

**YOUTH FORUM AGAINST RACISM
-- National Forum --
'The Econiche' – Gatineau, Québec
Aug. 3-5, 2001**

Introduction

On August 5, 2001, the National Youth Forum Against Racism came to a close. The three-day forum brought together eight representatives from the four regional forums held in Ottawa (May 18-20), Québec City (June 1-3), Halifax (June 22-24), and Edmonton (July 6-8). The main objective of the weekend was to combine the ideas of approximately 120 participants from the regional forums into one solid, timely, and innovative youth-driven educational model to combat racism. The eight representatives had the challenging task of incorporating the visions, needs, goals, and specific recommendations expressed by their fellow participants. All of the representatives worked hard to keep the voices of their respective groups alive at the National Forum, while at the same time working to achieve consensus with the other representatives. By the end of the National Forum, the eight representatives had decided upon the form the educational model would take, its contents, and a detailed action plan and timeline for producing, testing, and distributing the product. The weekend proved to be a very rewarding and productive experience with, as was the case in the regional forums, the formation of strong links between the people present.

Summary of involvement:

- ❖ There were 8 participants and 3 facilitators.
- ❖ Of these 8 participants, 3 were female and 5 were male.
- ❖ The regional representation of the National Forum was impressive: from the Edmonton Forum, 1 person from Vancouver (BC) and 1 person from Edmonton (AB); from the Québec City Forum, 2 people from the Montréal area (PQ); from the Halifax Forum, 1 person from Amherst (NS) and 1 person from Listuguj (on NB/PQ border); and from the Ottawa Forum, 1 person from Ottawa (ON) and 1 person from Markham (ON).
- ❖ Six of the eight national representatives were from racialized groups.

The agenda for the majority of the weekend was kept purposely un-structured in a way that allowed for participants to determine the process of the National Forum. Participants set the working agenda for much of Saturday and Sunday. On Friday, scheduled sessions addressed the key topics of participatory decision-making and consensus building.

Friday, 3 August 2001

The purpose of the first day together was to get acquainted with each other, as well as with the project timeline and the outcomes and recommendations of the four regional forums. Two brainstorms were scheduled to get the group thinking about the goals and directives of the educational model, and what form it would take.

The day started off with several icebreakers. The first energizer/trust-building activity, *The Tank*, got people up and moving, for which we used the beautiful green space of Econiche. The second icebreaker, *The Museum*, paired participants (and facilitators) in a ‘telling stories’ type activity which allowed everyone to use their creative energy to construct and present a ‘portrait’ of their partners.

Following this, Steve Mason, Executive Director of UNA-Canada, spoke briefly about the organization – its mandate and programmes – and the history of youth-oriented and educational projects. Ian Foucher and Christine Parsons followed with a re-cap of the Youth Forums Against Racism project to date and a brief on preparations for the World Conference Against Racism.

After lunch, presentations were jointly made by the two representatives from each regional forum on the outcomes, suggestions, and recommendations of their respective youth gatherings. The presentations mainly covered the four or five “ideas for action” that were generated in each of these forums. The goal of this session was to familiarize the whole group with the multitude of ideas and recommendations stemming from each regional group and to begin thinking about how ideas could be meshed or how new ones could be created from the existing ideas. By the end of this session, common threads and overarching themes were evident.

Brainstorm:

What do you want your “educational model” to achieve?

FORMAT: Large group brainstorm

DESCRIPTION: The objective of this session was to encourage the group to begin thinking about the “educational model” and its goals – irrespective of its form and content, which would be decided later.

“What do we want the educational model to achieve?” • “What are our goals in terms of anti-racism?”

- ◆ Empower youth
- ◆ Have a positive change on lives
- ◆ Engage youth, especially the silent majority

- ◆ Make people realize that racism is an issue
- ◆ Educate – regarding history, institutional racism
- ◆ Link the past, present, and future
- ◆ Sensitize people to the subtle forms of racism
- ◆ Challenge assumptions
- ◆ Define/seek clarity on issues
- ◆ Realize the complexity of, and issues behind, definitions – don't shy away from issues – go deep into the issues – expose the ugly side of racism
- ◆ Diffuse stereotypes and give people the tools to decipher them
- ◆ Make people aware of the danger of silence
- ◆ Information should be easily accessible and readable
- ◆ The redefinition of “Canada”
- ◆ Contrast the dangers of racism with the benefits of acceptance
- ◆ Self-identity awareness
- ◆ Address internalization
- ◆ Raise awareness of racism within yourself and your community
- ◆ Reiterate to people that they can change and progress
- ◆ It should be FUN!

