

of their coursework. Through classroom readings, dialogue, and art, they created a space for learning about, and reflecting on, the residential school history and legacy in the context of reconciliation.²¹⁴

A report commissioned by the TRC, “Practicing Reconciliation: A Collaborative Study of Aboriginal Art, Resistance and Cultural Politics,” was based on the findings of a one-year research project. Working with Survivors, artists, and curators, a multidisciplinary team of researchers examined the general question of how artistic practice contributes to the reconciliation process. The research was done through a series of interviews, workshops, artist residencies, planning sessions, symposia, artistic incubations, publications, and online learning platforms. The report reveals the depth and potential of arts-based approaches to reconciliation.

We should begin by echoing what many of our interview and artist subjects have repeatedly said: that the act of reconciliation is itself deeply complicated, and that success should not be measured by *achieving* a putative [commonly accepted or supposed] reconciliation, but by *movement* towards these lofty goals. Indeed, it could be proposed that full reconciliation is both mercurial and impossible, and that the efforts of theorists, artists, survivors, and the various publics engaged in this difficult process are best focused on working collaboratively for better understanding our histories, our traumas, and ourselves.²¹⁵

These various projects indicate that the arts and artistic practices may serve to shape public memory in ways that are potentially transformative for individuals, communities, and national history.

Residential school commemoration projects

Commemoration should not put closure to the history and legacy of the residential schools. Rather, it must invite citizens into a dialogue about a contentious past and why this history still matters today. Commemorations and memorials at former school sites and cemeteries are visible reminders of Canada’s shame and church complicity. They bear witness to the suffering and loss that generations of Aboriginal peoples have endured and overcome. The process of remembering the past together is an emotional journey of contradictory feelings: loss and resilience, anger and acceptance, denial and remorse, shame and pride, despair and hope. The Settlement Agreement identified the historic importance and reconciliation potential of such remembering by establishing a special fund for projects that would commemorate the residential school experience, and by assigning a role in the approval of these projects to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada.

As previously noted in this report’s section about the Commission’s activities, commemoration projects across the country were funded under the terms of the Settlement Agreement. Twenty million dollars were set aside for Aboriginal communities and various