



# *Our Shared Future: Windows into Canada's Reconciliation Journey — A Review*

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## ABSTRACT

The challenges and complexity of the reconciliation process are still not well understood by a large number of non-Indigenous people in Canada. As a nation, we are attempting to grasp the intricacy of how to unravel and atone for the damage that has been done in establishing and managing the more than 130 residential schools in Canada. This not only impacted more than 150,000 First Nations, Métis, and Inuit children but destroyed generations of families that are still and will continue to be impacted for years to come. The official apology from Prime Minister Stephen Harper on June 11, 2008, to all Indigenous people in Canada for the atrocities of the Indian Residential Schools was the start of a very long and painful continuous journey. The 94 calls to action released in 2015 by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission provide a road map to a complex recovery process for Indigenous people across the country. In January 2018, Health Canada held a national panel discussion with Indigenous leaders and experts on the question "Reconciliation—What Does it Mean?" One of the main themes of reconciliation revolves around education, and, in order to stay focused, we must continue to educate Canadians, including police leaders and new recruits, as we move through the meandering path of reconciliation. The book *Our Shared Future* provides an outstanding in-depth look through the windows into a number of individual perspectives on the reconciliation journey.

**Key Words** Calls to action; trauma-informed education; leadership.

It was an incredible honour to be asked by the *Journal of Community Safety and Well-Being's* Editor in Chief, Norm Taylor, to review a newly published book edited by Laura Reimer and Robert Christmas entitled *Our Shared Future: Windows into Canada's Reconciliation Journey*. The enclosed comments are mine alone and do not necessarily represent those of the Ontario Provincial Police. The contributors to this work include academic leaders, practitioners, community advocates, and leaders of change. All of the learned colleagues and contributors have added significantly to my understanding of the complexity and challenge of reconciliation: David Barnard, Peter Bisson, Ronald Evans, Joseph Garcea, Dale McFee, Mikayla Leanne Plett, Brian Rice, Annette Trimbee, Paul Vogt, and Christa Yeates. This book takes the reader quite literally through a journey of exploration from the Two-Row wampum on the cover (courtesy of the artistry of Plett) and historical reference points into a number of personal and professional viewpoints on reconciliation. As Norm noted, the patience and tolerance, among the most aggrieved, for both the settler/colonial and the "whiteness" orientations of

our institutional frameworks in Canada is at a critical all-time low. We need to continue to inform, educate, and act. This book does just that—informs, educates, and demonstrates some of the actions that have been taken and many steps that still need to occur.

The leadership of Dr. Bob Christmas and Dr. Laura Reimer is to be commended, as they have not only put together a list of outstanding and knowledgeable expert contributors, but weaved a path for the reader to explore difficult and incredibly complex subjects and pivot points when reconciliation is discussed. In addition to insights in their individual core subject area specialties, they put together great concluding summaries for each of the contributors' chapters. In truth, if I attempted to compile a review of each of the authors' contributions, it would not be within my capabilities to duplicate the comprehensive, yet succinct summaries crafted (so you will have to purchase the book). There were a number of areas which resonated with me, and I would like to share some experiences directly related to select chapters in the book.

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## The Reviewer's Perspective as a Police Educator

As a non-Indigenous person, my perspective has been influenced not only by my personal history but also by my position as a senior civilian police educator within the Ontario Provincial Police (OPP) for over 30 years. I recently had the honour to contribute some personal stories in the soon-to-be-published *The Seven Grandfather Teachings*, by George Couchie, as well as facilitating learning on the "Walking the Path" Instructor development program. I have served in a number of roles, including physical training and defensive tactics instructor, instructional designer, Chief Instructor, and police education leader. I bring a unique perspective, as I have been provided with great opportunities in the field of policing over the years within the institutional framework that has deprived many of similar opportunities. Norm asked me the question that must be the operative question surrounding any book on reconciliation in Canada, "will Canadian policing be able to absorb, comprehend, and act upon the book's observations and directions?" (N. Taylor, personal communication, August 11, 2020). With this short discussion, I will attempt to provide an answer to address that challenge.

