

**A Creative Arts-Based Approach to Using Children's Rights as a Vehicle for  
Tolerance Education at the Senior Elementary School Level**

by

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## **Abstract**

The following arts-based qualitative research study investigates the potential value of art-based children's rights and tolerance curricula in Canadian schools. The study addresses the question: Are the arts an effective way to educate children about their rights and the importance of tolerance in a democratic society? The research study was conducted in a grade seven classroom in a Northern Ontario community, where students created artworks to demonstrate their understanding of the topics of children's rights and tolerance. Data was collected through individual student and classroom teacher interviews, a class focus group and digital images of students' artworks. Interview and focus group audio recordings were transcribed and discourse analysis was conducted to identify emergent themes in students' comments and artworks. The overall goal of the study was to provide students the opportunity to respond to the curriculum unit they experienced and provide feedback on the potential value of arts-based children's rights and tolerance curricula. Students produced unique and individual artworks that demonstrated their personal understanding of children's rights and tolerance through a variety of social justice themes including racism, homophobia and homelessness. All of the participants responded positively to the unit and value of using the arts to teach children about the importance of children's rights and tolerance in a democratic society.

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

### **Description of Research Study**

The purpose of this research study was to investigate the potential value of arts-based children's rights and tolerance curricula in Canadian schools. The study explored whether the arts can be used as a tool to facilitate discussion among students about their basic human rights and the importance of tolerance in society. The research study is based on a children's rights model that serves to empower children and encourage young people to become active participants in their own education and learning. The following presentation begins with an autobiographical narrative from the researcher, which describes this researcher's interest in the topic of teaching children's rights and tolerance through the arts and is followed by a review of relevant literature, presentation of the research study, findings and analysis. This arts-based qualitative research study aims to answer the following question: Are the arts an effective way to educate children about their rights and the importance of tolerance in a democratic society? The arts-based research study introduces and investigates children's prior knowledge and familiarity with to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), as well as student and teacher perceptions regarding the implementation of the arts-based children's rights and tolerance curriculum. The overall goal of this study is to help build understanding amongst students and educators about children's rights issues in order to create a safer and more supportive school environment for all children. Information from this study can hopefully be used as a resource for teachers and curriculum developers in the development of similar arts-based children's rights and tolerance curricula.

## **Research Hypothesis**

Teaching tolerance through the arts provides a positive outlet for learning respect and understanding of differences, while raising awareness about children's rights and tolerance. Using the arts as a tool for teaching students about their rights can create a meaningful experience that allows children to explore their personal identities and to consider other perspectives. The creative process and shared learning experience further helps students to recognize how a person's lived experiences shape their identity and understanding of the world. When children learn about their rights under the Convention, they start to recognize the importance of mutual understanding and respect in the promotion of peace. As children learn about their responsibilities as citizens concerned for the welfare of others, it creates a positive learning environment wherein students recognize the value and importance of both differences and similarities (Howe & Covell, 2005). Children's rights and tolerance education can create a deeper understanding and sense of social responsibility when teachers are prepared to bring discussion of important social issues into the classroom. However, many teachers may feel unprepared, and, or lack the necessary supports and knowledge to facilitate these meaningful and important learning opportunities.

## **Personal Narrative**

Life is an education and our lived experiences inform the way we see and understand the world. Reality is a personal vision of the world shaped by different social, cultural and environmental influences. Autobiography is an interpretation of a person's lived reality shaped by personal past experiences that can inform new and present ways of knowing.

For life is no uniform uninterrupted march or flow. It is a thing of histories, each with its own plot, its own inception and movement toward its close, each having its own particular rhythmic movement; each with its own unrepeated quality pervading throughout. (Dewey, 1976, p. 597)

My interest in the arts and the importance of teaching tolerance is rooted in past experiences. The following is an autobiographical narrative that attempts to identify my particular interest in the topic of teaching tolerance through the arts from a children's rights perspective, while highlighting the importance of personal experience to my own learning and understanding. It is an account of my personal journey, as I attempt to capture both the essence of my personal and academic life.

Early childhood experiences can shape a person's perception and understanding of life in society. As a child, I was raised in an environment that taught me empathy for others. My parents made me aware at a very young age that not all children are fortunate to be born into privilege and grow up in a nurturing and caring environment. As responsible citizens, we should do our best to help those less fortunate. After the birth of my eldest sister, my mother elected to stay at home and care for her children. Prior to her decision to begin a new career in the home, she owned and worked in an early childhood day-care facility. My early education began at home with my mother as my primary caregiver and teacher. During my early years my mother actively pursued her interest in Early Childhood Education and Psychology, continuing her studies part-time at a University in Eastern Ontario. I grew up in an extremely creative environment filled with arts and crafts, music, nature, exploration and discovery, and it was through these rich learning experiences that I began to develop my understanding and

knowledge of the world.

The transition from the home into the school system can be a difficult time in many young children's lives. I have very few fond memories of my early childhood years at school and it wasn't because I didn't love learning, but because I felt creatively stifled in the school environment and had a strong feeling of being trapped. There was no more time to explore natural childhood curiosities - school was serious business. It was time to learn, read and write, and follow school rules. I pleaded with my parents to let me stay home, but they never agreed and it became a daily struggle. It was as though I never felt as though I belonged at school, but that changed when a very young and passionate teacher came along and rekindled my passion for learning. My grade two teacher transformed my unfortunate start at school into a new and very memorable experience. Not only was she an excellent teacher full of creative thoughts and ideas, but she also made sure that all of her students felt valued. At Schweisfurth (2005) states, it is important that children know that they are valued and made to feel as though they belong. A teacher can make all the difference and my new teacher made learning both interesting and enjoyable again.

Life and school fell into rhythm. The arts, particularly music were an integral part of my early childhood learning experience. The arts allowed me to express myself as a young individual and provided new and meaningful experiences that promoted enduring understanding. Fisher & McDonald (2006) argue that children are able to learn more effectively when what they are learning has meaning to them. The arts have always been present in my life. Whether, it was the interpretative dance and music classes in my elementary school or guitar lessons, they were all part of my early education and

would later serve me in my own teaching practices.

Teachers can have a lasting impact on their students' lives. I had both positive and negative experiences throughout my elementary school and high school career, but it is the positive experiences that transformed me, opening my eyes to new ways of seeing that I remember most. My first high school art teacher was a non-conformist to say the least. As Bickmore (2006) argues, it is important to recognize that teachers have agency and administrative guidelines do not always determine the reality of classroom practice. My high school art teacher, created a student-centred learning environment that recognized the diverse learning needs of his students and the importance of personal experience to their learning. It was in my first photography class at the high school level that I truly began to recognize the power of images to communicate new information and understanding (Weber, 2008). I developed a passion for photography that year and spent hours working in the darkroom. For me, photography was a tool that allowed me to communicate my lived reality and understanding of the world. I didn't want to be a passive participant in my education, I had something to say and photography gave me the voice to say it.

I always had a curiosity to know a life unlike my own, to know and understand a life without the privileges I had experienced as a child, and I always tried to be empathetic and understanding towards other people. It was as a youth that I began to become ever more aware of the inequalities that existed in society, but felt powerless to realize change. At the time I was living in the Ottawa area, where I often saw homeless people begging on the streets. I began to think more and more about these people, but what really hit home for me was the fact some of these people were children, the same

age as me. I wanted to understand, to learn more about their lives, to hear their stories first hand. I talked to several of my teachers and despite their hesitations they agreed to allow me to complete a photojournalism assignment as part of an independent study for my high school Photography and English class.

The black and white images from the photojournalism assignment left a lasting impression and I will never forget the story of one young girl, who agreed to participate in the project. The young girl told me that she had first runaway when she was twelve years old, but never revealed the exact reason for her leaving. She never learned to read or write and relied on others to help her get by. She was a traveller and had been to almost every major Canadian city. When I asked her about her dog, she assured me that although her dog was a large animal, the animal was not for her protection. She had rescued the dog from an abusive home and kept her as a companion ever since, as the streets could be a lonely place. She named the dog Freedom and tried her best to care for them both. This meeting of two worlds forever changed the way I saw the world.

I successfully completed my high school diploma and entered into my first year of undergraduate studies at Mount Allison University in Sackville, New Brunswick. I had chosen to study at Mount Allison, because in my letter of acceptance, the University included a personalized hand-written note. At Mount Allison, I was more than a number I was a person. I enrolled in my first year of undergraduate studies at Mount Allison University with the intention of pursuing fine arts, but took an elective in French to keep up the language skills I learned in elementary and high school. My first French professor was an outstanding teacher who did more than teach, he lived language,

literature and art. I had never seen a man with such enthusiasm for the French language and life. In his classroom, French grammar was never a chore it was an experience! It had been such a positive experience that the following year I decided to declare a major in French Studies and keep photography as a personal hobby.

My university experience had been a great experience, but after two years I was feeling in need of a change. I always had a desire to travel, to know something not my own – to see the world. I needed to push myself to new limits, to live the life that I had been learning about in the classroom. I decided to apply to the University's France-Canada exchange program to study abroad and was accepted. The following year, I would begin a new journey in Strasbourg, France, where I discovered a deep-rooted passion for the art of living. That year I tasted something beautiful, a life filled with language, literature, art and travel. I took every opportunity to put on my backpack and explore unknown places. I travelled France, Germany, Switzerland, Spain, Morocco, Greece, Italy, England and Ireland. I couldn't get enough! I wanted to see how other people lived, how they saw the world. I returned home to Canada the following year to complete my undergraduate studies, but was left reeling from the experience. Canada was my home, it was the place I was born and had grown up, but in some strange way I didn't belong anymore, something was missing. I had left a part of me in France and I had to go back. I finished my degree in Canada and applied as a Foreign Language Assistant and was offered a position in Western France.

I returned to France because of my passion for the French language and culture; teaching was my way of getting there. My understanding at the time was that my role as a language assistant was to assist a classroom teacher with language classes.

Upon my arrival, I soon learned that my role was not as an assistant, but rather as the language teacher. At the first staff meeting, I was informed of a new project for all foreign language assistants and that year the focus was learning through the arts. I was assigned to two schools, one in a quiet residential neighbourhood and the other in the ZEP (Zone d'éducation prioritaire). My "responsible" informed me that my second placement was at an "école difficile." I wasn't exactly sure what he meant by this at the time, but I was about to find out. I had little to no teaching experience and extremely limited classroom language resources available. I would quickly learn to sink or swim in my new role as a language and "music" teacher.

My first few weeks of teaching were more than overwhelming. My perfectly envisioned life strolling the streets of France and sitting in cafés was now spent planning and prepping, and with little experience, my lessons were little more than a creative stretch of the imagination. I learned quickly through trial and error. One of the schools where I had been placed was dealing with many tough social issues including poverty, abuse, violence, racism and discrimination. I saw how frustrated and exhausted some of the teachers were and others who just didn't have the skills to effectively manage their classrooms. I felt disheartened and sad for the students and many of their situations and I knew I had to do something. I needed to give my students something to hold onto and engage them in their learning. Music was it! The students began learning through their voices and song. I soon became known as the English teacher and "Canadian Folk Singer" and eventually was asked to give a workshop to other teachers to share my experiences with teaching language through music. In the Spring I recorded a CD of songs I was using in my classroom for the school board.



During my time there, I continued to work very closely with other colleagues working with other artistic media to promote learning in their classrooms.

The following year I requested a transfer to the city, where I had first lived when I moved to France. I was uncertain if I would be able to get a job in the area and was thrilled when I received a posting in a smaller commuter city just thirty-minutes away. I responded immediately and arrived at the end of the week to visit my new school and discuss the contract. I was again posted in a ZEP, but my impression of the school and staff was much different than at the previous school where I had been working. I saw a highly dedicated staff, working together to enhance the lives of their students and community. I also felt more confident as a teacher and continued to work on building new resources that promoted learning and created meaningful opportunities and experiences for my students. My classes were challenging, but I had a better handle on classroom management.

When I returned to Canada over the summer I filled my suitcases with children's books and other related classroom materials. I tried to find age appropriate resources that I could use in the classroom to address some of the issues facing students such as sexism, racism and discrimination, but the arts and music remained my greatest tool. The arts provided students the opportunity to share their lived experiences and create a shared learning experience. Through students' artworks I was able to catch small glimpses of their lives, to see their perceived realities and share mine.

My experiences as student, learner and teacher have helped me to see the importance of creating rich learning experiences that build understanding and the arts can offer students' new opportunities and a new way of looking at the world. All children

have different lived experiences and we cannot expect them or would we want them to leave these at the door. Children's lived experiences make them who they are and shape how they see the world. Not all children are fortunate to come from privileged homes and often these children arrive at school carrying the burdens of an adult world. Teaching tolerance through the arts can give students the opportunity to learn about the importance of human dignity and their fundamental rights. Education cannot cure all the ills of society, but it can give students a head start and the tools necessary for building peace in society.

I began this journey in an exploration of self in order to identify my own vested interest in studying tolerance education and art-based practices and methodologies. I believe it is through this personal narrative that I am able to see how my experiences have shaped my understanding and influenced my decision to further investigate art-based learning and tolerance education. Identifying our personal biases may help us to step outside our own frame of reference and see life from a different perspective. The ability to be able to empathize with others and understand different perspectives is key in tolerance education and I believe, the arts can provide a positive way for people to share their lived experiences and to grow as a community. Furthermore, the arts can be used as a tool to help children recognize their own voice in order to become active participants in their education and society.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

Education is a vehicle for social change and together, schools and communities can break the barriers that inhibit students from realizing their full potential as human beings. Different world perspectives may come into conflict in the classroom (Gutmann, 1995). While this may present its challenges, it can also be used as an opportunity for teaching and learning tolerance. Teaching tolerance is an important aspect of developing a sense of citizenship and belonging. Schools and teachers have the ability to guide students in critical discussion of important citizenship issues. Children's rights and tolerance education can help children to understand the importance of cooperation and peaceful living (Bickmore, 2006; Humber, 2003). Curriculum that ignores controversial social issues can disadvantage students, denying them a voice (Avery et al., 1991). Teaching tolerance is not always easy, many teachers may choose to avoid controversial topics in the classroom, which in turn fails to address important social issues that may challenge harmful social norms (Schick & Denis, 2005). Teaching tolerance through arts can create a positive classroom atmosphere where students feel safe to discuss important and sometimes controversial issues, while learning about their rights and the importance of respect for differences in a democratic society (UNESCO, 2004). The following literature review identifies both the need and value of tolerance curricula in Canadian schools and how the arts can be used as a tool to facilitate meaningful learning opportunities that educate children about their rights and the importance of tolerance.

Tolerance is necessary to ensure the rights and freedoms of all people are respected (Grover, 2007). When issues of intolerance are not addressed in the

classroom, they risk being perpetuated into society. “Intolerance, disrespect, and prejudice against groups who are different from mainstream are common problems and potential problems in virtually all societies” (Howe & Covell, 2005, p. 74). The term tolerance has often been associated with a negative connotation of “putting up with,” rather than the idea of understanding and respect, but as Witenberg argues, “it [tolerance] is a moral obligation bound by mutual respect and consideration between people, and, perhaps most importantly, it entails respect for the autonomy of the individual” (Witenberg, 2007, p. 434). This definition is most appropriate in an educational context, as it places tolerance within the moral domain, which recognizes tolerance as an important social value. As Federico Mayor, Director General of (UNESCO) states, “...it is crucial for all of us to give new meaning to the word 'tolerance' and understand that our ability to value each and every person is the ethical basis for peace, security and intercultural dialogue” (Museum of Tolerance, 1993). Tolerance education teaches respect for human rights and is redefining our understanding of the word from a children’s rights perspective.

