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## Leading in Extraordinary Times: Documenting Pandemic Stories Through Graphic Recording

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**ABSTRACT** This field report documents—through the use of graphic recordings—the “Leading in Extraordinary Times” webinar series that ran throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. Hosted by a team in the School of Leadership Studies at Royal Roads University in British Columbia, Canada, this series was notable for its use of a graphic recorder who joined each webinar and produced an image drawn in real time. We felt it was essential to document stories from this historical moment, not only through words and audio-visual recordings, but also through images. Following the webinar, each image was shared with participants, along with the video recording. At that time, free special topic webinars open to the public were still relatively novel. The success of this webinar series demonstrated that people were yearning for meaningful ways to connect online to reduce isolation and continue learning as wave after wave of the pandemic hit. We, therefore, saw a role we could play in both engaging and building community while hosting relevant, helpful, and timely dialogues throughout the pandemic. A summary of each webinar topic, together with the graphics and links to webinar recordings, are included in the report.

**KEYWORDS** Graphic facilitation; online engagement; COVID-19 pandemic; webinar; leadership

In March 2020, three colleagues (Sherry Richards, Emara Angus, and Selena Kunar) and I were faced with a tough decision. For over two years, we—together with colleagues from Royal Roads University (RRU), including Cheryl Heykoop and Kathy Bishop—had been planning to launch a “Leading in Extraordinary Times” conference in April 2020 as part of the School of Leadership Studies’ (the School) biennial conference schedule. The theme derived from the School’s newly articulated mission of “[f]ostering the imagination, capacity, and courage to lead in extraordinary times.” The conference aimed to bring together alumni, leadership scholars, and practitioners to discuss this topic. However, the pandemic disrupted our plans. Like many others who were hosting events at that time, we chose to salvage what we could of our conference and move some of it—the keynote speakers at least—online. We now know we were not alone in this decision as people around the globe were facing the same dilemma in millions of small and monumental ways.

On April 24, 2020, we hosted a virtual keynote address on the conference theme of “Leading in Extraordinary Times.” We invited all registered conference participants and also opened the virtual keynote address to the wider community. Not only did it attract approximately 700 participants, but it also demonstrated that people were yearning for meaningful ways to connect online to reduce isolation and continue learning as wave after wave of the pandemic hit. This realization about the role we could play in building community and hosting relevant, helpful, and timely dialogue launched the subsequent webinar series documented here.

It may be difficult to imagine now, but at that time, special topic webinars that were free and open to the public were still relatively novel—at least for our team RRU. As a result, we (like many others) upgraded our Zoom capacity and brainstormed ideas for a more engaging and interactive event with the keynote speakers, Julian Norris and Gloria Burgess. Julian and Gloria are both leadership scholars who draw upon arts- and nature-based experiential learning, teaching, and research practices, and I recall it was Julian who offered the idea to include a graphic recorder. With that suggestion, I reached out to Sam Bradd of Drawing Change.

