

WHAT MAKES  
*SHAKING*  
*THE MOVERS*  
UNIQUE?



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**Introduction:**

Shaking the Movers (STM) is a youth-led, youth-driven participatory model focused on engaging children and young people with their civil and political rights. Created by the Landon Pearson Centre for the Study of Childhood and Children's Rights at Carleton University in 2007, it is the only youth-centred participatory model in Canada that uses a rights-based framework grounded in the Guiding Principles and Articles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). This rights-based approach views children's and young people's rights in relation to those of adults in a complementary rather than adversarial positioning. Children's rights, like adults' rights, are inalienable, indivisible, and universal entitlements that recognize the inherent dignity of children who live with adults in a shared humanity. What is often misunderstood about the concept of children's rights is the perception that these rights compete with those of adults. This assumption incorrectly casts rights in a zero-sum equation; that is, either you uphold children's rights or you support adults' rights. The STM model demonstrates in a substantive way that this is not the case. Rights are relational, contextual and sustainable.

Apart from its participatory and rights-based approach, the Shaking the Movers model uniquely provides an ethical environment for children's participation by carefully transferring power to children who are central in the model design. This transfer is one of the key features that distinguish STM from other youth participation models. STM holds a space for children's and young people's participation as they learn about the ways rights matter in actual lives set in diverse and complex contexts using a 'capacity-realizing' approach. Capacity realization through mentorship and collaboration produces the kind of knowledge and understanding necessary for adult decision-makers working in policy, advocacy, academic, and practitioner contexts. This is knowledge that begins from the standpoints of children and young people themselves who are best situated to offer their views and perspectives on what is meaningful for their own lives. Through its

circular knowledge generating design that sees adults and children working towards the same participatory goals, these views and perspectives are offered for consideration to adult decision-makers with the intent to assist them in making informed judgements regarding provision and protection. STM presents an exemplary model for enabling respectful and eloquent dialogues between children, young people and adults that facilitates this decision-making function.

Apart from the unique circular knowledge generating design, the STM model includes elements that invert typical top-down learning processes and interrupt adult-centric interactions. The model reconfigures these elements by locating children and young people at the heart of the model. They are positioned to conceptualize and direct activities, to determine their own participatory agendas, and to control outcomes from the STM workshops. The goals of the model are three-fold: to gain awareness of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, to explore connections between civil and political rights and young people's lives in practical contexts, and to develop understanding of associations between childhood, young adulthood, rights, and social change in a contemporary context. The STM model accomplishes these goals by fully complying with the nine basic requirements of quality participation that is youth-led and youth-driven.



According to children's rights scholar and advocate Gerison Lansdown (2014), quality participation is: "transparent and informative; relevant to children's lives; voluntary; respectful; child friendly; inclusive; supported by trained adults; safe and sensitive to risk; and accountable to children.<sup>i</sup> The STM model

complies with each of these features and elevates them in unique ways: 1) by including in the model design a mechanism that brings together experiential young people in a way that goes beyond tokenistic participation, 2) a knowledge sharing protocol developed by the Landon Pearson Centre that aims to achieve impact beyond each individual workshop, and 3) a procedure that obligates adults to relinquish control of the workshop to youth animators and facilitators who interact and work collaboratively with STM participants.

In what follows, this report explores the concept of participation to reveal a complex interconnectedness between rights and children's lives that speaks to the relevancy and timeliness of the Shaking the Movers model in a globalized world.

### **Participation in a Globalized World:**

Participation is a complex term that has been increasingly heard in scholarly, policy and applied contexts over the past several decades. From 'student voice' in educational contexts, to 'hearing the voices of youth' in policy development, to calls from the scholarly community for research that includes the 'meaningful participation' of children and young people, these references to participation produce a range of definitions and meanings. Participation generally works from the premise that a participant is someone who is actively engaged with their environment and who has the resources and capacity to do so.