Why is tolerance education important? Intolerance can breed hate that fuels prejudice and can have lasting detrimental effects on its victims. Schools often bear witness to the harmful consequences of intolerance when confrontations erupt in student aggression and violence. “Do we want children to have zero tolerance for others, particularly when they are angry?” (Curwin, 1999, p. 120). It is important to teach students the value of tolerance and for educators to model it, which often means confronting issues of intolerance and not imposing censorship on discussion of difficult social topics. Issues of intolerance should be addressed before they occur. “As

concerns with school violence have risen so have zero-tolerance responses. But these are little more than quick fixes” (Howe & Covell, 2005, p. 169). Teaching tolerance through the arts is not another “quick fix” solution; rather it allows teachers and students to engage in meaningful discussion of relevant social issues, which can lead to important discussion of children's rights and responsibilities as citizens. Zero-tolerance policies do not model tolerance, nor do they prevent or give students the skills necessary in dealing with their problems and to negotiate peaceful solutions (Curwin, 1999). As Avery states, it is important to “...encourage them [students] to “walk in the shoes” of the perpetrator and the victim of intolerance, and to confront the consequences of intolerance for individuals and societies” (Avery, 1997, p. 35). Schools and teachers must work together and encourage students to find peaceful solutions to problems that respect human and children’s rights.

### **Children’s Rights and Tolerance**

The right to an education that promotes democratic values of tolerance and understanding is outlined in the *UN Convention on the Rights of the Child* (UNCRC). The UNCRC was established to protect children's rights as a vulnerable group of persons. Children's need for special protection rights is based on the reality that children lack the same “power” as adults (Grover, 2007). Children require additional rights guaranteed under the UNCRC to ensure the provision and protection of their fundamental human rights. Children also have the right under the UNCRC to participate in important decision-making that affects their lives (Howe & Covell, 2005). Teaching tolerance encourages children to become active participants in their education, learning the importance of cooperation and understanding. Canada as part of an international

community signed and ratified the UNCRC and as such agreed to uphold certain rights and responsibilities. The document outlines the responsibilities of “State Parties” to protect children, which includes the right to an education that promotes tolerance and understanding. Article 29, Section 1 of the Convention (1989) states “the education of the child shall be directed to:”

(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.

Children have the right to an education that teaches values of tolerance and understanding. The Convention also outlines a child’s right to enjoy and participate in cultural and artistic activities. Article 31, Section 2 of the Convention (1989) states:

2. States Parties shall respect and promote the right of the child to participate fully in cultural and artistic life and shall encourage the provision of appropriate and equal opportunities for cultural, artistic, recreational and leisure activity.

Education is essential in promoting awareness of children's rights. All people have certain fundamental rights and these rights do not begin or end at any age. The UNCRC is a tool that helps ensure the protection of children’s rights including participation rights, as well as ensure a safe and nurturing environment where children can learn and grow as citizens.

The importance of tolerance education and the arts to a child’s development and wellbeing are outlined in the Convention, but not all people agree that teaching

tolerance is an obligation of state parties set forth by the UNCRC. As Hostmaeligen states “The human rights conventions do not deal with tolerance in particular. There is no “right to tolerance” or “freedom from intolerance” written into the human rights conventions” (Hostmaeligen, 2005, p. 405). However, others, including Grover would argue that in fact the right to tolerance is clearly stated in the UNCRC.

The CRC provisions regarding protection of the child from physical, spiritual and mental injury are also integrally linked to the right to be protected from intolerance and its effects. Thus, the right to be educated for tolerance and to grow up in a tolerant society are core human right provisions stipulated in the CRC. (Grover, 2007, p. 65)

The UNCRC does not define how tolerance should be taught, and therefore this is left to the interpretation of its state parties and communities. There is a presumed understanding in the use of the word “tolerance” to be a positive value that fosters understanding and peace, as opposed to a concept of tolerance that means putting up with something we dislike or disagree with (Grover, 2007). Tolerance education from a children's rights perspective teaches respect and understanding of differences, which requires that citizens learn to look at the world from different perspectives and to grow together as a community.

Children’s rights education is often a controversial topic, largely because of a fear of a loss of parental authority over children. “The underlying concern appears to be mainly the fear that if children are aware of their rights, then teachers, parents and other adults will lose their ability and authority to control children. To date there is no evidence to support such a concern” (Howe & Covell, 2005, p. 5). Children are not the

property of their parents, they are human beings with the capacity to think and make decisions to be given weight according to the age and maturity of the children; The UNCRC does not undermine the important role that families play in a child's development and well being, rather it encourages children to be active members of society and participants in matters affecting their lives, as they grow as important family and community members.

The goal of children's rights education is to provide the knowledge, attitudes, values and skills that people need if they are going to build, sustain, or rebuild a society that is democratic and respects human rights.

A concomitant goal is to promote a society characterized by an appreciation for cultural diversity and the values of tolerance, social equality, peace, and global citizenship. (Howe & Covell, 2005, p. 7-8)

Children's rights and tolerance education guides students in their learning, teaching them the values of a democratic society where all people have the right to be heard and live free from prejudice and discrimination (Avery & al., 1999; Howe & Covell, 2005).

Children's rights education does not undermine the important role of families, rather it teaches respect for human beings by educating children about their fundamental human rights and freedoms.

Opposition to the Convention based on the assumption that it is too "permissive" and gives children too much power, taking control away from adult authorities, is a misrepresentation of the UNCRC (Smith, 2007). Despite the fact that these claims are grossly unfounded, there still remains both concerns and resistance to the full implementation of the UNCRC by many state parties. As Smith (2007) argues, it is the



responsibility of professionals and researchers working with children to be informed and familiarize themselves with the Convention in honouring the promises made to children by state parties in signing and ratifying the UNCRC (p. 3). For instance, Early Childhood Services in New Zealand are working to develop and implement a new curriculum, *Te Whariki*, that recognizes and is founded on children's rights' principles outlined in the UNCRC, which will also address many of the concerns related to the Convention and its implementation. What is unique about the curriculum is that unlike other curricula whose purpose is to provide a framework and guide for assessment, the curriculum also includes a model for children's participation rights. Based on the Vygotskian sociocultural theory, which highlights the importance of social interactions to a child's development, the curriculum emphasizes the autonomy of the individual child and active learning, rather than simply listing specific skills that children are to acquire (Smith, 2007). Children help direct their own learning and share their experiences with others, for example, students may use individual portfolios, which encourages students to take personal responsibility for their work and learning. New Zealand also announced a strategic plan, *Pathways for the Future, Nga Huarahi Arataki*, also founded on the principles of the Convention and serves to eliminate inequities in services for children throughout the country, including improved access to free early childcare services (Smith, 2007). These efforts on the part of the New Zealand Government reflect the use of the Convention for improving services and quality of life for all children.

Children are important members of society and as such are entitled to the same rights and freedoms as all human beings. "Rather like adults, children have basic

human rights because they are human beings, and they have the rights of citizenship because they are valued members of a political community” (Howe & Covell, 2005, p. 155). There is a common misconception that because children do not have a political voice (i.e. The legal voting age in Canada is 18), in governmental matters that they are not politically active members of society. Although children may not have the political rights that adults do, their opinions do matter and it is important that children are given meaningful opportunities to express their views. Children are political beings, because they are members of a political community. “Children already are citizens in their own right, not precitizens who are being prepared by schools to become citizens” (Howe & Covell, 2005, p. 43). Children are citizens entitled to the same basic fundamental human rights as all people and therefore, it is important that schools and communities encourage them to exercise their political voices.

### **Citizenship and Global Responsibility**

Living in a post-modern society new technologies are breaking global barriers of communication and redefining more traditional notions of citizenship (Smith, 1991). New forms of communication allow us to access information in an instant fashion. Larger numbers of children now have easier access to information via the Internet than ever before. Citizens are becoming more aware of what is happening in their communities and around the globe as a result of these new technologies. It is important to give children the tools necessary to be able to decipher what is reliable information and what is not. As children grow and learn, it is important to encourage them to be critical thinkers and to consider the influence this easy access to information can have on society and its implications.

Today, there is a widespread acceptance that citizenship involves the active exercise of rights and social responsibilities; appreciation for the citizenship virtues of tolerance, civility, and critical democratic thinking; the recognition of differentiated citizenship; and identification with the global community as well as with a particular state. (Howe & Covell, 2005, p. 57)

Global citizenship means more than just belonging to a political state, it means acting as a responsible member of a global community. As Noddings (2005) states, global citizens have an obligation to: Economic and Social Justice, Protecting the Earth, Social and Cultural Diversity and Educating for Peace. Children are able to learn more about these issues with growing access to new technologies and information.

Tolerance education teaches global responsibility by encouraging students to be critical thinkers, to question the value of information and to try and look at the world from different perspectives.

Global citizenship from a children's rights perspective recognizes and fosters respect for differences (Howe & Covell, 2005). This means that citizens become active members of society who are engaged in discussion and negotiation of what it means to be a citizen and live in a democratic society. Ignoring differences does not address issues that can lead to conflict which have the potential to escalate and erupt in violent confrontation. Willaim Galston (1991) explores 'liberal virtue theory', and defines the concept of "differentiated citizenship," which emphasizes the notion that as responsible citizens, we must recognize differences and make appropriate accommodations for all people so that they can realize their talents and exercise their rights in a democratic society.

It means affirming and embracing group differences rather than ignoring or denying them. It means recognizing that particular groups face disadvantages and barriers, and they are in need of special measures to protect their interests. It also means recognizing that particular groups have distinctive needs that require group-differentiated policies of special support ... (In Howe & Covell, 2005, p. 53)

This concept of citizenship embodies a new reality. Canada is a multicultural society and as such it is necessary that citizens assume responsibility to help one another grow as a community that embraces diversity. Public Education offers children the opportunity to interact with other children from different backgrounds and to learn to coexist in a peaceful environment. Schools are a microcosm of society and therefore it is important to equip children with the ability to deal with this reality both within the classroom and in society.

In Saul's (2008) *A Fair Country*, he poses a question to his readers to consider how Canada's historical immigration trends have impacted Canada's multicultural reality and the role education has played in shaping it. "Did the Northern Irish arrive in Canada in the Nineteenth century open-minded and ready to learn French?"(p. 149). This question reflects how Canada, a country that has known relative peace, and recognizes the rights and freedoms of all people, has evolved as a nation and is home to a diverse population. Saul states that public education has been vital in shaping Canada's multicultural reality and that all citizens, emphasizing the obligation of citizens whom exercise certain privilege in society, have a responsibility to continue to support the

public education system and the role it plays in shaping Canada's reputation as a fair and just country.

That is why the strength of the public school system has always been the key to new citizens finding their way. And it is why the desire of many in the established middle classes to withdraw their children from the public system is deeply irresponsible. To do so is a failure of citizenship; an unwillingness to take the time to help right whatever is wrong in the system; a failure to consciously accept that Canada works because of the mixes created in those schools. If the elite desert them; they betray their country. (Saul, 2008, p. 149)

Canadian classrooms can offer students from diverse backgrounds the opportunity to come together, to learn, to share their experiences, and to recognize both differences and similarities, that which makes them unique and human. When students learn to accept these differences and work together as a community, they can build a stronger country. Furthermore, as Saul (2008) states, as responsible citizens, Canadians must continue to support the public education system in order to ensure that Canada continues to progress as a country that is both fair and just.

Citizenship begins with the individual. "Children's rights education is a key to promoting citizenship" (Howe & Covell, 2005. p. 6). Education can give young people the tools to be able to realize their individual talents and reach their personal goals, as members of a global community. Children's rights and tolerance education teaches young people the importance of respect for their own and other people's cultural and religious beliefs. When children learn about their rights and the value of their own lived

experiences, they also learn the importance of other people's experiences to their understanding. Sharing lived experiences teach children to consider different perspectives (Eisner, 2008).

Experiencing a situation in a form that allows you to walk in the shoes of another is one way to know one aspect of it. Empathy is a means to understanding, and strong empathetic feelings may provide deep insight into what others are experiencing. (Eisner, 2008, p. 6)

Different approaches to children's rights education, such as teaching tolerance through the arts can offer students a valuable experience and new way of seeing the world. When children learn the value of their own lived experiences, they in turn begin to realize the significance of others' lived experiences in gaining a new appreciation for differences. As Burns and Aspelagh, (1996) state, "The emphasis has shifted recently towards conceptions of 'personal peace,' which embodies the realization that peace at the personal level is a prerequisite to peace at the societal and global level" (In Howe & Covell, 2005, p. 97-98). Children have the right to be educated in an environment that promotes peaceful living, tolerance and understanding at both an individual and global level.

### **The School Community**

The demographics of Canadian society are changing. Immigration laws and trends have created the multicultural society that we know and live in today (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2011). Canadian schools bring people together from diverse cultural and religious backgrounds. As Shariff states, "Canadian schools provide a context in which educational exchange of cultural, moral, religious, and language

differences has the potential to enrich students' lives" (Shariff, 2006, p. 477). Diversity within the classroom can provide a rich learning opportunity for students to share their lived experiences, but it can also present its challenges. Shariff discusses the Supreme Court of Canada (SCC) case *Multani (tuteur de) c. Commission scolaire Marguerite-Bourgeoys*, which illustrates how some personally held religious beliefs or practices may conflict with school policies. The Multani case involves a young adolescent boy who arrived at a public school in Quebec, wearing a kirpan, a small religious dagger worn by Sikh men. The school principal confiscated the kirpan under the school's zero-tolerance weapons policy, but later returned the kirpan and granted the student permission to wear the religious dagger under certain conditions including ensuring the flap covering the kirpan was securely sewn shut and the student complied with regular safety inspections by staff members. The governing board of the school refused to ratify the principal's decision and that refusal was upheld by the school board's council of commissioners on the basis that wearing a kirpan at the school violated Article 5 of the school's *Code de vie* (code of conduct), which prohibited the carrying of weapons. The school board's council of commissioners notified G and his parents that a symbolic kirpan in the form of a pendant or one in another form made of a material rendering it harmless would be acceptable in the place of a real kirpan. The student and his family complied with the restrictions but later filed a motion in the Quebec Superior Court (QSC), requesting that the school's actions be declared a violation of their religious rights as guaranteed by the Charter. The family won a judgment that the school board's council of commissioners' decision violated their religious rights and was void. The Quebec Appeal Court, however, restored the decision of the council of commissioners

to ban kirpans in Quebec schools holding this was a justified infringement of religious freedom to ensure school safety. The family then appealed the Quebec Appeal Court decision to the Supreme Court of Canada (SCC). The SCC ruled that not allowing the youth to wear the real kirpan with certain restrictions in place was a violation of his religious right under the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedom. "Significantly, the SCC directed that schools must carry out their responsibility to impart values of acceptance, accommodation, and tolerance in a democracy" (Shariff, 2006, p. 485). The case raised awareness of the importance of adaptation of schools to a changing social climate. "Changing times call for creative and innovative approaches to fostering and sustaining democracy in schools" (Shariff, 2006, p. 492). Schools need to be aware of the reality of today's classrooms and work together to find solutions that respect cultural and religious diversity in a pluralistic society.

Multiculturalism in Canadian schools and society creates the need for schools to address issues of difference and the importance of learning tolerance. Does Canadian curricula offer students the opportunity to engage in critical discussion and learn about important social issues related to civil responsibility and citizenship? In a study, Bickmore (2006) investigates three provincial curricula (Nova Scotia, Manitoba, and Ontario), to compare themes found in curriculum related to social conflict and citizenship issues. "The curricula mentioned abstract concepts of social justice and bias, but usually not attached to particular instances, causes, or ramifications" (Bickmore, 2006, p. 368). Bickmore states that while curriculum did address certain social issues including, social justice, it did not reflect or engage students as active members of society capable of decision-making and conflict resolution. "Where



curriculum reinforces student passivity and disengagement by marginalizing conflicting viewpoints, it denies those students opportunities to develop skills and understandings of themselves as social actors (citizens)” (p. 361). Where curriculum provides an opportunity for discussion of critical social issues, teachers need to utilize them. It is important to give students the tools necessary to be able to critically assess their role in society, while learning respect for human rights and freedoms. It is also important that students are active participants in the process and are given the opportunity to voice their opinions as young citizens capable of important decision-making. Teaching tolerance empowers students to be socially responsible members of society who are respectful of differences.

