

Supporting Aboriginal Histories: Librarians and Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission

By Erin Ziegenfuss.

This coming September, Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) will hold one of its final national events in Vancouver. The BC Library Conference session "The Role of Libraries & Librarians in Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission" provided excellent primer for those seeking to expand their awareness of reconciliation efforts as well as the history and legacy of Indian Residential Schools, in addition to creating a space for dialogue about the role that libraries and librarians might have around these issues.

Linc Kesler of the UBC First Nations Longhouse went over what he aptly termed as "the very troubled history" of Indian Residential Schools in Canada, providing excellent images and resources along the way. Dr. Kesler's overview underscored the importance of awareness and understanding of this history. He noted that many people still do not know about it, recognizing the resulting impact of limited means for our communities to understand these events or have context for related issues we see now. As he put it, there exists a "social amnesia" around this very tough history to contend with.

Building on the empowerment of learning about this history and the cultural importance of opening dialogues about it, Lisa Nathan, Coordinator of the iSchool at UBC's First Nations Curriculum Concentration, discussed the power of stories and remembering histories, as well as the challenges of doing so when these histories involve discomfort. To that end, she asked participants to consider who benefits from their work and what power structures are in place. Dr. Nathan posed the question of how libraries, museums, and information professionals can now assist in facilitating the mandates of the TRC including improving our communities' awareness of this history.

Presenters and participants held a shared interest in one another's thinking around these issues. With facilitation assistance by Sarah Dupont, Aboriginal

Engagement Librarian at UBC's Xwi7xwa Library, breakout groups were formed around further questions and actionable proposals posed by participants. Some discussion topics included:

- An advocacy or more direct role librarians can have in assisting with the acquisition of Canadian government documents wanted by the TRC;
- Recognition of efforts in support of Aboriginal peoples within professional codes of conduct;
- Engaging with communities in creating dialogue around reconciliation efforts and Aboriginal histories.

Participants left this session with greater understanding of the legacy of Indian Residential Schools and empowerment in their role as information professionals who can both contribute to the accessibility of solid information about this topic and the engagement of their communities around awareness and reconciliation efforts.

It was a privilege to be able to convene this tremendous session and gratitude goes out to both the presenters and participants for their contributions.

Vancouver's TRC event will take place September 18-21, 2013. Testimony and stories from survivors and those impacted by residential schools will be shared.

To find out more about Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, including their past and future national events: <http://www.trc.ca/>

For more information on other events being planned in Vancouver around the national TRC event: <http://reconciliationcanada.ca/events/>

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