



## *May 2021 CCRC Commentary on the Right to Education*

### **Children's Rights and Education from the Perspective(s) of Children and Youth**

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Prior to 11 March 2020, when the World Health Organization officially declared the outbreak of COVID-19, a global pandemic (WHO, 2020) there was a lack of children's rights awareness amongst Canadian young people and adults, as well as poor implementation in Canadian institutions, service delivery systems, and public policies relevant to children and youth; especially children's participation rights in particular (Bendo & Mitchell, 2017; Covell, Howe & Blokhuis, 2019; UNICEF, 2009). Participation rights include children's rights to express their views freely in matters that affect their lives, to freedom of thought, association, assembly, to privacy, access to information, and to play, rest and leisure (UN, 1989). When participation rights are implemented effectively, they aid in critical thinking, decision making, problem solving, confidence, self-esteem, skill development, teamwork, active citizenship, and civic engagement (Lansdown & O'Kane, 2014; Tisdall, 2013; Wood, Larson & Brown, 2009). They also enable opportunities for young people to share their insights which can provide stimulus for the creation of knowledge to inform research agendas, policy priorities and advocacy efforts (Lansdown, 2001; Tisdall, 2013); this can lead to the realization of best outcomes across health, education and family life (Lansdown & O'Kane, 2014). Since the pandemic started, it has become apparent that the lack of children's rights awareness and implementation in Canada have largely increased as a result of governments, institutions and service-delivery systems shifting priorities to respond to the pandemic. In order to re-focus attention to children's participation rights in Canada, it is helpful to revisit some of the rights-based work that has been done in communities to understand children's perspectives on rights issues that impact their everyday lives. For the purpose of this commentary, attention will be paid to the work that has been carried out with young people by the Landon Pearson Resource Centre for the Study of Childhood and Children's Rights (LPC) at Carleton University.

Each year, the LPC runs an annual youth-led, collaborative, consultative initiative known as Shaking the Movers (STM). As the LPC website<sup>1</sup> outlines STM takes place across Canada through workshops that focus on unpacking the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the

Child (CRC) in the context of young people's lived experiences. STM workshops also provide spaces for young people to exercise their right to engage in civil and political processes with the assurance that their voices will be listened to and heard by decision makers who receive reports that outline their insights and recommendations. The LPC designed STM to enable children and young people to present their informed perspectives and experiences, and to provide specific recommendations and input related to a children's rights theme.

In 2019 the rights-based theme that young people selected to explore and unpack was children's rights in schools. The workshops considered various sub-themes relating to children's rights in schools which differed based on the location of each workshop. Youth-led workshops were held with young people aged 7-18 in Ottawa, Toronto, BC, New Brunswick, and Montréal, but also, with very young children aged 3-10 years old in Toronto, Edmonton and Pond Inlet. The following sub-themes highlight some of the areas that young people identified as important areas relevant to children's rights and education:

- Discrimination, Equality and Diversity
- Identity and Belonging
- School and Community
- Bullying and Mental Health
- Curriculum and Extra-Curriculum Activities

The following (select) excerpts below are derived from the various STM reports and reveal the informed perspectives and viewpoints that young people highlighted in relation to children's rights and schools<sup>2</sup>:

“School doesn't teach us about UNCRC rights, and we don't know that we have these rights, but they are supposed to protect us” – Toronto STM Report

“The only safe place in my school was the music department. All the teachers there were really welcoming... the art world in general. Everyone didn't care who you were or why you were there” - Toronto STM Report

“One of the most important rights that a child should have is the right to get apologized to by adults. Because, so often adults will not apologize to a child even if they are wrong. [Admitting] that they are wrong, and getting an apology is important.” – Toronto STM Report

“We ended up debating which right was the most important, but in the end, we decided that all of these rights were important for quality education.” – New Brunswick STM Report

“Adults should understand that children have different perspectives and need to be able to share these perspectives to make their lives better. They should give them more credit. They should support young people to express themselves without the fear of being judged” – New Brunswick STM Report

“In school we are just taught to listen and not to give an opinion or learn to understand and respect other’s point of view.” – New Brunswick STM Report

“My brother has glasses. But he doesn’t like them. He doesn’t want to wear them. My anaana said he needs to wear them at school.’ -T\*\*\* (A child draws connections between home and school – and how important it is to wear glasses, especially at school. Highlighting how education is valued in his home).” – Pond Inlet STM Report

“Every child has a right” – Edmonton STM Report (3 years old)

“People should learn to keep their language. Kids shouldn’t be ashamed of their language even if you are the only kid in your class that speaks that language.” – Ottawa STM Report

“Students should be able to do evaluations so things can improve and change positively.” – Ottawa STM Report

The following visual represents young people’s vision of a rights-respecting school (Ottawa STM Report, p. 23)<sup>3</sup>



- Be kind to those around you because you don't know what they are dealing with
- Rights are important
- Open to all
- Right to learn your culture
- Equality
- Accessibility-- stairs and elevator
- Incorporate mental health into health class. We learn the same thing every year about physical health, it would be easy to incorporate mental health into the discussion.
- Putting sexual health education into all the schools. It's not just about you and how you are but it's also about protecting yourself and thinking about how you treat other people.
- Don't end sports just because there is a tournament. Keep them going all year.
- Schools need to listen to the opinion of every child.



Reflecting on young people's perspectives on the right to education, the CCRC is calling for<sup>4</sup>:

1. The Council of Ministers of Education do a mapping of how children's rights, as articulated in the Convention, are incorporated into provincial education legislation, curricula, policies, and practices;
2. Provinces and territories make child rights education mandatory for Bachelor of Education/ teacher certification programs and provide ongoing training for teachers to use curricula that are fun, relevant (contextualized), and accessible, with a monitoring system designed to ensure all children learn about their rights;
3. Child rights training be provided for all individuals who work with children, including but not limited to: bus drivers, support educators, class aids, kitchen employees, janitors, etc., and;
4. Provinces and territories make it mandatory for schools to document and report the nature of rights violations that take place in their schools, as well as actions taken, in order to foster accountability for protecting the rights of all children.

Additionally, regarding respect for the views of the child, the CCRC recommends that:

1. A robust evaluation be done to inform the expanding use of youth advisory groups within governing bodies as one means for implementing Article 12. The results should be made public and used to inform good practices to realize Article 12 rights.
2. Canada lead a program of legal review and reform to fully implement Article 12 through all means, for all children, in all areas of law that affect children's lives.
3. National and sub-national governments each establish child and youth-friendly mechanisms within their areas of jurisdiction for hearing and resolving appeals when children's rights to have their views considered are not upheld.
4. A national capacity-building program be developed and implemented to include parent education, informing children how to exercise their rights, and training professionals to exercise their duties to meaningfully listen and act upon the views of children when appropriate.

## References

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<sup>1</sup> The Landon Pearson Centre Website can be accessed at the following link: <https://carleton.ca/landonpearsoncentre/>

<sup>2</sup> The following link provides access to all of the LPC STM reports: <https://carleton.ca/landonpearsoncentre/shaking-the-movers/>

<sup>3</sup> The LPC recently carried out additional STM workshops online with young people in various locations across Ontario - reports will be available shortly on their website: <https://carleton.ca/landonpearsoncentre/>

<sup>4</sup> Recommendations are outlined in the CCRC's alternative report: "Close Systemic Gaps through Systemic Change: Implement Children's Rights in Canada (2020)": <http://rightsofchildren.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Close-Gaps-through-Systemic-Change-CCRC-Report-to-UN-Committee-March-1-2020.pdf>