Reconciliation Canada

We have a great opportunity:
- to talk to each other
- to teach
- to learn

Impact of residential schools carries on till today
- Our culture, language, traditions suppressed

Youth Voices on Reconciliation

To truly heal, we must talk about our past

More beyond the pain to reconciliation

Think: How can I change the world?

Role of High Schools in promoting understanding and reconciliation between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal youth

- History of residential schools
- Your own history

Reconciliation:
- Freedom to be who you are
- Celebrate your traditions, family, history
- Celebrate your uniqueness

Credit: Avril Orloff at outsidethelines.ca
Acknowledgements

Youth Voices on Reconciliation was convened by Simon Fraser University’s Centre for Dialogue in partnership with Reconciliation Canada. The event took place as part of the programming associated with the 2014 Jack P. Blaney Award for Dialogue and featured recipient Chief Robert Joseph. Moderating the event were Kris Archie from Vancouver Foundation and Kian Sani, a grade 12 student from Carson Graham Secondary.

This dialogue event was made possible through funding from the Government of Canada and Province of British Columbia.


Chief Joseph is a Hereditary Chief of the Gwawaenuk First Nation, Ambassador for Reconciliation Canada, and Special Advisor to Canada’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission, among other distinctions.

As Co-Chair of British Columbia’s September 2013 national Truth and Reconciliation event and Ambassador for Reconciliation Canada, Chief Joseph led a historic effort to unite Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples. Events included a 70,000-person Walk for Reconciliation that brought Canada’s many cultures to walk a path together in a shared commitment to reconciliation.

About Simon Fraser University’s Centre for Dialogue

Simon Fraser University’s Centre for Dialogue uses dialogue to generate non-partisan and constructive communication around difficult topics. We partner with government, business, and community groups to explore critical issues that impact the social, economic, environmental, and cultural well-being of our communities.

About the Jack P. Blaney Award for Dialogue

The Jack P. Blaney Award for Dialogue is presented to an individual who has demonstrated, internationally, excellence in the use of dialogue to further the understanding of complex and profound public issues. Far more than a simple ceremony, the Blaney award supports SFU’s mandate to be Canada’s most community-engaged research university through the delivery of programming designed to achieve meaningful community impact and tangible outcomes. Past award recipients include Charter for Compassion founder Karen Armstrong, MacArthur “Genius” choreographer Liz Lerman, former United Nations High Commissioner on Human Rights Mary Robinson and environmentalist Maurice Strong.
Purpose
This report provides a record of the Youth Voices on Reconciliation dialogue, held March 6, 2014. Included are an overview of the event’s background and design, and a summary of key themes that emerged through participant discussions.

The information in this publication is intended to reflect, as accurately as possible, the ideas expressed by the dialogue participants. This information does not necessarily reflect the opinions of Simon Fraser University’s Centre for Dialogue, its partners or advisors. This publication is published in the Creative Commons (CC BY-ND). It may be reproduced and distributed so long as its contents are not modified and credit is attributed to Simon Fraser University’s Centre for Dialogue. Any works referring to this material should cite:


Contents
- Background 1
- Event Planning and Design 2
- Ideas for Action by Schools and Districts 5
- Conclusions and Next Steps 9
Background

*Youth Voices on Reconciliation* was a day-long dialogue taking place March 6, 2014. The goal of the event was to create space for students, teachers and administrators to discuss the role of the high school system in creating reconciliation among Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples. A major output was a list of actionable ideas generated by participants for their districts to consider for implementation.

Education for and about Aboriginal peoples is currently undergoing a transformation in BC schools. At the time of the *Youth Voices* event, many participating districts were working with local Aboriginal representatives to create a second phase of Aboriginal Enhancement Agreements that set benchmarks and goals for Aboriginal education. The BC Ministry of Education was also in the process of confirming and releasing new curriculum to more closely integrate Aboriginal knowledge into learning objectives across all subject areas.

Despite these ongoing positive efforts at the policy level, severe challenges still exist within the classroom. Dogwood graduation rates of 40% or less for Aboriginal students are not uncommon for many Metro Vancouver school districts, and Aboriginal students report drastically different classroom experiences based on the knowledge and priorities of individual teachers. Statistics show that many graduate without feeling like the histories and perspectives of their communities were taught in the classroom.