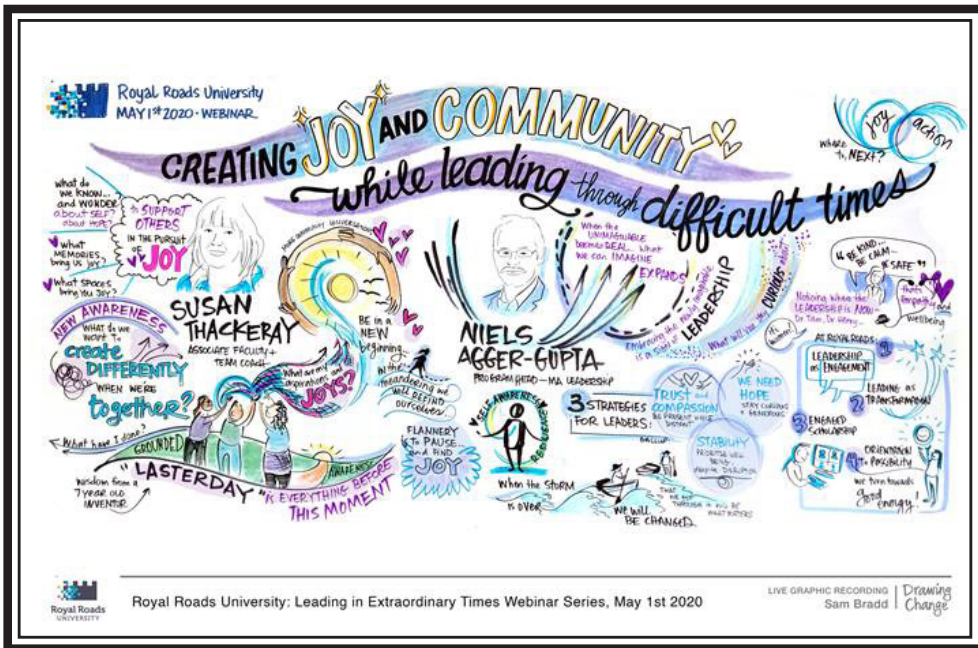
As a gifted graphic recorder, facilitator, and illustrator, Sam sees his role as listening deeply so he can translate speakers’ ideas into visuals and help people create connection and belonging through better meetings. Drawing Change works with clients across sectors to solve complex problems and distill big ideas—and they prioritize social impact work. Sam believes that his clients make the world a better place and his job is to amplify their work by transforming complex information and meetings into something joyful. His tag line is, “Together, we’re Drawing Change.” We were honoured that Sam agreed to serve as a graphic recorder for the “Leading in Extraordinary Times” webinar series. Sam specifically identified the importance of documenting stories from the pandemic through images as well as words. A graphic recorder joined each webinar and produced an image drawn in real time that, along with the video recording, was shared with participants after the webinar.

As Sherry Richards observed, “from the comments participants shared, especially early on in the series, it was evident how unique, special, and impactful it was to have a graphic recorder present and capturing key ideas in the moment.” Now, to share these graphically captured pandemic stories more widely, we are documenting them in this report from the field. Each graphic is accompanied with a title, date, overview, and link to the webinar recording. Although we include a brief description of each webinar, we invite readers to focus on—indeed to *read*—the graphics. As such, this is an arts-based graphic report, where images provide the main content and text serves to support the images. We invite readers to consider what messages, emotions, or lessons are evoked through the images and whether they have any new or different insights from this approach to documenting ideas. Links to each webinar are included as follow-up resources for readers interested in learning more.

## Creating Joy and Community While Leading Through Difficult Times (May 1, 2020)

Webinar overview: On a daily basis, we can see how leaders in Canada and elsewhere are addressing the unique challenges of the COVID-19 global pandemic. Some leaders are thriving and succeeding in bringing their communities together as they lead through these difficult times. In this webinar, leadership educators Susan Thackeray and Niels Agger-Gupta share insights on how leaders can cultivate joy, community, and hope, and maintain an orientation to possibility through appreciative practices. Watch the webinar recording [here](#) or click on the image below.