### **Social Justice and Tolerance Curricula**

In recent years, there have been efforts on the part of various individuals, groups and organizations to develop curricula that deal with issues related to human rights, social justice and tolerance education. In the early 1990s, Avery et al. explored strategies for teaching tolerance, developing a four-week tolerance curriculum with a “hands-on” approach. Avery et al. (1991) tested the curriculum with a group of 338 grade nine students in three different Minnesota schools with a population of 99 percent European-American. During a four-week period students were encouraged to explore the meaning of tolerance and develop a personal definition and understanding of the word. Students participated in activities that encouraged critical thinking and reflection including, role-play, simulations, literature and case studies. Students were encouraged to become active participants in their learning through a series of interactive lessons included topics such as:

- Victims of Intolerance, Intolerance
- From Whence it comes, Basic Human Rights
- Censorship Issues, Case Studies
- International Rights and responsibilities
- Beliefs and Believers
- Taking action to increase understanding of rights of expression

Throughout the four-week period, students engaged in discussion with their peers and were encouraged to think critically about the consequences of intolerance. Where often curriculum deals with abstract concepts related to social justice issues, the curriculum developed by Avery & al. emphasized the importance of attaching real life situations of intolerance, both national and international to the concept of tolerance (Bickmore, 2006). Where controversial subjects resulted in disagreements, students had to work to resolve their problems which taught students important skills for regarding conflict resolution. In the study, Avery et al. found that while it is possible to teach tolerance and to improve levels of tolerance amongst young adolescents, that individuals with certain personality characteristics are more open to the message of tolerance than others, including students who have high levels of self esteem, as opposed to individuals with lower levels of self-esteem who remained more close-minded. Avery et al.'s curriculum study identifies that teaching tolerance can have positive results, but there are elements of the curriculum that could be improved to better address the needs of students coming from diverse backgrounds, while increasing their levels of self-esteem.

## **Tolerance Education and the Role of the Teacher**

Children are constantly learning and it is important that children are provided a safe and nurturing environment that recognizes and supports their personal growth and development. Recognizing students as valuable members of society capable of decision-making is important to a student's sense of self-worth and belonging. "But the essential source of self-esteem is knowing one has value simply because one exists" (Howe & Covell, 2005, p. 145). Students have diverse lived experiences and they need to feel they are valued members of society. Schools and teachers are responsible for creating a positive atmosphere where students feel worthy and safe. Differences in the classroom cannot be ignored, as this can be harmful to a student's sense of identity. Schick and Denis (2005) argue that when teachers fail to address issues of privilege in the classroom they silence the voice of the minority. "The phrase "cultural difference" connects education failure to the "other" by shifting the emphasis away from how dominant identities are implicated in the production of "difference" (Schick & Denis, 2005, p. 306). Schools' celebration of differences only masks social injustices. "The celebration of heritage and heroism not only maintains difference but also allows a multicultural Canada to congratulate itself on achieving tolerance" (Schick & Denis, 2005, p. 307). Schools need to provide meaningful learning opportunities that engage students and mere celebration of differences is not sufficient in creating these experiences. Teaching tolerance through student involvement encourages students to confront prejudice and engage each other in discussion about the importance and value of differences, while learning to appreciate the richness of living in a diverse society.

Teachers have a very important role in helping to guide students in their learning

and understanding of the world. They are also responsible for ensuring they are following curriculum expectations and adhering to administrative policy. Classroom teachers often find themselves being pulled in multiple directions with increasing demands from students, parents and administration.

Teaching at its best is a delicate balancing act. Teachers, like skilful tightrope walkers, must often teeter between what they know is good pedagogical practice, what their students need and want, what their students' parents demand, and what school administrators ask them to do.

(Boyd & Bailey, 2009, p. 658)

Teachers may ignore controversial issues in the classroom in order to avoid potential risks to their careers and also because a lack of administrative support. When teachers select “safe” materials to avoid conflict in the classroom this is referred to as “grey censorship” (Boyd & Bailey, 2009, p. 659). Yolen (2009) argues that when teachers attempt to bring controversial materials into the classroom and are criticized by parents and administration, “Everyone in the teaching community turns to one another and says, “This took up too much money and too much time and too much energy. Next time, let's be more careful....” It's like winning the battle and losing the war” (In Boyd & Bailey, 2009, p. 659). It is important that administrations and teachers work together to support one another. A curriculum that ignores critical social issues denies students a voice and devalues the importance of their lived experiences. Tolerance education can change students' understanding of the world in a positive way when teachers are prepared to teach sometimes-controversial issues in the classroom and are supported by school administrations and communities to do so.

Teacher education programs and Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) can help provide pre service and classroom teachers with the training and support necessary for teaching tolerance in the classroom. As Shariff (2006) states, “professional-development and teacher-education programs would benefit from incorporating courses in cultural studies, social justice, and critical pedagogy” (Shariff, 2006, p. 493). Educational programs and school administrations need to help better equip teachers, giving them the necessary tools to be able to better address issues of intolerance in their classrooms. It is important that school communities do not ignore important opportunities for learning tolerance. “Clearly the solution is not to remove the important opportunity to develop critical thinking and conflict resolution capacities in school, but to reattach these skills to the concepts, instances, and social challenges that give them meaning in pluralistic democratic life” (Bickmore, 2006, p. 373). Teachers guide children in their learning, as they grow as citizens who learn respect for the values of life in a democratic society. Therefore, it is necessary that teachers be provided the appropriate training to be prepared for addressing important citizenship issues in their classrooms.

### **The Importance of Experience**

Meaningful learning experiences can help guide students in becoming socially responsible citizens, who not only care for themselves, but also the wellbeing of others. Humber, Murphy & Clandinin (2003) investigate peace-candle gatherings where students come together to discuss issues affecting their lives, such as bullying, in a peaceful setting and engage in conflict resolution. They describe peace-candle gatherings as “...spaces that allow us to see, to become awake to, to attend to the

tensions that, too often, are buried beneath the taken-for-granted living out of the dominant story of school, which silences stories of diversity” (Huber, Murphy, & Clandinin, 2003, p. 346). Peace-candle gatherings give students the opportunity to learn about respect for diversity and promote tolerance for differences. “Frontiers become less [like] barriers and prohibitions and more [like] gateways and invitations” (Schweisfurth, 2005, p. 225). Peace-candle gatherings are an example of a creative approach that teaches tolerance, while creating a memorable experience that opens new doors for learning and understanding. Creative approaches to learning can change a child’s personal outlook on life and help them to see, not only the negative, but also the positive, while learning important skills to be able to resolve their problems in a peaceful way.

The arts can also provide a meaningful experience for children to learn about their rights and express their personal views and opinions. The arts offer a non-competitive and safe learning environment for students to share their lived experiences. From a children’s rights perspective, it gives children the opportunity to express themselves as individuals and learn how others interpret their lived realities. Through different art-based activities students become active participants, and not passive learners (Knuth et al., 2002; Kopeliovich & Kuriansky, 2009; Lewis, 2007; Milbrant, 1998).

Humans are sentient creatures who live in a qualitative world. The sensory system that humans possess provides the means through which the qualities of the world are experienced... [and] out of experience, concepts are formed... Our conceptual life, shaped by imagination and the

qualities of the world experienced, gives rise to the intentions that direct out activities. (Cole & Knowles, 2008, p. 60)

Children learn through experience. As Dewey states, “The poetic as distinct from the prosaic, esthetic art as distinct from scientific, expression as distinct from statement, does something different from leading to an experience. It constitutes one” (Dewey, 1967, p. 618). Sharing lived experiences through the arts offers children the opportunity express their thoughts and ideas and to learn how different forms of expression are often not better than the other, but equally valid in different ways. These opportunities allow children to talk about their rights and share their personal experiences in a meaningful way. “Just as no man lives or dies to himself, so no experience lives and dies to itself” (Dewey, 1938, p. 27). The act of creation is an experience in itself and has the ability to educate. Creating something tangible, something that can be shared with others can serve to facilitate discussion, which may raise important questions about human rights as children gain new understanding of the importance of shared experience, tolerance and respect.

### **The Arts and Tolerance Education**

Positive childhood experiences are important to a child’s healthy development and can influence their understanding of society and their role within it (Dewey, 1938). The arts encourage students to become involved in a process that requires a great deal of reflexivity, to question what they are doing and how they will achieve it. When people are provided meaningful experiences as children, they may gain a deeper understanding of the world, which will serve for richer future experiences.

We always live at the time we live and not at some other time, and only by

extracting at each present time the full meaning of each present experience are we prepared for doing the same thing in the future. This is the only preparation that in the long run amounts to anything. (Dewey, 1938, p. 49)

The arts can provide a non-competitive environment for children to discuss and learn about the value of tolerance. Children learn tolerance by listening and sharing different worldviews. The objective of projects such as the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization's (UNESCO) school project is to promote the value of the arts in the promotion and creation of social change.

The objective of these efforts on the part of UNESCO and the global community is: to contribute to the integration of arts and creativity into the learning process; to foster the development of the fulfilled individual; and to encourage mutual respect and understanding among cultures and people. (UNESCO, 2004)

Schools need to find creative and effective solutions to problems. When students are aware of their rights, it opens new doors for learning, personal growth and understanding, all of which are prerequisites to peace.

The arts are accessible to the larger public, because they speak to different ways of knowing and not all people see things the same way. "If the broad intent of new knowledge and the theoretical quest is to explain things, then art practice achieves this goal in a distinctive way" (Sullivan, 2008, p. 242). As citizens and educators, we may not always recognize the importance of our daily lived experiences to our understanding of the world, but when we stop to consider the way things are and to try to see the world



from a different perspective, perhaps there is something to be learned about the human condition.

Human understanding is a “category of life” (Lebenskategorie), which is manifest daily whenever we find ourselves in situation of which we have to make sense. Furthermore, as human beings we are surrounded by the “expressions of life” (Lebensausserrung) in texts, artefacts, gestures, voices, and so forth and we understand them to the degree to which we can show how they emerge from “lived experience” (Erlebnis), that deep sediment and texture of our collective life.” (Smith, 1991, p. 191)

Art is an interpretation of lived realities. The artist internalizes external stimuli and processes them in order to recreate his or her distinct vision of the world.

A poem and picture present material passed through the alembic of personal experience. They have no precedents in existence or in universal being. But, nonetheless, their material came from the public world and so has the qualities in common with the material of other experiences, while the product awakens in other persons new perceptions of the meanings of the common world. (Dewey, 1976, p. 615)

Art-based practices speak to different ways of knowing, because there are different ways of communicating information and not all people see the world in the same way. The arts recognize the value of lived experiences in communicating understanding and knowledge in a language that can break cross-cultural and linguistic barriers. “In many instances there is merit in stepping outside of what is known so as to see more clearly what is not” (Sullivan, 2008, p. 242). The arts challenge people to look at life from a

different perspective, which is why the arts are so valuable in teaching tolerance. Tolerance for differences recognizes the importance of individuals' diverse lived experiences and the value they have to life in a pluralistic society.

### **Arts-Based Peace and Tolerance Education Initiatives**

*The Portrait Project* (2002) is an educational initiative started by a local public librarian, Ann Murray of Benton Harbour, Michigan, who worked with local and surrounding area schools to share a message of respect and to teach elementary school aged children about the importance of tolerance. The arts-based program brought children together from different backgrounds and taught students to see that although they may be different, in other ways they are very much the same, and as a result, students began to understand the value and meaning of respect and tolerance for differences. Benton Harbour is a predominately black city that has been "cut-off" from its surrounding white neighbours. The aim of the project was to bring students from different neighbourhoods together, and bridge the communities. A group of 50 grade three students from Benton Harbour and Bridgman came together for a day of learning that began with a story time<sup>1</sup>. In creating a shared experience, the students became more comfortable with one another and started to share their personal interests to discover many of them had much in common. Later in the day, the children were paired off to paint portraits of each other. They were given a simple lesson before students began their work sketching and painting each other's portraits. "Painting each others' skin tones helped students to realize how similar most people are; just a few drops of brown or white adjusted a pre-mixed base to achieve the right shade" (Knuth et

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<sup>1</sup> The book that was read to the students was Ezra Jack Keats' *The Snowy Day* (Viking), winner of the 1963 Caldecott Medal. Keats was the first author to portray a black child as the main character.

al., 2002, p. 52). The project was a great success in bringing the students together and creating new friendships, and as a result the project has expanded to include other grades, schools and activities, including a book making project, mural painting and dance lessons. Shared experiences through the arts can help break down barriers and bring people from diverse backgrounds together.

*Journeys for Peace* (2003) is a program run by a non-governmental organization (NGO), based in Mexico that involves children and youth from Mexico, Australia, the United States and the Middle East. The program was founded by a Mexican-based peace activist, artist and architect who started the program, offering free-of-charge “peace art workshops” that took place in different public plazas around Mexico<sup>2</sup>. As children began working in these public spaces, creating peace themed paintings, it began to generate dialogue between children and adult passer-bys about the meaning of peace. Having witnessed this interaction between the children and adults generated the idea for “mini-parliaments,” where different guest political and world leaders are asked to participate and children can ask questions related to the topic of peace. The focus of the activities was to raise awareness of the importance of peace on a both a local and global level (Kopeliovich & Kuriansky, 2009).

The objective is to promote peace and understanding, as well as tolerance and non-violence among children from different nations through educational and artistic activities, and to address the need to awaken in the minds of children the various conditions for peace, which are applicable to all facets of life. (Kopeliovich & Kuriansky, 2009, p. 70)

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<sup>2</sup> Similar art-workshops also took place outside the country in Washington, DC, USA and in Jerusalem, Israel.

Through various artistic media including, painting, photography, music and theatre, as well as the “mini parliaments,” children are given a voice to express their views and to work together to promote awareness of different social issues in their communities. The program has since expanded to recruit college students as volunteers who are trained to go into classrooms and animate different classroom activities with school children, including art workshops, puppetry and choirs. Children that display strong leadership qualities are then chosen to participate in the “mini-parliaments,” which are held in public locations for others to observe and where students can ask their questions to different guest political and world leaders<sup>3</sup>. Children who participate in the “mini parliaments” are encouraged to think about “conditions for peace” and the “consequences of war” and to consider related questions they would like to ask to the different leaders (Kopeliovich & Kuriansky, 2009, p. 72). The program, *Journeys for Peace*, began as a small initiative and continues to grow and expand its activities. The project is an example of a program that can offer students a unique and memorable experience that creates enduring understanding and gives children a voice.

### **Arts-Based Social Justice and Children’s Rights Curricula**

Arts-based curriculum and classroom learning can serve to create a positive atmosphere to involve all students in shared learning experience. Discipline-based arts education (DBAE), explores the use of postmodern art as a tool for teaching students about social issues, while acting as a vehicle for social change. Milbrandt (1998)

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<sup>3</sup> World leaders that have participated in “mini-parliaments” include: Dalai Lama, Kofi Annan, Laureates Rigoberta Menchu, Frederick de Klerk, Lech Walesa, Israel Shimon Peres, Mikhail Gorbachev and Bill Clinton.

identifies DBAE to be an “authentic”<sup>4</sup> form of instruction that requires higher levels of thinking that are transferable to real life situations (p. 50). In Lowndes County, Georgia, a group of fifth-grade students participated in a DBAE designed unit which consisted of four lessons that explored issues related to art, activism and change. Students began the unit by viewing artworks of different postmodern artists, including: Krzysztof Wodickzo’s *Homeless Vehicle Project*, and Ciel Bergman and Nancy Merrill’s *Sea full of Clouds, What Can I Do*. After viewing the works, students discussed and talked about the value of art to society. Students’ initial responses to art as simply “decorative” began to shift more towards the idea that art can also be used as a means to raise awareness about different social issues.

Following students’ introduction to the unit of art as activism, in which students studied other artists’ works, students were required to complete a studio component and apply what they had learned. In preparation for their studio work, student were asked to brainstorm a list of relevant social issues and to choose one they would most like to symbolically represent in a painting. Using a large 4x8 feet sheet of paper, the paper was cut into “puzzle pieces” that were given to the students to paint. When the students had completed their artwork, the “puzzle pieces” were put back together to create a large poster mural to display in their school. Working in cooperation with their classmates to create the poster mural created a positive classroom atmosphere that encouraged the participation of all students. Upon completion, the students chose to leave some of the “puzzle pieces” blank for other students to add their comments and designs (Milbrant, 1998). The study suggests that the arts can serve as a tool in the

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<sup>4</sup> Milbrandt uses Newmann and Wehlage's (1993) framework for authentic instruction. For further reading see: Newman, F., & Wehlage, G. (1993). Five standards of authentic instruction. *Educational Leadership*, 50(7), 8-12.

classroom to teach students about different social issues, while promoting a positive atmosphere where students learn to cooperate and work together as a community of diverse persons.

