



Education for Reconciliation and Social Justice: Grades 3 to 6

2012

Bringing the Shannen's Dream, Jordan's Principle and I am a witness campaigns into the classroom

The First Nations Child & Family Caring Society (Caring Society) is honoured to work with educators and schools across Canada to engage children and youth in peaceful and respectful processes of reconciliation designed to achieve culturally based equity for First Nations children and young people. This resource guide offers ideas for engaging students in critical learning to better understand the situation of First Nations children and young people and to address the inequalities they experience in education, child welfare, and access to government service through three interrelated campaigns nested in principles of reconciliation and in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC): Shannen's Dream, Jordan's Principle and I am a witness.

All three campaigns feature resource rich websites that provide background information, independent reports/research and examples of what children and young people have undertaken to support the campaigns across Canada. We strongly believe in respectfully engaging all peoples and organizations in reconciliation and thus the campaigns are designed so that there is no cost for participation and time commitments are minimal.

In addition to assisting First Nations children and young people, the campaigns are designed to uplift all children by promoting critical reflection on the historical and contemporary relationships between Aboriginal and other peoples in Canada and engaging children and youth in peaceful and respectful restorative actions. Teachers report that participating students have a better understanding of Aboriginal peoples and Canadian history within a human rights context, and show an improved sense of respectful

citizenship, social agency and academic success. Students are often inspired, excited and motivated when they are provided with an opportunity to make a difference within existing curriculum. For instance, students take great care in writing a letter that could help another child, offering the dual benefit of enhanced French/English language learning and applied civic engagement. There are many examples where students who have worked with educators on the campaigns during the school year have been motivated to organize learning and engagement opportunities for others outside of the school hours, further enhancing the learning process. Teachers have developed learning activities related to the campaigns at both the elementary and secondary levels consistent with Provincial school curriculums and these are available to assist other educators.

The reconciliation based campaigns:

Shannen's Dream
(www.shannensdream.ca) for "safe and comfy schools" and quality education

Shannen Koostachin, youth education advocate from the Attawapiskat First Nation in Ontario, had a dream: safe and comfy schools and culturally based education for First Nations children and youth. First Nations schools receive less funding per student than Provincial and Territorial schools, and zero dollars for things like libraries, computers, languages or extracurricular activities. Many schools are plagued by serious health concerns such as extreme black mould contamination, high carbon dioxide levels, rodent and reptile infestations, sewage fumes in schools and unheated portables.

Shannen worked tirelessly to try to convince the Federal government to give First Nations children a proper education before tragically passing away at the age of 15 years old in 2010. Named in her memory, the campaign engages Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples to better understand

the education inequities and to take action to ensure all First Nations children and young people attend good schools and receive a proper education that prepares them to achieve their dreams and be proud of their distinct cultures and languages.

Jordan's Principle (www.jordansprinciple.ca) to ensure equitable access to all government services

Jordan River Anderson was a First Nations child from Norway House Cree Nation in Manitoba. Born with complex medical needs, Jordan spent more than two years unnecessarily in hospital while the Province of Manitoba and the Federal government argued over who should pay for his at home care. Jordan died in hospital at the age of five years old, never having spent a day in a family home.

Payment disputes within and between Federal and Provincial governments over services for First Nations children are not uncommon. First Nations children are frequently left waiting for services they desperately need, or are denied services that are available to other children. This includes services in education, health, childcare, recreation, and culture and language.

Consistent with the UNCRC, Jordan's Principle, named in memory of Jordan River Anderson, is a child first principle for resolving these disputes and ensuring First Nations children and young people receive government services available to all others. It was unanimously passed in the House of Commons in 2007 but sadly the Canadian Paediatric Society reports that neither the Federal government nor Provinces/Territories have fully implemented Jordan's Principle.

"I am a witness" (www.fnwitness.ca) to help First Nations children grow up safely at home

In 2007, the Caring Society and the Assembly of First Nations filed a human rights complaint against the Federal government, alleging that Canada's failure to provide equitable and culturally based child welfare services to First Nations children on-reserve amounts to discrimination on the basis of race and ethnic origin. After several unsuccessful efforts by the Federal government to have the case dismissed on legal technicalities, it is currently before the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal and hearings on the merits of the complaint are scheduled to begin on February 25, 2013.

Repeated studies have found funding for First Nations child and family service agencies to be inadequate and inequitable. Research indicates that First Nations children on reserve receive 22% less for child welfare than other children. The I am a witness campaign invites organizations and people of all ages to follow the case in person or online and to decide for themselves if First Nations children are being treated fairly. To facilitate learning, the I am a witness website includes a comprehensive timeline with the legal submissions by all parties in the case along with relevant reports from credible independent sources like the Auditor General of Canada. Over 10,000 people and organizations around the world have registered to follow the case on the I am a witness website making this the most formally watched child rights case in Canadian history.