Figure 1. *Creating Joy and Community While Leading Through Difficult Times*

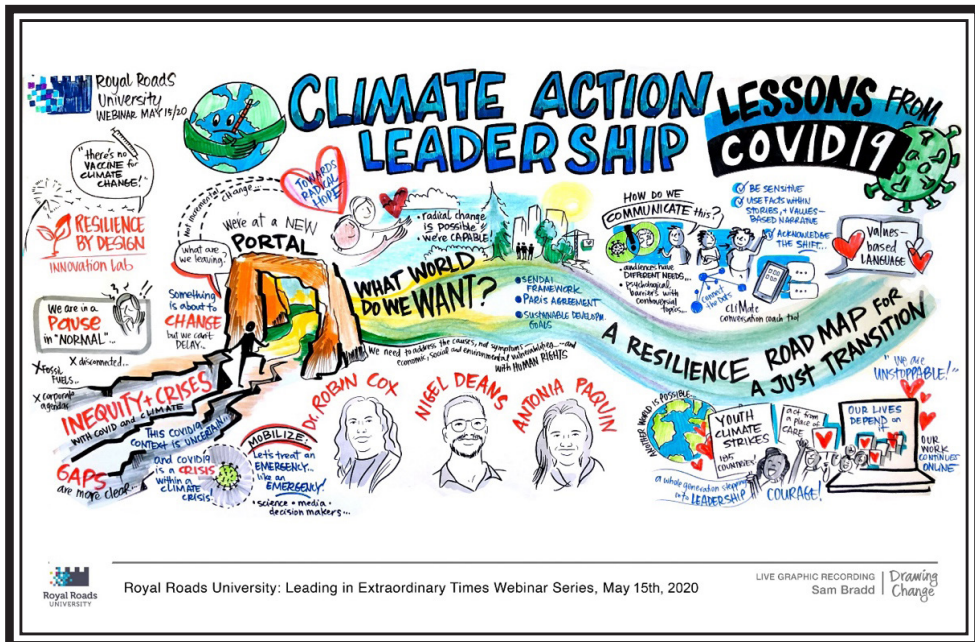


Note. Speakers: Susan Thackeray and Niels Agger-Gupta. Graphic recorder: Sam Bradd.

## Climate Action Leadership: Lessons From COVID-19 (May 15, 2020)

Webinar overview: Reduced CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, leatherback sea turtles nesting in Thailand, and conversations about renewable energy: these are among the many silver linings from COVID-19 quarantine measures. In this webinar, you can join the Resilience by Design (RbD) Lab Team—a group of researchers who inspire climate action through research, innovation, and connections—as they explore what it could mean if we took the climate crisis as seriously as this global pandemic. Watch the webinar recording [here](#) or click on the image below.

Figure 2. Climate Action Leadership: Lessons From COVID-19



Note. Speakers: Robin Cox, Antonia Pacquin, and Nigel Deans. Graphic recorder: Sam Bradd.

## Essential Mindfulness Practices for Leaders (May 29, 2020)

Webinar overview: In stressful times when the ground beneath us is shifting, one of the most important competencies a leader can have is self-awareness. And what brings forth that awareness better than anything else? Mindfulness. Everything we do, or fail to do, begins in the mind. Training the mind to pay attention and be in the present moment allows us to build our inner resources. Healthy minds create healthy organizations. With nearly two decades of mindfulness meditation experience and a certified MBSR (Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction) instructor, Patricia Galaczy shares her vast experience in this webinar. Watch the webinar recording [here](#) or click on the image below.

Figure 3. Essential Mindfulness Practices for Leaders



Note. Speaker: Patricia Galaczy. Graphic recorder: Adriana Contreras.

## Building Resilience and Leadership Capacity: Finding the Gifts in Struggle (June 12, 2020)

Webinar overview: People at the epicentre of socio-political turmoil have a great deal of practice in navigating and overcoming extraordinary challenges. Without romanticizing the experience of struggle, our two featured speakers seek to expand consciousness for leadership. Métis speaker Lorelei Higgins shares her personal leadership story of learning from two worlds. In so doing, she invites us to shift our lens and look at the world as “double” versus “half.” Political scientist Wanda Krause offers a case study on women in the Middle East, whom she has worked with over several decades. With resiliency and adaptability at the core of their being and seeing, these women demonstrate the leadership capacities developed through collective struggle. Both speakers share strategies for addressing the complexities of our current collective challenge(s) and for the turbulent times ahead. Watch the webinar recording [here](#) or click the image below.

Figure 4. Building Resilience and Leadership Capacity: Finding the Gifts in Struggle



Note. Speakers: Wanda Krause and Lorelei Higgins. Graphic Recorder: Sam Bradd.