The Children's Rights Centre, Cape Breton University (CBU), has developed a curriculum, *Teaching Children's Rights through Art*<sup>5</sup> that provides examples of activities that can be used in the classroom to educate children and youth about their rights under the CRC. Diane Lewis, an arts educator in Nova Scotia, Canada recognized the need for raising awareness and educating children and youth about their rights, after returning from a conference<sup>6</sup> in the Middle East that spoke of strategies for prevention of genocide. Lewis saw the arts as a unique opportunity to educate children about their rights, and in collaboration with Dr. Katherine Covell of the CBU Children's Rights Centre, and in cooperation with a group of 80 high schools students from Memorial Composite High School in Nova Scotia, developed an art-based curriculum to help guide students in their learning. The curriculum was designed for grade 10 classes, but is easily adaptable to different grade levels.

*Teaching Children's Rights through Art* introduces children to the Convention, and engages students in small group and class activities, where students talk about children's rights. Students are encouraged to talk about what rights they believe are being respected or violated in their lives and around the world. They are also, encouraged to share ideas, think critically and learn to support their ideas and opinions. In many of the activities students are provided access to computers to research and look for articles related to their different children's rights topics. After researching and

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<sup>5</sup> Complete curriculum document available online:  
[www.cbucommons.ca/science/psychology/index.php?/children](http://www.cbucommons.ca/science/psychology/index.php?/children)

<sup>6</sup> Conference: *Teaching the Holocaust to future Generations*; Summer, 2006; Jerusalem, Israel.

discussing a topic, students plan and begin work on artistic projects utilizing different artistic media, including painting, sculpture and creative writing. Upon completion, students are encouraged to share their works and, or work on written statements that identify the significance of their artwork and its relevance to the CRC. Teachers and students involved in teaching children's rights witnessed positive outcomes among children and youth, from an increased respect for others' rights, to a decrease in bullying and improvements in students' attitudes and self-regulation (Lewis, 2007). Through this creative exploration of children's rights students learn the importance of human rights in a democratic society, as well as the lack of rights afforded to many children throughout the world. Educating about children's rights is a necessary step in ensuring that children's rights are respected.

### **Children's Rights, Fundamental Rights**

As Frinberg (1973) states, "[Rights] are not mere gifts or favors, motivated by love or pity, for which gratitude is the sole fitting response. A right is something that can be demanded without embarrassment or shame (In Howe & Covell, p. 34). Children have rights and it is important they are aware of these rights. Education can raise awareness of children's rights and help children to grow as responsible and caring citizens. When children are aware of their rights, they are better equipped to exercise them. As Frinberg argues, children should not have to feel ashamed or embarrassed to ask for help when their rights are being violated. Human rights are not special privileges; they are fundamental rights that are deserving of each and every individual in democratic life. With respect for human rights, there is hope of a achieving a healthy society where peaceful living reigns. Children's rights serve to ensure the rights of all

young citizens are protected, so they can realise their full potential as human beings. Children's rights education teaches human rights and promotes the values of tolerance and understanding.

### **Conclusion**

Education has the ability to transform society. Children's rights and tolerance education provides students with the necessary skills to be able to go out into society and to realise change, in learning the importance of respect for differences and peaceful living. However, there are barriers inhibiting the realisation of these educational objectives. Some parents may fear a loss of authority in the upbringing of their children. However, to recognize children's rights is not to deny the importance of family in children's lives, but rather to encourage children to become responsible participants in their collective living, both within the home and in society. The multicultural reality of today's classroom is indicative of the need to teach children tolerance for differences. Teachers need the support of school administration, communities and government to be better prepared and supported. Teachers are role models to many students and they need also to model the democratic values of tolerance and understanding. Children's lived experiences will influence how they see the world. The arts offer young people an opportunity to be heard as politically active members of society. Change does not happen overnight, it takes great efforts on behalf of different groups of people to raise awareness and make changes. When children have meaningful experiences as young citizens, they learn the importance of shared experiences and understanding of how others' may see the world a little differently. Children's rights and teaching tolerance education through the arts are stepping stones towards building peace.



## Chapter 3: Research Design

### Methodology

**Arts-Based/ Arts-Informed Research.** The study, *A Creative Arts-Based Approach to Using Children's Rights as a Vehicle for Tolerance Education at the Senior Elementary School Level* is based on a qualitative arts-based approach to research. The focus of Arts-Based Educational Research (ABER) and Arts-Informed Research (AIR) is to communicate information through diverse media (Cole & Knowles, 2008; Slattery, 2001). Art practices and art-based research have the ability to communicate information in a unique way (Sullivan, 2008). As Eisner (1997) states, "... from a purely intellectual perspective, the exploration of alternative forms of data representation is simply a symptom of a fertile imagination seeking to discover its limits" (p. 5). The arts can give a voice to individuals and highlight the importance of lived experiences to their understanding of the world, which can sometimes be lost in traditional text-based approaches to research.

As a research methodology, art practice is premised on the need to "create and critique," which opens up the possibility of achieving new understanding. In many instances there is merit in stepping outside of what is known so as to see more clearly what is not. (Sullivan, 2008, p. 242)

The arts can help researchers learn about people's diverse lived realities in communicating new understanding. "All arts-based research is psychological because it involves the reflexive subject engaged in psychophysical processes related to the psychological construction of self and world" (Higgs, 2008, p. 549). Arts-based

research engages subjects as active participants working with researchers to construct knowledge through shared experiences. The arts can offer researchers the opportunity to gain new insight into the subject or phenomena being investigated. Arts-based research can provide valuable information in the development of fields, such as children's rights education and was the basis of design of this research study.

**Narrative Inquiry and Autobiography.** As Clandinin & Humber (2002) state, it is looking at the "artistic and aesthetic dimensions" of life that raises an awareness of how lived experiences contribute to a person's understanding of the world. Narrative inquiry offers researchers the ability to engage in their research as both researcher and participant. It also allows researchers to explore both the personal and academic arenas of life and to see how they are often intertwined.

Whether inquirers begin with telling stories or living stories, we enter into the midst of stories. Participants' stories, inquirers' stories, social, cultural and institutional stories, are all ongoing as narrative inquires begin.

(Clandinin, 2006, p. 47)

Narrative inquiry can be a valuable tool to educational research and encourages reflexivity. Johnson (2007) discusses how a teacher's life history can influence their ethic on teaching for social justice. Narrative inquiry can help teachers and researchers look at their practices with a critical lens. Teachers and researchers need to be able to consider alternative perspectives and listen to others, including student voices (Ellis, 1998).

Clandinin and Connelly (1990) identify autobiographical writing as a form of narrative inquiry. Narrative inquiry through autobiography allows researchers to reflect

on their lived experiences and to explore how their experiences have contributed to their understanding of the world. Autobiographical forms of inquiry can provide valuable information and enhance research practices. Although, a useful tool to educational research, Ellis & Scott-Hoy (2008) discuss how autobiographical forms of inquiry can present a challenge to researchers trying to find their place within the academic community. Autobiographical research requires that the researcher be attentive to the social reality, finding a balance between the personal and private, as well as personal and academic. “Quality self-study requires that the researcher negotiate a particularly sensitive balance between biography and history” (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2009, p. 15). As Bullough & Pinnegar (2009) further state, “Each self-study researcher must negotiate that balance, but it must be a balance – tipping too far toward the self side produces solipsism or a confessional, and tipping too far the other way turns self-study into traditional research” (p. 15). This research began with a personal narrative from the researcher, which seeks to establish that balance and identify personal biases, as well as her vested interest in the topic of children’s rights and tolerance through the arts and how personal experiences have contributed to this researcher’s journey and learning. Furthermore, the research study also provided students the opportunity to share their stories and narratives through individual interviews and a class focus group, which further provided insight into the meaning of children’s rights and tolerance they were trying to communicate through their artworks

**The Visual Arts and Arts-based Research.** The use of the visual arts in art-based research can provide researchers and participants the ability to communicate information through diverse visual media. An image can communicate multiple

meanings and express ideas or concepts that can sometimes be difficult to translate into spoken or written language. The incorporation of visual arts practices in academic research can build new understanding and encourage participants and researchers to view data from a different angle and consider alternative perspectives, which can sometimes be lost in traditional text-based approaches to research.

It is the ability of images to convey multiple messages, to pose questions, and to point to both the abstract and concrete thoughts in so economical a fashion that makes image-based media highly appropriate for communication of academic knowledge” (Weber, 2008, p. 43).

As Canadians, we live in a visual culture and are surrounded by images and it is important to consider how these images can be used to inform and influence our understanding of the social world. As Weber (2008) states:

Seeing, being surrounded by the visual, doesn't always necessarily mean that we notice what we see. It is the paying attention, the looking and taking note of what we see that makes images especially important to art, scholarship and research. (p. 42)

The use of the visual arts and the incorporation of images into scholarly research can provide insight into the lived realities of individuals and groups when researchers take the time to recognize the added value that the visual arts can provide to research.

"When we plan, analyze, imagine, think, or critique, our thoughts are associated with and largely constituted by images" (Weber, p. 41). Visual arts-based practices in research involve the active engagement of participants, working cooperatively with researchers to share meaning and build understanding, which can be particularly useful

in educational research when considering how a person's lived experiences contribute to their personal learning and development. The following research study incorporates the use of student artworks to share their personal understanding and perception of children's rights and tolerance in Canadian society, while also providing insight into children's worldviews.

### **Overview of the Research Study**

In the first phase of the research study, the researcher developed a unit with a focus on teaching tolerance through the arts and worked with the classroom teacher and students to negotiate its implementation. In the second phase of the research study, data was collected through digital images of students' artworks during their creation and upon completion. Also, in the second phase of the study, a focus group discussion was held with students to discover their reactions to experiencing the unit. This discussion was audio taped. Individual semi-structured interviews with student volunteers and the classroom teacher were also held to gather additional in-depth responses. These individual interviews were audio taped and discourse analysis was conducted to discover emergent themes and to discern the impact of teaching tolerance through the arts on children's understanding of rights and the concept of tolerance.

**Ethics Procedures and Guidelines.** The research study explored children's perceptions of an arts-based tolerance curriculum and was approved by the Lakehead University Research Ethics Board (REB) and adhered to all Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) ethical guidelines. Particular attention was made to ensure the safety and well being of all child participants in this low-risk study, including the presence of the classroom teacher and researcher in the room at all times

(Powick-Kumar & al., 2009). Written consent was obtained from all participants, including the consent of parents and legal guardians for participants under the age of majority, prior to their participation in the study. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained through the use of pseudonyms and by reference to the participant's role in the study (e.g., a teacher, a student).

**Setting and Participants.** The study was conducted in an elementary school in the Northern community, and involved students aged 12-13 years of age drawn from a grade seven classroom. Students in this age group were selected based on research that identifies the cognitive ability of children in this age group to understand more abstract social concepts.

The improved cognitive skills of late childhood have significant impact on social understanding because they evoke improved perspective taking and empathetic understanding. Starting at around age ten to eleven years, children become able to consider their own and another's opinion and realize that the other person can do the same. In addition, the child is able to assume the perspective of a third party and to anticipate how each person may react to other's perspectives (Howe & Covell, 2005, p. 123).

An objective of the study was to create a positive classroom environment that is respectful of students' needs and individual rights. The research study supported a positive classroom environment pre-established by students and the classroom teacher, where a strong emphasis was placed on the importance of respect for others and their worldviews. The curriculum further supported teaching students the importance of tolerance and understanding in a multicultural society, and encouraged students to be

respectful of others' views in order to create a psychologically and physically safe classroom environment.

**Recruitment Procedures and Permissions.** In order to obtain access to working with the participants, the proposed research study was first submitted to the Lakehead University Ethics Committee for approval. Once the approval was obtained, written permission was sought first from the school board, principal and teacher and then from the parents and legal guardians, and the potential student participants themselves. Approval from the school board was obtained before the principal was contacted. All other participants of legal age capable of providing consent were provided with an information summary letter, which they were asked to read and then to sign if they agree to participate in the study. All participants were informed that they could choose to not answer any questions they were asked as part of the research and that they had the right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. Written consent was obtained from the classroom teacher, parents and legal guardians and student participants, and there was a hundred percent participation from the class, which involved 25 students and one classroom teacher.

**Limitations.** The overall objective of this study was to provide exploratory data regarding the effectiveness of teaching tolerance through the arts at the senior elementary level. This study, however, is limited to the data collected from one grade-seven classroom in a Northern community. Although, limited to one classroom and geographical location, the study can provide valuable information for teachers and researchers looking to further explore the topic of children's rights and tolerance education and the development new curricula by providing feedback and suggestions

from students that experienced the curriculum unit. The study also looked at the practical implementation of teaching tolerance through the arts and how it might be further integrated into the classroom and teacher education programs. In the original study proposal, there was to be a third phase in the study that involved a focus group with pre service teachers and explored their familiarity with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, as well as gather their responses on the children's rights and tolerance curriculum unit. The University pre service teacher candidate focus group component of the study was omitted, as students could not be recruited in time before they left the university for their teaching placements at various locales inside and outside the city.

**Data Collection Methods.** The design of the study aimed to provide children the opportunity to express their perceptions towards the children's rights and tolerance curriculum unit having experienced it. Throughout the data collection process students were asked to consider the value, if any, to the implementation of similar children's rights and tolerance curricula in schools and what they personally had learned throughout the process. It is important that children's voices are heard and as researchers working with children recognize that children have agency and an awareness of their social surroundings (Maguire, 2005). The study used a mixed-methods approach, providing students the opportunity to participate and provide feedback through individual semi-structured interviews, a class focus group and digital photographs of students' artworks. The researcher developed questions to help guide both the individual interviews and the focus group discussion (See Appendix O). All interviews and focus group were audio recorded and later transcribed by the



researcher. The researcher also photographed and edited the photos of students' artworks. The mixed-method approach to data collection provided students multiple opportunities to share their thoughts and opinions, whether through verbal communication or their artworks, or both.

**Data Analysis.** The researcher transcribed the audio-recorded interviews and the class focus group recordings. As Tilley (2003) states, transcription is intertwined with analysis when researchers do the work themselves. Throughout the transcription process the researcher was able to begin the analysis of the data collected through the identification of recurrent themes in both the students and teacher's interviews and focus group (Bernard & Ryan, 2003). Following the initial review of data, transcripts were reviewed to further uncover emergent themes and discourse analysis was conducted. Discourse analysis as Cheek (2004) states is a tool used to "... uncover the unspoken and unstated assumptions implicit within them that have shaped the very form of the text in the first place" (p.1145). This method was used in both the analysis of student and teacher transcripts, as well as in the analysis of students' artworks. According to Cheek (2004), data analysis can be used in the analysis of a variety of media. "Texts can be pictures, interview transcripts, poems, procedures, field notes; in fact, texts can be any representation of an aspect of reality" (p. 1144). Discourse analysis allows researchers to examine a text and to consider the social context in which it was created and how this contributes to its meaning in today's society, "... discourse analysis is concerned with the way in which texts themselves have been constructed in terms of their social and historical "situatedness" (p. 1144). Following the analysis of data, the researcher presented the findings by theme with written comments

from students and the classroom teacher, as well as selected images of students' artworks.

### **Conclusion**

The research study used a qualitative art-based approach to research and a mixed-methods approach for collection and analysis of data. The research began with a personal narrative from the researcher that identified her interest in the topic of children's rights and tolerance education and was followed by the research study that involved the implementation of the arts-based children's rights and tolerance unit in a grade-seven classroom. Individual interviews, class focus group and digital photographs of students' artworks provided students' the opportunity to express themselves and provide feedback on the unit and is information that can be useful in the development of future children's rights and social justice curricula.

