Landon Pearson Resource Centre
for the Study of Childhood and Children's Rights

Shaking the Movers III

Child Rights in Education
CRC Articles 28, 29, and 42

Final Report

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Background Information

On June 5 and 6, 2009, the Landon Pearson Resource Centre for the Study of Childhood and Children's Rights conducted a two-day workshop with children and youth, the fourth in its annual series and the third installment in its "Shaking the Movers" initiative. The workshop was conducted in partnership with the Centre for Initiatives on Children, Youth and Community at Carleton University, and supported by the Canadian Commission for UNESCO, the Public Health Agency of Canada, the Laidlaw Foundation, and the Collaborative Centre for Aboriginal Public Health at the University of Northern British Columbia.

The Landon Pearson Resource Centre's workshops are designed to expand national understanding of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) by magnifying the voices of those most affected by it. Entitled "Child Rights in Education," this year's workshop had two overarching objectives:

- To provide an opportunity for children and youth to exercise their right to take part in discussion and to share their perspectives about issues affecting them, with the assurance that their voices would be heard and listened to.

- To provide an opportunity for children and youth from across Canada and from a variety of backgrounds to prepare comments and recommendations for governments, academics, civil society, and particularly for stakeholders in the education system.

The three articles from the CRC that framed the workshop are:

Article 28 – The right to education

1. States Parties recognize the right of the child to education, and with a view to achieving this right progressively and on the basis of equal opportunity, they shall, in particular:

(a) Make primary education compulsory and available free to all;

(b) Encourage the development of different forms of secondary education, including general and vocational education, make them available and accessible to every child, and take appropriate measures such as the introduction of free education and offering financial assistance in case of need;

(c) Make higher education accessible to all on the basis of capacity by every appropriate means;

(d) Make educational and vocational information and guidance available and accessible to all children;

(e) Take measures to encourage regular attendance at schools and the reduction of drop-out rates.

2. States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to ensure that school discipline is administered in a manner consistent with the child's human dignity and in conformity with the present Convention.

3. States Parties shall promote and encourage international cooperation in matters relating to education, in particular with a view to contributing to the elimination of ignorance and illiteracy throughout the world and facilitating access to scientific and technical knowledge and modern teaching methods. In this regard, particular account shall be taken of the needs of developing countries.

Article 29 – The aims of education

1. States Parties agree that the education of the child shall be directed to:

(a) The development of the child's personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential;

(b) The development of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, and for the principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations;

(c) The development of respect for the child's parents, his or her own cultural identity, language and values, for the national values of the country in which the child is living, the country from which he or she may originate, and for civilizations different from his or her own;

(d) The preparation of the child for responsible life in a free society, in the spirit of understanding, peace, tolerance, equality of sexes, and friendship among all peoples, ethnic, national and religious groups and persons of indigenous origin;

(e) The development of respect for the natural environment.

2. No part of the present article or article 28 shall be construed so as to interfere with the liberty of individuals and bodies to establish and direct educational institutions, subject always to the observance of the principle set forth in paragraph 1 of the present article and to the requirements that the education given in such institutions shall conform to such minimum standards as may be laid down by the State.

Article 42 – Making the Convention widely known

States Parties undertake to make the principles and provisions of the Convention widely known, by appropriate and active means, to adults and children alike.

Considering the tremendous scope of these articles, and the multiplicity of issues arising from them, the workshop encouraged the young people to focus on four themes:

Day 1   The right to education and barriers to access

        Fostering inclusivity, acceptance, and respect in schools

Day 2   Civil and political rights of youth in the school setting

        Child rights education

The following report highlights the discussions that took place around the four thematic areas addressed by the children and young people who attended the two day workshop. It provides their perspectives based on their personal experiences, and brings forward recommendations that reflect their wisdom, their insight, and their lived realities as students in the Canadian education system.

Workshop Overview

The workshop's 41 participants ranged from 11 to 22 years of age and represented a variety of cultural groups, including Aboriginal youth. Young people came to the workshop from rural and urban communities in Nova Scotia, Quebec, Ontario, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta, and British Columbia. Participants were divided into five groups of 8-9 people, and remained in these smaller groups to discuss each of the four themes. The participants' discussion was directed by two youth facilitators and recorded by a notetaker, who was also a young person; all three remained with the same group for the duration of the workshop. After each small group discussion, groups returned to the plenary with a summary of their ideas and the key messages that they felt were most pertinent. Accompanying adults, and others committed to hearing what young people had to say, met separately to discuss the same themes to prepare them for the young people's presentations in plenary.