Group decision-making session

Following this brainstorm session, Rida Abboud, a UNA-Canada facilitator, ran an informal session entitled *Group decision making and expectations setting*. The objective of this session was to launch a group discussion on the way in which decisions would be made during the weekend. First, Rida introduced two concepts of group process – participatory groups and conventional groups. Some of the points that were highlighted were:

- Everyone participates, not just the vocal few;
- Opposing viewpoints are allowed to co-exist in the room; and
- Members can accurately represent each other's points of view – even when they don't agree with them.

The group then discussed and debated decision-making options. Some of the options introduced were to allow for the group to ‘naturally’ come to decisions as the need arose, or to follow a voting process according to majority rules, unanimity, or consensus. The main concepts behind consensus decision-making were presented with a “Gradients of Agreement” scale which listed six ways that each group member could agree – or not agree – to a particular decision. The group vocalized that the most beneficial reasons for using this scale was that it allowed those who were not completely comfortable with the results of a decision to voice their concerns without feeling silenced, as well as providing a means to call an end to a discussion concerning a particular decision when it has gone on too long or is ‘off track’. It was decided by the group that they felt comfortable using the scale below to register decisions:

Endorsement

- “I like it”

Agreement with reservations

- “I can live with it”

Abstain

- “I have no opinion”

Stand aside

- “I don’t like it, but I don’t want to hold up the group”

Formal disagreement

- “I don’t want to stop anyone else, but I don’t want to be involved in implementing it”

Block

- “I veto this proposal”

This session ended by a reflective group activity entitled the *Supportive Chair*. Each person had the option of sitting in the ‘supportive chair’, in which s/he would field questions from the entire group. The topic and range of questions was left open (“anything goes” type questions), and of course the person to whom the question was directed had the right to pass. The objective of this activity ties directly into the concept of participatory group processes in which there must be an element of mutual understanding between group members for a group to be truly ‘participatory’. Every member should understand and accept the legitimacy of one another’s needs and goals, and, in this respect, the group can develop innovative ideas that incorporate everyone’s points of view.

The Supportive Chair proved to be an intimate and highly personalized experience for participants. Even though we were only eleven, the activity lasted well into the night. It was an important means for building trust, mutual understanding, and spirit to serve as a strong foundation for moving forward as a group.

Saturday, 4 August 2001

The first session on Saturday morning was called “The Big Decision” – the time at which the eight representatives needed to decide upon the focus, format, and content of the educational model. The group started by generating a list of the possibilities that the educational model could be, largely taken from the ideas presented on Friday afternoon. Each suggestion or possibility was discussed and evaluated according to feasibility, usefulness, and validity. The group also considered the feasibility of combining multiple ideas into one coherent proposal.

What was decided through this discussion was that the group will work to elaborate an educational ‘package’ which includes three components: (1) a “kit” which includes a detailed

information section, activities, resources, and links to fight racism; (2) a supportive website which will showcase this initiative and serve as a network between similar groups; and (3) a “train the trainer” component, i.e. a means for interactive exchange between the project team and those who are interested in disseminating the educational model.

Prior to discussions of content, a ‘prime directive’ was developed. At present it reads:

A youth-based initiative to combat [issues of] racism and racial discrimination through education [of youth] in Canada. (NOTE: Bracketed sections still to be decided)

The content of the following categories, as well as the website layout, will be developed by members of the core team: the eight national representatives and UNA-Canada project staff.

‘The Kit’: a new, youth-driven educational model for anti-racism

Section 1: Introduction

- Directive
- Mandate
- Getting started (general, how to read the kit)
- Background/contributors
- Table of contents
- Logo/slogan

Section 2: Information

- History
- Current issues
- Success stories
- Glossary
- Key concepts
- ‘Misconceptions revealed’/facts

Section 3: Resource List

- List of organizations in Canada (listed regionally)
- Books (both fiction and non-fiction, biographies, etc.)
- Magazines (subscription information)
- Videos
- Websites
- Role models
- ‘Happenings’ (events, competitions, rallies)
- Programmes of study

Section 4: Tools

- Activities *
- Workshops *
- Pictures/visuals/clippings

* trouble-shooting tips to be included throughout

Key concepts for this section (particularly as thematic focuses for activities or workshops):

- Self-identification workshop
- Privilege
- Historical
- Institutional/systemic
- Overt and covert racism
- Immigration
- How to fight racism on a daily basis
- Cultural sensitivity
- Intersections of racism (sexism, classism, ageism, ableism, etc.)

Section 5: “How to”

Step-by-step implementation of whole process

1. Read the manual.
2. Make sure you understand it. If you would like more assistance, contact...
3. Identify the group you would like to work with.
4. Make contact with the group. You may make use of the template provided, or use your own introduction.
5. Follow up your letter with a phone call.
6. Make contact in-person.
7. Visit the site. Be aware of the physical space.
8. Select and adapt a suggested workshop based on your gathered information.
9. Use the template provided to determine what parts of the workshop will take place where.
10. Gather all the materials you need.
11. Rehearse/practice – do whatever you need to do to feel confident.
12. DO IT!
13. Collect evaluations from participants. Reflect and assess.
14. Submit collected forms.
15. Follow-up activity with a personalized thank-you.
16. Congratulate yourself on having made an effort to combat racism.