Children's and young people's participation compels a consideration of both process and outcomes. These can have positive and negative impacts for different children given that they involve interactions within cultural, social, political and relational contexts. Scholarly critiques, for example, point out that the emphasis in some conceptualizations of participation on action, capacity, and on individual performance can be exclusionary.<sup>ii</sup> This is partly due to the concept's reliance on opportunities for participation for some young people but not for all. Disabled children, for instance, may experience exclusion from participation in

some contexts when questions of access, and autonomy to act, are overlooked. It is a particularly important point given that one of the keys to participation is the view that all children and young people are full members of society and engaged social actors who have a right to participate in matters that affect their lives according to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. As Joana Lucio and John l'Anson (2015, 131) argue

“ the acknowledgement of children’s right to participate is indelibly connected not only to an acknowledgement of their ability and willingness to do so, but also to their recognition as actors in their own right – authors of their own social and cultural actions, whether through play and/or their language(s) and forms of self- and hetero-governance...”

Valuing and validating children’s and young people’s right to participation is at the core of the Shaking the Movers model. It begins from a place of strength and serves to move participation beyond tokenism to authentic and inclusive forms of engagement. Moreover, Shaking the Movers emphasizes the relational contexts in which children and adults find themselves. This enables a view of children and young people as power-holders in certain circumstances and moves beyond viewing them as mere objects of protection. Rather, they are envisioned in the STM model as actively engaged participants who live their lives amid, rather than apart from, adults. In turn, children’s right to participation is understood in this context as working in tandem with the rights of adults in decision-making that includes identifying barriers to participation and inclusion/exclusion in the world. This relational and contextual view that marks the Shaking the Movers model of participation opens up meaningful spaces for engagement in part because it locates children as full and capacious members of society with both rights and responsibilities. Recognizing this full membership, alongside developmental markers and outcomes, underscores the point that children and young people live their lives in relationships with others and are situated by a matrix of gender, race, class, age, ability, sexuality, locality and other social lines of difference. Recognizing this complex

positioning allows children and young people a way to accommodate, resist, refuse, challenge and engage; the point is that they are not always and only victims or vulnerable. Importantly, it is a recognition that is transformative and especially compelling when children and young people are taken seriously, listened to, and heard. This transformational element distinguishes the STM model for the ways that it engages children and young people and recognizes as well as for the recognition that vulnerability, like power, is something that is lived on a continuum rather than as an all-encompassing and static social location.

### **Participation and the UNCRC:**

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) clearly identifies children and young people as rights-holders through its Guiding Principles of protection, provision and participation. Article 12 of the UNCRC emphasizes the participation rights of children to have a say in the decisions that affect their lives, contingent on age and maturity, and that this right is to be taken seriously by duty-bearers. The UNCRC encodes the relationship between children and adults clearly so that children as rights-holders, and adults and institutions as duty-bearers, have specific obligations to uphold in view of children's rights. These participation rights are found in other Articles of the Convention as well including children's rights to freedom of expression, association, conscience, information and privacy. As Joana Lucio and John l'Anson (2015: 130) note,

“child rights in its many forms, is acknowledged in Article 23 (where it is stated that children with disabilities should be awarded conditions that facilitate their active participation in the community) and Article 31 (which recognizes the child's right to participate freely and fully in the cultural and artistic life of their community). Other Articles are, however, equally relevant to understanding the concept of participation that is at stake in this document – namely, Articles 12–15, which generally acknowledge the child's ability to form their own views, as well as the right to express them freely, to be heard and to have their views acted on when appropriate (freedom of speech, freedom of thought and freedom of association).”<sup>iii</sup>

What this means for children and young people is that the UNCRC encodes their participation as rights-holders and holds to account the 196 countries who have ratified this international human rights treaty. The STM model supports this accountability in ensuring that participation proceeds in sustainable and meaningful ways.

### **Why Does Children's Participation Matter?**

Children's right to participate matters in a contemporary world that is complicated by powerful global forces that mark children's and young people's lives in profound ways. Whether it is through movement and migration, conflict and war, discriminatory and exploitative environments, technologies that sharpen the immediacy of lived experiences, or rapid social changes due to economic, socio-cultural and environmental upheavals, there can be no doubt of the centrality and urgency to recognize and uphold children's rights in contemporary times. Living amid adults in these local/global contexts, children and young people are not bystanders but fully involved members of society. As childhood anthropologist Sharon Stephens insightfully pointed out as early as 1995 in her work on childhood and the politics of culture,

“As representatives of the contested future and subjects of cultural policies, children stand at the crossroads of divergent cultural projects. Their minds and bodies are at stake...”<sup>iv</sup>