## **Chapter Four: Findings**

The following chapter presents the data collected from students and the classroom teacher during the implementation of the children's rights and tolerance curriculum unit. Pseudonyms are used to present the findings in order to protect the identity of the school board, school and individual participants. All ethical guidelines were strictly adhered to throughout the data collection process and signed consent was obtained from all participants, including consent from the children and from parents or other legal guardians of all participants under the age of majority. Throughout the implementation of the classroom unit, students were encouraged to reflect on the topic of children's rights and the concept of tolerance and to create artworks that represented their understanding of children's rights. Students' artworks were photographed and follow-up individual interviews were conducted that further allowed students to comment on their artworks and the creative process. In addition, a focus group was held with students and the classroom teacher to gather their views and perspectives on the children's rights and tolerance curriculum unit they had experienced. The classroom teacher further participated in an individual interview to provide feedback on the unit.

### **Negotiating the Implementation of the Curriculum Unit**

In initial meetings with the classroom teacher, Mr. Anderson welcomed the idea of the proposed research study and worked with the researcher to incorporate the unit into his teaching schedule. From the beginning, Mr. Anderson requested that the researcher ensure that the proposed research study be linked to Ontario Curriculum expectations as outlined by the Ontario Ministry of Education for implementation in the classroom (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2011). The classroom teacher was

responsible for providing documentation to parents and school administration showing that curriculum guidelines were being followed, should they inquire. Unit lesson plans were easily connected to specific curriculum expectations (see Appendix N) as outlined in *The Arts, Grades 1-8 Ontario Curriculum* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009).

### **Classroom Environment**

The study took place in a grade seven classroom in Thunder Bay, Ontario with students aged 12-13 years old. Prior to beginning the children's rights and tolerance curriculum unit, Mr. Anderson had been working with students to incorporate issues of social justice into his teaching and was currently weaving the theme of homelessness throughout various curricular subjects, including language arts. Mr. Anderson created a positive classroom environment where all students were encouraged to share their ideas and participate in discussions. Before introducing the curriculum unit, both, the classroom teacher and researcher discussed with students the purpose of the study and invited students to ask questions or voice concerns they might have with participation in the study. Written consent was obtained from all participants and there was a hundred percent participation in the study.

### **Introduction to Children's Rights and Tolerance Curriculum Unit**

The children's rights and tolerance curriculum unit began with a personal introduction from the researcher, where students were given the opportunity to ask questions regarding the research study. Following this brief introduction, the researcher, also an experienced teacher<sup>7</sup>, shared a photo journalism assignment<sup>8</sup> on

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<sup>7</sup> The researcher, also an experienced teacher, both planned and implemented the curriculum unit with the cooperation and input of the classroom teacher.

<sup>8</sup> The photojournalism assignment on street youth was a personal project created by the researcher as a teenager.

the topic of street youth to integrate both the theme of homelessness and using art as a medium of expression which led to a discussion on the topic of children's rights. Students were enthusiastic about the images and many raised their hands to ask questions. Students actively discussed ideas of basic human rights and what they considered to be children's rights, before being introduced to the Convention on the Rights of the Child. In small groups students were then given select articles from the Convention to consider. As students regrouped for a class discussion, one student said to a classmate, "I don't have to do everything. I have rights!" which presented the opportunity for students to discuss the importance of social responsibility and respecting other people's rights (Campbell, Researcher's Notes, February 1, 2011). Following the class discussion students broke into small groups to create graffiti art that expressed their understanding of the topic of children's rights and tolerance (Think Literacy, 2007). The majority of students were actively engaged with the material; however, some students were more reluctant to participate in the activities on the first day.



Figure 1. Students worked in small groups to create graffiti art using the theme of children's rights and tolerance. (*Graffiti Art*, 2011)

## **Overview of Curriculum Unit Lesson Plans**

The children's rights and tolerance curriculum unit was broken down into four lesson plans that were taught over a two-week period (approx. 15 hours of classroom time), the lesson topics were as follows:

1. Introduction to Children's Rights and Tolerance
2. Tolerance in a Multicultural Society
3. Art and Social Justice
4. Social Change and You

The lesson plans combined various art-based approaches and teaching methods, including: Drama, role-play, music and visual arts. The available classroom technologies, including a Smart Board and Internet access also permitted students the ability to view various media sources related to the topic of social justice, tolerance and children's rights (See appendix N). The first three lessons were spread over the first week and introduced students to the topic of children's rights and tolerance through the arts. The final lesson, "Social Change and You," lasted the duration of the second week, where students planned and created artworks to express their understanding of the concept of tolerance. Students were provided basic guidelines and had the option to create a poster or propose an art project that represented their personal understanding of children's rights and tolerance. To begin, students were asked to write a brief description, create a rough sketch of their proposed art project and to list the materials they required to complete it. Only one student proposed a project other than a poster, a paper-maché sculpture, but later changed and opted to create a poster.

### **Student Artworks**

All students created and gave their permission to have their artworks photographed for the purpose of the study, and while most students volunteered to give

interviews, several students chose to allow their artworks to speak for themselves. Following individual interviews, students were invited to participate in a focus group to reflect on what they had learned about children's rights and tolerance, as well as provide suggestions for improvements. Although, there was a hundred percent participation from the class for the focus group, some students chose to listen and reflect on the process rather than speak aloud in front of their peers. All students were encouraged to share their opinions, whether through their artworks, individual interviews or in a focus group setting. The following is a selection of student artworks presented by theme that illustrates students' understanding of children's rights and tolerance.

**Tolerance/Intolerance.** In her artwork, Carly (2011) chose to contrast the theme of tolerance and intolerance, using both words and images to convey her message.

*My poster is about this girl getting water from the river and in the river is names of friendship, care, happiness, tolerance, nice and love. And there is like a waterfall to it and sharp rocks at the bottom of it, and that's intolerance, hatred, abuse and homelessness. (Interview, Feb. 11, 2011)*

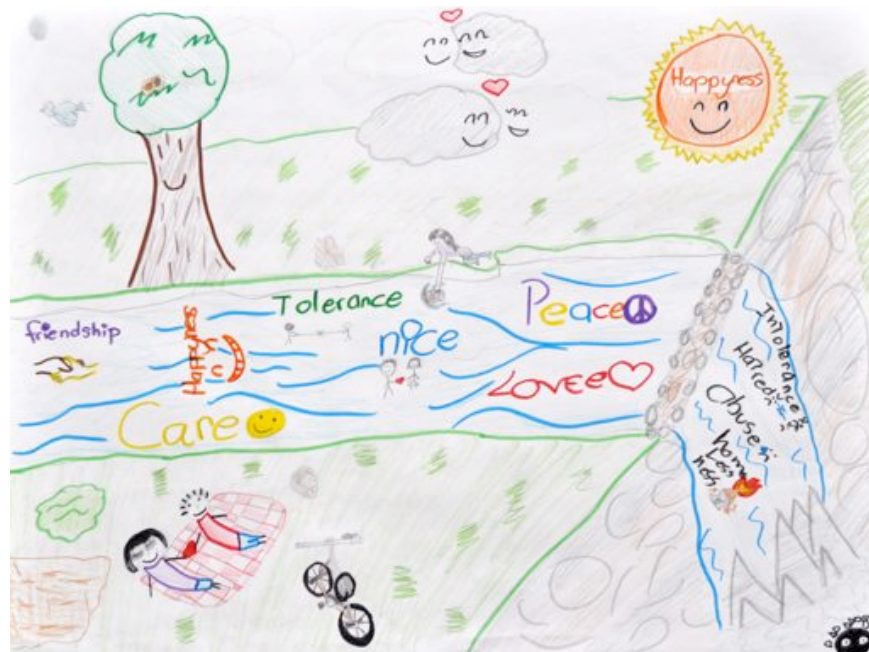


Figure 2. Student artwork (Carly, 2011)

Carly uses the image of a damn to represent a divide between tolerance and intolerance. The cheerful scene along the riverbank is broken by the image of a damn where words of tolerance turn into words of hate and the image of sharp rocks at the bottom of the river. Carly also contrasts the colour of the clouds to represent her understanding of tolerance and acceptance of differences, “...*up in the sky there’s these two clouds, like four clouds and one’s a thunder cloud and the others just a normal cloud and there’s a heart.*” Carly chooses to share a message of tolerance through her art, but also warns of the consequences of intolerance.

Elizabeth (2011) also uses the theme of tolerance and intolerance in her artwork. In her poster, she drew a brick wall that represents a divide between hate and love, tolerance and intolerance and on the wall is written, “a side to everything.”

*On the top half of the paper there is like a brick wall and on one side it’s showing tolerance and on the other side it’s showing intolerance. And, like behind that brick wall there is another wall and it has love and hate on each side and there’s a couple fighting and a couple getting along, and at the bottom half I put tolerance with a blue force field and then on the other side is intolerance. (Interview, Feb. 10, 2011)*

Elizabeth compared having two sides in a situation to taking a circle, similar to a moon and splitting it in half, to create similar, but opposite sides. Elizabeth illustrates a couple on either side of the wall to show her interpretation of a real life situation that models tolerance, but also warns of the consequences of intolerance. Elizabeth also spoke about the importance of personal responsibility and how our choices today can impact the future, “...*there is a big sun, which means doing the good things will lead you to a better place*”. (2011). Elizabeth shares a message of hope and how doing the “good things” can have a positive impact on our own and others’ lives.



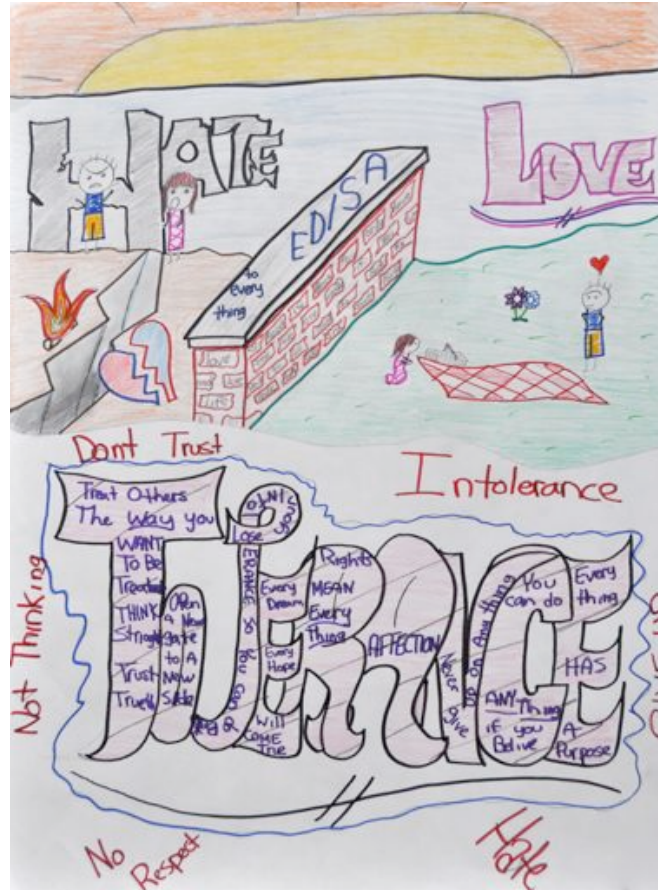


Figure 3. Student Artwork (Elizabeth, 2011)

Aidan and Thomas (2011) worked cooperatively to create two different posters with the theme of tolerance and intolerance. The first poster “The World of Tolerance” uses bright colours and has the words “live freedom” above a pair of multi-coloured hands. The choice of colours Aidan uses to represent the people in his poster is based on traditional aboriginal teachings on the medicine wheel (Canadian Race Relation Foundation, 2011). “It’s called the world of tolerance and I put my hands in there, and put like also freedom and live freedom, and I put four people holding the world and they are the colours of the medicine wheel, the people” (Aidan, Interview, Feb. 10, 2011).



Figure 4. Student artwork (Aidan, 2011)

“The world of Intolerance” by Thomas (2011) uses pencil on paper and is without colour. The poster depicts a scene of people on the street, fighting and homeless, and deals with the topic of racism. Aidan worked with Thomas to help him come up with the concept for his poster. The posters represent the students’ understanding of two very different worlds, “A world of tolerance” that explores the theme of culture and freedom and “A world of Intolerance” that explores the consequences of intolerance while addressing the topic of racism and homelessness.



Figure 5 & 6. Student artwork Cropped (Thomas, 2011)

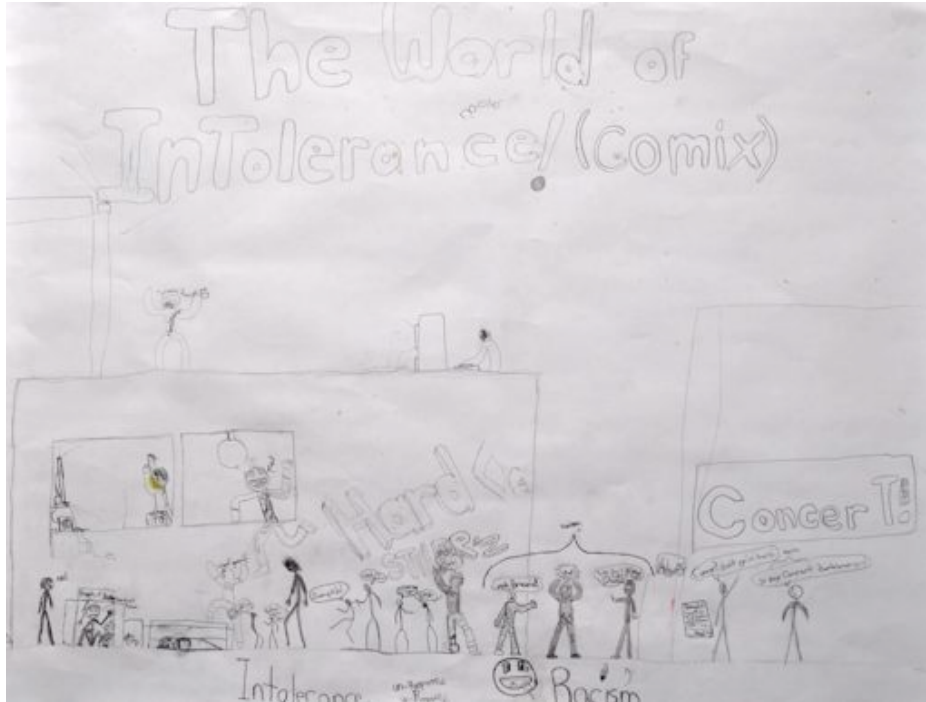


Figure 7. Student Artwork (Thomas, 2011)

**Racism.** Paul (2011) created a poster to address the issue of racism and the importance of including everyone, no matter the colour of their skin. “My artwork is basically against racism, like, how some people disclude black people. And so, it’s a soccer ball and somebody stitching a black patch on it and it says, “Include everyone””(Interview, Feb. 10, 2011). Paul’s poster also addresses the importance of play in a child’s life and how it can provide the opportunity for all children to come together and have fun. Paul chose a soccer ball, not only to represent the importance of play in a young person’s life, but also because the soccer ball is black and white. The white hand stitching the black patch onto the soccer ball represents people of different races coming together to create a whole. The words “Include everyone” are colourful contrasting the black and white image of the soccer ball sending a positive message of acceptance and tolerance.



Figure 8. Student Artwork (Paul, 2011)

**Homophobia.** Christopher (2011) created a poster to raise awareness about sexual orientation discrimination and to promote tolerance of differences. He chose to incorporate different symbols from the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer (LGBTQ) community, including the rainbow, lamda, pink ribbon and gender symbols (venus and mars) into the medicine wheel (LAMBDA, 2004; Canadian Race Relations Foundation, 2011). “I created, like a gay and lesbians and straights, and a medicine wheel...” (Interview, Feb. 11, 2011). Christopher spoke of how sometimes students are teased or bullied because of their sexual orientation. His poster sends a message to accept to people of all different sexual orientations: Gay, bisexual, transgendered, intersex, queer, questioning, 2-spirited, asexual and heterosexual (Toronto District School Board, 2011).