Since the workshop took place on Algonquin land, it began with a traditional welcoming ceremony, conducted by a young woman from the Algonquin First Nation. The Honourable Landon Pearson, director of the Centre, then briefly introduced the thematic discussion topics in the context of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Children. Mrs. Pearson addressed the plenary after each thematic session, providing a wrap-up statement about the issues in question.

Each session was introduced by an invited speaker. For the first session on the basic right to education, Cindy Blackstock, Executive Director of the First Nations Child and Family Caring Society, spoke of the situation of Aboriginal children and youth in Canada, specifically as a population that receives less public funding for education than any other group in the country. To illustrate the impact of funding deficits on education for Aboriginal youth, Ms. Blackstock told the story of schoolchildren in Attawapiskat, Ontario, whose school grounds were poisoned by diesel fuel 30 years ago and who are currently leading a child rights campaign to have a safe and healthy place to learn.

The second session on fostering inclusivity and respect began with a speech from Joanne Cave, high school student and founder and director of Ophelia's Voice, a non-profit organization that empowers girls and young women to affect social change in their community through self-initiated social justice projects. Joanne spoke of her experiences in creating a space for girls to have open and meaningful conversations with one another, no matter what their backgrounds.

To introduce the third session on civil and political rights, Samira Ahmed, law student at the University of Ottawa and co-founder of For Youth By Youth (FYBY) News, provided a summary of children's rights in the education system under Canadian law. Samira talked about safe school environments; rights to privacy in the school; issues surrounding attendance, curriculum material, and disciplinary measures; and legislation protecting youth from human rights violations.

For the fourth session on child rights education, Valerie Kelly-Turner, recent graduate of the Faculty of Education at Queen's University, told workshop participants of how knowing her rights as a high school student enabled her to participate in the decision-making process of her school council. Robin MacLean, student at Cape Breton University's Children's Rights Centre, expanded upon the proven value of child rights education, showing that rights-respecting schools boost empathy among students and morale among teachers.

On the evening of the first day, participants were taken to Victoria Island, an ancient Algonquin gathering place on the Ottawa River, where they were given a tour of Aboriginal dwelling places from across Canada, followed by dinner and a dance presentation.

On the morning of the second day, in keeping with the education theme and as a way of bringing the group together, young people brought in an artefact for "Show and Tell." Each young person brought something that was important to them and that reflected who they were, sharing their personal stories with the other workshop participants. Here are some of the items that participants brought…

Metis sash… hockey jersey…dirt-biking jersey… synchronized swimming cap… tap shoes…step-dancing shoes… family photos…hermit crab shells… baby blanket…iPod touch…Blackberry… toy puppy…teddy bear…pink stuffed rabbit…lifeguard whistle…flag from the Dominican Republic…still from a self-made film about global warming…necklace from a Mayan grandmother…necklace from a total stranger… pair of pearl earrings…Himba bracelets from Namibia…oven mitts…love letter from a boy…love poem from a husband…paper star…

SESSION 1
Right to education and barriers to access

Discussion Questions:

- **Do you have any personal experiences with barriers in the education system (i.e. physical, linguistic, gender, cultural)?**
- **In general, what do you see as the major obstacles to the child's right to education in Canada?**
- **Of the barriers that you have identified, what can be done to help overcome them?**

The first session of the workshop focused on the basic right to education and the ways in which this right is both challenged and upheld in students' daily lives. Children and young people examined a broad range of issues, including school location, curriculum flexibility, cultural sensitivity, and ageism. Participants saw community outreach, peer support, and open avenues of communication, among other initiatives, as key to overcoming these impediments. The following section highlights the youth participants' ideas and perspectives, using their own words.

The barriers we face…

- Geographic location of schools: Having to travel long distances to get to school is a major obstacle to students' education. Participants stated that finding a school that meets their post-secondary education needs, whether in academics or in trades, often comes at the price of having to spend a long time getting there.

    "Children should be closer to school. We're scattered everywhere,
    like sand on a piece of paper."

    "Where we live should not determine our success later on."

- School district boundaries: The process by which the education system delegates students to go to particular schools is quite arbitrary. Students should be free to attend whichever school best suits their interests and future career-paths.

    "You're forced to go to one school when you need the services of another."

    "I'm not allowed to go to a school if I don't live in that area,
    even if it offers programs that I don't have in my neighbourhood."

- Resources: Youth brought up the difficulties facing those students who do not have the resources to attain a higher quality or level of education.

    "Some students want to go to a better school,
    but they have to suffice with whatever they were given."

- Switching schools: Participants stressed the importance of a stable school environment. Youth in the children's aid system noted that they are particularly vulnerable because of their placements in different foster homes. Aboriginal youth pointed to the stress of switching from a school on reserve to one off reserve.

"Moving from home to home, I always had to change schools, and that prevented me from getting comfortable with the teachers or the school. It's important for children and youth to be stable in one place and in what they're doing."

