



Canadian Education Association An Agenda for Youth – Our thoughts so far

Why Youth?

“Respect us.”

“Don’t judge us.”

“Teach us.”

“We want to succeed. “

“Teachers make all the difference.”

These were the messages that twenty seven students from Halifax, Toronto and Vancouver sent to educators through the drama *Imagine a School...* a provocative kick-off to CEA’s national conversation: *Getting It Right for Adolescent Learners*. Available on DVD, *Imagine a School...* has been seen and discussed by well over 6,000 educators in Canada and the United States. As a follow up to this initiative, twenty students from Riverside School Board joined us in Montreal to create *Designs for Learning Spaces, Learning Relationships and Learning Programs*. Through these powerful experiences, it became clear that we owe it to each of these students and to their peers across Canada to act on all that we have learned from them.

Why Now?

Youth is not primarily a biological phenomenon; it is a social construct. Our ideas about who young people are in relation to society change over time. The impacts of globalization, technological developments, immigration and migration have an especially direct impact on youth. The movement of manufacturing jobs to low wage economies and the growth of high skilled jobs have eliminated ‘soft-landings’ for young people who do not graduate from high school. Post-secondary education in university or college including apprenticeships is a minimal basis from which young people can develop sustainable livelihoods. Young people are constructing their identities in a pluralistic society of great complexity - aboriginal heritage, affiliations to countries and cultures of origin, gender and sexual orientation, disability and non-disability; and the different aspirations and expectations of young people in urban and rural communities.

Success in secondary and post-secondary education is more important now than at any other time in our history, but new social and economic realities are also compelling us to question the nature and quality of learning that youth experience in arriving at the transition from youth to adulthood. More than ever, we understand that learning is an incredibly complex and social process that emerges through the continuous interaction of intentional and unintentional experienceⁱ. Learning researchⁱⁱ and the intense pace of change in the past twenty years have underscored the fact that industrial age habits, and more importantly, its habits of mind are no longer sufficient: we must rethink “what can be learnt, where learning can happen and who is involved in the learning process.”ⁱⁱⁱ

An enduring challenge within our school systems, and in Canadian society at large, has been our failure to adequately meet the needs of all adolescents, especially those from the most vulnerable groups in society. More students graduate from high school now than they did fifty years ago, but the

average Canadian graduation rate has remained at about seventy-five percent for almost ten years^{iv}. This statistic is a troubling indicator of the effectiveness of our education system and becomes even more so when we consider the number of students who may graduate, but have a low sense of belonging, low participation rates,^v and lower achievement rates as they progress through secondary school.

Disengagement from secondary school – whether a student leaves or struggles through – is a significant source of inequity in Canadian society, not only because it places a large number of students at a disadvantage as they transition to adult roles, but because disengagement is disproportionately experienced by students living in poverty, youth with disabilities, and adolescents from visible minority and aboriginal communities^{vi}.

An Agenda for Youth

CEA's emerging agenda rests on the conviction that Canadians are ready to explore new ways of thinking about public education in the 21st century. We are fortunate that there is incredible potential within Canadian research communities, both within and beyond education, for contributing to new perspectives on education and adolescent learning. To capitalize on this potential, CEA's research agenda will inspire new perspectives, nurture innovative thinking and exchange knowledge among others who share CEA's vision for educational and social transformation in Canada.

The work so far

At a CEA symposium – *Getting it Right for Adolescent Learners* – students, parents, educators, senior decision-makers, government officials, and people who work in the voluntary set down principles for a focus on adolescent learning in Canadian schools:

- Our purpose is to help students be the best they can be and meet whatever meaningful goals they have set for themselves.
- All students have the capacity to learn and the right to set their own goals.
- Young people learn best when they are valued and respected by adults.
- All people value and are entitled to the respect of others.

- Embracing diversity and pluralism enriches the learning environment for all students.
- Community is essential to the creation of a sense of belonging.
- Curriculum and pedagogy are tools to an end, not ends in themselves.

Specific initiatives have begun, but we know this agenda will develop and change over time and that getting it right for adolescent learners is not CEA's work – it is the work of all of us who care about the well-being of Canada's youth.

1. What did you do in school today (WDYDIST)?

This is a collaborative initiative of the Canadian Education Association, the Canadian Council on Learning, and a number of Canadian school districts to study, assess and enhance the learning experiences of adolescents in classrooms across Canada. The three-year project will develop a framework for classroom effectiveness and then study the learning processes and activities that students are actually engaged in. The research team includes the Galileo Educational Network from Alberta and The Learning Bar from New Brunswick.

2. Research Use and Impact Study

CEA is working with a research team from the Ontario Institute of Studies in Education at the University of Toronto (OISE/UT) on a study that will shed light on how research is encountered and used to shape policy and practice in Canadian secondary schools. Working with the school districts partnering in WDYDIST, the study will answer questions such as:

- How do educators learn about research findings?
- What knowledge do educational leaders have about some important research findings related to their goal of improving secondary schools?
- What interventions might most effectively and efficiently improve the availability and use of research in and for secondary schools?

3. Youth Confidence Index

A youth confidence index is a key component of two complementary initiatives that have as their goals:

- Providing important youth perspectives on current and future policies and practices;
- Advancing more accurate and contemporary images of young people;
- Building and mobilizing shared knowledge to contribute to:
 - i) the development of new policy frameworks to guide cross-sectoral collaboration in support of young people, and
 - ii) improve current practices within existing frameworks.

