

TRC public education forums: Education Days and Youth Dialogues

Education for reconciliation must happen not only in formal education settings such as elementary and secondary schools and post-secondary institutions, but in more informal places. One of the ways that the Commission fulfilled its public education mandate was through forums such as National Event Education Days and Youth Dialogues. The Commission believes that establishing a strong foundation for reconciliation depends on the achievement of individual self-respect and mutual respect between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians. While this is true for adults, it is particularly urgent with regard to young people; they are the lifeblood of reconciliation into the future.

At the Saskatchewan National Event, Grade Eight student Brooklyn Rae, who attended the Education Day, said, “I think it’s really important for youth to voice their opinions, to not only prove to themselves that they can, that their voice is important, but to prove to adults that they have a voice and that they have a strong opinion that is important in the world.”¹²¹ Elder Barney Williams, a member of the TRC’s Survivor Committee and one of the panellists at the Education Day Youth Dialogue, said,

I think more and more people are realizing that the engagement of youth is crucial. For me, as a Survivor, I’m really impressed with how much they knew. I was very impressed with the type of questions the audience asked. It tells me, as somebody who’s carried this pain for over sixty-eight years, that there’s hope. Finally there’s hope on the horizon and it’s coming from the right place. It’s coming from the youth.¹²²

The Commission agrees. We believe that children and youth must have a strong voice in developing reconciliation policy, programs, and practices into the future. It is therefore vital to develop appropriate public education strategies to support the ongoing involvement of children and youth in age-appropriate reconciliation initiatives and projects at community, regional, and national levels.

Through direct participation in the TRC’s National Events, thousands of young people and their teachers across the country had the opportunity to learn about the residential schools and think about their own role and responsibility in reconciliation. The TRC’s Education Days were designed specifically for elementary and high school students and their teachers. Young people had the opportunity to listen to, and interact with, Elders and Survivors. They attended interactive workshops where they learned about the residential school history, resilience, and healing through the arts—painting, carving, storytelling, music, and film. They visited the Learning Places to walk through the Legacy of Hope Foundation display, “One Hundred Years of Loss,” and to see posters and archival photographs of the residential schools from their own region.

Education Days were well attended. For example, at the British Columbia National Event in Vancouver, approximately 5,000 elementary and high school students from across the province spent the day at the National Event. In advance of Education Day, teachers