Stephens eloquently makes the point that participation must be viewed within the context of the instability of children's and young people's lives in a rapidly changing, globalized world. Stephens urges scholars to develop an approach for understanding children's and young people's lives that is broad and complex. Her prescription is to attend carefully and thoroughly to culture, politics, society, and economy through the lens of childhood. For Stephens, children and young people are to be viewed as key holders of knowledge about these contexts as well as part of the effort to improve them. This cannot be accomplished without their active and authentic participation. The STM model ensures that children and young people are equipped with knowledge about children's rights and positioned to participate with the goal to effect social change and decision-making in a globalized world. Part of this process is to create a safe space in order for children's and young people's views and perspectives to be voiced, listened to, and acted upon. Some models of participation include a focus on children's and young people's voices. However, hearing their voices alone does not go far enough in this effort to support children's participation in any meaningful and sustainable way. Critics of the concept of 'voice' support this view. Childhood anthropologist Allison James, for instance, argues that voice is not, in and of itself, sufficient. James (2007, 262) observes, "...giving voice to children is not simply or only about letting children speak." She asserts that it is not so much a matter of whether or not children and young people can or should speak about their own experiences of the world; rather, it is the difference that children's perspectives provide in adult understanding and theorizing about the world as well as in children's self-reflections about decision-making processes that affect their lives. It is this comprehensive understanding of 'voice' that distinguishes the Shaking the Movers model from most other models of child and youth participation.

In addition to scholarship exploring participation, child protection experts recognize its importance in their efforts to secure children's lives in a globalized world. In fact, bringing participatory processes that are

meaningful and sustainable into protection efforts is a current key debate in this field (Ruiz-Casares, Collins, Tisdall & Grover, 2017). Not only is children's and young people's participation highly valued in protection contexts, it is viewed as indispensable to the creation of effective policies, interventions, advocacy and research relevant to protecting and improving the quality of children's lives. As child protection expert William Myers has noted, "a key function of child protection must be to help create and defend social spaces for developmental participation. We should track how well it does that. This means that child protection would not be a stand alone, separate activity apart from others."<sup>vi</sup> What Myers is suggesting here is that protection and participation are inter-related and thus child protection efforts should focus on process as much as intended outcomes of interventions, policies, strategies and programs. He argues that it is not only the purview of international child protection to protect individual children from threats but to protect and presumably open up participatory spaces for children and young people. The difficulty for child protection is the tension that arises given that opening up participation involves transferring control from adults to children that is difficult in some situations. This power transfer, as noted above, is one of the key exciting features that makes Shaking the Movers unique; that is, the model is designed to transfer control to children and young people who are well-supported and informed about their rights.

Refocusing adult-centered power in this way interrupts adult-initiated actions and decision-making processes. Shaking the Movers' design transfers power by meticulously attending to details that are informational, procedural, and ethical. One example is the use of language. Adult-centred participatory action through language is heard in models that use phrases including "to clear space, to protect, to give voice." This language suggests that adults continue to direct relationships with children and young people who are subsequently positioned as recipients of these processes rather than producers of their own agendas. The approach used in the Shaking the Movers model changes this language in a respectful rights-based

manner. To clear space, to protect and to give voice transform into rights-respecting language of *enabling* voices to be articulated, *holding* an ethical space for children's participation, and *facilitating* critical thinking about rights in context. This is part of the transformative effect of the Shaking the Movers model where children and young people are recognized and whose experiences of the world are valued as legitimate sources of knowledge based on their expertise of the world. The Shaking the Movers model acknowledges that it takes a great deal of competence to live fully in a 5 year old, 7 year old or 17 year old world as much as it does to live as an adult in contemporary society.

Thus, valuing and validating the experiences of children and young people from their points of view is not only about 'voice'; it is an approach and worldview that demands that children are taken seriously as knowing, fully human subjects encountering global forces as much as the adults around them. This is an empowered position from which children can speak and act, unlike traditional models of childhood that are captivated by vulnerability, dependency, and passivity. Shaking the Movers accomplishes substantive empowerment in its quest to take participation beyond tokenism and to recognize children's and young people's *authentic* lives.