Additionally, students and educators have attended at the Federal Court and Tribunal hearings to experience the legal process as a tool for the implementation of child rights and to inform their own critical reflection about the alleged inequity.

Bringing reconciliation into the classroom

The United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada have both emphasized the vital importance of actively educating children and young people about Aboriginal peoples and providing them with meaningful tools to engage in reconciliation. Educators and students have applied Shannen's Dream, Jordan's Principle and the I am a witness campaign in multiple subject areas. For example, teachers in Ontario and Quebec have used Shannen's Dream to shape lessons in English/Language Arts. Children have written letters and reports about the inequities and are educating other children. Secondary students have attended the Tribunal hearings as part of their civics and law education.

Possible subject areas include...

Arts, Careers, Civics, Communications/Media Studies, Drama, English/Language Arts, Health/Nutrition, History, Law, Math, Music, Native Studies, Parenting, Social Studies.

For younger children, the campaigns may fall under learning expectations such as: Personal and Social Development, Language, Health and Physical Activity, Arts.

Maintain a focus on social justice

Educators engage students as co-creators of knowledge by inviting them to ask critical questions about why things are the way they are and empowering them by teaching respectful and peaceful skills to change things that concern

Remember that you may have Aboriginal students in your classroom. Engaging with social justice issues often involves challenging stereotypes and assumptions; while this is vital work, Aboriginal students can be hurt by the discussion, even when stereotypes are expressed with a view to new understanding. While encouraging all students to share in the

Table 1. Kinds of Citizens

Personally Responsible Citizen	Participatory Citizen	Social-Justice Oriented Citizen
Description		
Acts responsibly in their community Works and pays taxes Picks up litter, recycles, and gives blood Helps those in need, lends a hand during times of crisis Obeys laws	Active member of community organizations and/or improvement efforts Organizes community efforts to care for those in need, promote economic development, or clean up environment Knows how government agencies work Knows strategies for accomplishing collective tasks	Critically assesses social, political, and economic structures Explores strategies for change that address root causes of problems Knows about social movements and how to effect systemic change Seeks out and addresses areas of injustice
Sample Action		
Contributes food to a food drive	Helps to organize a food drive	Explores why people are hungry and acts to solve root causes
Core Assumptions		
To solve social problems and improve society, citizens must have good character; they must be honest, responsible, and law-abiding members of the community	To solve social problems and improve society, citizens must actively participate and take leadership positions within established systems and community structures	To solve social problems and improve society, citizens must question and change established systems and structures when they reproduce patterns of injustice over time

Westheimer, J. (2008, May). No child left thinking: Democracy at-risk in American schools. *Democratic Dialogue Series* (17), p. 6.

them. The campaigns promote an understanding that child rights is a mechanism to ensure all children have an equitable opportunity to succeed and be proud of who they are. Disadvantaged people are reframed from being people who need to try harder to people who often need an equitable opportunity to achieve their dreams. Through the campaigns, students develop critical thinking skills and the capacity to apply curriculum to real word situations. Students learn that they have a voice, and that people will listen to their feelings and ideas.

Joel Westheimer, university research chair in democracy and education at the University of Ottawa, argues that lessons on fostering democratic citizenship usually have more to do with voluntarism and charity than promoting a critical exploration of fairness, equality of opportunity or democratic engagement. He asks educators to orient their teaching toward social-justice oriented citizenship, as outlined below. Shannen’s Dream, Jordan’s Principle, and I am a witness, are designed to promote just such an approach.

discussion, it is unfair to ask First Nations students to ‘teach’ others by sharing their personal stories or answering questions on behalf of all Aboriginal peoples.

Resources

Visit the **campaign websites** for video clips, audio files, Access to Information documents, legal documents, news articles, important links and a timeline of events for each campaign. Many educators find the ‘Gallery’ sections to be particularly helpful, especially the video clips.

- Shannen’s Dream: www.shannensdream.ca
- Jordan’s Principle: www.jordansprinciple.ca
- “I am a witness”: www.fnwitness.ca

Letters from children inspired by the Shannen’s Dream campaign have been published in the book *Children Have Power: Children Standing in Solidarity with First Nations*

Children. The book was titled by the children and is available for purchase through the Caring Society.

In collaboration with Indigenous and non-Indigenous leaders across North America, the Caring Society has developed resources on community-based reconciliation called **The Touchstones of Hope**. The Touchstones of Hope set out principles to guide reconciliation within a four-phase process. A **Touchstones Toolkit** is available to help build momentum toward reconciliation in your community.