"We lost a lot of students because they couldn't handle the change from reserve to city. The transition is sometimes too much for students to take and it affects their education."

- Planning for the future: There is a lack of guidance from the school administration in helping students to plan the next steps of their education and to prepare for life after school.

    "I didn't feel like they sat down with me and asked what I wanted to do when I grow up."

- Health education: There is a deficiency of information about mental and sexual health. Workshop participants stressed that all children should have access to sexual education.
- Communication with school administrators: Youth underscored the importance of freedom of expression, particularly in communicating their thoughts and opinions to the administration. They mentioned being unable to talk about the issues affecting or

interesting them due to a lack of openness to dialogue among adults in positions of authority .

"When we voice our opinions, we get in trouble for being out of line."

- Sexism: Participants identified informal or implicit discouragement from teachers, parents, and peers towards girls wanting to get into engineering and other "hard" sciences.
- Racism: Racism should be something that teachers in schools take more seriously.
- Ageism: Participants spoke of experiencing prejudice because of their age. They pointed out that adults, by dismissing the opinions of young people, are creating a bigger problem: a generation of disengaged youth.

"Adults tell us that we don't know anything, we haven't had enough experience.
They don't take us seriously because we are young."

- Cultural sensitivity of teachers and counselors: School staff should reflect the dominant demographic of the students, or at least be provided with special training to enable them to relate to their students from a cultural perspective.

"If you go to a school that is dominantly Native or Spanish,
have a counselor that understands your culture."

- Moral education: Children who do not have a moral framework at home need to acquire it in another environment, and that environment is the school. Workshop participants noted that teachers are wary of discussing ethical or controversial issues for fear of fostering the "wrong" ideas in the child.

"Teachers say parents are supposed to foster values, but what if your parents are closed-
minded? You end up getting confused and lost."

"Teachers argue that their only responsibility is to teach the curriculum,
not to teach ethics and social values."

- Language: Participants stressed the importance of language acquisition to success in school, particularly through English as a Second Language (ESL) courses. In one young person's experience, although he was registered as an ESL student, he received no ESL instruction.

Breaking down the barriers…

- Community outreach: Promote discussion in classrooms and communities. Engage the school and the community to be partners in young people's lives.

"Sometimes the problems are in the community around us, not in the school."

- Mental health: Create a space in the community where people with problems can come and talk with others who are experiencing similar difficulties. In the school, students should have the choice of a male or female nurse, depending on who they are more comfortable with.

- Peer support: Establish a mentoring program, in which students who have been at the school for a year or more can show younger students where everything is and draw them into the school community.

  "It's really important to have a peer support system,
  because sometimes parents and teachers can't help you."

- Integration of students with different needs: Gifted students and students with learning disabilities should be in the same classroom with mainstream students. For students with special needs, it is especially important that they feel like they are a part of the school and that they share the school spirit.

  "Usually, you don't see the separation of students with different needs until high school,
  which is the worst time to separate them."

- Open up the lines of the communication: Youth recommended installing anonymous complaints boxes for students to leave comments for their teachers, with a big complaints box for the principal.

  "We have the right to stand up and say, 'This is what's wrong.'
  Adults should give us that chance."

- Supportive administration: Teachers should not just offer educational support, but emotional support as well. Teachers are continuing to distance themselves from students because there are a lot of legalities surrounding what can and cannot be done around a student; however, students feel that they require more personal, rather than strictly professional, association with their teachers.

  "Be more than a teacher, be more like a friend."

  "It seems like a teacher is there to teach, not to be a human being."

- Manageable class sizes: Since it is difficult for one teacher to effectively instruct and reach out to a large number of children, create smaller classrooms with fewer students and hire more teachers.
- Free post-secondary education: All young people should be able to attend university or college.

  "In our world, post-secondary education is more important than anything."

- Planning for the future: Students should start learning about their educational and career options at an earlier age. There should be a counselor or social worker who talks to youth about what they want to be and helps them to set education goals. This adult could meet with the student several times throughout elementary school, so that by high school they have a better idea of want they to do.

  "The main reason behind education should be to empower children."

- Flexibility in curricula: Generate an open curriculum so that youth can start learning about cultural, sexual, and other relevant issues, especially children's rights. These discussions should not begin in high schools, but at a younger age.

"An important part of education is to learn to make decisions and to deal with issues properly. We need to be allowed to learn from our mistakes."