### **Models of Children's Participation**

Given the recognition of the importance of children's and young people's authentic participation in scholarly, policy, and advocacy contexts, it is hardly surprising to find many different models available for children's participation (Lundy, 2007). A scholarly review of these models conducted by the Landon Pearson Centre (2018) suggests that while they purport to value and validate children's lived experience, few, if any, are as comprehensive or as transformational as the Shaking the Movers model given its rights-based grounding. Gerison Lansdown (2010: 20) identifies three models of children's participation that

demonstrate an increasing focus on positioning children at the heart of the model. As the models intensify their focus on respecting and implementing children's authentic participation, Lansdown notes that they become increasingly difficult to implement in practice. This partly explains how Shaking the Movers distinguishes itself from other participation models: Shaking the Movers features a sustainable structure that enables *authentic* participation as key to the process rather than an outcome of the process.

Lansdown's first model of children's participation is the "consultative participation" model. It retains an adult-centric focus wherein adults seek children's input in order to build knowledge about children's lives and experience. Given that it includes a space for children to offer their experiential knowledge, it does honour children expertise in their own lives. However, it is configured as an adult-driven model and does not include children in a decision-making capacity.

The second participation model Lansdown identifies is the "collaborative" model. This configuration brings together children and adults in a kind of sharing relationship moreso than the consultative model. Adults include children in research and policy design and in some of the decision-making process.

The third participation model Lansdown identifies is the "child-led" model. It positions children at the centre of the model so that they are the ones who drive the agenda for participation and engagement. Adults are situated on the periphery where their role is to provide the infrastructure for children's participation. This infrastructure includes a safe space, professional support, and access for all children to participate. Children lead the participatory aspects of this model while adults hold the space in order for this participation to unfold.

For the most part, most child and youth participatory models attend to the consultative and collaborative aspects of participation. What is more difficult to find are models that transfer power to

engage young people's participation and connect with adults in a respectful and mutually beneficial relationship as with Shaking the Movers. STM features this power transfer as a key element of its design, setting it apart from other participatory models. Importantly, STM recognizes participation at a collective level and moves beyond the resilience of individual young people to understand that true participation reorients attention to the relational and contextual aspects of lived experiences that can be uniquely accomplished using a rights-based lens.



### **Shaking the Movers - A Model for Sustainable Child and Youth Participation:**

Shaking the Movers (STM) uses a workshop format to combine what Lansdown notes above as a consultation and collaboration approach with a vibrant and comprehensive rights-based framework for participation. This approach aims to provide all children and young people regardless of gender, race, class, age, ability, sexuality or locality, with a unique opportunity to exercise their right to explore civil and political processes that affect their lives. Guided by the UNCRC, it brings accountability to children and young people to the forefront by transferring power to them as rights-holders who are viewed in relation to adult duty-bearers in a central and significant way.

Shaking the Movers workshops are held in locations across Canada each year.<sup>vii</sup> Approximately 40 young people between the ages of 8 and 18 attend each of the two-day workshops. Organizers strive to reflect the diversity of Canadian communities at each STM through outreach and recruitment. A local host university with senior students studying in a program in children's rights and/or social justice

supports each workshop. Instructors in these programs assist in preparing students who wish to participate in the workshops. Senior students are recruited from the programs to act as workshop animators and facilitators. All students receive specialized training in children's rights using materials developed by the Landon Pearson Centre. This feature of the model can be adapted to work with universities or other organizations that have programs in design-based fields. Each workshop assigns one student to capture the outcomes, priorities, and ideas presented by the STM participants in written format.<sup>viii</sup> The Landon Pearson Centre, through its local, national and international networks in academia, policy, government, advocacy and practitioner connections, distribute this concluding report widely.

Adult involvement in the STM process is limited and restricted to providing the infrastructure for the workshops to take place. They offer supervision of students staying in overnight accommodations, responding to requests from facilitators for external support appropriate to the theme of the workshops (mental health, education, media, climate change, refugee children's rights), photography, and ensuring the safety of the space for individuals at each gathering. Apart from the local organizer(s), adults do not enter the STM workshop spaces except for an initial welcome from Landon Pearson who attends either in person or via Skype.

