bridging literature and lived experience to reveal the layered realities Indigenous faculty navigate in academia.

Cecilia Elizabeth Best, a Métis and First Nations scholar and Sixties Scoop survivor, brought a powerful lens to organizing RGD qualitative data. Grounded in Indigenous research methodologies, they emphasized **“locating self”**—a relational practice rooted in accountability and context. *“It’s not about individualism,”* they explained, *“but about understanding one’s place within community, history, and responsibility.”* In analyzing interviews, they discovered language to describe the racism they had long endured. *“The interviews taught me to advocate for myself and put labels on the racism I see.”* Their story illustrates how Indigenous research is more than scholarship—it’s resistance, reclamation, and survival. Through the themes, Cecilia Elizabeth translated lived experience into research that speaks truth to institutional silence.



Katie Skelton & Dr. Sheelah McLean

Panel Two: Representatives Katie Skelton and Dr. Sheelah McLean from San’yas delivered a compelling presentation on their nationally recognized work in anti-racist education. Katie, Anishinaabe kwe from Henvey Inlet First Nation, is a Senior Director at San’yas, advancing anti-Indigenous racism education through Indigenous knowledge. Sheelah, a third-generation settler, is a curriculum developer whose research interrogates whiteness in Canadian education systems.

Rooted in Indigenous knowledge systems and guided by Elders, scholars, and community leaders, San’yas was created under the Transformative Change Accord: First Nations Health Plan. It challenges white supremacy, disrupts dominant narratives, and fosters critical self-reflection. The program invites participants—especially settlers—to examine how institutional power and personal behaviors uphold colonial systems. Through facilitated learning journeys, interactive forums, and strengths-based approaches, San’yas reframes inequity as a product of ongoing settler colonialism, not Indigenous failure. It also uplifts Indigenous brilliance, resilience, and leadership, offering both a training program and a call to action for structural change.

DAY 2

It Needs to Be Said: Truth, Identity, and Resilience in Indigenous Scholarship



Elder Terri "Dutchie" Barnhard



Dr. Jacquie Green
(Kundoqk)



UVic Elder in Residence, Barb Hulme

Elder **Terri "Dutchie" Barnhard**, Songhees Nation of the Ləkʷəŋən people, UVic's səlɬw'éyn sq'él Elders' Voices Program provided the opening prayer for day two. Terri's late mother was Janet Dick, her uncles are Skip and Butch Dick, their presence inspires her on her journey into the role of Elder. Terri welcomed attendees to the space, recognizing the dichotomy of discussing anti-Indigenous racism while within colonial institutions.

UVic Elder in Residence, Barb Hulme, also joined the conference, alongside Faye, sitting as Elders for the Symposium and supporting the project team members. Barb provided attendees with a Stitch Heart pattern, she crafted herself and attendees received colourful threads to highlight the diversity and unity amongst us all. Barb is a Metis, from Selkirk, Manitoba, and a retired Registered Nurse and member of the Canadian Armed Forces. Barb supports many students, faculty and health professionals with her knowledge, skills and presence.

Dr. Jacquie Green (Kundoqk), from the **Haisla Nation**, is the **Executive Director of Indigenous Academic and Community Engagement (IACE)** and an **Associate Professor in the School of Social Work at the University of Victoria** welcomed attendees with a story that wove together personal memory, ancestral teachings, and the responsibilities of Indigenous scholarship. She spoke of her journey into academia as one of **reconnection and resistance**—a path shaped by the silences imposed by colonial systems. *"I began by learning and asking questions about our way of life, our laws,"* she said. Her dissertation, written with her late mother and father, was not just an academic milestone—it was a **sacred act of healing**.

