

Sharing the Land, Sharing a Future

Highlights from a Special Reconciliation Forum at Congress 2016

On 1 June 2016 the Federation for the Humanities and Social Sciences co-sponsored a unique half-day public forum on reconciliation at the University of Calgary in conjunction with Congress 2016. The event was a collaboration between the Federation, several member associations representing humanities and social sciences disciplines, and a coalition that has come together to mark the 20th anniversary of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (also known as RCAP). Over 140 academics, administrators, community members, and others attended the morning's event, which featured a keynote, panel discussion, and workshops. This report showcases a few highlights of this engaging event; you can find the full Agenda for the forum [here](#).

The Federation and the RCAP Anniversary Initiative: A Commitment to Reconciliation

In May 2015 the Federation for the Humanities and Social Sciences announced its [commitment](#) to contributing to reconciliation between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples by adopting the Touchstones of Hope Principles and Processes. The Federation's focus is on the crucial role that post-secondary education, and the humanities and social sciences, will play in the process of research, understanding, and action towards reconciliation. As part of this ongoing commitment the Federation has partnered with a coalition working to mark the 20th anniversary of the RCAP report. The coalition's initiative centers around a conference taking place November 2-4 at the University of Manitoba. The purpose of the RCAP Anniversary Initiative is to mobilize, explore, and extend knowledge available from the Report and the intervening 20 years to advance reconciliation. *Sharing the Land, Sharing a Future* not only provided an opportunity to discuss the role of government and the humanities and social sciences in reconciliation, but it also allowed those preparing papers for the November conference to gather feedback on their works in progress.

Keynote Address by Cindy Blackstock - "Government's Great Failure: Doing Better for First Nations Children When They Know Better"

Cindy Blackstock's keynote came after a welcome by President of the Federation Stephen Toope and an opening prayer and comments by the co-chair of the RCAP Anniversary Initiative and Professor Emerita (Trent University) Marlene Brant Castellano. Blackstock is the Executive Director of the First Nations Child and Family Caring Society of Canada and a Federation Board Member. She delivered a powerful keynote that pointed to the systemic racism of the Canadian government and held it to account for the trend of studying issues affecting Aboriginal peoples, accepting ensuing recommendations (such as those from RCAP), and then not following them. She told the audience that Canada has a long history of putting itself between First Nations parents and their children, and has direct complicity in enabling their abuse. She pointed to the historical examples of the firing of Peter Henderson Bryce, a doctor and civil servant who revealed the atrocities inside residential schools, which she contrasted with the celebration of Duncan Campbell Scott, a civil servant and poet who oversaw and defended the system. Blackstock also pointed out that researchers and members of humanities and social science disciplines, including her own social work, have played key roles in the propagation of discrimination, and that we



need to confront our own roles and history to make change in the future. She warned that academics too often see themselves as benevolent, and asserted that Canada is pursuing a policy of “incremental equality” —small changes that will never add up to full equality. She stated that “we have become accustomed to being grateful” for these inadequate steps to address racial inequalities, and called on the audience to be morally courageous like Bryce, and like Shannen Koostachin, to advocate for justice now, including equitable funding for First Nations schools. Blackstock’s moving keynote received a standing ovation.

Panel – How are humanities and Social Science Associations responding?

Six humanities and social sciences associations came together to discuss their response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s Calls to Action and what remains to be done. Terry Wotherspoon, President of the Canadian Sociological Association, stated that reconciliation is an ongoing process and that the association has an equity group to develop their work in this area, while Vice President of the Canadian Political Science Association Yasmeen Abu-Laban announced that the CPSA has struck a reconciliation committee to address the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s recommendations. The need to further reconciliation through education was a prominent theme throughout. Dixon Sookraj, President of the Canadian Association of Social Work Education, articulated the need for Indigenous control over education and to integrate Indigenous methods in the curriculum, while the Canadian Society for the Study of Indigenous Education’s Kevin Lamoureux highlighted the critical potential of educators and the need to connect universities and traditional teachings. Winona Wheeler, chosen to represent the Canadian Historical Association, stated that the association had heard the call to integrate the TRC’s recommendations into their teaching, but asserted that the right to teach Indigenous knowledge needs to be earned. Indigenous Literary Studies Association representative Deanna Reder spoke from a report co-authored with Linda Morra of the Association of Canadian College and University Teachers of English and stating that ILSA is promoting Indigenous writing and understanding, while ACCUTE has held events and panels on indigenous topics. Like many other disciplines, the field of literature is often Eurocentric, and Reder and Morra argued that Indigenous English Departments should be a priority. Audience discussion focussed on the challenges of evaluating the outcomes of associations’ commitments to reconciliation, addressing the shortage of Indigenous scholars, and how to find resources for reconciliation initiatives.

Workshops – Shaping Future Research

After the panel discussion the audience split up to attend one of four interactive workshops that gave audience members the opportunity to provide feedback on authors’ ideas and research as they prepare for the November RCAP conference. The sessions featured Mark Dockstator, President of First Nations University of Canada, who presented on nation-to-nation relations; Cindy Blackstock, Executive Director of the First Nations Child and Family Caring Society of Canada and Federation Board Member, whose workshop discussed reconciliation and the well-being of Indigenous children; a paper on indigenizing education presented by Jan Hare, Professor of Indigenous Education in Teacher Education at UBC and co-authored by Jo-Ann Archibald, Associate Dean for Indigenous Education at UBC; and Jonathan Dewar, former Director of the Shingwauk Residential Schools Centre and Special Advisor to the President at Algoma University, who spoke about the power of the arts in reconciliation. More information on the





November Sharing the Land, Sharing a Future conference will be available on the Federation website shortly.

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