Figure 9. Student Artwork (Christopher, 2011)

David (2011) also created a poster to address the topic of bullying and homophobia. David's poster portrays a "kid" sitting against a brick wall in a pink shirt<sup>9</sup> with his head pointing down towards his knees and a "bigger kid" standing over and making fun of him. The poster addresses the issue of bullying and discrimination against people of different sexual orientations. He further addressed the importance of accepting people for who they are and respecting differences, not trying to change them. "Kids can be made fun of for like being who there are, like in their sexuality, like... cause they can't change it and stuff like that" (Interview, Feb. 11, 2011). Below the two figures is written in purple "So gay, is so yesterday," which challenges students to reconsider the language they might use in common speech and consider how it may

<sup>9</sup> In 2007 two Nova Scotia students started the pink shirt campaign against bullying after a fellow student was bullied and called a homosexual for wearing a pink shirt to school (CBC News Canada, 2007; Pink Shirt Day, 2011).

be hurtful or offensive to others. David's (2011) overall message: "Accept people. Don't be a bully. Don't put people down" (Interview, Feb. 11, 2011).

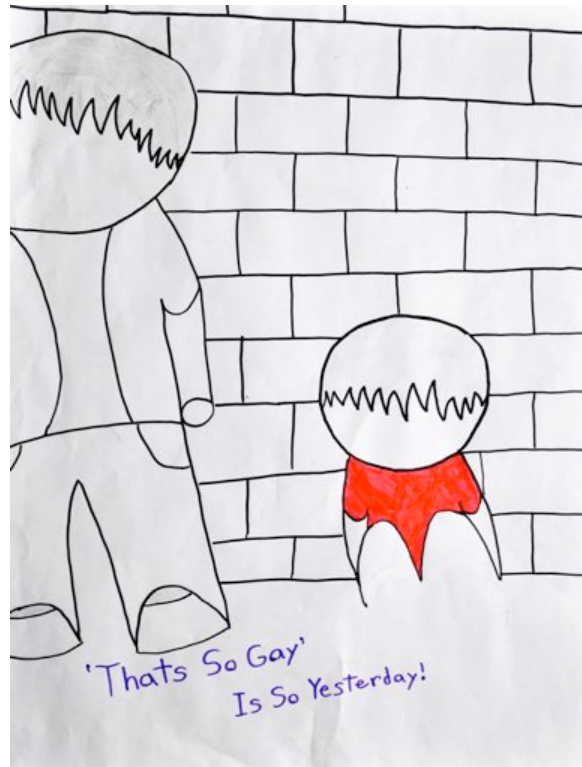


Figure 10. Student Artwork (David, 2011)

**Homelessness.** The topic of homelessness had been a topic of discussion in the classroom prior to the introduction of the children's rights and tolerance unit. Several students in the class made connections to the topic of homelessness and how it related to the topic of children's rights and tolerance. For one student, Donald (2011), he shared how homelessness had been a reality for him and how children's rights might improve the situation for other children facing homelessness or a lack of affordable family housing (CBC News Canada, 2010).

*For my art work I created a thing of children's rights by, umm... a man standing outside in the rain and then another child on the other side inside of the house, because at one point I was homeless myself and I had to either go into a house I didn't like or just sleep on the streets at moments. (Interview, Feb. 10, 2011)*

Donald's willingness to share his personal story sends a message of personal strength and of hope for other children. The message that Donald (2011) wants to share, "just that every children should have a right to a hou... home and no one should not have a home just because everyone has the same rights" (Interview, Feb. 10, 2011).



Figure 11. Student Artwork Cropped (Donald, 2011)

**Lived Experiences.** Donald and Serena (2011) took concepts they had learned about in class throughout the children's rights and tolerance curriculum unit, and using prior knowledge made connections to real life situations and used those experiences to inform their artworks.

*When I was doing my art the message I had for it was: You're not alone, there are always people there, you just have to go look for them wherever they may be. I picked that message because when I was in grade four I moved, because my mom's a doctor, so um... it was like in December, so the school year had already started, so I was getting new and we all wanted to go outside and play and everybody played with me and everything, but then in a couple of days later this one girl came up to me and was like, "this is my group and you're not allowed in it" and everything, and it was just because the school, it was like... not to be racist or anything, but everybody was all white people, and then there was me, like*

*a different colour. So nobody stuck up for me, or anything, so I had to go to a teacher to help me. But after, on the same day of class... like, the problem got solved and everything, and then when I moved a year... two years later to [Southern community], people were nicer and when I moved here I actually found like really, really good friends, like they actually care for me, and they're always there for me. So, that's my message. It took me sometime to find my friends. Like, when I was alone in grade four and came here, now I have all of these amazing friends that are always there for me and help me when I have problems. (Interview, Feb. 10, 2011)*



Figure 12. Student Artwork (Serena, 2011)

Serena used four different shades of hands to represent people of different races from around the world. In the centre of her poster, she painted a globe with the words, "tolerance is a way of love and friendship." The globe represents the idea of global friendship and understanding of different cultures.

*And when I used the globe it was sort of like, "wherever they may be" in my message, like, they could be anywhere around the world, like when you travel, meet new people, make amazing new friends and like learn about different cultures... (Interview, Feb. 10, 2011).*

Serena also expressed the importance of being yourself, but also being open to learning about different cultures and meeting new people, "...they [people] may have this great



personality and you never know if you don't try and talk to them and express yourself and open yourself to them" (Interview, Feb. 10, 2011). Serena drew from personal experience to create a message through her poster to share with others.

**Balance in the World.** Frederic (2011) created a poster with a message of tolerance and balance in the world, where different cultures are respected. "I made the earth with the yin-yang to symbolise balance in the world and I made the medicine wheel to symbolise all the cultures" (Interview, Feb. 11, 2011).



Figure 13. Student Artwork (Frederic, 2011)

Frederic's poster shows a world in balance, but he also discussed the consequences of world without tolerance, a world that is not in balance and the impact it would have on life and the environment.

*Researcher: What do you think would happen if we didn't teach tolerance, or there wasn't balance in the world like you said?*

*Student: I think the world wouldn't be the same and it would be all like, the water would be polluted and it wouldn't be that good to live on earth.*

Frederic relates his message to the detrimental effects that a world out of balance would have on the environment and to human life, which represents his understanding of tolerance in the world.

**A Message of Hope.** In his poster, Anthony (2011) depicts a scene of war that illustrates hate and violence, yet his poster has a positive message, a message of hope and rebuilding peace in the world. Amongst the black and white scene of war and destruction, there is a coloured flower growing that represents hope.

*The title of my art is “There’s still hope,” and I tried to draw something that shows there is still hope, so at the top I did war and like stuff all broken and stuff, and then you see flowers coming up with big pieces of green land and people shaking hands, and flowers and stuff, and that represents tolerance. And the tank and the guys with guns and stuff represent intolerance. And the reason why I put this piece right here, breaking and falling is cause even though everything is all breaking and stuff like that, there’s always hope, that’s why this one [piece of green land] is coming up. (Interview, Feb. 11, 2011).*



Figure 14. Student Artwork (Anthony, 2011)

Anthony's poster portrays a world destroyed by war and he speaks about how tolerance can rebuild broken relations and create a better world when people learn to get along and stop the violence and fighting.

**Cooperative Learning.** Carrie (2011) created a colourful poster with the image of a child reaching out to an adult. In a discussion of children's rights and tolerance, Carrie speaks of how rights can benefit everyone, both children and adults alike.

*...It says, "let's help each other" because I think that if adults sometimes help kids, the kids that they help, can sometimes emotionally help them. And so, by helping the one kid, the kid can help them, which means they can both benefit from it. And rights sometimes help adults see that they can help. (Carrie, Interview, Feb. 10, 2011)*



Figure 15. Student Artwork (Carrie, 2011)

Carrie chose bright and "happy" colours for her poster to share a message of children's rights for everyone. Under the image of the hands is written, "Because everyone benefits from rights," not only children. As Carrie (2011) states, children's rights can provide adults the opportunity to better understand how they can help children by working together and listening to each other.

**Participation and Action.** Mr. Anderson's grade seven students created posters to express their understanding of children's rights and tolerance and share their unique perspectives. Students created posters with a message they wanted to share with others. Some students created posters with a message directed at their peers, and others, like Carrie, created posters directed at both children and adults. Joseph created a poster with a message he wanted to share, not only with his peers and adults, but also with government. In his poster, Joseph (2011) created two scenes where he illustrates the Canadian Prime Minister, Stephen Harper and a child in Prime Minister Harper's office. Joseph describes the first scene:

*Mr. Harper is trying to get this young child out of his seat, cause Mr. Harper doesn't know what the reason is, why there is a child in his... in the government office. So the kid is saying, "children's rights matter"... after leavin'. (Interview, Feb. 14, 2011)*

In the second scene, "Mr. Harper called the kid back and Mr. Harper said, "Children's rights DO matter.""

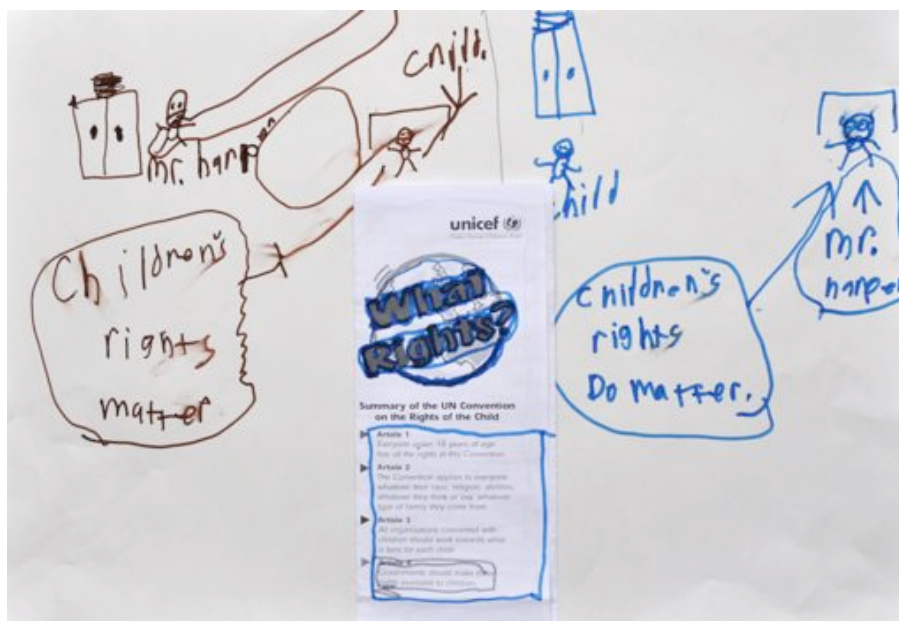


Figure 16. Student Artwork (Joseph, 2011)

Joseph attached a brochure on the Convention on the Rights of the Child to his poster and circled, Article 4 of the Convention (child-friendly version) that reads, “Governments should make these rights available to children” (UNICEF, 2011). Joseph talks about how students in his class created messages using art as a medium of communication and how other children can do the same thing.

*Student: ... So, frankly, if Mr. Harper sees this, he will put this on the rights list. That's on my children's rights "What Rights?" list, it says: "Governments should make these rights available to children."*

*Researcher: And how do you think they can do that?*

*Student: Well, simply, they make a message. Just like I did. If this is a message... this is what I call a message, then everyone in my classroom made a message.*

*Researcher: And do you think those messages will reach other children and adults?*

*Student: We hope it stands out and we hope we can get this message all the way.*

Joseph and his classmates created posters that demonstrated their understanding of children's rights and tolerance using art as a form of communication. Students used their imaginations to express their ideas in a creative way that offers the viewer a different perspective and a glimpse into their worlds.

### **Student Responses to the Children's Rights and Tolerance Unit**

**What Students learned about Children's Rights and Tolerance.** Throughout the children's rights and tolerance unit, students were encouraged to reflect on the topic of tolerance and to apply their understanding of the concepts in the creation of their artworks. At the end of the unit, students were invited to share their perspectives and comment on the unit they experienced through both individual interviews, as well as in a

class focus group setting. Students were asked to share what they had learned about children's rights and tolerance, what they enjoyed about the unit, as well as things they might change about it (See Appendix M). When asked what they (students) had learned about children's rights and tolerance, Serana (2011) responded:

*I think that children's rights is sort of like freedom for children, and like how that they should get to go to school no matter where they come from or who they are or what their culture is, and they should all be treated fairly, no matter what race or whatever. (Focus Group, Feb. 14, 2011)*

Serena talks about the importance of fair treatment for children of all different racial and ethnic backgrounds. Timothy (2011) also speaks about the importance of respect for peoples' diverse backgrounds and cultures. "Tolerance means a lot to me, because like... tolerance is like being tolerant of different races or religions and everything and millions of people are very different with religion, colour and customs, like all different cultures" (Focus Group, 2011). Another student, Carrie (2011) speaks not only of the benefits of tolerance, but also of the consequences of intolerance, "if you don't learn about tolerance and stuff to other people, you might be intolerant to them and that could hurt somebody" (Foccus Group, 2011).

**Learning about the UNCRC.** For many of the students, it was the first time they had heard of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and for others students like Paul, they had prior knowledge coming into the classroom, "...I first learned when I was five about children's rights. I got a rights book from my worker" (Interview, Feb. 10, 2011). In Ontario, a "child in care" is informed by his or her social worker and in some cases counsel of his or her legal and protection rights as outlined in the *Ontario Child and Family and Services Act* (Service Ontraio, 2010). While many students said they had heard of rights before, learning about the UNCRC was

something new to them. After learning about the Convention, Anthony (2011) spoke of the benefits of learning about the Convention. “I think the Convention for kids is good... it’s nice to know that somebody cares about you and they’ll do whatever they can to give you rights and things like that” (Focus Group, 2011). Other students identified the importance of teaching about the Convention in schools and how this information can be used to better help ensure the protection of all children. Carrie (2011) spoke of how learning about the Convention not only informs children of their own rights and responsibilities as young citizens, but also teaches respect for other people’s rights.

*I think it’s important that we learn about children’s rights at school like we are doing now, so that children’s and youth know what their rights are and what they... have and they can do and their rights and what other people have as right to, cause if you don’t know what rights you have and other people then you also will be going against those rights to others to. (Focus Group, Feb. 14, 2011).*

When children are made aware of their rights under the Convention, it empowers them to take responsibility for their actions, but also helps them to understand the importance of respecting other people’s rights.

**Making Connections.** During the discussion on children’s rights, Serena (2011) made the connection of children’s rights to a book<sup>10</sup> students had been reading in class and how children’s rights might relate to what they were learning in other subjects.

*...When we learn about children’s rights is sort of like how our class... how our class is reading this book called “How to Steal a Dog” and how there is like this homeless girl in it called Regina and how her dad left and now she’s having all these problems trying to find a home and her mom is working two different jobs and she’s an elder sibling looking after her brother and how it is really tough for her because sometimes she thinks all the other kids are making fun of her, and how she doesn’t know what to do, so she resorts to trying to steal a dog to try earn some money, but um... I think when we have children’s rights... we should be able to help*

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<sup>10</sup> As a class, students had read and discussed the book “How to Steal a Dog” by Barbara O’Connor (Macmillan, 2009).

*people whenever they are in need, like how we have the homeless shelters and food drives for homeless people. How we can help little by little (Serena, Focus Group, Feb. 14, 2011).*

Serena used her knowledge of children's rights and linked it to other classroom materials, as well as making connections to real life situations, when she talks about the things her school does to help, such as school food drives.

**Art as a Teaching Method for Learning.** During the focus group, students expressed their overall impressions of the unit and using art as a learning tool to express their ideas and share their understanding of children's right and tolerance.

*The art was a good way... to express ourselves, because it is easier to draw and have more emotions flow with one pencil stroke than to try and explain something that is really deep and thoughtful, because sometimes it's harder to get them to understand quite what you mean, but with colour and the way you draw and what you draw it's easier to try and get people to understand what you're trying to find and sometimes they'll find something else that you didn't even recognize and you explain what they're seeing and feel with you're picture, than you get another idea and everything just comes out more, and there's also more to it than just a few sentences. (Carrie, Focus Group, Feb. 14, 2011)*

Carrie discusses how art allowed her to express her ideas that may have otherwise been lost in words. She speaks of how colours and images can communicate feelings and ideas that are not easily expressed in written language. She also comments on the interaction between the viewer and an artwork and how viewing someone else's artwork can generate new ideas and interpretations, offering both the viewer and the artist a new and different perspective.