Because of the trauma her parents endured in residential schools, Jacquie was not allowed to learn her language or cultural teachings growing up. She wasn't even permitted to take First Nations studies. Her doctoral work became a

space to reclaim what had been denied—to **carry forward the knowledge of her ancestors** and to write them back into the story. Jacquie offered this image as a metaphor for Indigenous scholarship: *“You never know when the waves are going to hit you or what the weather is going to be like, and you just have to keep paddling because there’s nowhere else to go.”*

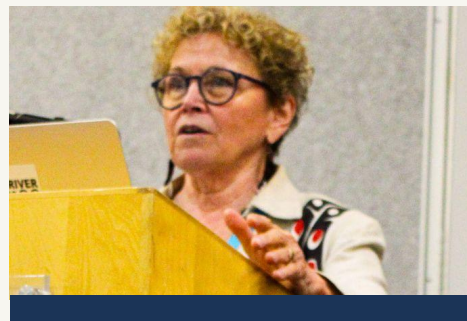
In the academy, she explained, Indigenous scholars are constantly **translating between worlds**—between Indigenous and Western knowledge, between story and theory, between spirit and structure. She urged students to *“keep the essence of the stories you are hearing,”* and to *“listen, replay, record, and write the stories until it’s in here,”* she said, pointing to her heart. Her message was clear: Indigenous scholarship is not just about producing knowledge—it is about **cultural survival, ethical responsibility, and spiritual nourishment**. She reminded everyone to care for themselves on this long journey, to find what keeps them strong, and to paddle forward with purpose. Dr. Green’s story is a testament to the power of **resurgence, relational accountability**, and ancestral strength—a reminder that every act of Indigenous scholarship is also an act of love, resistance, and continuity.

Keynote: Jean Teillet, a Red River Métis author, artist, and recently retired Indigenous rights lawyer, is a fierce advocate for Métis sovereignty and women’s rights. In her keynote, Teillet brought clarity and conviction to three core tensions: **collective identity versus Western individualism, race versus nationhood**, and the **transactional nature of identity in liberal democracies**. Her authority was not

just legal—it was lived. *“I am giving you seven generations of my family line... and I was quite literally born on the banks of the river.”* Her Métis identity, she emphasized, is not theoretical but inherited, relational, and defended: *“I make no pretense to be anything other than what I have given to you there.”*

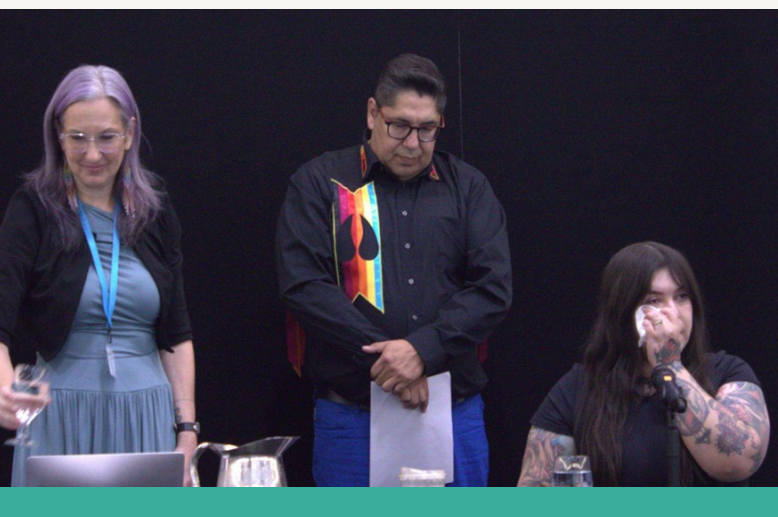
Teillet challenged the audience to rethink identity not as paperwork, but as **community-rooted responsibility**. *“This identity only exists in relation to the community,”* she said. True membership, she explained, involves **self-identification, demonstrable connection**, and community recognition—and with that, real obligations: *“All my relations mean I have serious obligations to you; if you need help, I must help you.”* She contrasted this with the **individual-property model** embedded in Canadian law: *“We have to stand up and loudly say that’s wrong... that’s not the way Indigenous identity is formed.”* Reducing Indigenous peoples to a racial category, she warned, strips away political rights, land title, and self-government. *“Genealogical mining,”* she added, *“merely allows identity frauds a way to commune with the dead.”*