The Caring Society publishes the **First Peoples Child and Family Review**, a free on-line and peer-reviewed journal released twice a year. We also offer a **free searchable database** of research and other resources related to Aboriginal children and families.

The award-winning **Project of Heart**, created by high school teacher Sylvia Smith, offers educators a social-justice oriented approach to teaching and learning about residential schools. Detailed teacher lesson plans and resource guides on residential schools are also available through **The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada** and **The Legacy of Hope Foundation**.

For additional background on Caring Society campaigns and ideas on how to get involved, visit the Canadian Teachers' Federation website (www.ctf-fce.ca) for a recent article by Dr. Cindy Blackstock, Executive Director of the Caring Society, on "**Reconciliation in Action: Educators and Students Standing in Solidarity with First Nations Children and Canadian values.**"

If you would like further information about any of the above resources please contact Jennifer King, Education and Public Engagement Coordinator:

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Grades 3 to 6

Activity: Learn the songs! (Art, Music)

Diamonds in the Snow was composed by Charlie Angus, Member of Parliament for Timmons-James Bay and long-time supporter of the Shannen's Dream campaign. The song is a tribute to Shannen Koostachin and the children of Attawapiskat First Nation. Watch the video at: www.youtube.com/watch?v=OC4vrdMUaRI. You can also purchase the song through iTunes! Lyrics are attached.

Witness was composed for the I am a witness campaign by Riva Farrell-Racette, a musician and law student from Saskatchewan. Lyrics are attached.

Teachers can invite discussion by asking: What is this song about? What do you think about it? How does it make you feel? What did you learn? What questions do you have?

Activity: "This is what a safe and comfy school looks like" (Civics, Health/Nutrition, Law, Native Studies, Social Studies)

Use the "Safe and Comfy" school sheet to introduce concepts of child rights, health, and safety. What do children need to be 'safe and comfy' at school? At home? In their community? You can also incorporate the lesson plan on First Nations Communities and Human Rights Through Shannen's Dream, developed by teacher candidate Samantha Ierullo (attached).

Activity: Share your reflections, express yourself! (Art, Civics, Drama, English/Language Arts, History, Music, Native Studies, Social Studies)

Drawing on resources from the campaign websites, ask students to share what they have learned, how they feel, any questions they have, etc. Reflections can be shared through pictures, writing, circle discussion, dance, videos, poetry, recipes, or songs. Invite creativity by encouraging different formats or mediums of expression. The I am a witness logo, for example, was designed by a high school student from Elizabeth Wyn Wood Alternate High School in Ottawa, Ontario. She designed the logo after attending hearings in the child welfare human rights complaint. Students at Pierre Elliot Trudeau School in Gatineau, Quebec, created a video in response to Shannen's Dream. Watch it at:

www.youtube.com/watch?v=QobYB7n45FU&feature=youtu.be

Activity: First Nations schools and education by the numbers (Math)

In 2009, the Parliamentary Budget Officer released a report on the funding requirement for First Nations schools in Canada (www.parl.gc.ca/PBO-DPB/FirstNations.aspx). Teachers and students can use this report to look at the number, condition, and needs of First Nations schools 'by the numbers'. Chapter 8, for example, lists the number of schools by province as well as how many schools are in "good", "fair", and "poor" condition. Teachers can use this data to create age-specific lessons that range from counting the number of schools to statistics/percentages that compare the condition of schools across provinces. For older students, the report provides data to compare the funding gap between Provincial and First Nations schools, and to look at funding and school construction rates across time periods.

Activity: Shannen's Dream word search

The word search (attached) can be used as a follow-up to discussions about Shannen's Dream and concepts of rights, health, and safety.

Activity: Write (or send a picture!) to the Prime Minister or your Member of Parliament (Civics, English/Language Arts, Social Studies)

Writing to the Prime Minister (or Member of Parliament) introduces students to civic participation, how government works, and also ties in to English/Language Arts curriculum. This activity can be done at any age level through a variety of formats—anything from short letters, to drawings, comics, poems, or recipes!

Social action projects

On February 14, Have a Heart for First Nations children.

Have a Heart Day invites people of all ages to support culturally based equity for First Nations children by sending letters and Valentine cards to the Prime Minister, by hosting

an awareness raising event in their school or community, or by spreading the word through social media like YouTube, Twitter, or Facebook.

Organize an Our Dreams Matter Too walk on June 11.

Our Dreams Matter Too is an annual walk and letter writing event calling for culturally based equity for First Nations children. Write letters to the Prime Minister or your Member of Parliament and organize a walk to a nearby mail box or around the playground, gym, or classroom! Learn more at: www.fncaringsociety.com/our-dreams-matter-too