SESSION 2
Fostering inclusivity, acceptance, and respect in schools
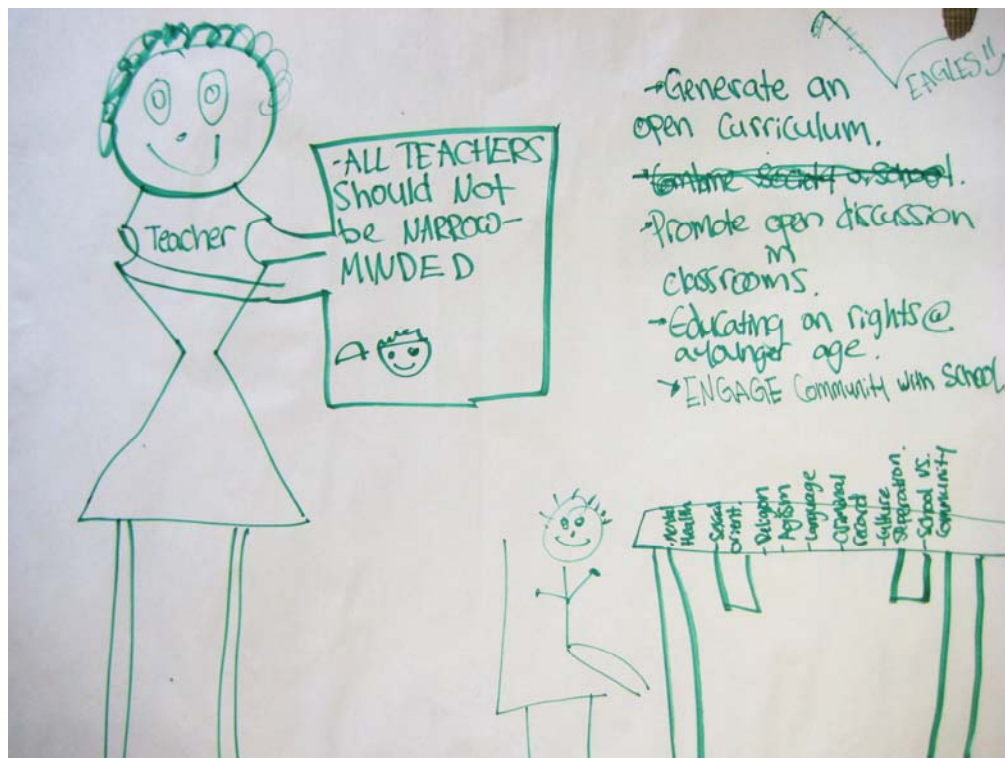
Discussion Questions:

- **In your school experience, has there been a program or club that fosters inclusivity, acceptance, or respect?**
- **Based on what group members have shared, how could schools create an inclusive and respectful environment? Who should be involved (e.g. parents, teachers, members of the community) and what should their role be?**

On the afternoon of the first day, workshop participants explored the factors that contribute to a respectful school environment. They identified negative modeling from parents and media, academic segregation of students, and tacit discrimination as barriers, which inter-school partnerships, teacher education, extracurricular activities, and a modified curriculum can help combat. Young people emphasized that peers, parents, teachers, and government all have a role to play in making diversity and tolerance a part of school life. The following section highlights the youth participants' ideas and perspectives, using their own words.

"Acceptance, respect and inclusivity form a triangle with unity in the middle."

Stating the facts…

- Some students get bad role models from their parents, and so do not know what is right or wrong. They take in what they learned from their parents and bring this with them to school.

   "We trust them because they're our parents, but parents aren't always right."

- Social skills play a role in respect. If you do not have them, you cannot interact with other students. Social skills enable you to discuss what you agree or disagree with.
- Media defines the ideal person in today's society. Teach youth how to put on a filter to see what is realistic.
- We need to recognize that stereotypes exist and that most of us will have them. We need to accept this fact and then take steps to rectify it.

   "We are not born with hate, we learn to hate."

- Nothing happens in a vacuum. There are the people directly affected by discrimination, but there are also the people indirectly affected—their family and their allies. We have to engage all three populations.
- There is a difference between making a group open to everybody and actually including people. We have to actively reach out to everybody rather than just make the group available to everyone. Be equipped to educate people and to combat ignorance.

   "People are afraid to learn about the unknown."

- Schools like to put labels on students, whether they are "academic," "applied," or "college" level learners. There should be different tracks for students to follow according to their educational goals, but those tracks should not be labelled. In one participant's experience, teachers dumb down their language when speaking with students in the applied or technical strain.

"What makes an academic person more valuable than a technical or hands-on student?"

- There is a line of hidden discrimination in the school system according to ethnicity, disability, and obesity. This subversive type of discrimination also affects students living in poverty: arranging field trips that are extremely expensive excludes more marginalized students because they cannot afford to go on the trips.
- Cultural neutrality: When looking at issues, people must remember that there is no such thing as "culturally neutral." Everything comes from a cultural perspective, and youth need to examine whose perspective they are learning from.