Teillet condemned identity fraud as *“intentional deception for material gain,”* rooted in colonial entitlement: *“They have thought from day one*



Jean Teillet

that they can take on an Indigenous identity when it suits their purposes.” Whether for scholarships, jobs, or prestige, this theft turns living Nations into commodities. **“It’s the ultimate last step in colonization: you take our lands, take our children, take our languages, take our religions, and now take our very identity.”** She closed with a call to action for retiring Indigenous academics: *“Education got us into this mess... and it’s education that’s going to get us out.”* Urging Elders to protect the next generation, she said: *“We’re the ones who can stand up and do this... so they don’t have to deal with this in the same way that we did.”* With heartfelt gratitude, she ended simply: *“I’m very honoured to be here.”*



Panel Three

Panel Three: Dr. Cathy Mattes, a Michif curator, writer, and Associate Professor of Art History at the University of Winnipeg, and **Jamie LaFleur**, a Rock Cree master’s student in Epidemiology and Community Health at the University of Saskatchewan, co-led a powerful panel titled **“Navigating Identity Fraud and Systemic Racism as an Accidental Whistleblower”** and **“Indigenous Identity Fraud: Now What?”**

Cathy, who found herself at the center of the University of Winnipeg’s identity fraud controversy, opened with a term coined by her son— *“Indige-nots”*—a way to name the harm with humour when laughter felt impossible. Her reflections were rooted in a deeper truth passed down from her father: *“If you can’t dazzle them with brilliance, baffle them with bullshit.”* That, she said, is how institutions often operate—choosing performative gestures over genuine Indigenous leadership. In response, Cathy and her students organized weekly *pizza-and-strategy sessions*, crafting ten demands for institutional accountability. Nine were met. But the fraudulent research chair retained millions in grants—her title simply changed. *“This isn’t about jealousy,”* Cathy emphasized. *“It’s about students. It’s about the institution.”* She warned of the damage when *“Indige-nots are the only perceived Indigenous person a student, colleague, or department has looked to for their decolonial efforts.”* She contrasted colonial **“truth”** as malleable and self-serving, with **Tâpwewin**—truth as a **collective, cultural, and anti-racist responsibility**. *“Walking with Tâpwewin,”* she said, *“means centering kinship and care over hollow credentials.”* Jamie LaFleur brought the student’s perspective. A Rock Cree woman from the Lac La Ronge Indian Band, she shared how, after enduring racism her university, she found mentorship in someone she believed to be Indigenous—only to later discover that person’s identity was fabricated. *“It felt like grieving a person who had just died,”* she said. *“This visceral rage... a betrayal that fractured my trust in academic mentors.”* Together, Cathy and Jamie called for a shift—from trauma to **resilience**. Their message was clear: **stop tolerating fraud, elevate Indigenous brilliance, and defend**

the integrity of nation-based identity. Their stories are not just warnings—they are blueprints for resistance, care, and collective action.

Panel Four: In the panel “Exploring the Lived Realities of Métis Aunties in the Academy,” **Dr. Laura Forsythe**, a Métis scholar from the University of Manitoba, invited the audience into a space of memory, resistance, and reclamation. She opened by grounding her work in territory and lineage, holding up an old photograph: *“It gives my grandmother dignity,”* she said, honouring the powerful matriarchs who shaped her. Laura recounted crashing so-called Indigenous conferences, only to find *“white women talking about white feelings... stealing words and drawings.”* When she finally spoke, she was reduced to sanitized surveys. To counter this erasure, she resurrected a 1970 rallying cry from Métis leader **Marlene McDougall**: *“It needs to be said.”* Her research, based on interviews with 80 self-identifying Métis women born between 1949 and 1970, used a haptic, **kitchen-table methodology**—a practice of deep listening that *“privileges embodied memory over sanitized data.”* These conversations surfaced decades of *“hard work, artwork, spirit work”* that academia too often ignores.