The foreword, by Dr. David Barnard (Spirit name Standing White Bear), opens the journey by providing the context of the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in areas such as health, economic opportunities, housing outcomes, etc., which especially today is totally unacceptable. He discusses the areas that are still out of balance. The first four chapters set the context, origins, and history of the reconciliation journey. Loretta Ross (LLB), in chapter seven, helps the reader to understand the main principles of treaties between Indigenous peoples and the Crown. The treaty of Niagara in 1764 and the creation of the wampum belt was intended to record a means to solidify a mutual understanding of the "shared responsibility" for recognizing the importance of the relationship between nations. Unfortunately, we have drifted far from that initial mutual understanding. In the beginning chapter, "Our Long Road," Dr. Reimer describes the history of Indigenous relations in Canada and the Acts and Treaties that were initially engaged in by the government with Indigenous peoples. Although there were previous treaties and proclamations, the Indian Act of 1867 entrenched the stripping of Indigenous rights, culture, and identity more formally. This brief but very informative chapter ends with the delivery of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (2015; TRC) as well as the 94 calls to action.

In chapter two, Dr. Vogt does a great job of transitioning the discussion to Leadership, Reconciliation, and Friendship. Of the 94 calls to action, 28 involve education reform. He also notes Murray Sinclair's (Chair of the Truth & Reconciliation Commission Report) comment that "it is precisely because education was the primary tool of oppression of Aboriginal people, and miseducation of all Canadians, that we have concluded that education holds the key to reconciliation" (Sinclair, 2014, p. 7). As a career-long police educator, I of course would agree with that keen observation, but I also recognize the importance of the other themes of historical consciousness and identity. As education is a key theme particularly for police, new recruits receive Indigenous training both at the Ontario Police College and the Provincial Police Academy, which is delivered by our Indigenous Policing Bureau. As an employee of the OPP, I have completed the five-day

Indigenous Awareness Training course (originally named First Nations Awareness course), a required course for every instructor and all OPP officers. Completing this course was transformational for me (and others as well): I learned about the treaties, some of the traditions and ceremonies of Canada's first peoples, but also of the horror of children being ripped from their parents' arms to be placed in Residential Schools. That this was part of the government's policy is something that is unfathomable to any parent.

## An Uneven Journey to Reconciliation

Dr. Rice leads us on a walk in the footsteps of a peacemaker. This very personal odyssey of reconciliation highlights that we all experience our journey differently. Indeed, Reimer and Christmas (2020) point out that not everyone is on this journey: some deny it, some are just awakening, others struggle in silence, and still others are unsure of their role. Although I am a non-Indigenous person, one of my first exposures to the institutional injustice and inequity experienced by Indigenous peoples goes back more than thirty years. In 1990, in my first few months of working for the OPP, I was honoured with a Commissioner's Commendation for life saving when I provided first aid to a First Nations police recruit who was attending OPP training and suffered a medical emergency. The OPP had a longstanding positive relationship with Indigenous communities. Indigenous band councils identified recruits to be trained at the Ontario Police College (OPC) and sent their recruits to the OPP Academy to help them prepare by attending our pre-OPC training. During this time, it was customary for OPP recruits to have a full background check, including medical screening, which occurred over a period of several months (and even years in some cases) before their training started. This particular First Nations recruit had only recently been hired, days prior to the start of the class, and had been directed to report to the Academy for training with very little screening, including no medical or physical fitness requirements that any staff were made aware of. This put this recruit at risk, staff being unaware of any potential health risks.

I can say that the majority of instructors recognized that there were a number of inequities between OPP recruits and First Nations recruits and attempted to address some of these issues and provide support to the best of their ability. I have seen the changes and improvements first-hand. Our Indigenous Policing Bureau provides a number of supports and works collaboratively with our First Nations policing partners in OPP-administered areas as well as with "stand-alone" Indigenous Police partners. The selection standards and training have improved significantly over the years, and all recruits in Ontario have to meet the same provincial standard. Although I have not been involved in recruit training for some time I recall consistently outstanding Indigenous recruit officers from Six Nations, Rama, Treaty Three, NAPS, and Akwesasne Mohawk agencies to name a few.