The UNCRC's guiding principles of best interests; non-discrimination; right to life, survival and development; and respect for the views of the child, frame each of the STM workshops.<sup>ix</sup> The UNCRC, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1989, is a legally binding human rights treaty. With 54 Articles and a set of Optional Protocols, this Convention is the most widely ratified human rights treaty in history with 196 States ratifying the Convention including Canada (1991) and the U.K. (1991). The U.S. is a

signatory to the Convention but has not ratified it. Responsibility for implementing the Convention in Canada is shared by the federal, provincial and territorial governments. The Convention sets minimum legal and moral standards for the protection, provision and participation rights of children. These rights include provision for optimal growth (health care, education, economic security, and play); protection from abuse, exploitation, and neglect; and the right to participation.

At the conclusion of each two-day STM workshop, participants select an Article of the UNCRC or a theme that becomes the focus for the following year's workshops. 2018 will mark the 11th year that STM workshops have been held across Canada.

Three core issues have emerged from an analysis of STM workshops over the past 11 years: 1) lack of awareness of children's rights, 2) diminished value of their ideas and opinions due to age, and 3) inability to effect social change (Finlay and Pearson, 2018). Consistently, children and young people have expressed their frustration at their own lack of awareness of the UNCRC despite their participation in educational institutions.

The second theme emerging from STM workshops is the view that adult allies who support their self-advocacy efforts to overcome barriers in their lives is significant for them but they feel that their ideas and opinions are not always given due weight. This exemplifies the importance to form alliances between children and adults using a right-based approach that supports rather than overtakes their agency. It accurately describes a key design feature of the STM model. In addition to adult/child alliances, children and young people have regularly voiced their concerns regarding how the institutions in their lives, including school and family, discount their abilities to voice their concerns and abrogate their rights in some situations that impede their ability to live their lives fully. These responses point to the value of the STM model to engage young people in a way that goes beyond tokenism to their benefit as well as for adult decision-

makers. It is this authentic participation that addresses the third theme expressed by Shaking the Movers participants; that is, not only to make their voices heard but to effect social change in a meaningful way. STM's design features support and accomplish this goal.



### **To Conclude: What Makes Shaking the Movers Unique?**

The Shaking the Movers model uniquely engages children and young people to explore and understand their civil and political rights. It does so by viewing children as actively engaged, fully human citizens. With its unique design guided by the UNCRC, STM creates a safe and ethical space for children to be meaningfully involved in understanding their rights, how they matter in decisions that affect them, and how their input into adult decision-making makes a difference. The model does not prioritize adult agendas; rather, it transfers power to children. Consistently, STM workshop participants report that STM provides an opportunity for them to participate authentically in part because the model supports a locally owned process by children themselves. Over the past 11 years, STM has grown into a sustainable and participatory structure that forges connections between young people and adults in a dialogue about what is important to children and how can this impact decision-making processes that uphold and respect children's civil and political rights. The workshops have generated a cohort of children and young people who are now aware of their rights, who have an understanding of how international human rights legislation affects their lives, who

are able to speak for themselves from an informed position as well as on behalf of their peers, and who understand rights as relational and contextual. STM supports children's capacities for participation as active citizens who know and understand that they are important and their civil and political rights matter.

With its strong rights-respecting structure, the Shaking The Movers model has many unique features that set it apart from other youth participation models. What we have learned over 11 years of hosting STM workshops is that when children and young people find themselves in places they perceive as 'safe,' they are more likely to confidently and authentically express their views and experiences. It is this authenticity and confidence that appears to be less developed in other participatory models that purport to move away from tokenistic inclusion but end up failing to do so in part because of flaws in model design and process; Shaking the Movers is a consistently successful model with a proven track record because it includes a systematic way to have an impact beyond the workshops themselves. It is a model designed to include aspects of both consultation and collaboration but goes one step further to action. For some STM participants, it is a game changer. After attending an STM workshop, one clear and consistent message heard from young people is that it is the first time that they have felt that their views and perspectives have been heard and taken seriously. They report feeling an enhanced level of confidence both as individuals and as part of a larger collective to effectively address issues relevant for young people's lives through their new understanding of a rights-based approach. We have heard many times over stories of personal growth and awareness of a broader view of the ways rights are intertwined with the ways young people live their lives. The creative and collaborative STM space enables these connections and reflections to flourish by transferring power to children and young people and consistently positioning them as the ones who lead 'movers.' They leave STM workshops understanding that as rights-holders they can hold to account the duty-bearers who make decisions on their behalf. The two mechanisms in place to develop this

