

Styres, S. D., & Kempf, A. (Eds.). (2022). *Troubling truth and reconciliation in Canadian education: Critical perspectives*. University of Alberta Press. 302 pages. ISBN: 9781772126006

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Through our writing collaborations, we have both made references to insights and inspirations that we attribute to one author or another in Styres and Kempf's (2022) *Troubling Truth and Reconciliation in Canadian Education: Critical Perspectives*. As an Indigenous faculty member and an Indigenous graduate student, we were inspired by the courage of the truths that we had encountered in the text. When invited to review this book, we were excited to comment on this publication that had occupied prominent spaces on our desks and to fully engage with this volume. Many of the truths felt like what we knew to be spoken in hushed tones among our contemporaries regarding benevolent and performative reconciliatory acts all too characteristic of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) era. The text is both liberating and challenging as it exposes the reality of the continued role of the postsecondary and K–12 education sectors in diminishing Indigenous knowledges and participation. We talked in terms of vindication, pride, and a bit of trepidation in how a broader audience might react to the courageous throughlines that Styres and Kempf established in their editing of their book.

The editors have brought together an esteemed community of contributors who bring timely perspectives and insights to what reconciliation means and how it is manifest in schools and society. Through exposure of the *effervescence* of reconciliation, the contributors recognize the imperative of making sense of how far we have come in the reconciliation journey and what work lies ahead. The editors and contributors elucidate a notion of *troubling* reconciliation in an appreciative sense of telling truths that expose the limitations based on what we *thought* reconciliation was and could achieve and how Indigenous and non-Indigenous people *encounter* reconciliation in education sectors. Styres and Kempf embody the type of leadership that Corntassel (2023) describes “starts with the person having a vision or dream. That person begins to embody that vision by putting it into everyday practice. While implementing it, the person also has a responsibility to make that vision understandable to other people” (p. 154). Styres and Kempf’s vision of the value of exposing the vulnerabilities in an unexamined notion of reconciliation honours a learned context by speaking truths that resonate with those of us who have long addressed issues of power imbalances and injustices. The legacy of those injustices manifest in reconciliation discourse is what the editors set out to *trouble*.

The contributing authors evidence the scholarship that has emerged from the context of colonization that continues to exert pressure on learning institutions to resist challenges to dominant Western narratives. This scholarship answers back to the perceived *audacity* of Indigenous insistence on the recognition of our knowledge traditions as whole, intact, and standing alongside other world knowledges. Troubling this narrative recognizes the tenacity of Indigenous and ally scholars and teachers who have instigated this critical discourse within the postsecondary and K–12 education sectors. By instigating an examination of reconciliation in education systems in Canada, the editors and contributing authors invite the reader to reimagine what they believe about the role and value of publicly funded education in a reconciliation agenda.

Dr. Jan Hare, a professor and the Canada Research Chair in Indigenous Pedagogy at the University of British Columbia, provides a foreword that voices growing impatience with the reconciliation agenda and highlights the question advanced by the editors as to “whether reconciliation is dead, whether it ever existed, and indeed whether it is a worthy idea (if not an impossibility)” (Styres & Kempf, 2022, p. ix). Hare convincingly introduces the *troubling* thesis as the right analytical lens for this conversation at this time and in this place. The foreword is also explicit about the theoretical underpinnings of the book grounded in the complementary concepts of Indigenous self-determination, self-governance, and sovereignty as the reader will encounter these concepts frequently and forcefully. The editors point out that the purpose of the book is “to restore the relationship between the Onkwehonwe (Original) and settler peoples of this land” (Styres & Kempf, 2022, p. xiii), of course inclusive of Indigenous conceptualizations of sovereignty, as these conceptualizations are crucial to embrace for the reader to encounter the text in all its richness.

The book is presented in two parts. In Part 1, “Theoretical Perspectives on (Ir)reconciliation: Polishing the Silver Covenant Chain,” the editors argue that postsecondary and K–12 education perpetuate the narratives of the oppressor and diminish those of Indigenous peoples. The following question is posed: “How do we take up reconciliation in the midst of genocide” (Styres & Kempf, 2022, p. xviii)? To fully appreciate the theoretical perspectives on (ir)reconciliation unpacked in this section, it would help the reader to consider DiAngelo’s (2018) observation:

When I start from the premise that *of course* I have been thoroughly socialized into the racist culture in which I was born, I no longer need to expend energy denying that fact. I am eager—even excited—to identify my inevitable collusion so that I can figure out how to stop colluding! Denial and defensiveness that is needed to maintain it is exhausting. (p. 149)

This invitation to liberate from denial in the state of Indigenous–settler relations in Canada provides useful receptors to engage with the debate.

The seven contributors to the first part of the publication “explore the complexities of legislation, identity, and recognition; Indigenous–settler relationships, resurgence, and nation building; the politics of curricula and programming; and systemic undertakings concerning resurgence and colonial restitution in education” (Styres & Kempf, 2022, p. xix). Each of the seven attestations to the experiences of navigating place, voice, and influence within education sectors offers compelling insights into the limitations of systems and the resolve of Indigenous peoples to participate on our own terms, commensurate with what is expected in an institution of higher learning.

