The arts: Practising resistance, healing, and reconciliation

The reconciliation process is not easy. It asks those who have been harmed to revisit painful memories and those who have harmed others—either directly or indirectly—to be accountable for past wrongs. It asks us to mourn and commemorate the terrible loss of people, cultures, and languages, even as we celebrate their survival and revitalization. It asks us to envision a more just and inclusive future, even as we struggle with the living legacies of injustice. As the TRC has experienced in every region of the country, creative expression can play a vital role in this national reconciliation, providing alternative voices, vehicles, and venues for expressing historical truths and present hopes. Creative expression supports everyday practices of resistance, healing, and commemoration at individual, community, regional, and national levels.

Across the globe, the arts have provided a creative pathway to breaking silences, transforming conflicts, and mending the damaged relationships of violence, oppression, and exclusion. From war-ravaged countries to local communities struggling with everyday violence, poverty, and racism, the arts are widely used by educators, practitioners, and community leaders to deal with trauma and difficult emotions, and communicate across cultural divides.[206]

Art is active, and "participation in the arts is a guarantor of other human rights because the first thing that is taken away from vulnerable, unpopular or minority groups is the right to self-expression."[207] The arts help to restore human dignity and identity in the face of injustice. Properly structured, they can also invite people to explore their own world views, values, beliefs, and attitudes that may be barriers to healing, justice, and reconciliation.

Even prior to the establishment of the TRC, a growing body of work, including Survivors' memoirs and works of fiction by well-known Indigenous authors, as well as films and plays, have brought the residential school history and legacy to a wider Canadian public, enabling them to learn about the schools through the eyes of Survivors. This body of work includes memoirs such as Isabelle Knockwood's *Out of the Depths: The Experiences of Mi'kmaw Children at the Indian Residential School at Shubenacadie, Nova Scotia* (1992), to the more recent works of Agnes Grant's *Finding My Talk: How Fourteen Native Women Reclaimed Their Lives after Residential School* (2004); Alice Blondin's *My Heart Shook Like a Drum: What I Learned at the Indian Mission Schools, Northwest Territories* (2009); Theodore Fontaine's *Broken Circle: The Dark Legacy of Indian Residential Schools: A Memoir* (2010); Bev Sellars's *They Called Me Number One: Secrets and Survival at an Indian Residential School* (2013); and Edmund Metatawabin and Alexandra Shimo's *Up Ghost River: A Chief's Journey through the Turbulent Waters of Native History* (2014).

Works of fiction (sometimes drawn from the author's own life experiences), such as Tomson Highway's *Kiss of the Fur Queen* (1998), Robert Alexie's *Porcupines and China Dolls* (2009), or Richard Wagamese's *Indian Horse* (2012), tell stories about abuse, neglect, and loss that are also stories of healing, redemption, and hope. In 2012, the Aboriginal