accountability are the Child Rights Academic Network (CRAN)<sup>x</sup> and the LPC Knowledge Transfer Protocol. CRAN is organized around a broad understanding of the term ‘academic’ in order to bring multi-sector members in dialogue. This membership comprises leading child rights academics, policymakers, governmental and non-governmental representatives, and advocates, who meet annually in Ottawa with the express purpose to respond to the views and perspectives of STM participants. Prior to each CRAN meeting, outcome documents prepared by young people based on their interactions at STM workshops are circulated to CRAN members and used to set the agenda for the annual CRAN meeting. They are asked to respond concretely to the concerns articulated by STM participants who virtually observe the CRAN meeting via social media and provide live feedback to the adults. This technologically mediated interaction creates a robust conversation between young people and adults that extends individual STM and CRAN meetings in important ways.

A second example of the ways the STM model is designed to move beyond individual workshops and meetings is its knowledge transfer protocol. STM reports, written by a youth delegate following each of the STM workshops, are sent to the Landon Pearson Centre. The Centre takes on the responsibility to circulate these reports widely to key government and policy representatives as well as to distribute them through their networks and social media outreach. In the spring of each year, the Centre hosts an interactive event that brings decision-makers to Carleton to respond directly to children’s and young people’s concerns arising from STM workshops. For instance, Climate Change was the theme for the STM 2016 workshops. The Landon Pearson Centre met with the Federal Minister of the Environment’s office to deliver STM reports and issued an invitation to the Minister to appear on a panel at Carleton University to speak directly to young people about concrete changes that could be made (or reasons why they cannot be made) based on young people’s views and recommendations. These are two of many examples of the ways the STM design

transfers power to children in a substantive way. It is a design feature that moves the STM model one step further than other youth participation models that more typically end at the conclusion of individual participatory events. Children's and young people's participation on matters important to their lives resonates long after the workshops conclude in ways that hold adult decision-makers accountable to children. The STM model ensures this relational approach and provides young people with a transformational experience in exploring their right to participate in the decisions that affect their lives.

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- i For more, see Lansdown (2014) who provides an overview of the impact of 25 years of the UNCRC on the notion
  - ii. See Cott, C. *Conceptualizing and measuring participation*. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005) for example, for a discussion by scholars in disability studies who argue that there is an over-emphasis on individuals and less on participation viewed as relational and dependent on having access and opportunities in the context of diverse social relationships. For more on individual rather than collective emphasis, see also Perenboom, R JM, Chorus A MJ. "Measuring participation according to the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF)." *Disability Rehabilitation* vol. 25 (2003): 577–587.
  - iii. Lúcio, Joana and John P'Anson. "Children as members of a community: Citizenship, participation and educational development – an introduction to the special issue." *European Educational Research Journal* vol. 14, no. 2 (2015): 129–137.
  - iv. Anthropologist Sharon Stephens, Sharon was one of the early childhood scholars to discuss children and young people in a globalized context.
  - v. James, Allison. "Giving Voice to Children's Voices: Practices and Problems, Pitfalls and Potentials." *American Anthropologist* 109, no. 2 (2007): 261-272.
  - vi. Myers, William. (2015). "Children's Right to Defend Their Well-Being and Development." International Conference, Child Participation and Child Protection, 2015. Available at <https://icpnc.org/publications-and-resources/conference-on-child-participation-and-child-protection-resources/>
  - vii. The Landon Pearson Centre has built the infrastructure for STM workshops with a central coordinator who assists with recruitment and coordination. However, each workshop is locally organized.
  - viii See the Landon Pearson Centre website for STM reports: [www.carleton.ca/landonpearsoncentre](http://www.carleton.ca/landonpearsoncentre)

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- ix. For more on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, see [https://www.unicef.org/crc/index\\_30177.html](https://www.unicef.org/crc/index_30177.html)
- x See the Landon Pearson Centre website for CRAN reports: [www.carleton.ca/landonpearsoncentre](http://www.carleton.ca/landonpearsoncentre)

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