Several students discussed how the arts encouraged learning and gave them the opportunity to share their personal perspectives and feelings. Serena (2011) talks about how art as a method of learning helps build understanding when students



internalize meaning and make it their own. The arts allowed students to share their perspectives, but also experience a different perspective.

*When you express it through song or music, or like plays, or um...essays or poems and art, it kind of gets to people and how um... they understand it little by little, and how everyone gets to experience children's rights and to know that it always helps to like... express yourself, like everybody was saying through art or music or art or drama or poetry. (Senena, Focus Group, Feb. 14, 2011)*

Elizabeth (2011) further expresses how children come from all different backgrounds and that all people have a unique perspective and way of expressing themselves, and how art can provide an opportunity for personal expression.

*I liked it, because everyone has a different way of expressing their feelings, and also I was told that is better to live in a poor home with a loving family instead of a rich home with a family full of hate. (Focus Group, Feb. 14, 2011).*

Elizabeth (2011) talks about how some students may be afraid to speak aloud in front of their peers and how art offers them an alternative form of communication, "... the paper was a good idea, the art, because some people might be scared to show their feelings out loud and they'll just get the sadness out of them" (Elizabeth, Focus Group, 2011).

Students expressed how the arts provided the opportunity to learn about their rights and provided an enjoyable learning experience.

*I really liked this art project because you get to do something that's really fun, which is art and... you get to express your feelings and put them on paper... (Anthony, Focus Group, Feb. 14, 2011)*

*I really enjoyed it, because... I got to do what I wanted to do and I honestly don't get to do that a lot, and like, it was really fun because I got to learn more about children's rights and tolerance... (Jillian, Focus Group, Feb. 14, 2011).*

Carrie (2011) also spoke about how the arts created a positive classroom environment that allowed students to talk about children's rights and tolerance, which for some people can be a sensitive subject.

*I just wanted to say that... this was a fun way to learn about something so delicate and a good way to tell others what you know as well about a sensitive topic and to express yourselves, individually and in a group. (Carrie, Focus Group, Feb. 14, 2011)*

Carrie expressed that the arts provided her the opportunity to learn about children's rights and have fun while doing it.

**Cooperative Learning.** Students responded to the unit by sharing some of the challenges they experienced using art as a medium to communicate their ideas.

Several students discussed how talking with their peers helped them to develop their understanding of children's rights and tolerance and inspire creativity.

*I talked to a couple people about what they were doing and then even before I started my art, I was like... just thinking of all these ideas and then when I saw Joseph's, I was like... I didn't really know what it meant, like, a hand holding a soccer ball. Well, I think that was tolerance, because of people having fun, so that's when it got to me, so then I thought of a kid coming home and finding: Hope, love and respect. (Tyler, Focus Group, Feb. 14, 2011).*

The inspiration for Tyler's artwork came from a classmate's artwork, and while all the students in the class presented their personal interpretations of children's rights and tolerance through individual artworks, students often worked cooperatively to engage their peers in dialogue and ask questions.

*I drew a little bit and there was still lots of the page left and so I asked a few of my friends to look at it and they gave me some good ideas, to like add buildings in the background and stuff like that. (Anthony, Focus Group, Feb. 14, 2011)*

Anthony's classmates helped him to develop his ideas and create an artwork that best expressed his personal understanding of children's rights and tolerance.

**Working Together: Children, Families and Communities.** Children's rights is not only about children, it concerns everyone, and Carrie (2011) points to how mutual respect and support for children's rights and tolerance education from both, children and adults can improve everyone's situation.

*... It's been directed about children and stuff, but adults can be affected by it to, by children being helped, adults can be affected as well and if you tell how adults can be affected then maybe adults will start to listen more. (Carrie, Focus Group, Feb. 14, 2011).*

Students agreed that children's rights are not only about children, but are about everyone working together, children, families and communities to create a better environment for children. As Carrie (2011) stated, when adults listen to children they can also learn from them. Classroom teacher Mr. Anderson spoke to his students about what he learned from watching them create their artworks and how it allowed him to see another side of his students.

*It's been a real learning experience for me and I think all of you were really unique and from what I see some of you are starting to feel way more comfortable, because you had a chance to express yourself through the art and I really feel like I've gotten to know you a little bit better as well. (Mr. Anderson, Focus Group, Feb. 14, 2011).*

Mr. Anderson expressed how the unit provided everyone a chance to express themselves as individuals, but also provided him the opportunity to learn and gain new insight on his students as their teacher.

**Suggestions.** The unit provided students the opportunity to experience different arts-based activities. Students shared their impressions about the unit, the activities they most enjoyed and learned from, as well as suggestions for what they might

change. Mariah (2011) most enjoyed when students worked in small groups to create tableaux that demonstrated tolerance and intolerance and to share them with the class. “My favourite part of the class was when all the groups came up... we got put in groups and we did the tolerance/intolerance, because then we got to show what people thought tolerance and intolerance were... was” (Focus Group, Feb. 14, 2011). Anthony (2001) said he most enjoyed the graffiti art and working as a group to create a single artwork that represents different perspectives. “What I suggest we do again is doing the graffiti art, because you express everybody’s feeling, like not just one person could just do it, everybody needs to have a part in it” (Focus Group, Feb. 14, 2011). Elizabeth (2011) made a suggestion for students to make booklets about children’s rights and tolerance to share, “I actually enjoyed everything, but making little booklets of children’s rights would be cool and it would be fun.” (Focus Group, Feb. 14, 2011). Carly (2011) suggested making a flipbook, “I would recommend doing a flipbook about tolerance, and then like another one that’s intolerance” (Focus Group, 2011). Different students discussed how they enjoyed different elements of the unit and also provided suggestions for how other students might learn about children’s rights and tolerance in a way they would enjoy.

**Giving Students a Voice.** This arts-based curriculum on children’s rights and tolerance provided an opportunity for students to experiment, express themselves and be creative. The students responded to having had a positive experience where they were able to express their feelings and consider other perspectives. Elizabeth (2011), expressed how learning about children’s rights and tolerance through the arts gave her new found confidence to speak aloud in front of her peers and express her feelings

more openly. “Well, this isn’t a question, but I want to thank you for all the things you taught me and it really helped me to speak out more and to get comfortable with the class” (Focus Group, Feb. 14, 2011). Elizabeth’s classmates responded with a round of applause to show her their support and to express respect for their classmate.

### **Classroom Teacher’s Response to Unit**

Classroom teacher, Mr. Anderson (2011) said he had prior knowledge of children’s rights and a familiarity with the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Although, he had not specifically addressed the topic of children’s rights in class, he had been working with students to address the topic of homelessness and social justice. As a grade seven teacher, he stated that it was an excellent time to introduce topics of social justice to students, “...this is the time in their life that they start to really recognize the issue of justice and fairness, and equity.” As the classroom teacher, and having observed the students during the unit, he believed students responded very positively to using the arts as a teaching method.

I think the students responded incredibly well, just having them speak right now, many of our kids that don’t speak did speak. Many of the kids spoke through their art, which was amazing. It was a real eye opener for me in many ways and they participated, and their level of engagement was really, really high. And that’s something I really believe in as a teacher is having a high level of engagement with my kids, and this allowed them to stay engaged (Interview, Feb. 14, 2011).

Mr. Anderson expressed his enthusiasm regarding hearing from students who don’t often speak out in class, but were really able to speak through their artworks. He said he witnessed how students took the topic of children’s rights and were able to connect it to real life situations, “...for some kids it was about racism, and some it was sexism, homophobia and I think it was really interesting for them to take that general, generic

concept of rights and make it specific to their life and I think that that is really important”(Interview, Feb. 14, 2011). Mr. Anderson also shared that he had not before considered integrating the arts into his class in this way, feeling that he did not have the professional qualifications or background in the arts to do so, but after observing the unit he saw how he himself might be able to use the arts as a teaching method. “I thought that I had to have a certain level of expertise to teach it, but I see that I could probably do this.” (Interview, Feb. 14, 2011).

As Mr. Anderson (2011) said, often teachers provide students with plain guidelines to follow, but sometimes having fewer guidelines allows for more student creativity. “I feel that I have to point them [students] in the right direction, give them all these parameters, but I think having less parameters really allowed that creative freedom to flow. So I loved that” (Interview, Feb. 14, 2011). He also discusses how the arts helped to generate conversation amongst students and provided them an opportunity to share their perspectives, particularly for students who have been less vocal in his class. When asked if he perceived any challenges for students teaching an arts-based unit on children’s rights and tolerance, Mr. Anderson expressed that in the beginning he wondered if some students might have difficulty grasping more some of the concepts.

...My only thing that was looking at kids that might be on an IEP<sup>11</sup> that may not be able to understand that higher level of human rights... I think that is a higher level-thinking requirement. So, for some kids that were a little more literal, it’s just their own abilities... I thought that might have been a challenge, but when all was said and done, I still saw their interpretation of what the art was. So, I was afraid they wouldn’t get it, but in their art, they got it in the way they could best understand it.

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<sup>11</sup> Individual Education Plans (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009)

As a teacher, Mr. Anderson (2011) was also conscious of Ontario Ministry guidelines and ensuring that the classroom time devoted to the children's rights and tolerance unit was meeting curriculum expectations and he would be able to carry on with his teaching and cover other materials, "...how do we make the curriculum, meet the curriculum expectations and all of them, and then how do we continue to move on and cover what we are mandated to cover" (Interview, Feb. 14, 2011).

Mr. Anderson (2011) identifies how students have different abilities and ways of learning and that sometimes the value of this process of learning is forgotten in favour of achieving the mandated end result (attainment of learning objectives set by the province). Information must be accessible to students and the arts created that opportunity for students to explore their talents and abilities and build new understanding (Interview, Feb. 14, 2011).

*...I really want to stress the fact that it was so accessible to everyone. It was so accessible. The artwork was accessible and the knowledge was accessible. The information was accessible. It allowed them to really engage. You had one hundred percent engagement, and almost one hundred percent through everything. We don't get that, and as teachers sometimes we think we can't force the issue, we may in fact be making it worse. So, I really felt that they chose to participate in it and I just had to coax them a little bit, whereas other times, I've really had to coax them a lot. And I'm thinking short term, I need to get this project done and long term, I need to evaluate this. I need to know what you can do, and I didn't have to have that struggle with the kids throughout this.*

Mr. Anderson expressed how teachers often feel the pressures of meeting curriculum expectations and are constantly thinking about evaluation and how to produce end results, and sometimes this means trying to "force" an issue, which may discourage students and hinder the learning process. The children's rights and tolerance unit was

taught during a two week period, which allowed students to focus on creating their artworks.

*The process, it was really interesting for me to see the process, because we went from kids trying to understand the concept, from putting a pencil to paper, paint to paper and then creating something. I thought... Again, it is something that we as teachers discount, not intentionally, but we are looking at the product right, not... what do you have at the end that we can mark? And I think that is sometimes a challenge for us, because we miss this amazing growth as kids move through things. One of the things that I recognized is that when we do art, it is almost rushed, because we don't have enough time. Art is actually one quarter of one credit, so we say, okay, I just got to meet the expectation and sometimes I think that that stunts the artistic process.*

Students were encouraged to reflect and create quality works that they felt best reflected their understanding of children's rights and tolerance. Mr. Anderson (2011) observed that as students continued to work on the art project; the more they began to grasp the concepts and apply their knowledge to their work.

*I think what happened was that they got more and more immersed as the time went on and they were able to get deeper into the subject matter and reflect on it, and then bring that reflection into the next stage of work and produce. (Interview, Feb. 14, 2011).*

Overall, Mr. Anderson (2011) expressed that there was a very high level of engagement from students and that students enjoyed the art-based unit and that it gave them the opportunity to share their ideas and express their feelings. The artistic process was a learning process as students developed their personal definition of the concept of tolerance and children's rights.



## **Chapter 5: Discussion and Interpretations**

### **Creating a Positive Learning Environment**

The children's rights and tolerance curriculum unit reinforced the pre-established child centred learning environment in Mr. Anderson's grade-seven class. The role of the classroom teacher is important in creating a welcoming atmosphere where students feel comfortable to share their lived experiences and participate in class discussions. Prior to the implementation of the children's rights and tolerance curriculum unit, the teacher had been working with students to create a positive classroom environment that fostered respect and caring. Students were habituated to class discussions, where Mr. Anderson would ask students to gather together at the front of the classroom for discussion. During these discussions, he would ask students their perspectives and they would be given the opportunity to express their thoughts and opinions. Students were actively involved in problem solving and decision-making within the classroom community, which encouraged students to be active participants in decision-making affecting their education and lives (Howe & Covell, 2005). Students were given agency as young citizens within the classroom community and Mr. Anderson worked with his students to provide a classroom environment that is consistent with Article 29, Section 1 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) which highlights that a child's education should promote tolerance and understanding. This positive learning environment set the stage for the children's rights and tolerance curriculum unit, as students were eager and ready to actively engage in discussion concerning children's rights and other various social justice issues.

## **Children's Rights and Social Responsibilities**

Children's rights education teaches children about their basic human rights, but also about their responsibilities as young citizens. There is often an unfounded concern that teaching children about their rights gives young people too much power and diminishes the authority of parental and guardian controls that can result in a lack of respect and personal responsibility (Howe & Covell, 2005; Smith, 2007). As students learned about the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child through the children's rights and tolerance curriculum unit, the material also raised questions of students' social responsibilities as young people. Student artworks reflected children's social consciousness and awareness of social issues. Artworks addressed a variety of social issues related to children's rights including, bullying, racism and homophobia. These chosen topics reflected students' ability to empathize with others and consider alternative perspectives. One student in the class, Carrie (2011) spoke of the importance of adults and children working together to create a better environment for all people. Contrary to misguided beliefs that teaching children about their rights can result in a loss of control and respect for authority, students in Mr. Anderson's class demonstrated throughout the children's rights and tolerance unit, respect and understanding for their classmates, as well as their classroom teacher and researcher (Howe & Covell, 2005). The importance of cooperation and understanding were central themes in class discussions throughout the unit, where students used their understanding of children's rights and tolerance to promote notions of activism for social justice and peace.

## **The Multicultural Classroom**

Education in Canada has created diverse learning communities within the public school sector. Cultural diversity within classrooms can provide a rich learning environment and an opportunity for students to learn about different cultures and the importance of respect of differences in the promotion of peaceful living (Saul, 2008; Shariff, 2006). Students in Mr. Anderson's classroom were able to share their stories and relate their art to personal experiences, which allowed them the opportunity to share aspects of their lives and cultural identities. The image of the medicine wheel appeared in several students' artworks (Aidan, 2011; Christopher, 2011; Frederic, 2011). The medicine wheel is a symbol based on traditional aboriginal teachings and has been incorporated into some Canadian classrooms to represent an indigenous perspective and teaching methodology (Canadian Race Relation Foundation, 2011). The depiction of this cultural symbol in their art by several students in the classroom gave these students a voice and provided them the opportunity to share with their classmates a part of their cultural heritage and worldview. Students were able to use images as well as language to represent their uniqueness and humanity. Furthermore, these students were able to communicate their understanding of the topic of children's rights and tolerance while, at the same time, contributing to a culturally rich classroom learning environment for their peers and teachers through their creation of meaningful, highly personal artworks. Students from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds created artworks that represented their experiences and worldviews. However, Mr. Anderson's students also demonstrated how cultural diversity in the classroom can create a rich learning environment in which students can learn about different cultures

and consider other perspectives when they are provided the opportunity to share their lived experiences.

