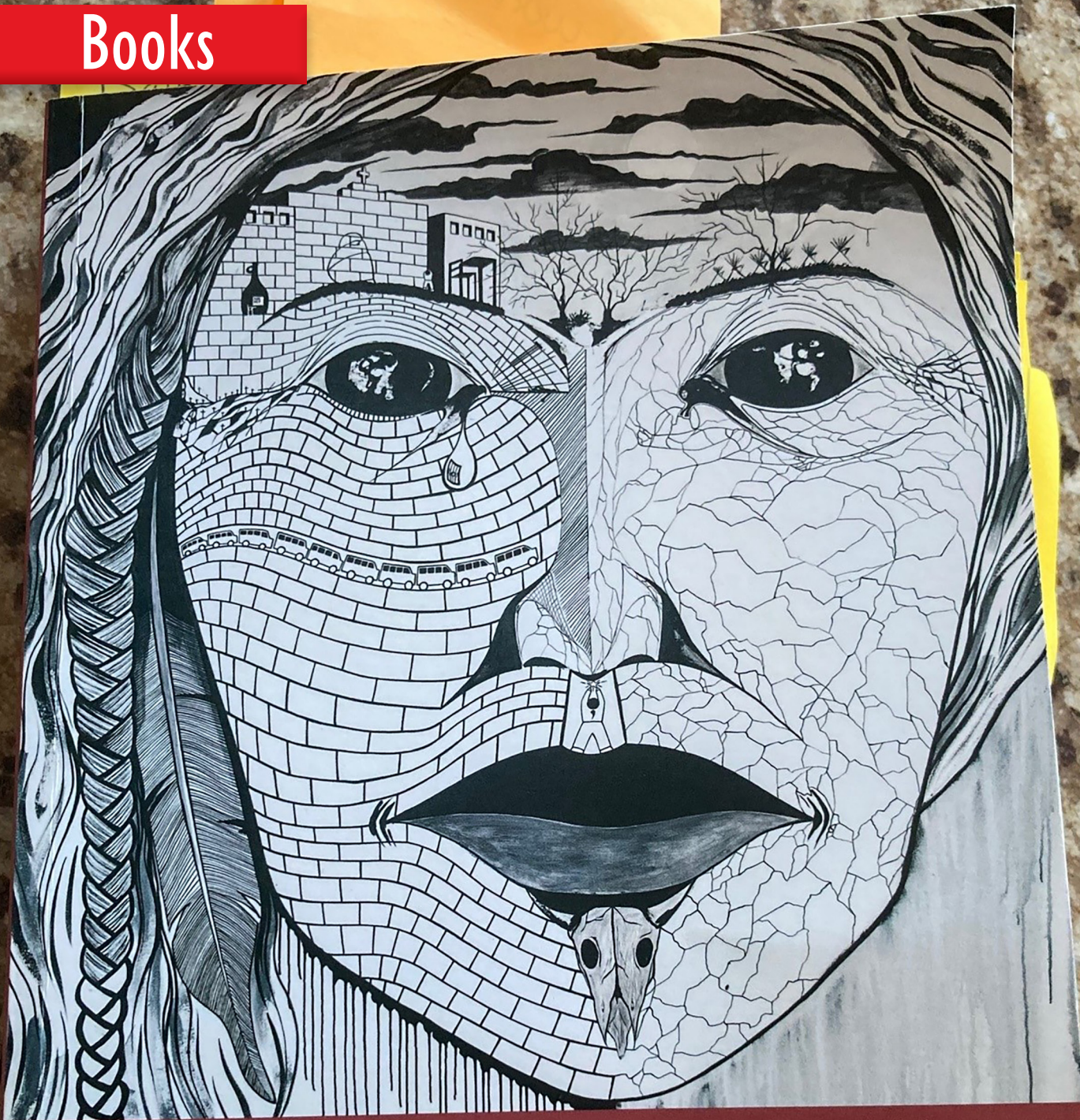


Books



Edited by

SANDRA D. STYRES & ARLO KEMPF

Troubling Truth and Reconciliation in Canadian Education

Critical Perspectives

Carolyn's well-loved and
annotated copy of the book

Troubling Truth and Reconciliation in Canadian Education: Critical Perspectives

Edited by Sandra D. Styres and Arlo Kempf

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Reviewed by
Carolyn Roberts

**Faculty Lecturer and Indigenous Pedagogies
Teaching Fellow, SFU Department of Education**

I cannot put this book down! It is a must-read for anyone in education and – I would argue – anyone living today in this place now known as Canada. The book is a collection of scholarly work that gives the reader a critical perspective of what reconciliation looks like today in education, following the final report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. Since this report in 2015, there have been many policies, procedures, and mandates put in place that are gestures towards reconciliation. As an Indigenous educator within the system, I can speak from the experience of what it is like to do this work. This quote from the opening chapter speaks directly to the work I do.

"Reconciliation in education is a complex and challenging endeavour that necessitates first identifying the effects of settler colonialism on education practices, and then finding ways to decolonize those practices. It is also fraught to consider (or conceive of) these undertakings in the contexts of ongoing colonialism – like trying to dry off while you were still in the shower with the water running."

(p. xviii Kemp, Styres, Brechbill & El-Sherif)

As someone who is immersed in this work on a daily basis, I am in full agreement with the authors. Trying to change the system from within sometimes feels like a battle in quicksand. This collection of articles from Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars speaks to the challenges of procedures and mandates of decolonial educational practices within higher education and the K-12 system. From the outside looking in, you may not fully understand how these procedures and mandates harm the process; by reading this book, you will see in the writing a critical lens on the challenges that many who do this work face on a daily basis. The book not only shows the harms, it discusses the absence of the work being done even though it is mandated work in many systems. The chapters challenge the mainstream understanding of what the work of reconciliation is, and how we can support the work if true change is the goal.

***"Trying to change the system
from within sometimes feels
like a battle in quicksand."***