   "When you're looking at your rights, ask yourself:
   'Whose story am I telling?' 'Whose standards am I holding myself to?'"

Some programs that worked…

- Awards for positive behaviour: Whenever a teacher noticed a good deed a student had done, they were nominated for an award, such as the responsibility award or the empathy award.

"School should reward you for good behaviour."

- Bringing the school together: One school held assemblies every week, during which teachers would read a chapter of a book, as well as stories about what real kids can do about bullying, cliques, and friendship issues.

Some programs that need to be developed…

"Mental illnesses, women's rights, and sexual diversity
are three issues that our society does not address properly."

- Mental illness: Create a rehab type centre where, if you need group support or one on one discussion, you can have either. This should be a place where your condition and your background do not matter.

"Mental illness can affect anyone at any time in their life, you always have that risk."

- Women's rights: Establish a club for women from a wide variety of ethnic backgrounds. The club would serve a variety of purposes, such as educating women coming from other cultures about Canadian society and preparing them for life here, or helping girls with growing issues.
- Sexual diversity: Have Gay Straight Alliances with LGBT members leading the conversation rather than being the object of conversation. Find an environment that reflects the values of the group. Provide food and transportation to make people more comfortable about attending group meetings.

"Youth centres based out of churches aren't bad,
but the setting makes it difficult to discuss some of these issues."

Wide-ranging solutions…

- Review the school curriculum: Issues like colonialism are not embedded in the curriculum; an open curriculum that deals directly with issues of acceptance and diversity needs to be in place. The curriculum should also integrate social issues and how to take action on them. Anti-stigma campaigns should be worked into the curriculum as well.

"Respect should be taught in school."

"Learning is not just about maths and sciences, but about life lessons."

- Include parents, students, and teachers in all discussion: Parents and school staff should communicate and work together to decide what the school should do about

students, what rules it should include in its code of behaviour, and what courses it should offer. Parents should be more supportive and actively involved, while teachers should promote open discussion in classrooms.

"Students are the biggest stakeholders of all."

- Encourage students from different walks of life to interact with one another. Their conversations could lead them to find that they all have similarities.

"Get students to come together about something that relates to all groups,
no matter where they come from."

- Peer support and counselling: The best way to discourage peer pressure and conflict is through peer teaching. Support groups of peers effectively resolve many problems.

"If there's a bully, you need to find his problems as well as yours in order to fix the conflict."

- Mentorship: Older students can be brought in to have informal discussions with younger people.
- Government involvement: Government officials have a role to play, which is to bring stakeholders together. Create the position of ombudsman to hold government and school boards accountable.

"There should be legal consequences for government if they don't fulfill their obligations."

- Education on different cultures in an inclusive environment: Spend one Friday a week or a month learning abut different cultures. By participating, students are able to learn about their peers, to see from their perspective, and even become friends with them.

"It's really important that everyone knows everyone is a person."

"Inclusivity is about recognizing that each individual is a person,
no less, no more than anyone else."

- Strengthen the school community: By combining feeder schools, and partnering up elementary, middle and high schools, we can create a supportive and close-knit school community.

"Real solutions are continuous."

- Education and support for teachers: Improve teachers' ability to deal with certain issues, such as mental handicaps and bullying.
- "Unlearn" preconceptions: Work with teachers to see what their preconceptions are so that they do not pass them on to children.

"You have to deconstruct everything that you think,
in a way that you can bring it to your classroom."

- Clubs, sports, and other extracurricular activities: These groups teach teamwork and cooperation. They provide students with a sense of belonging and connection; they make students feel accepted.
- Self-confidence and empowerment: Everyone has the responsibility to foster a sense of confidence and empowerment in themselves and in others.

SESSION 3
Civil and political rights of youth in the school setting

Discussion Questions:

- **The Convention on the Rights of the Child protects children's rights to freedom of expression and upholds respect for the views of the child. In your opinion, are students' voices heard and respected (e.g. as individuals or via student councils and student trustees)? How would you ensure that they are?**
- **The Convention on the Rights of the Child states that the school system should prepare you for being a responsible citizen. What does being a "responsible citizen" mean/involve? Do you feel that the school system prepares you for this role by giving you opportunities to be engaged? How could school do a better job of preparing you?**

On the morning of the second day, youth addressed their civil and political rights within the school system. Children and young people stated that there is no effective and consistent vehicle for making their views known or for engaging them in school life; this is evident in the lack of consultation with youth about school discipline and government. Workshop participants felt that this could be remedied by an expanded civics and careers curriculum, a role model program, and an agreement of mutual respect between adults and children. The following section highlights the youth participants' ideas and perspectives, using their own words.