With the support of the Canadian Council on Learning, CEA is conducting a feasibility study of a Canadian youth confidence index (YCI), a tool for measuring and assessing young people's 'confidence' in key aspects of their lives today and their expectations for the future. The YCI will measure young people's confidence in areas such as learning, working, belonging, and participating, thereby contributing to an understanding of young people's perceptions and how these factors shape their pathways.

4. Rethinking Youth/Rethinking Learning

This initiative consists of a series of focus papers that explore the realities of young people's lives today and what this means for learning. In addition to providing the conceptual basis for CEA's agenda, the papers will frame issues to create a public and professional dialogue on youth; identify and develop compelling 'generative themes' that could drive change; and synthesize the literature to make it more broadly available and 'user friendly' to non-academic audiences.

5. Leaders' Network

Leaders of school districts that are members of CEA and are committed to exploring ideas about the education of young people can join the Leaders Network, an online collaborative private group work space and participate in the annual face to face meeting with peers at the CEA CEOs' Forum.

6. Symposia and workshops across the country

Each of CEA's events is specifically designed for its audience and stands as a unique and valuable program, yet they form a series of learning sessions and are available to wider audiences on CEA's website through podcasting and reports. So far, events in the *Getting it Right for Adolescent Learners* series have been held in Vancouver, Montreal and Winnipeg. Events in 2008 are planned for Fredericton and Edmonton.

Resources and Links

A Call to Action

<http://www.cea-ace.ca/res.cfm?subsection=cal>

CEA's Research Agenda

<http://www.cea-ace.ca/res.cfm?subsection=agd>

Imagine a School...

<http://www.cea-ace.ca/pub.cfm?subsection=dvd>

Podcasts

Getting it Right for Adolescent Learners, Vancouver 2006

<http://www.cea-ace.ca/dia.cfm?subsection=the&page=ado>

- Drs. Pat Clifford & Sharon Friesen, *I Hold in My Hand a Bird*
- Dr. Gordon Neufeld *Adolescence and Education*

Podcasts

Design for Learning, Montreal 2007 <http://www.cea-ace.ca/dia.cfm?subsection=the&page=del>

- Dr. Jane Gilbert, New Zealand *Catching the Knowledge Wave? The Knowledge Society and the Future of Public Education*
- Kathleen Gould-Lundy, *What Young People Want*
- Dr. Doug Willms, *Engagement at School: A Report from Canadian Children and Youth*
- Yves Maufette, *Problem Based Learning: A Problem for Students or Teachers*
- Ben Levin, *Making it Happen*

Podcasts

Rethinking Adolescence: Rethinking Schools, Winnipeg 2007

<http://www.cea-ace.ca/dia.cfm?subsection=aut&page=07&subpage=recap>

ⁱ Hargreaves, A (2003). *Teaching in the Knowledge Society: Education in the Age of Insecurity*. New York: Teachers College Press; Sefton-Green, J. (2004). Literature Review in Informal Learning with Technology Outside School - A Report for Futurelab. Accessed on January 11, 2007 at http://www.futurelab.org.uk/research/reviews/07_01.htm

ⁱⁱ Commission on Behavioral and Social Sciences and Education (2000). *How People Learn: Brain, Mind, Experience, and School: Expanded Edition*. Accessed on January 10, 2007 at http://books.nap.edu/openbook.php?record_id=9853&page=13

ⁱⁱⁱ Rudd, T., Sutch, D., and Facer, K. (2006) *Towards New Learning Networks - An Opening Education Report from Futurelab*. Accessed on January 10, 2007 at (http://www.futurelab.org.uk/research/opening_education/learning_networks_01.htm)

^{iv} Statistics Canada (2005). *The Daily – Wednesday February 5, 2005: Secondary School Graduates*. Accessed on November 22, 2006 at <http://www.statcan.ca/Daily/English/050202/d050202b.htm>

^v Willms, J.D. (2003). Student Engagement at School - A Sense of Belonging and Participation Results From Pisa 2000. Accessed on November 21, 2006 at <http://www.unb.ca/web/crisp/pdf/0306.pdf>

^{vi} Audas, R. and Willms, J.D. (2001). Engagement and Dropping Out of School: A Life-Course Perspective. Accessed on January 8, 2007 at (<http://www11.hrsdc.gc.ca/en/cs/sp/hrscd/arb/publications/research/2001-000175/SP-483-01-02E.pdf>);

Caledon Institute of Social Policy (2006) *Improving Primary and Secondary Education on Reserves in Canada*. Accessed on January 8, 2007 at (<http://www.caledoninst.org/Publications/PDF/608ENG.pdf>);

Ontario Ministry of Education (2006). Early School Leavers: Understanding the Lived Reality of Student Disengagement from Secondary School - Final Report. Prepared by Community Health Systems Resource Group at the Hospital For Sick Children. Accessed on December 8, 2007 at (<http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/parents/schoolleavers.pdf> pg. 27);

Richards, J. and Vining, A (2004) *CD Howe Institute Commentary - Aboriginal Off-Reserve Education: Time for Action*. Accessed on January 8, 2007 at (http://www.cdhowe.org/pdf/commentary_198.pdf)



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