The divide in access to medical and social support resources between some Indigenous and non-Indigenous recruits prior to attending the Academy was quite evident. As a result of continued efforts, current Indigenous police screening and preparation of candidates is vastly different from those earlier conditions. However, we know that gaps in access to medical and social supports, particularly in the

northern parts of Ontario, are still a major issue today. Leaders such as United Chiefs and Councils of Mnidoo Mnising (UCCM) Police Chief Faron Whiteye recently indicated that it's about getting control over their own budgets: "It's not just about equal treatment, but equitable treatment as well" (White, 2020, para. 13). Self-governance with traditional colonial constraints, without consultation and collaborative efforts, is doomed to failure. Chief Roland Morrison of the Nishnawbe Aski Police Service (which is the largest First Nations Police Service in Canada and the second largest in North America), however, has witnessed the progress over the years: "We are seeing a lot of progress in the last 5 to 7 years, and our communities are seeing that. It's coming, it's just not as fast as we would like it" (para. 23). It is encouraging that change is occurring, but the multisectoral involvement required in the reconciliation process means that this will be a long, slow journey.

As a lifelong educator I have the privilege of educating both Indigenous and non-Indigenous law enforcement officers and civilians. In chapter five, Yeates and Reimer (2020) address "Reconciliation and Indigenous Adult Learners: Reshaping a Trauma Informed Lens." This chapter resonated significantly with me. Most police educators are not well versed in trauma-informed education, much less trauma-informed strategies to deal with issues, including vicarious trauma. We address this in our criminal investigation courses, such as Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Investigator courses, but all instructional staff need to have this training as well. Many universities and colleges, including the one where I work as a part-time professor, provide similar supports and strategies to assist educators.

Yeates and Reimer (2020) also note that "It is not uncommon for the adult students to be absent for weeks at a time... Often they do not telephone to explain or say they are going to miss a few days or several months" (p. 99). In the police training context, attention to detail, commitment to public service, studying, showing up on time, documentation, and accountability are all important ingredients for achieving success. During an early morning physical training session in the early 1990s, one of our First Nations recruits did not show up to class. Staff members checked his room, but he wasn't there. Some of his clothes appeared to be missing, but he still had personal items in his room. We called the detachment area (which was several hours away) and band council to inform them about his disappearance. Since he had no phone at his residence, officers and band members went to his home, which was accessible only by snowmobile (or by ATV in the summer). During the wellness check, there he was. When confronted about disappearing without notifying anyone, he was relaxed and quite frank about it: "Well, I had to chop wood for my family cuz they ran out. I needed to come home and chop some more wood so they don't freeze during the winter while I'm away doing police training" (Personal Communication, Dave Woodhouse, n.d.). Firstly, we were all relieved that he was fine, but then the reality sank in... how privileged we are and the fact that most of us don't have a clue about the hardships experienced by many in marginalized communities like our Indigenous peoples. It is stories like these that need to be continually told until changes occur. I was pleased that our Academy leadership and Instructors continually discussed ways in which our

Indigenous recruits could be supported to ease their transition into the role of peacemaker. Being empathetic and having an understanding of Maslow's hierarchy of needs really put things in perspective and I was very proud of the fact that our Academy leadership recognized this and supported Indigenous recruits.