Three layers of colonial erasure emerged. First, **invisibility**: universities can’t even report Métis-specific enrollment or faculty numbers. *“The lack of sensitivity and transparency is not a neutral omission,”* she said. *“It’s a barrier to justice.”* Second, **whitewashing**: Indigenous content is co-opted while Métis voices are sidelined. Third, **denial of group identity**: Métis scholars are lumped under broad “Indigenous”

labels, erasing their presence and undermining solidarity. Laura also exposed **credential gatekeeping and plagiarism**. *“Many academics choose not to cite or recognize the contributions Métis women have made,”* she said, recalling how fluent Michif speakers were excluded from committees for being *“not educated enough.”* Reflecting on her own dissertation, she admitted: *“It was so spicy, and I couldn’t put it in there.”*

In closing, she returned to McDougall’s words: *“It needs to be said.”* Laura called on institutions to **catalog and cite Métis scholars**, demand **transparent Métis data**, create **Métis-led funding and publishing streams**, and recognize **community-rooted knowledge** as equal to Western credentials. Her message was clear: only by naming and dismantling these layers of erasure can the academy truly honour the resilience, brilliance, and generational wisdom of Métis women.



Dr. Laura Forsythe

DAY 3

Extending the Rafters: Confronting Institutional Racism & Centering Indigenous Brilliance in the Academy

Prayer: Elder Terri “Dutchie” Barnhard, Songhees Nation of the Lək̓ʷəŋən people, UVic’s səl̓xw’éyn sq̓wél Elders’ Voices Program provided the opening prayer for day two. Terri welcomed attendees this morning, thanking those who nourish and energize us all with food and caffeine. Terri welcomes attendees to the First Nations lands, stating that we were all families before treaties and borders caused separation. Terri reminded all of the importance of this work, stating that racism is a daily encounter for Indigenous peoples, closing with “I hear you, I see you, and I want to congratulate each of you for the work you’re doing.”

Keynote: Dr. Verna St. Denis, Professor Emerita and trailblazer in anti-racist education, delivered a keynote titled ***Four Decades: An Indigenous Woman Teaching and Researching Racism and Anti-Racism in the Academy***. With over 40 years of experience, she offered an intimate, sweeping reflection on anti-Indigenous racism embedded across Canada’s institutions—from classrooms to healthcare and research.

She began by naming the contradiction in Canada’s self-image: “*Canada touts itself as multicultural,*” she said, “*while masking white supremacy.*” Public outrage is selective. “*Any police brutality and violence against Blacks, First Nations, Métis, Inuit—should equally provoke*

collective outrage.” Education, she declared, “*remains a colonial and racialized institution.*”

In early Indigenous teacher education programs like SUNTEP, simply naming racism was radical. Indigenous leaders were viewed with suspicion—some whispered of “an Indian takeover.” She entered academia with hope and relationship-building, but as she developed anti-oppressive curricula, resistance emerged. “*Education is built for a particular mind and mindset,*” she said, one that fiercely defends the status quo. Using Cheryl Harris’s “*Whiteness as Property,*” Verna described academia as a gated estate: “*Disposition rights, respect, legitimacy, insider status—these are withheld unless Indigenous scholars conform to white norms.*” White researchers move freely through networks of funding and mentorship, while Indigenous scholars face exclusion, erasure, and