These issues are well-known and Aboriginal students are regularly surveyed in all districts about their experiences in BC schools. What is more uncommon is an opportunity for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students to engage in extended conversations with teachers and administrators to brainstorm ideas for improvement, and for these conversations to take place under the auspices of a third party convener.

Many districts within British Columbia may be interested in using similar methods to engage their students and teachers. Interested districts are highly encouraged to contact the Centre for Dialogue and Reconciliation Canada for additional information about the event. Significant trauma still exists within Aboriginal communities due to the effects of residential schools and other colonial legacies, and creating a safe space for dialogue about these topics requires adequate resources and significant expertise in the concept of reconciliation. The Centre for Dialogue, therefore, cautions against hosting similar events without adequate preparation and strong, Aboriginal-led partners such as Reconciliation Canada.
Event Planning and Design

Consultation

Event planning began in spring 2013 by interviewing select Metro Vancouver school districts, the BC Ministry of Education and the BC Teachers Federation. Participating schools and districts were confirmed in fall 2013 based on alignment with district programming, and included School District No. 41 (Burnaby), School District No. 44 (North Vancouver), School District No. 43 (Coquitlam) and Point Grey Secondary (Vancouver). The Centre for Dialogue then convened an Advisory Committee from event partners and participating districts, with committee members including:

- Karen Joseph, Reconciliation Canada
- Brandon Curr, School District No. 41 (Burnaby)
- Ron Johnston, SFU Office of Indigenous Education
- Brad Baker, School District No. 44 (North Vancouver)
- Trista Fuller, School District No. 43 (Coquitlam)

School Districts No. 41 (Burnaby) and No. 44 (North Vancouver) both arranged for consultations with groups of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students. These consultations helped to forecast the types of issues students might wish to discuss at the event and the programming elements that would most interest students.

Outreach and Invitations

Participating districts and schools were responsible for all internal recruitment. A minimum of 25% of the 150 participants were required to be teachers or administrators, whose presence was critical both to contribute to the dialogue and to support the mobilization of the ideas resulting from the event. Districts were encouraged to send teachers and administrators in positions of influence, such as department heads, principals, vice principals and Aboriginal educators.

The target student composition was half Aboriginal and half non-Aboriginal. This composition supported the intended message that reconciliation is a shared objective and responsibility among Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples. Districts were encouraged to recruit students capable of helping in the implementation of ideas generated at the event, as well as students with specific perspectives and challenges whose voices were important to include.
**Event Design**

The event began with two traditional songs from the Squamish Nation by students from School District No. 44 (North Vancouver). Wade Grant, a councillor from the Musqueam Nation, then welcomed participants to the traditional territory of the Coast Salish peoples and provided historical and personal context related to the subject of reconciliation in the education system.

This was followed by a presentation by Reconciliation Canada about Canadian and Aboriginal history, including the impacts of residential schools. Chief Robert Joseph, the Ambassador for Reconciliation Canada and a residential school survivor, then discussed his residential school experience and vision for reconciliation.

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**Credit:** Avril Orloff at outsidethelines.ca
Students next attended one of five breakout workshops designed to enhance leadership skills and provide tools for personal expression. Topics included spoken word/hip hop, leadership skills, graphic facilitation, storytelling, and theatre/movement. During this period, teachers and administrators from mixed districts sat in groups of 8 to discuss challenges, successes and opportunities for supporting reconciliation at their schools. Each group included a Centre for Dialogue facilitator and an Aboriginal Education lead, who acted as a resource for the group.

After a complimentary lunch, students and teachers from within the same district sat in tables of 10 to brainstorm actionable ideas to support reconciliation within their schools and districts. A facilitator recorded ideas at each table on flip chart paper. At the end of the session, each participant was asked to write his or her favourite idea for personal and institutional action on an index card that was collected by event organizers and grouped by theme for this report.

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Written by Students at Spoken-Word Poetry Workshop

Dialogue is your story, your knowledge, your acceptance, and the understanding you play in the world. And your story, your great, great grandchildren will classify you by.

Understanding your story builds empathy and makes us compassionate.

Craving for nothing, but peace and fight.
Nothing but love.

Without knowledge there is no progress.
With truth there is no progress.

#celebrateourdifferences

Difference is what sets us apart, but brings us together.

Alone we are nothing, but together we are movement.