**Online Community Organizing and Coalition Leadership in a Pandemic (June 26, 2020)**  
 Webinar overview: The COVID-19 pandemic has shed light on multiple local and global injustices based on racism, ableism, sexism, classism, and more. Even in a rich country such as Canada, we see significant inequities in support and access to basic necessities such as food, personal safety, education, safe housing, and health care. The common phrase “we’re all in this together” means that we may all be experiencing a pandemic, yet our experiences of this pandemic are vastly different and depend on our level of privilege. For the past few months, community organizers and self-advocates have been building coalitions and promoting progressive policy change on the issues of equality and housing, as well as guaranteeing access to treatment for people with disabilities and ending gender-based violence. Watch the webinar recording [here](#) or click on Figure 5 below.

**Figure 5.** *Online Community Organizing and Coalition Leadership in a Pandemic*



*Note.* Speakers: Rebecca Pauls, Paul Gauthier, Sharon Floyd, and Sonia Théroux.  
 Graphic Recorder: Sam Bradd. ASL interpreters: Jessica Siegers and Jen Jahnke.

## Bold Organizations Mobilizing for the Climate Emergency (January 22, 2021)

Webinar overview: The year 2020 has become defined by the COVID-19 global pandemic. Yet the climate crisis poses an ongoing existential threat of similar if not greater magnitude. Just as the pandemic exacerbates the fractures inherent in our socio-economic systems, so too does the impact of climate change. What will it take for us to collectively recognize and address the climate emergency? How can we advance existing social and economic innovations that account for finite resources and a changing climate? Courageous leaders are needed to reimagine the culture of our organizations, the norms we live by, and our understanding of what constitutes a good life.

This webinar examines how we can learn from the past to take action in the present and plan for the future: it showcases how and why leadership matters when bold organizations are taking action for the climate emergency. Watch the webinar recording [here](#) or click on the image below.

Figure 6. Bold Organizations Mobilizing for the Climate Emergency



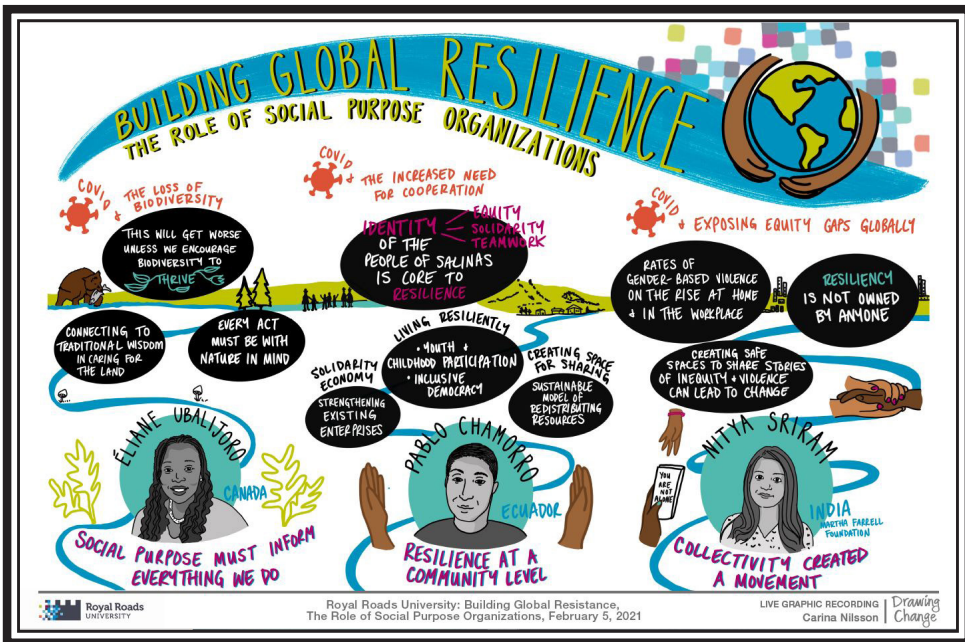
Note. Speakers: Seth Klein, Jess Housty, Joanna Kerr, and Philip Steenkamp with Program Head Kathy Bishop. Graphic recorder: Carina Nilsson.