Challenges…

- No rights-respecting disciplinary process: There is no in-between from act to punishment, no discussion with students in a middle ground.

"If something happens at school and we get in trouble for it, we can't defend ourselves properly because we don't know our rights."

- A rift in communication: A gap exists in the education system, in that it is always parent to teacher or teacher to parent communication and students are not involved in that discussion. To communicate with the administration, students must go through a teacher.

"People in authority don't believe students,
you need someone who is an adult to talk to them."

- Receptiveness to student voices: Youth feel that they have so much knowledge and insight to offer, and that they have something to teach adults as well. However, they are impeded by the widespread notion that youth do not know what is best for them.
- Access to information: Children should be consulted on whether or not they would like to be taught sexual education, evolution, or other sensitive and controversial topics.

"The rights of the students should be considered over the opinions of the parents."

- Access to technology: Open up and advertise the school's resources, because school might be the only avenue to the Internet for many children. Schools sometimes block certain websites containing information that could be useful to students.
- Explanations for punishment: Students should know more the why and how of doing certain things. If you hand something in late, maybe you have a reason for doing that, maybe you have a problem, but the teachers do not consider that.

"Norms aren't always in keeping with rights. If it's the norm at your school for teachers to go into your lockers, and nobody steps up, eventually you think this is acceptable."

- Student government: Some schools have student trustees that are helpful in real ways, but student councils do not always have the opportunity to speak to the right people. There are often meetings held where students can provide input, but these opportunities are not advertised.
- Disconnect from the real world: Courses in high school do not apply the information learned to real life. Students need more detailed courses that involve more than just going though the textbook.
- Exclusion of marginalized groups: Children with special needs should be with regular students. It hurts when you are excluded and set apart from the group.

"You can't be engaged when you are excluded."

- "Clique phenomenon": All the same students are asked or volunteer to get involved in the school community. Opportunities are pooled toward a particular group of people because the teachers know them. Schools should offer different opportunities for different types of students.

"People assume that because you're not on student council, you're not involved.
Give students a chance to show that they care in other ways."

- One-sided respect: With regards to the relationship between student and teacher, participants pointed out that teachers will ask for respect from the class without respecting their students in return.

"You are taught to respect everyone, even if they are not respectful to you."

Solutions…

- Respect works both ways: Although students have the right to expect their teachers to respect them, students should treat teachers with respect as well.

"I had a teacher who looked more positively at all of his students
because I approached him and I respected him."

"We want respect to be mutual, so that everyone is on an even playing field."

- Consequences that apply to everyone: School administration should be more accountable to more individuals; there are always consequences for students, so why not for administration? For example, teachers are rarely evaluated, whereas students are evaluated constantly through tests, quizzes, and report cards.

"If I get punished for doing something in school, a teacher should also be punished for doing
something, so that there is a balance between my rights being respected and the teacher's
rights being respected."

- Rights education: Children need to learn their rights sooner, with concrete explanations and real world applications of those rights.

"Give us life examples to show how we can use our rights to defend ourselves."

  o Student agendas contain a list of possible infractions along with the appropriate punishment; instead, the agenda could contain a list of students' rights, which teachers could read through with the class at the beginning of the year.

"We are focusing too much on the wrongs, on punishments and consequences,
and not enough on the rights."

  o Have a show at the beginning at the year to teach students their rights and responsibilities

"How can we defend our rights if we don't know them?"

- Civics and careers: Teach civics and careers at younger grades and throughout school. Make civics interesting, so that students want to learn about it. Offer politics class in every grade, because school should introduce children to the political side of life.

"Educate youth on issues that are relevant to them. This empowers them to be passionate."

- Role models: Set up prevention programs for children in grades 7 and 8 to prepare them for what might happen in high school. Bring back past students to share their stories and experiences. Get students who had trouble in high school, or who dropped out, to talk to the younger children about avoiding the same mistakes.

"Being able to give more of yourself requires you to be all there for yourself."

- Recognize all students' contributions: There are people who do not stand out, who are not the picture perfect responsible citizen, but who do just as much for the school community. These students deserve recognition, even if it is in a small gathering in the classroom.

"School-wide assemblies miss the students behind the scenes."

- Empower students: Give students the power to sit on school boards, to participate in meetings, and to have their voices heard. Students should be involved in forming school legislation.
- Realize students' potential: Give students the opportunities to discover what it is they are capable of accomplishing without labeling their achievements as "university" or "college" level.
- Address all aspects of students' lives: Teach detailed courses that prepare students for everyday activities; for example, have classes about proper nutrition or filing taxes. There could even be character education for building character.

"There should be a curriculum on being a person!"