Understanding in the mind.
Compassion is in the heart.

Victory is in dialogue.
Victory in understanding.

Everyone and everyone have something in common.

Understanding is what brings us together.
Compassion is what makes us love one another.

We are created to live and forgive each other, no matter what.
We are the new generation.

So please, understand, because it’s the only string that still holds us together.
The only one that hasn’t been broken, and the one connected to the rest of the world. It creates and surfaces all the goodness we desire.

We may not have everything.
But together, we have it all.
Ideas for Action by Schools and Districts

This section summarizes participant ideas for institutional action by their schools and districts. These ideas fall within six major themes:

1. Integrate Aboriginal culture, arts, and history in all subject areas.
2. Include Aboriginal peoples in decision-making and the presentation of Aboriginal knowledge.
3. Provide professional development opportunities for teachers.
4. Support student-driven reconciliation initiatives and provide resources towards these.
5. Model healthy relationships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples.
6. Hold cultural awareness activities for Aboriginal students to learn about and proudly share their culture.
7. Increase Awareness of Aboriginal history and heritage at a younger age.

The full list of participant ideas within each theme is provided below, grouped by school/district:

**Integrate Aboriginal culture, arts, and history in all subject areas**

**Burnaby**
- Educate Aboriginal students on our own history.
- Provide more context on Aboriginal studies to make students more interested and curious.
- Teach traditional knowledge in school.
- Increase First Nations Studies classes.
- Incorporate First Nation traditions cross-curriculum.
- Study Aboriginal literature in English class.
- Normalize Aboriginal knowledge and history in curriculum.
- More Aboriginal focused classes, ‘Native Socials’.
- Introduce an Aboriginal language class.

**North Vancouver**
- Introduce an Aboriginal language class.
- Teach Aboriginal history and culture through dance and art, not only social studies.
- Expand the knowledge that exists in current textbooks.
- Mandatory First Nation classes and open discussions.
- Cross-curriculum learning of accurate history.
- Adjust Socials 10 curriculum to include more depth and relevance.

**Coquitlam**
- Provide textbooks with material on Aboriginal history.
- Integrate First Nations’ worldviews into education curriculum.
- Create classroom space for discussion of Aboriginal culture.
- Include Aboriginal history and current events in Socials 10 curriculum.
- Provide First Nation studies dedicated courses and interactive learning.
- Aboriginal fiction and non-fiction reading material must be available in the library.
- Question why some post-secondary institutions don’t recognize First Nations Studies 12 as a social studies credit – this needs to change!

Point Grey Secondary
- Increase access to Aboriginal literature, more First Nations books in our library.
- Based on the truth, add First Nations history to our curriculum.
- First Nations English class.

Include Aboriginal peoples in decision-making and the presentation of Aboriginal knowledge
North Vancouver
- Aboriginal survivors and Elders should visit schools as guest speakers.
- Invite Aboriginal guest teachers or instructors (e.g. carvers to teach woodworking).

Burnaby
- Involve Aboriginal people in curriculum planning.
- Invite Aboriginal Elders to visit and speak about past history and the present.

Coquitlam
- Aboriginal survivors and elders come to speak with students.

Point Grey Secondary
- Increase the number of Aboriginal teachers.
- Develop a relationship with the Musqueam Nation.
- Encourage district management to attend Aboriginal events.

Provide professional development opportunities for teachers
Burnaby
- Increase opportunities for teachers to be more informed on the topic matter.
- Continued professional development district-wide for teachers to learn.

North Vancouver
- Share what is working in your class with other classes and schools.
- Organize smaller district-wide committee to discuss and organize events for raising awareness.
- Provide more education on Aboriginal culture and history for teachers.

Coquitlam
- Pro-D day focused on local First Nations.

Support student-driven reconciliation initiatives and provide resources towards these
Burnaby
- Support student-led clubs on reconciliation – a place where students can discuss issues and be supported.
- Make an awareness video and show on school screens.
- Create a retreat day – workshops for students.
- Increase experiential learning opportunities.
- Group Council – discuss racism.

North Vancouver
- Increase student empowerment: student-led leadership group that shares cultural understanding throughout the district; encourage students to share what they are
learning with their parents; create a mentorship program for Aboriginal youth to encourage leadership positions.