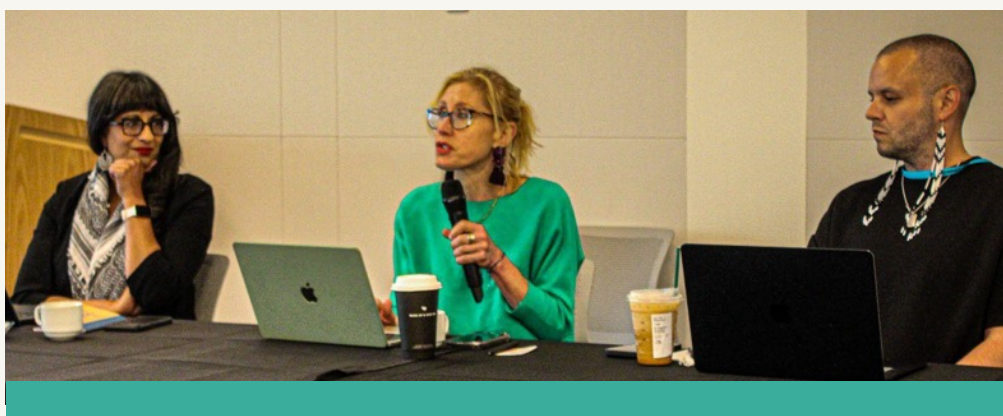
Dr. Verna St. Denis

appropriation. “*When I started, I was told I had to work twice as hard to be respected*,” one participant told her. Another likened peer review to “*the invisible curriculum all over again*.”

Verna issued a clear call to action: **symbolic gestures aren’t enough**. Institutions must implement mandatory anti-racist training for hiring committees, transparent peer-review processes, Indigenous-led mentorship, and equitable funding that supports relational, community-rooted research. “*Only by codifying these changes*,” she said, “*can we begin to dismantle the possessive logic of whiteness*.” She closed with a vision of a truly Indigenized academy—where Indigenous brilliance is honoured, methodologies guide pedagogy, and power is genuinely shared. “**Indigenous excellence**,” Verna affirmed, “**is both a corrective and a transformative force. The brilliance has always been here.**”

Panel Five: In a powerful panel drawn from their co-authored book *White Benevolence*, Drs. Jaris Swidrovich, Nisha Nath, and Willow Samara Allen exposed how white benevolence—especially through white settler womanhood—often masquerades as care while reinforcing colonial control, exclusion, and harm, particularly in the “helping professions.”

Jaris, a Two-Spirit Saulteaux and Ukrainian scholar and Canada’s first self-identified Indigenous pharmacist, spoke to the “*whiteness of medicine*,” where Indigenous knowledge is routinely dismissed in favour of “*evidence-based*” systems that erase Indigenous brilliance. “Chapter 13,” he noted, “*shows how legitimacy is reserved for whiteness*.” Nisha and Willow, both settlers, expanded the critique, revealing how institutions protect themselves through silence, redaction, and bureaucratic evasion. “*Who and with whom are our institutions in service to?*” they asked, pointing to how universities and public sectors shield themselves from scrutiny while demanding emotional and intellectual labour from Indigenous faculty. Their stories revealed the emotional and structural violence Indigenous scholars face: belittlement, stereotyping, and constant barriers. Colleagues avoid Indigenous work, administrators fear Indigenous leadership, and Indigenization efforts are quietly resisted. This violence is systemic—embedded in policies, paperwork, and hierarchies. They emphasized the need for “*institutional literacy*”—the informal, often unspoken knowledge Indigenous scholars must acquire to survive. Through storytelling, refusal, and everyday resistance, they push back against systems designed to erase them.



Panel Five

Their call was clear: decenter settlers, reject assumptions of settler futurity, and stop pretending institutions are neutral. *“Institutions can change quickly when they want to,”* they reminded us—often dismantling equity programs or redirecting funds with little notice. This proves colonial systems are maintained by choice. Their message: **benevolence is not justice**, and care without accountability is control.