A responsible citizen has…

- big ears for listening to others
- big eyes to see what's going on
- big feet for stepping up to defend their rights
- a strong backbone to stand up for what they believe in
- a mouth that speaks out and also smiles
- a big heart to care for others
- an open mind
- good actions and good intentions
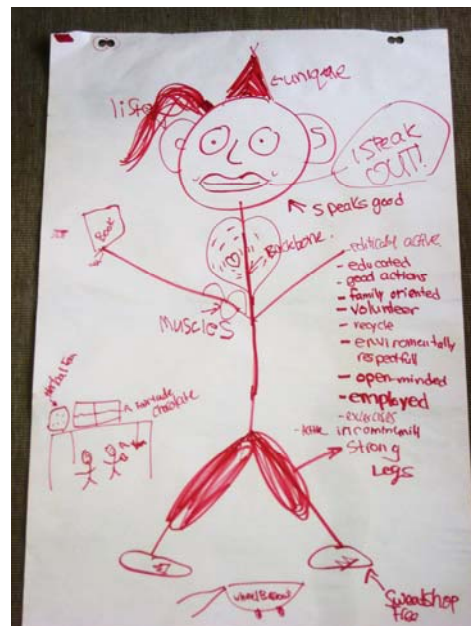
A responsible citizen is…

- educated
- employed
- environmentally friendly
- active in the community
- politically active
- not afraid of getting their hands dirty and doing hard work
- family oriented

A responsible citizen…

- likes reading
- respects the law
- eats free trade chocolate, drinks herbal tea, and wears sweatshop-free shoes
- leaves their own mark on the world and sets the example for others to follow

SESSION 4
Child rights education

Discussion Questions:

- Why is it important for young people to be educated about their rights? What are the benefits of knowing your rights?
- According to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, children should be made aware of their rights. What did you learn in school about the Convention? If children's rights are to be taught in schools, when (at what age) should they be introduced? How should they be taught? Who should do the teaching?
- The Convention on the Rights of the Child states that every country is responsible for making the principles of the Convention widely known "to adults and children alike." How should we teach adults about the Convention?

For the final session of the workshop, children and young people discussed how to approach child rights education and what a rights-respecting school would look like. All of the youth emphasized the importance of rights education and its benefits for children and adults alike. Although few of the workshop participants had heard of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, they had many ideas about how to make it known to children and young people, whether it be through the classroom, the school board, or the media. The following section highlights the youth participants' ideas and perspectives, using their own words.

Our rights now…

- Absence of education on the Convention: The overwhelming majority of participants stated that they had never learned about the Convention on the Rights of the Child in school. This is due largely to lack of time, but also to a lack of urgency: there is no drive to incorporate the Convention into the curriculum.

    "You learn how to be expelled or suspended but not about rights."

    "We've never really been told abut our rights, we need to know what our rights are."

- Schools in Canada, for the most part, have done a pretty good job of following the Convention, and participants felt that a lot of their rights are met. Participants noted that there is legislation enforcing many of their rights, and that these rights are a part of Canadian society and culture.

    "We feel privileged to live in Canada,
    where we have the right to play, the right not to be sold or exploited."

Why learn about rights…

- Gives children a sense of importance and inclusion

"Childhood is a big step in a person's life. If they don't feel important, that's what they will carry with them for the rest of their life."

- Fosters a sense of responsibility within children: Knowing rights makes children accountable to others, even as they expect others to be accountable to them.

    "Not only do kids stick up for themselves, they learn to stick up for other people."

- Offers a sense of protection: Rights give children the certainty that they can be safe.
- Rights translate into other settings: A school setting fosters education about rights in other places. If a child learns about their rights in a school setting at an early age, they are more likely to transfer this knowledge about their rights to different settings, to political processes and community processes.

    "When you learn about rights, you learn that they apply outside of school as well,
    in the home or on the street."

- Rights education lasts your entire life: Once a person is taught their rights as a child, they will continue to respect them when they get older.
- Knowing your rights enables you to defend your rights effectively.

    "It's one thing to know your rights, it's another to know how to use them."

- Rights education reduces violations and fosters respect in the classroom because children feel empowered.
- Knowing your rights enables you to teach others about their rights.

How to learn about rights…

- Through common understanding or basic instinct
- By word of mouth
- Through the school system: courses, assemblies, class discussions
- Through experience: committing or experiencing a rights violation
- By seeking sources with the correct information
- By attending conferences, workshops, and forums

"Place information about the Convention in people's faces."