As educators within the system today, I cannot encourage you enough to take the time to read through these pages. There is so much within this collection that will help support your understandings, and your development of a critical lens on this work in education. The chapter that I have read and re-read is Chapter 3 by Dawn Zinga, “Uncomfortable Realities”. Her work speaks directly to me as an educator. Her chapter talks about the challenges of how the work is being done in educational spaces. When we step into this work for change, one of the very first things we need to do is speak the truth. Zinga uses the lawn care metaphor to help us understand why this needs to happen:

“Consider a lawn care metaphor: if you continue to mow your lawn and use that mowing to address the weeds, then your lawn will continue to have weeds. If instead you go and remove the weed by the root, you will eventually eliminate the weeds. Similarly, if we continue to see our responsibility as simply engaging in conversation about what is happening without examining the root of the issue – and if we fail to engage in ethical space to examine and trouble our biases and ways of knowing to see how they contribute to the root causes – then we will continue to gloss over the issues and fail in attempts at reconciliation.”

(Zinga p.55)

What I appreciate about Zinga’s metaphor is that if we never address the roots of racism, oppression, and colonization, then true change is not possible. Within my journey in education, I see this as the core of our work as educators. When we teach the truth about this place now known as Canada, the truth about how this land and systems are built upon the colonial system and racism, then we will have the opportunity to dig up some roots, and change maybe possible.

“When we step into this work for change, one of the very first things we need to do is speak the truth.”

This is just one of the 14 chapters in this book. The scholars that have contributed to this book come from a wide range of backgrounds and knowledge. Each chapter invites you into the work, with various approaches and context, as the authors share with the reader the troubling challenges of decolonizing the education system. The book tells some hard truths we must all hear in order for educational change to happen.

I encourage all educators to pick up this book, sit with the words, and engage with the ideas shared. I am reminded of the words shared by Chief Harley Chappell from Semiahmoo Nation this past school year at Surrey Schools Indigenous education professional development day. He reminds us that we should listen with our ears, take the words in, and chew on them for a while as we try to digest them. We can then come back to the work with a deeper understanding and knowledge. This work is challenging, and if we take the time to really look and educate ourselves, then I believe that change can happen. So read, sit, chew, and repeat.



@mcarolynroberts

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