Panel Six: In a session that blended sharp critique with lived experience, **Drs. Amanda LaVallee and Jaime Lavallee** pulled back the curtain on a quiet but powerful mechanism of institutional harm: student evaluations. Their talk, titled **“Mean Tweets: Unveiling Biases,”** explored how these evaluations—originally designed to support teaching—have become tools of **systemic bias**, disproportionately harming Indigenous faculty. Amanda and Jaime highlighted a core issue: Indigenous instructors are **often judged not on their teaching, but on how comfortable they make students feel**. When that comfort is disrupted—by truth-telling, challenging white privilege, or refusing to sanitize colonial history—the backlash is swift. *“If I’m not palatable to their tastes, then I’m wrong,”* Jaime said. Amanda added, *“Students get uncomfortable when asked to reflect on privilege... especially if they’ve never considered systemic inequality.”*

This discomfort leads to Indigenous faculty being penalized for doing the very work universities claim to value—**critical thinking, decolonial pedagogy, and truth-telling**. Instead, they’re expected to “spoon-feed” sanitized narratives—*“maple syrup and Mounties,”* as Amanda put it—rather than confront

colonialism, trauma, and systemic inequity. The harm is compounded by emotional labour, especially for Indigenous women, who are pressured to be nurturing and agreeable. Jaime noted that colleagues only grasped the severity of biased evaluations when they were read aloud: *“Only then did the shame become visible.”*

Amanda and Jaime described academia as a space of *“structured hostility”*—promising inclusion while enacting violence through stereotyping and erasure. It rewards intergenerational privilege and punishes intergenerational trauma. Student discomfort is misread as instructor failure, rather than a necessary part of unlearning dominant narratives. They called for culturally informed, equitable approaches to assessment—ones that recognize Indigenous pedagogy’s brilliance and legitimacy. *“Student evaluations are not working for Indigenous peoples,”* Amanda said. Their message: **stop mistaking discomfort for failure** and stop using biased feedback to silence Indigenous voices. Build systems that honour truth, support relational teaching, and protect those who dare to disrupt.



Panel Seven: Dr. David Newhouse, Onondaga from the Six Nations of the Grand River community near Bradford, Ontario, Trent University.

Indigenous survival, David reminds us, requires more than adaptation—it demands “learning how to think as Indigenous people,” even when our words aren’t in English. He recalls apprenticing under his father, a traditional healer. When his father passed, “*he took so much wisdom with him.*” Though some knowledge was preserved in writing, the loss highlighted the urgency of safeguarding Indigenous knowledge for future generations.

True Indigenization, David insists, is not about token gestures. It’s a structural shift that begins with Indigenous worldviews. Simply adding Indigenous content to Western frameworks “*muddles*” the work. Instead, we must “*extend the rafters*” of the academy—creating longhouse-style spaces governed by Indigenous languages, protocols, and intellectual traditions. These spaces follow “*our own set of rules and ways of being an academic.*” Combating racism begins with **building good relations**. Many Indigenous languages lack a word for racism, but they have words for kinship, respect, and



being in right relation. “*Racism unfolds as a lack of good relations,*” David explains. Anti-racist work means teaching others who we are and how we lead and research in community-centered ways. Education must reinforce Indigenous identity, not demand assimilation. Despite resistance, David sees hope. We stand on the shoulders of three generations of Indigenous scholars. Each grant secured, each curriculum reshaped, each rafter extended is an act of resilience—transforming colonial institutions into fertile ground for collective liberation.

CLOSING REMARKS

Carrying the Songs Home: Truth-Telling, Relational Accountability, and the Long Journey Through the Academy

As the final day of the Tâpwewin Symposium ended, the room vibrated with quiet power—a culmination of truth-telling, resistance, and relational healing. Raven spoke first, her voice grounded yet urgent. *“Anti-racist work must be more than critique,”* she said. *“It must be life-affirming.”* With gentleness and gratitude, Raven acknowledged those who **hold space** through the hard parts— *“like Skye and others,”* she said—who help make way for *“those really good conversations,”* the ones that nourish spirit and keep the work moving forward. Dr. Verna St. Denis followed, four decades in teacher education had given her more than credentials; they had given her battle-worn wisdom. *“We must demand universities be accountable for the harm done,”* she urged. Symbolic gestures, she warned, will not suffice. Despite decades of inclusion efforts, student evaluations and colonial curricula continue to push Indigenous educators out. Raven returned the conversation to spirit. *“Racism isn’t just a social failure—it’s a spiritual violation,”* she said, reminding the audience that broken relationships exact a toll, not only on bodies but on hearts, on ancestral obligations, on community well-being. Verna offered a counterpoint of resilience: her mother’s return to ancestral land and quiet affirmation— *“They can’t get rid of us. We belong here.”* That defiant belonging echoed