How to teach rights…

- Rights of the child should be posted in each classroom: A child-friendly version of the Convention should be posted in every classroom in the country. Because it will be constantly in front of them, students will internalize it, even if they do not realize it.
- Positive behaviour should be modeled to avoid misrepresentation/misinterpretation: Explain the text of the Convention (for example, through theatrical representation) so that children understand the implications of their rights.
- Age-appropriate rights education: Teach children, from a young age, in a way that suits their age.
    - Kindergarten to Grade 4: illustrating rights through games, role play, puppet shows, an imaginary child to illustrate different rights situations
    - Grade 5 to Grade 8: each student should research and act out a right, act as role-models to younger children by staging theatre performances, go on field trips
    - Grade 9 to Grade 12: have students take on a leadership role, play a mentorship role in educating younger students, invite guest speakers from outside the school

*"You have to wait until you're a certain age to learn about rights,
and by that point a lot of kids don't care about them anymore."*

- The rights of students should come printed in a handbook at the start of the school year.
- Incorporate rights, along with manners, into a mandatory ethics class.
- Teachers should be taught the Convention at teacher's college: Get teachers to sign a pledge, like the Hippocratic Oath, committing themselves to protect children's rights.

*"Every teacher's college student should take an oath
to uphold the Convention on the Rights of the Child."*

"Teachers have to be taught that they need to know our rights as well as their own."

- Present rights in a way that relates to real life, where students can put themselves into real situations that they may one day face.
- Protect students' anonymity: Set up an anonymous question box where students can write down questions that they have about the school board or about their rights in the school. Set up an online portal where students can do the same thing.

*"Kids must also be able to access information anonymously.
This way they can go to sites where their voices are protected."*

- Use youth tools: Employ different forms of media. Have a website that is colourful and easy to navigate, with a search engine so that it is easy for students to find the answers to their concerns. Use Facebook to create a huge group and encourage dialogue. Find vibrant and interactive avenues for getting through to students.
- Make time and space for students to come together: Create environments in which children feel comfortable. Some children are shy of talking in front of groups, so form smaller groups to make them feel comfortable speaking. Have more workshops that incorporate fun and serious topics, teamwork and leadership activities.

"No one wants to take out time for what they think isn't necessary, so make rights necessary!"

- Establish a mandate or policy that sets students at decision-making levels. These should be students from different backgrounds and grade levels.

"Place students and teachers in situations where they have to exercise their rights together."

- Make support for children official: Set aside a time each year to discuss children's rights, to show the school's commitment to the issue.

"Even one day a year would be good to talk about child rights."

"If the day of the child becomes the month of the child, the momentum is carried all the way through the year. That way the energy never dies."

Who should teach rights…

- Teachers: Students spend most of their time with their teacher. The teacher can organize activities in the classroom, based on a rights curriculum.
- Parents: Schools should create a rights dialogue with parents through emails, newsletters, or assemblies. Parents are responsible for teaching children too, and they have to be encouraging for rights education to work.

"First educate parents on the Convention, then parents should teach their kids about it."

"If parents take on the responsibility of having a child, they also have to respect the child, as a separate entity with their own rights."

- Media: Create an accessible resource for information (pamphlets/brochures, websites, bookmarks, posters in halls and classrooms, agendas) both within and outside of the school

"If media plays a role in an issue, it's more attention-grabbing, it becomes more important."

How to act on your rights…

- Listen and understand and ACT.
  - Take preventative measures to protect yourself.
  - Assert yourself and your rights.
  - Evaluate the process for filing a complaint and the system in place that follows through with the violation.

- o File a human rights complaint.
- Learn from an early age what your rights are.
- Be trained to know what to look for when a child's right has been violated.
- Inform others who may not be aware of their rights.

"I'm really happy that so many people came to this and that they care about children's rights."

In a rights-respecting school…

(1) Classroom settings are small and teachers understand their students' rights.
(2) Everyone is made welcome, so that everyone feels they belong.
(3) Rights are taught at an early age and are implemented in daily activities.
(4) Respect is mutual.
(5) Students are in a position to make decisions, at every grade level.
(6) Students' voices are heard and adults listen to what students have to say.
(7) Students have the opportunity to hold and attend meetings and the floor is always open for discussion.
(8) Students have the right to choose.

"Every child deserves to go to school and deserves to have the chance to grow up."

Next Steps

The Landon Pearson Resource Centre for the Study of Childhood and Children's Rights has undertaken the responsibility to disseminate this report, which captures the perspectives of young people, to networks of experts, academics, researchers, educators, government, and civil society, in the hope that it will stimulate discussion and open dialogue, so that the young participants' recommendations and contributions will be fully recognized, valued and incorporated into the practices and policies of Canadian society.

In keeping with the principles of the CRC and of meaningful youth engagement, participants were asked to suggest topics for next year's workshop. Based on the outcome of the discussions, as well as the feedback provided through evaluation forms, children and young people's rights to both freedom of expression and access to information have been identified as a primary concern and priority. Shaking the Movers IV in 2010 will therefore centre on Articles 13 and 17 of the Convention.