Deer’s (2022) querying of the role of schools in “the development of students’ capacity for moral decision-making” (p. 12) as an extension of and contribution to learning about Indigenous relationships and cultures introduces a critical discourse that challenges complacency with what schools determine is the role and purpose of reconciliation education. Pidgeon (2022) explores concepts of Indigenous resiliency, renewal, and resurgence in decolonizing Canadian higher education and how the exercise of Indigeneity empowers Indigenous participation in the academy. George (2022) explores the performativity of reconciliation and argues that “reconciliation and justice cannot be rooted in the performative inclusion of Indigenous knowledge, but instead must manifest in tangible actions that honour and respect Indigenous knowledge, authority, and self-determination” (p. 105). These and the other invitations to *trouble* the experiences and manifestations of reconciliation discourse in education in the first part of the book provide opportunity to examine Indigenous experiences and observations that validate how Indigenous contributions enrich reconciliation discourse in a manner commensurate with the scope of the resistance while providing opportunity for change.

Part 2, “Reconceptualizing Reconciliation in Education: Teaching and Learning in Right Relation,” explores “the ways we can use decolonizing approaches to critically interrogate reconciliation and reframe the ways we think about and do education” (Styres & Kempf, 2022, p. xxi). This section examines teaching as an affordance to critical reconciliation in postsecondary and K–12 education. The seven contributors to the second part of the publication offer insights and innovations consistent with what Kevin Lamoureux concluded, that “we have the opportunity to contribute to reconciliation in inclusive classrooms where *all* students see themselves as transformative, of having the tools and compassion they need to help our nation heal and reclaim its identity as a Treaty nation” (Katz, 2018, p. 211). Styres and

Kempf challenge that “the troubling concept of reconciliation can no longer be seen as an abstract, tacit, or benign notion with no current political and social implications” (p. 141). Haig-Brown and Green (2022) offer an inspiring exchange that demonstrates the need and opportunity for a paradigm shift in education at a level of authenticity and investment consistent with the spirit and intent of truth and reconciliation. Fittingly, the last word in this section is given to Kerr and Parent (2022) who share four relational commitments. These include “embodied decolonial relations, relation as a storying of land and Indigenous territory, ethical relationality as an educational practice, and interrelatedness as the foundation of whole human being” (p. 282). They recognize that:

There continue to be many (im)possibilities and complicities in higher education ... but we do believe that an overt and critical focus on settler colonialism that centers ethical relationality, truth-telling, and Indigenous sovereignty provides pedagogical opportunities for instructors in higher education to gesture toward decolonial futures. (Kerr & Parent, 2022, p. 292)

Part 2 is encouraging with diverse narratives of ideas and actions that are taking up the space of reconciliation in education in ways that are not tempered by complacency or misunderstanding of Indigenous aspirations of reconciliation. The diversity in voices, styles, and approaches to exploring constraints and affordances in reconciliation provides many points of departure for validating, understanding, challenging, and engaging in reconciliation discourse in education.

Examining racism, trauma, and resistance in postsecondary education, Cote-Meek (2014) concluded:

It is my hope that one of the primary pedagogical contributions ... has been to produce and document a narrative of the impact of ongoing colonial violence on Aboriginal students and professors. This narrative is not new, but it does reaffirm that colonialism continues to have devastating effects on Aboriginal peoples. It also reaffirms the pervasiveness of violence in our society despite the fact that many would rather ignore or downplay the level of violence that exists. (p. 166)

That courageous statement preceded the TRC Calls to Action and the flurry of activity that has followed within Canadian postsecondary and K–12 education sectors. There has been a lot of attention to truth and reconciliation agendas in Canadian education, but the opportunity to engage the caliber of contributors that Styres and Kempf have assembled advances the discourse in ways that honour those who persisted in representing Indigenous peoples and knowledges within oppressive contexts. *Troubling* truth and reconciliation in Canadian education engages with those who advocate for and instigate systemic changes, who stand alongside their Indigenous colleagues, and who add their voices to calls for change. It instigates opportunity to make sense of reconciliation in institutional and societal contexts and to reassess intent and actions against a renewed, shared meaning of reconciliation.

Styres and Kempf have contributed a vocabulary for examining our intent and actions by opening portals to learning about ourselves, our communities, and our institutions; assessing alignment with what we believe and aspire to; and describing the most compelling Calls to Action for institutions of learning: resisting power and oppression and flourishing a shared human experience that recognizes the inherent worth and contributions of all.

Troubling Truth and Reconciliation in Canadian Education: Critical Perspectives is a stellar resource that not only orients readers to the challenges of decolonization and Indigenization in Canadian learning institutions but also creates space for dialogue in our social and professional collaborations to enact meaningful, necessary change. It is not always a harbinger of doom but an invitation to engage with the conversation in a manner that models our societal aspirations.

Styres and Kempf, as well as their inspired contributors, offer a publication that aims to nurture the flame of reconciliation and provides points of departure to recommit, revision, and recast efforts at reconciliation in postsecondary and K–12 education in ways that advance beyond rhetoric. The level of discourse; grounding in evidence and experience; balance of voices of Indigenous and settler contributors; and dedicated throughlines to articulations and aspirations of Indigenous sovereignty, self-governance, and self-determination provide a text that we predict will continue to motivate educators and leaders in

education.

Troubling Truth and Reconciliation in Canadian Education: Critical Perspectives is not and should not be an easy read, but we invite that it is a necessary read. The conversations that its contributors instigate will result in a retrospective 10 years hence that *troubling* was worth it and that we are better for having engaged in the dialogue.

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