## Building Global Resilience: The Role of Social Purpose Organizations (February 5, 2021)

Webinar overview: COVID-19 offered organizations the opportunity to pivot quickly to support their employees and volunteers and to serve their clients and communities with greater purpose and relevancy. Yet while the words “purpose” and “resilience” are widely used, they are poorly understood. In reality, organizations have struggled with how to build that resilience and support while simultaneously learning to be resilient, adaptable, and strong themselves. A year and a half after the start of the pandemic, they continue to grapple with how to have impact in a VUCA (volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous) world, while questioning their own relevancy and sustainability. Building resiliency is not enough for surviving the new era: a global imperative for supporting health and wellbeing is also needed. COVID-19 has shed light on the urgent and pivotal role non-profit organizations, registered charities, co-ops, social enterprises, and other organizations designed to fulfill a social purpose (for which we are using the umbrella term social purpose organizations) play in the immediate issues the crisis has brought, as well as in our ability to survive and thrive into the future. Watch the webinar recording [here](#) or click the image below.

Figure 7. Building Global Resilience: The Role of Social Purpose Organizations



Note. Speakers: Eliane Ubalijoro, Nitya Sriram, and Pablo Chamorro with Program Head Wanda Krause and Program Coordinator Lisa Corak. Graphic recorder: Carina Nilsson.

## Healthcare Management in a Pandemic: Hearing Health Leaders' Voices (February 19, 2021)

Webinar overview: The panel features four female healthcare leaders who are graduates of the MA Leadership program at Royal Roads University. They are bound to inspire and educate on being a leader during this global health crisis. Use the words and images in the graphic below to reflect on your own experience with health care or the media stories and images you received throughout the pandemic. Watch the webinar recording [here](#) or click on the image below.

Figure 8. Healthcare Management in a Pandemic: Hearing Health Leaders' Voices



Note. Speakers: Eunice Joe, Jennifer Jupp, Lori Sparrow, and Huma Ali with Program Head Cheryl Heykoop. Graphic recorder: Carina Nilsson.

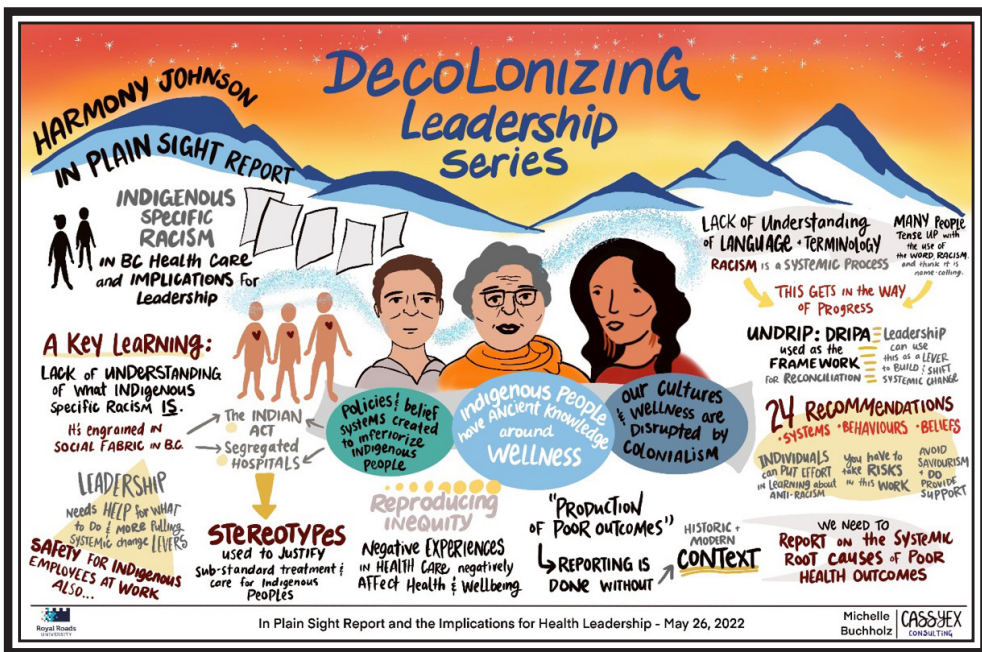
### Decolonizing Leadership Series

In 2022, our team, together with Cheryl Heykoop, offered a follow-up series entitled “Decolonizing Leadership,” which included three webinars (the graphic recorders for this series were not affiliated with Drawing Change). All webinar recordings from this series are available [here](#).