### Reconciliation through Shared Learning

In chapter six, "Reconciliation through Education," Dr. Trimbee sparked one of my most poignant moments as a facilitator. Trimbee (2020) explains that "a central distinction between *reconciliation indigenization* and *decolonization indigenization* relates to where power is situated in decision-making processes" (p. 124). Although the focus is on higher education and student access, I would like to share a police education and training example at the grassroots level. In a previous role as an Instructor at the OPP Academy I was supervising, assessing, and debriefing simulations. The simulation scenario was a traffic stop for speeding where, once the officer (recruit) stops the vehicle and engages the driver, the driver accuses the officer (recruit) of racially profiling them. Part of the information the officer has is that the driver has been stopped for speeding on two previous occasions over the last couple of weeks. One of the expectations is that the officer remains professional and courteous throughout the traffic stop despite the accusations and the attempt by the driver to escalate the situation. Recruits have to demonstrate their ability to de-escalate a volatile situation, and this is one of many that they are engaged in during their training. The primary OPP officer (recruit) for this scenario was Indigenous. The officer (recruit) did a fine job of de-escalating the situation with the driver, took his driver's license, ownership, and insurance back to the police cruiser to run the vehicle and the driver checks.

As the debriefer, I asked him what was he going to do, and he said, "he's getting a speeding ticket" and wrote up the ticket. On the way back to the offender's vehicle, the officer (recruit) stopped directly halfway between the two vehicles (yes, we debriefed officer safety issues), turned to me, and said "I've changed my mind. I am giving him a break and letting him off with a warning only, because I know what it's like being discriminated against" (personal communication, recruit, n.d.). He continued on to the driver and communicated to him that he understood the idea of being profiled and discriminated against. It was a poignant moment, because during the debriefing with all the recruits, we had an incredibly open, honest dialogue regarding racism, profiling, using discretion (use, misuse, and abuse), implicit bias, and critical decision making. If we ask students to trust us with their opinions and perceptions, we have to be able to deal with the outcomes of those requests as well. In chapter three, Rice (2020) points out that "we all bring our biases into our conversations; however, it is only through dialogue with one another that we can truly find reconciliation" (p. 47).

Dr. Garcea discusses the issues related to reconciliation and satellite urban reserves in Canada, while Dr. Evans outlines the critical aspects related to Call to Action #92 in "Business and Reconciliation" in chapters eight and nine, respectively. While some organizations may establish Indigenous programs or positions for political capital or to restore positive relationships, some corporations recognize that it's

more than just doing the right thing. As Evans (2020) points out, “having the private sector engage in the reconciliation efforts identified by the TRC is simply good for business” (p. 190). It is encouraging to see some of these changes occurring in large corporations in the banking industry, which is also part of the calls to action (TD Bank Group, 2015). In fact recently, Krystal Abotossaway, who is Anishinaabekwe (personal communication, October 3, 2020) announced she will move into the exciting position of Senior Manager, Diversity and Inclusion— Indigenous markets, for TD Bank effective October 4, 2020. TD Bank Group (2015) is an example of organizations taking a proactive leadership role to address call to action #92.

### Systemic Reform: Better Ways are Possible

In chapter ten, Chief McFee and Dr. Christmas discuss the importance of building authentic trust in the reconciliation and the evolution of Canadian policing. The challenge, as noted by McFee and Christmas, is that police are infused in some of Canada’s most inflamed conflicts. In fact, it is well accepted that turning to local and provincial police has become the default when facing a number of social and judicial issues. McFee and Christmas (2020) discuss the four pillars of the Scotland model used to assist police agencies in that jurisdiction in dealing with complex community safety issues. These four pillars focus on (1) local solutions, (2) data-driven indicators, (3) partnerships, and (4) collective outcomes (p. 206). These are not new to policing in Canada, but the section provides a renewed look at how they can impact police service delivery by putting the focus on individuals and connecting them with the services they may need. These are particularly important, compelling arguments where Indigenous policing issues are discussed.

Police officers have to deal with a society that has a lack of mental health and social supports for vulnerable populations, such as Indigenous people, who are significantly over represented in our judicial system. The lessons learned from Prince Albert and Edmonton and many agencies across the country point to the need for a multisectoral, collaborative approach to dealing with social determinants of crime and the need for judicial reform. Any agency trying to deal with major community and social issues related to crime on its own, I would say, is not just ludicrous but verging on negligent. Police leaders need to recognize when it’s time to consolidate and engage external resources and expertise because they don’t have the ability to independently deal with complex social issues.