- Mentorship program with DSAC students and Aboriginal students.
- Fundraise for a community totem pole and ceremony.

Coquitlam
- Incorporate the subject of reconciliation into Grade 9 leadership course.

Point Grey Secondary
- Create an Aboriginal Student Council.
- Create an Aboriginal student newspaper to help schools share their successes.
- Apply for a grant through Vancouver Foundation to help fund activities.

**Model healthy relationships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples**

North Vancouver
- Host a series of reconciliation conferences and assemblies.
- Implement a mandatory acknowledgement of traditional territories.
- Encourage critical thinking to prevent stereotyping.

Burnaby
- Open Aboriginal circle to non-Aboriginal students (**expressed by 6 different participants**).
- Community education opportunities.
- Inter-cultural dialogue opportunities.
- Engage in dialogues – safe space for controversial conversations.

- Include and immerse ALL students, over-emphasizing Aboriginal student role may further ‘other’.
- School should forget about ‘it’, treat everyone equally.
- Include Aboriginal voices in daily school life.
- Mandatory Aboriginal representative on student council.
- Schools emphasize equality.
- Have another ‘Youth Voices’ session for students and teachers to share ideas.

Coquitlam
- Don’t separate Aboriginal students from non-Aboriginal students.
- Provide a healing night to educate and share community stories.
- Honour the traditional territories at all major assemblies and meetings.
- Create opportunities to share Aboriginal success: Create a hallway display highlighting the twenty most influential Aboriginal people.
- Decrease tokenism.
- Engage families of First Nations students to help them overcome the idea that school is a place of harm.

**Hold cultural awareness activities for Aboriginal students to learn about and proudly share their culture**

Burnaby
- Create a collaborative Aboriginal artwork display.
- Aboriginal awareness day.
- Opportunities to make First Nation textiles and foods.
- Aboriginal sport day.
- Aboriginal talent show.
- Aboriginal book club.
North Vancouver
- Anonymous story sharing.
- Raise awareness of Aboriginal spirituality.
- Field trips like today!
- Acknowledge art/belongings that are Aboriginal.
- Aboriginal awareness day including traditional games, music and food.
- School assemblies to learn about First Nations history and culture.
- Mandatory Aboriginal Week and/or Reconciliation Day.
- Promote National Aboriginal Day.
- Work with other schools and districts to create events for raising awareness.
- Increase teacher and student awareness about Aboriginal circle.

Coquitlam
- Host annual Aboriginal culture week.
- Aboriginal Culture Day including a powwow, elders and cultural elements.
- Assemblies to discuss Aboriginal/Canadian issues and inspire students.

Point Grey Secondary
- Aboriginal Cultural Day or Multicultural Day – sharing cultures, stories and food within schools.
- Opportunities for Aboriginal field trips, a canoe trip.
- Aboriginal games and culture: drum circles and bones tournament.

Burnaby
- Increase Awareness of Aboriginal history and heritage at a younger age
- Teach about Aboriginal history and culture before Socials 10.
- High school volunteers teach elementary students about Aboriginal people in Canada.
- Embed age-appropriate information in K-12 materials for all BC schools.

Coquitlam
- Include lesson plans about Aboriginal history at a younger age.
- Grade 6-7 should learn about the most present history.
- Invite volunteer high school students to teach elementary students.
Conclusions and Next Steps

Participants left the *Youth Voices* dialogue with significant energy and interest in next steps. Although only ideas for institutional action are included in this approach, the students, teachers and administrators at the *Youth Voices* dialogue also produced ideas for individual action. We encourage districts to follow up with these groups to encourage and offer resources in support of such action.

While some of the ideas within this document require new resources, many represent opportunities to redirect existing resources, such as professional development budgets, towards topics relevant to reconciliation. If the participants attending *Youth Voices* provide any indication, teachers and students are highly interested in engaging further with Aboriginal culture and history, but frequently feel inhibited because they lack the knowledge or resources to proceed.

The Centre for Dialogue highly encourages participating districts to distribute these findings widely and identify priority actions at the district and school level. It is equally critical that such actions be communicated to *Youth Voices* participants to create a positive feedback loop that encourages further action. Changes within the school system can be supported through policy and institutional resources, but ultimately occur through the voluntary actions of educators and students who care about their schools and communities.

Credit: Avril Orloff at outsidethelines.ca