**Episode 1 - Exploring the *In Plain Sight Report* and the Implications for Health Leadership with Harmony Johnson (May 26, 2022)**

In this webinar, Tla'amin (Coast Salish) health and wellness researcher and author Harmony Johnson reflects on the *In Plain Sight Report: Addressing Indigenous-Specific Racism and Discrimination in B.C. Health Care* nearly two years after its release. She explores key meta-findings from the report and considers their implications for the human beings and leaders working in the health sector. Although the *In Plain Sight Report* focuses on the B.C. health care system, its lessons about the ongoing impact of colonization and institutional racism, as well as the necessity for trauma-informed approaches, are relevant and applicable for all leaders working in Canada. Watch the webinar recording [here](#) or click on the image below.

**Figure 9.** Exploring the *In Plain Sight Report* and the Implications for Health Leadership

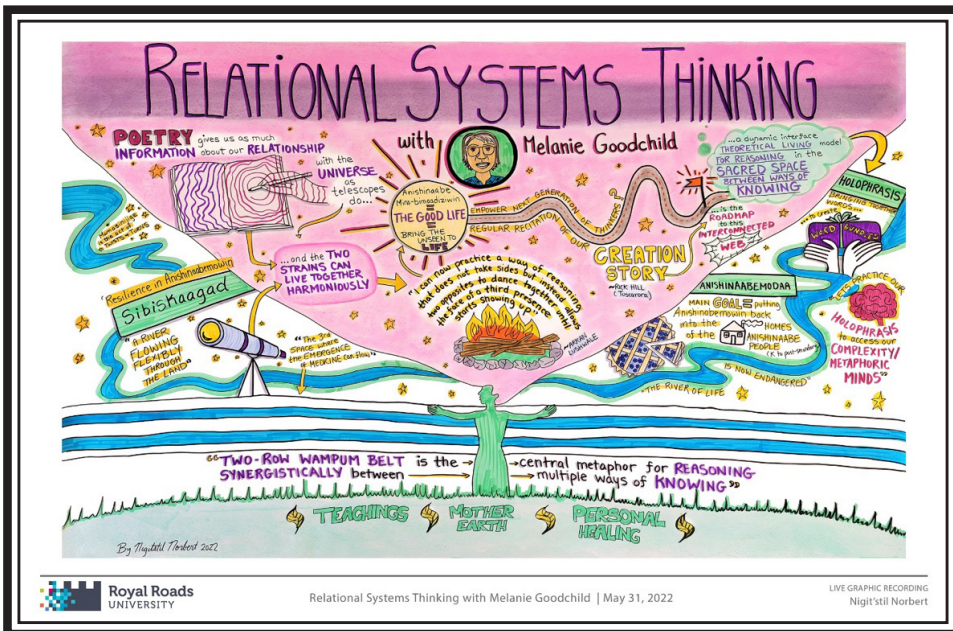


Note. Speaker: Harmony Johnson. Graphic recorder: Michelle Buchholz.

**Episode 2 - Relational Systems Thinking with Melanie Goodchild (May 31, 2022)**

Over the past few decades, systems theory, systems thinking, and systems change have become popular topics in the field of Leadership Studies. However, many of these approaches rely on principles derived from ancient wisdom and from Indigenous cultures worldwide. Drawing upon her 2021 and 2022 articles on relational systems thinking, as well as her doctoral work with Haudenosaunee Elders and Western systems thinkers, Anishinaabe (Ojibway) systems thinking and complexity scholar Melanie Goodchild identifies doorways to healing, transformation, and spiritual understanding through considering meanings embedded in the syntax of language and finding a middle ground between cultures. Watch the webinar recording [here](#) or click on the image below.