### Embracing Our Shared Future

The challenge of change and reconciliation is complex. The title of this book quite frankly outlines the path ahead simply: “Our Shared Future.” The path of reconciliation continues to be incredibly intricate, and only a committed, collective, collaborative approach across multi-sectored systems will move our nation forward. While great strides have been made by police, we need leaders who understand the urgency of continuing to support changes through the calls to action and beyond. Although implementation of changes can occur and is occurring in both the police training and education areas at provincial and national levels, the major roadblock continues to be institutional legal structures such as the Indian Act, which must be dismantled.

Further to this, Bisson (2020) noted that the process of reconciliation is non-linear. The path to true reconciliation will include processes that will “stall, regress, progress slowly, stumble forward accidentally, or move forward with some intent” (p. 76). Each police agency will move forward towards reconciliation impacted by a number of those factors, and our agency is no different. The OPP has a longstanding history of collaboratively nurturing positive relationships with Indigenous communities, but it hasn’t been all positive and it would be naïve and wrong to suggest it has. Historically, we have progressed and we have improved programs and initiatives, but in some instances, we have also stalled and regressed. However, I am proud that we are continually moving forward, being accountable, and improving our service to Indigenous communities. In 2007, the Ipperwash Inquiry Report was made public; that same year, the OPP established our First Nations Policing Bureau (now Indigenous Policing Bureau) to improve our capacity to work with our community partners to mitigate, manage, and resolve conflict. I am extremely proud of the strides and contributions our Indigenous Policing Bureau continues to make provincially and nationally. The fact that my wife works in that Bureau is just a bonus (no bias!). In fact, a previous Director of that Bureau became the current Director of our Academy, Superintendent Sue Decock, when, in 2014, she became the first female Academy Director in OPP history who is also a proud Ojibway and a band member of the Alderville First Nation.

The path to reconciliation is challenged when our political leaders, such as Quebec Premier Francois Legault, acknowledge that there is racism against Indigenous people but repeatedly maintain that systemic racism doesn’t exist in the province. When we discuss our shared future, I see tremendous opportunity for continued growth and change in the actions of our youth. The recognition of the need to change is part of the education process that is discussed throughout *Our Shared Future*. I am encouraged to see that in a small Cape Breton high school, the 900 Riverview Rural High School students voted to change their sports teams’ names because they were disrespectful to Indigenous peoples. After almost 50 years, the school is now rebranding itself. School officials said the name “Redmen” was initially chosen because red was one of the school’s colours, but the student body forced the issue and changed the name to “Ravens.” Allison Bernard, of Eskasoni First Nation, who works with the Mi’kmaq Rights Initiative, attended Riverview and played hockey for the school in the 1980s. Bernard noted, “Students are more compassionate these days, the younger generation...they know, through social media and education that Aboriginal Canadians have gone through a lot. And they understand our plight” (Martin, 2020, para 11).

As Vogt (2020) pointed out, reconciliation will not occur with one Act of Parliament or one Treaty Agreement being fully fulfilled; it will only occur over an extended period of time. Recognizing that “reconciliation can take many forms [and] comes down to individual acts and personal relationships, regardless of how big or small our sphere of influence is” (Reimer & Christmas, 2020, p. 232), is an important final consideration. This is a valuable resource: its contents should be part of police Indigenous Awareness Training programs, and I would encourage all police leaders and educators to read *Our Shared Future*, as education is a critical pathway to

reconciliation. Reconciliation is not a simple, linear process. I have only touched on a couple of the areas of this book, and this discussion does not do justice to all the wonderful information I have not been able to address. The contributors to this incredibly valuable resource include evidence of forward momentum on the reconciliation path, but clearly there still is a lot of heavy lifting that needs to be collectively shared.

To conclude where we began, Norm posed the question, “Will Canadian policing be able to absorb, comprehend, and act upon the book’s observations and directions?” With a continued emphasis on fulfilling the Calls to Action, the answer is “yes.” Miigwetch.

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#### CONFLICT OF INTEREST DISCLOSURES

The author’s wife works in the Ontario Provincial Police Indigenous Policing Bureau. There are no other known conflict of interest.

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