It is important to note that the group made it a priority to get submissions and suggestions for the activities and workshops from regional forum participants (though submissions will also be sought from external sources). Original activity and workshop ideas will be

encouraged, though existing activities could also be included if they have been found to be effective and engaging for youth.

A list of the supplementary information needed on each activity or workshop was developed to guide submissions:

- key theme(s) or concept(s)
- workshop/activity breakdown (i.e. introduction, main activity, debrief)
- number of people
- age group
- space needed
- time needed
- list of resources and/or materials needed
- background material (i.e. references)
- troubleshooting ideas
- evaluation (i.e. if there already is one that goes with the activity)
- source information: if it is an existing activity, please provide as much information as possible regarding its source or copyright
- approximate time needed for preparation
- other: anything else that would be useful to know about this activity

Submissions will be collected throughout August, September, and October, after which they will be compiled and reviewed by the eight national representatives and UNA-Canada project staff.

Website

Although the content for the website was not detailed at the forum, it was decided that the website will be a vehicle to support the educational model. It will serve as a networking tool for those using the new educational “kit” and those involved in the Youth Forums Against Racism as well as other youth organizations across the country. The website will also feature links, resources, and a ‘start-up kit’ for those interested in initiating a group in their own communities; and, if time permits, web games and web communications.

Train the Trainers

Beginning with the core team of national representatives, those who already have experience with “The Kit”, and in particular facilitating workshops or activities featured in it, will introduce the educational model to new facilitators (or “trainers”). This train-the-trainers component will broaden the model’s reach and assist newcomers to anti-racism education who wish to use “The Kit” to organize and/or conduct anti-racism activities.

This component will be elaborated further in later discussions.

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After spending the day developing this framework – the educational model’s vision, goals, content, and outreach – the group spent the evening winding down by sitting around the fire and talking.

Sunday, 5 August 2001

Sunday was used to develop a detailed action plan for production and distribution of the educational model. The facilitators presented a tentative calendar spanning the next nine months, during which the educational model needs to be developed, produced, and distributed. Tasks and deadlines were listed and divided amongst the eight representations and UNA-Canada project staff according to personal interest areas, expertise, and time availability.

Testing

It was agreed that the educational model should undergo two testing phases. The objective of these testing phases is to maximize the effectiveness and appeal of the educational model for its target population. The following testing plan was developed:

Testing 1

Test A: Testing for validity – “Does this work?”

Testing with people who are interested in using the kit. Have them use the kit and then assess it and offer suggestions and modifications.

Test B: Testing for generalizability – “Will it work for a lot of people?”

Testing with a target population. Use the feedback from the populations who have gone through the workshops to modify the kit. (These can be the populations that were targeted in Test 1A.)

Testing 2

Test A2: Testing for validity

Testing again with same trainers as Test 1A. This will ensure that the same people are involved with the assessment, and that their suggestions are used twice, to heighten the validity of the model.

Test B2: Testing for generalizability

Testing with the same demographic as Test 1B, but a different population. (For example, if a class of grade 10 students was used in the first round of testing, then a different grade 10 class should be used for the second round of testing.) Their suggestions would modify the second draft.

Promotion and distribution

The possibilities for promotion and distribution of the model were discussed briefly by the group, though it was decided that further discussion on promotion and distribution needs to be held closer to the production date. Some key ideas that were brainstormed include:

- Engage youth organisations
 - try to get involved in meetings/events
 - organize local youth summits (which would serve as launching events for the education model)
 - try to involve other organisations during the testing period of the education model

- Organize a national launch
 - prepare a press release
 - plan an event

- Make use of your own contacts

- Coordinate launch with March 21st activities

- Involve university groups (concerned with social issues)

Since MuchMusic has expressed interest in this initiative, the potential partnership that UNA-Canada could form with MuchMusic was also discussed:

1. Interviews with Youth Forums Against Racism participants and/or UNA-Canada project staff
2. Commercials (especially in preparation for March 21st)
3. Website link to the educational model website (and also mentioned on air)
4. Getting involved in Master T's Youth Summit
5. Idea of a compilation CD (e.g. "Artists Against Racism")
6. Special with artists (e.g. War Child's programmes)

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The National Forum concluded on Sunday evening and participants travelled back to their homes (from British Columbia to Nova Scotia) that night. Three intensive days of discussion, decision-making, and planning produced a detailed action plan to guide the team's work for the next nine months. As soon as we unpacked our bags and replenished our energy, work on "The Kit" began!