**Figure 10.** *Relational Systems Thinking*



*Note.* Speaker: Melanie Goodchild. Graphic recorder: Nig'it'stil Norbert.

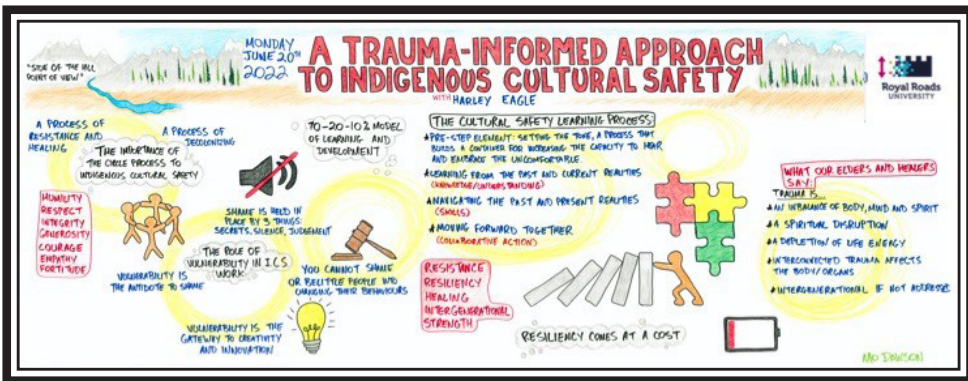
### Episode 3 - A Trauma-Informed Approach to Cultural Safety With Harley Eagle (June 20, 2022)

This webinar explores Indigenous Cultural Safety (ICS) through a trauma-informed lens, including how to create respectful environments that acknowledge systemic injustices due to racism and colonization and encouraging self-reflection and cultural humility by those in positions of power. ICS and anti-racism educator Harley Eagle offers foundational understandings and insights into:

- Indigenous Cultural Safety, including a description of trauma and a cultural safety learning journey
- Indigenous perspectives on the colonial history of Canada
- Systemic racism and its connection to colonization
- Actions to address systemic racism at the personal, intra-personal, classroom, and institutional levels

This webinar was influenced by several discussions between Harley and the School of Leadership Studies, as well as a training he conducted in the winter of 2021. Watch the webinar recording [here](#) or click on the image below.

Figure 11. *A Trauma-Informed Approach to Cultural Safety With Harley Eagle*



Note. Speaker: Harley Eagle. Graphic recorder: Mo Dawson.

### In Closing

We would like to thank all the speakers, graphic recorders, ASL interpreters, tech hosts, and many other behind-the-scene supporters who generously gave their time, passion, and expertise to these webinars. This was a team effort and together we ignited ideas, joy, purpose, and connection throughout some of the darkest days of the COVID-19 pandemic.

## **Acknowledgements**

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Thanks to Andrea Torres Lopez, Karina Monsalve, Anne Dale, and Chris Ling for their inspiration with pre-pandemic webinars.

Many people supported these webinars—too many to name. In particular, I would like to acknowledge key members of the team: co-lead on the series Sherry Richards as School Manager, Emara Angus as Marketing Specialist, Selena Kunar as Education Specialist, and Sam Brad as lead Graphic Recorder. Members of the School of Leadership Studies Administration Team and many other people provided support at different points of the series, and we simply could not have run this as a series without the individuals named here. Our deepest gratitude to all.

## **About the Author**

**Catherine Etmanski** is a Professor and Director of the School of Leadership Studies at Royal Roads University. Catherine has a passion for facilitating arts-based approaches to research, leadership and learning as a means of facilitating the transformative changes needed today. Email: [catherine.etmanski@royalroads.ca](mailto:catherine.etmanski@royalroads.ca)