through the room like a song; a declaration stitched into skin and memory. As the final words circled the space, Raven carried forward a vision of continuity. The work, she said, is a sacred inheritance—from Verna, from David, from all those who have stood firm in storm and silence. *“We are in it for the long haul,”* she said, naming the generations yet to come and the nourishment this labor offers. The closing was not solemn—it was ceremonial.



Ociem Drum Group, with members Scott Sam, Toby Joseph, and Ben George from Tsawout First Nation, stepped forward to close the circle. The rhythm of their “Journey song” rose, echoing like paddles striking water. The drumbeats didn’t just signal an ending—they called forth

collaboration, strength, and shared direction. The canoe journey through the academy continues—not alone, not adrift, but guided by ancestral rhythm and communal purpose. This was no final note—it was a forward motion, a song to carry us home and onward.



NEXT STEPS

Tâpwewin in Action: Advancing Truth, Reconciliation, and Sovereignty in the Academy

The Tâpwewin Symposium powerfully embodied the principles and vision of Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) Calls to Action, particularly those emphasizing Indigenous-led education, anti-racism, cultural resurgence, and institutional reform. The symposium aligned with multiple TRC directives: critiquing colonial frameworks in education (Calls #10–12), demanding mandatory anti-racist training in hiring and peer review (Call #57), and affirming the critical role of language, worldview, and protocol in research and teaching (Calls #13–17). It elevated Indigenous youth and early-career scholars through mentorship and storytelling (Calls #66–67), while also calling for transparency and Indigenous control in data and publishing practices (Call #65). The need for reform in institutional funding systems to support Indigenous priorities was boldly asserted, speaking directly to Call #8, pushing for reform in funding bodies that uphold settler-colonial norms, promoting community-based and Indigenous-led financing models.

Building on the momentum from these dialogues and reflections, the symposium identified clear pathways for future transformation. Participants called for the implementation of Indigenous-led data governance frameworks at institutional and national levels, and the creation of decolonial hiring and evaluation

systems to dismantle structural barriers. The vision included funding channels guided by community priorities, sovereign publishing platforms for Indigenous scholarship, and the embedding of Grandmothers and Elders into curriculum development as living archives. To expand this work nationally, the symposium proposed the creation of a network of Indigenous-led academic gatherings modeled after Tâpwewin to foster sustained collaboration, truth-telling, and accountability across Canadian campuses. Rather than responding to reconciliation in abstract terms, the Tâpwewin Symposium rooted action in Spirit-led listening and lived experience, offering both critique and a roadmap forward. It affirmed that the transformation of academic institutions is not only possible, but already underway **led by Indigenous scholars as sovereign architects of a more just and relational future.**



Acknowledgements

To everyone who supported the Tâpwewin Symposium - in big and small ways - we want to send our sincerest thanks to each of you. From the initial brainstorming meetings over the years, to the long days of event planning leading up to Day 1 of the symposium, this event was carried out thanks to a collective effort. Thank you to our RGD participatory advisory committee and co-investigators, for all the guidance over the years: Jaris Swidrovich, Percy Lezard, Laura Forsythe, Cynthia Stirbys, David Newhouse, Lawren Trotchie, Amanda Gebhard, Jaime Lavallee, Alex Wilson, Dale Spencer, Willow Samara Allen, Winona Wheeler, Lynn Lavallee, Jacquie Green, Gail Baikie and Michael Cappello. Thank you to Donna Barker and Hanah Molloy for their behind-the-scenes invaluable contributions to the symposium, and to all the students who worked tirelessly over the three-days to ensure things ran smoothly. Lastly, many thanks to our project Elder, Richard Vedan for his wisdom and guidance in keeping us on the right path.