### **Children's Rights and the Ontario Curriculum**

A major concern for many teachers, as Mr. Anderson (2011) addressed, is ensuring that expectations outlined by provincial and territorial Ministries of Education are met. Prior to the implementation of the children's rights and tolerance unit, Mr. Anderson requested that the researcher ensure that the curriculum unit met Ontario Ministry of Education guidelines and expectations (2011). Teachers are presented with the challenge of trying to meet the needs of their students and to help nurture their talents to their fullest potential, while also trying to assess student progress and accomplish other classroom and administrative tasks and responsibilities. With increasing demands by students, parents, and administrations, teachers often feel as though they are being pulled in multiple directions (Boyd & Bailey, 2009). The Ontario curriculum presents various opportunities for teachers to incorporate social justice and children's rights issues into their teaching as was demonstrated here through this arts-based children's rights and tolerance curriculum unit where lesson plans were linked to specific Ontario Ministry of Education (2009) expectations (See appendix L). Prior, to the children's rights and tolerance unit, Mr. Anderson (2011) had also worked to weave the theme of homelessness, as a topic of social justice throughout his teaching of language arts. This further provided students the opportunity to engage in discussion of important social issues and responsible citizenship. Throughout Mr. Anderson's teachings on homelessness and the researcher's children's rights and tolerance

curriculum, students were encouraged to consider their role within society as members of a community with the potential to effect social change.

### **Supporting Teachers in the Classroom**

Teachers have increased pressures and workloads with demands from students, parents and administration, and in order to be able to incorporate children's rights and social justice issues into classrooms they need the support of families, schools and communities. Children's rights education aims to develop networks and communities that build stronger supports for children and their families. Additional training through pre service teacher programs and professional learning communities, as well as greater support from administration for the incorporation of children's rights in the classroom can: (i) strengthen classroom practices and curriculum content that promote social justice and (ii) lessen the pressures on teachers to assume sole responsibility for students' learning and success in this area (Shariff, 2006). It is also important that administrations and ministries of education recognize that teachers have agency and the ability to direct students learning within the classroom, drawing on their own experience, expertise and talents (Boyd & Bailey, 2009). The development of curricula devoted to children's rights education can also provide more opportunities for children and teachers to exercise their agency, share their voices and provide opportunities for learning about tolerance and social justice. Working together; families, schools and communities can make a positive difference for all children.

### **Learning Through the Arts**

As Mr. Anderson (2011) expressed, sometimes teachers with the pressures of assessment and marking forget the value and importance of the creative process and

observing how students learn. Art is an expression of lived experiences that can inform and educate (Dewey, 1976). Students in the current study expressed their enjoyment in having participated in the arts-based children's rights and tolerance curriculum unit. Several students expressed that they had "fun," while learning more about children's rights and tolerance (Anthony, 2011; Guss, 2011).

*I think it was really fun to do this art project about children's rights and tolerance and all this, because... it's much funner to draw and paint and everything and to express how you feel about the subject... sometimes feelings are harder to put into words than to put into a picture. (Guss, Focus Group, Feb. 14, 2011)*

The implementation of the art-based curriculum unit in the classroom supported a positive learning environment and atmosphere, but this can also be attributed in large part to the classroom teacher's work with students throughout the year and his personal dedication to integrating social justice issues into the classroom. The children's rights and tolerance unit complemented the work of the classroom teacher with students, but also introduced different art-based teaching and learning methods. The arts can speak to different ways of knowing and multiple intelligences and allowed students in Mr. Anderson's class to explore using art as a novel and personal form of communication to express their thoughts and ideas (Sullivan, 2008).

Art as a mode of communication also provided students the opportunity to deeply engage in their learning and to express their opinions, relating their lived experiences to classroom material and the topic of children's rights and tolerance. Students immersed in this curriculum unit on children's rights and tolerance were not passive participants in their education, recipients of knowledge, but rather, as the classroom teacher noted, highly engaged learners. Through the artistic process, students worked to build their

own understanding and knowledge of the subject matter. Students, Serena (2011) and Donald (2011) shared stories through their art about how their lived experiences have shaped their personal understanding and world perspective. Other students expressed how it is sometimes difficult to express their feelings in words, but that using images gave them the opportunity to really express their feelings (Anthony, 2011; Carrie, 2011). “I think it was a lot easier to put...what you thought about it on paper, instead of saying it in words, cause it’s harder saying it in words than it is like expressing yourself through pictures” (Carly, Focus Group, Feb. 14, 2011). The creative process not only allowed students to express and to share their lived experiences, it also created an experience in itself. As Dewey (1967) states, the arts provide a medium for students to express their thoughts and ideas, but it also creates an experience, as students work through the creative process. Some students like Tyler (2011) expressed uncertainty about the art project and had difficulty choosing a subject matter for their artwork. However, the more Tyler and the others like him discussed and worked through the creative process, the more engaged he and other students in the class became in discovering the meaning of children’s rights and tolerance in creating enduring understanding. In the end, there was a hundred percent participation from students in the classroom and everyone produced an artwork, which as the classroom teacher, Mr. Anderson (2011) stated, isn’t something that happens every day in the average classroom.

### **Art and Diverse Learning Communities**

The arts provided the opportunity for students to come together as a diverse community of learners and to share their perspectives and worldviews, relating their understanding of children’s rights and tolerance while making connections to their own

lives and experiences. The integration of the arts into the classroom can help students to recognize the value of understanding different perspectives, seeing how others may take a topic and interpret it to create an artwork that reflects their own worldview. The arts create a non-competitive environment where students are encouraged to realize their creative abilities and learn to appreciate the talents and the diversity of others. Had students been given specific topics to which they were to relate children's rights and tolerance, it would have limited the potential of what students might create and experience as learners building their own understanding through the process of creation. The teaching method for the children's rights and tolerance unit allowed students artistic freedom of expression that facilitated their learning as they gave meaning to the topic of children's rights and tolerance in today's world.

### **Redefining Citizenship and Tolerance Education**

Children are young citizens in their own right and in today's global culture, it is important that children's voices are heard (Howe & Covell, 2005; Noddings, 2005). Citizenship involves certain responsibilities and when children are provided learning experiences that explore topics such as human rights and social justice, it provides them the opportunity to engage in discussion, while also learning about different cultures and worldviews. Furthermore, it allows students the opportunity to learn how to negotiate and resolve conflicts that may arise in the classroom in a peaceful and non-confrontational manner (Huber, Murphy, & Clandinin, 2003). The arts-based children's rights and tolerance curriculum unit allowed students to engage in discussion of topics related to various citizenship issues and to express their opinions, while learning to respect and listen to others voices.



*Without children's rights and tolerance, the world would just be worse, and they kind of make the world a better place because, like without children's rights children wouldn't be able to do very much and with it, it makes the world kind of stay in order. (Patricia, Interview, Feb. 10, 2011)*

Children's rights are human rights; however children, as a vulnerable group of persons have additional rights to ensure their protection, security and healthy development. Giving children a voice through the arts, allowed students, like Elizabeth (2011) to speak out and find their voices as young and important members of society. When children have these types of positive experiences as children, they are more likely, it is thought, to develop an interest in social justice and in making positive contributions to society with a greater awareness of their rights, but also their responsibilities as global citizens (Howe & Covell, 2005).

### **A Researcher and Teacher's Experience**

As both researcher and teacher, working with Mr. Anderson and his grade seven students was an experience that also contributed to my own learning and understanding of children's rights and tolerance education. As teachers, entering the classroom for the first time, we are faced with a diverse group of individuals that have different backgrounds and lived experiences. What we can learn from these students, when as teachers, we listen to student voices can prove to be both a rewarding experience for the teacher and students, but also contribute to teacher's professional learning development and improve their own teaching practices to better support the needs of students and nurture their creative potential as individuals and young citizens. The themes that students selected for their artworks in this study required a great deal of reflection and have left a lasting impression on this researcher and on the classroom teacher. The thought and reflection, but also the willingness and openness of students

to share a part of their lives with the class, and with others that see their artworks is courageous. As Mr. Anderson (2011) stated, unfortunately the time allotted to the arts in classrooms is often very limited. Using creative ways to integrate the arts and children's rights into the classroom through various curricular subjects may not only encourage student learning, but give students a voice, which is a promise that Canada made in ratifying the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989). As a state party to the Convention, Canada has made the commitment to assist and educate children living in Canada and around the world about their rights and responsibilities as young citizens.

## Chapter 6: Conclusion

The aim of the study was to address the question: Are the arts an effective way to educate children about their rights and the importance of tolerance in a democratic society? While the study was limited to a grade-seven class in a Northern community, the arts-based children's rights and tolerance curriculum unit was well received by students. Furthermore, the students demonstrated an impressive understanding of the topic of children's rights and tolerance by the end of the unit as reflected in their artworks. The student artworks promoted discussion about important citizenship and social justice issues, while giving students a voice to express their thoughts and opinions. The study further demonstrated students' ability to take a concept, such as tolerance and to relate it to real life situations. Students explored self-generated topics surrounding the concept of tolerance including: culture, racism, homophobia and homelessness. Another class provided the same opportunity might have chosen very different themes for their artworks based on their own backgrounds and experiences. The study allowed students to use art as a medium of communication to express their thoughts and opinions and see other perspectives while learning about their rights as young people and the importance of acceptance of differences in the promotion of peaceful living. The arts-based children's rights and tolerance unit created a non-competitive and psychologically safe environment where students through their art, interviews and focus group shared their personal experiences and understanding of the importance of tolerance to life in a democratic society.

## Recommendations for Practice

The arts as a method for teaching about children's rights and tolerance, as well as other social justice issues offers students a unique opportunity to engage in their learning through the process of creation. Through various arts-based hands-on activities, students come to interpret meaning and make it their own, which creates enduring understanding.

*The arts spurred a lot of conversation... it really did open up this window for me to view their lives and I think for the first time they feel comfortable coming out, speaking about other things we may not get around to, or we may not make it until later, but the fact that it was generally about them and their perception of it was really important. (Anderson, Teacher Interview, Feb. 14, 2011)*

The multicultural reality of today's classrooms can offer a rich learning opportunity for students to learn about different cultures and world perspectives when children are given the freedom to express themselves. All students have their unique talents and abilities and learning through the arts can teach students tolerance and respect of differences when students learn about how other children see the world.

*I think several really did speak for the kids, but the thing I'm remembering is the kids, I haven't heard from, haven't heard their side of the story. Maybe I have a little inkling or understanding of what they've done. When I saw it in art, it really made a whole lot of sense to me. There are four or five that really stand out for me, to see the amount of quality they put into it and to see the message they are trying to send through their art was remarkable. (Anderson, Teacher Interview, Feb. 14, 2011).*

The arts can create a shared classroom experience for students and therefore helps to build stronger classrooms and school communities. Every classroom is different and the artworks produced by Mr. Anderson's grade-seven class are examples of what one group of students produced and the possibilities that exist when students are given the

opportunity to direct their learning and explore topics including children's rights and tolerance, as well as other social justice issues.

Teachers need not be afraid to experiment with the arts in their classroom. The creative process is important to the learning process, and it is not always about achieving an end result, but rather about looking at how one arrived at where they are and how they got there.

*A positive classroom environment with art underlying it...it is something that kids like and we as educators don't do as much as we could or should. Maybe it is because of expertise or lack there of, but also maybe it is because of the time commitment, or maybe unfortunately maybe it's because we don't think we're knowledgeable enough to draw things out of it. (Anderson, Teacher Interview, Feb. 14, 2011)*

Children learn through play and exploration, and the arts provide students the opportunity to learn through their experiences (Early Years Education Ontario Network, 2011). Thus, when we as teachers ignore or restrict students' ability to be children and to learn through active participation, we may inadvertently stifle the realization of their talents and potential to discover and share a part of who they are as people and as learners. Sometimes giving students less structure and allowing students the freedom to explore their creative potential can produce very personalised and authentic results that produce lasting memories and enduring understanding. When students are engaged and have the ability to direct their learning and make decisions, it creates active learners. The artistic process is a journey of learning and understanding. As Mr. Anderson (2011) comments, "...It was interesting watching the focus group, because you could see it a little bit, the more they stuck to it over the two weeks... They really got a grasp of it at the end of two weeks" (Teacher Interview, Feb. 14, 2011). The arts can be used as a teaching method for students of all ages and adapted to their unique

needs and abilities. The arts as a teaching method are not about achieving perfection, but rather about allowing students to experiment and express their thoughts and opinions through a variety of creative and artistic media.

Pre service teacher training and professional development courses and learning communities, as well as increased support from administrations can help ensure that children learn not just traditional subject matter but also about their basic human rights and the importance of rights in a democratic society. The integration of the arts into the classroom can create a positive atmosphere and offer a unique way for teachers to combine student learning and children's rights.

I've been doing it kind of one dimensionally. I've been teaching and trying to integrate rights into it, but now, I think that we have to teach and integrate arts and rights, because I think that it is going to take a lot better. (Anderson, Teacher Interview, Feb. 14, 2001).

Teaching through the arts can help students realize their potential and give them a voice as young citizens, while educating about important citizenship issues. When Canada, as a state party, signed and ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, the state also accepted certain responsibilities, including ensuring that children have access to an education that models tolerance and understanding (Convention, 1989). As Mr Anderson (2011) states: "We need to make it more urgent, so that they have a broader sense of social justice"(Teacher Interview, Feb. 14, 2011). The arts are a useful vehicle for learning about and disseminating information relating to children's rights and tolerance. As Canadians and responsible global citizens, we must work together to ensure that all children are given the opportunity to succeed and to know respect as individuals and as members of a community.

## **Developing Children's Rights and Tolerance Curricula**

The data gathered throughout the course of this study can further be used in the development of related children's rights and tolerance curricula. The arts proved a successful tool for teaching about children's rights and tolerance, while engaging students in their learning, as active participants and valued members of society. Children's rights and tolerance are topics that can be both incorporated into other subjects or taught as a block unit, which was demonstrated in this study. Students and the classroom teacher provided a positive response to the added value of arts-based learning strategies in the classroom. The arts also provided students a medium of communication to express their thoughts and ideas and fostered a positive classroom environment. Students should have a voice in important matters affecting their lives, including their learning and education. The feedback from students in this study can further provide curriculum developers and teachers with information to consider when working with children. Student, Tyler (2011) states how he benefited from the children's rights and tolerance through the unit, "For both of you teachers, thank you. I learned a lot about children's rights and the way to respect people" (Focus Group, Feb. 14, 2011). Overall, the study demonstrated that the arts provide a useful tool for teaching about social justice issues also with older students and that students are likely to respond positively to and engage with the topic of children's rights and tolerance taught using an arts –based curriculum. Hopefully, the findings from this study will provide valuable information for future curriculum development in this area.

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## APPENDIX A

TO BE PRINTED ON LAKEHEAD UNIVERSITY LETTERHEAD

### Cover Letter/ Introductory Information

Dear Parent/ Guardian & Potential Participant,

Your child has been invited to participate in an arts-based qualitative research study, *A Creative Arts-Based Approach to Using Children's Rights as a Vehicle for Tolerance Education at the Senior Elementary School Level*. The purpose of this study is to explore the value of children's rights and tolerance curriculum in Canadian schools. The overall objective of children's rights and tolerance education is to foster respect and understanding for others. Your child is being invited to participate, as one of the main objectives of the study is to hear children's voices and for them to be able to comment on the value of an arts-based tolerance curriculum. Students that agree to participate in the study will be encouraged to be active participants in their learning working cooperatively with others to create shared learning experiences through the arts that will help facilitate discussion of important social issues affecting their lives.

My name is Ashley Campbell and I am a second year Masters of Education student at Lakehead University and will be conducting the study. Dr. Sonja Grover, a professor at the Faculty of Education, Lakehead University, will be supervising the research. Both parent/ guardian and potential participant (your child) must agree to participate in the study. Should you choose to give written consent for your child to participate in the study, your child's participation would be entirely voluntary. Your child may also refuse to answer any question asked as part of the research or to withdraw at any time without any adverse consequence. You may refuse to allow your child to participate in any part of the study and can withdraw your child from the study at any time without penalty or your child suffering any negative consequences.

During the study student participants will be asked to participate in discussion about children's basic human rights and to share their experiences and understanding of tolerance in today's society. Following an introduction to the topic of children's human rights and tolerance, students will be asked to create artworks that represent their understanding of the concepts they have learned and discussed in class regarding human rights and tolerance. The children's artworks will be photographed and later used to help facilitate an audio taped focus group discussion with the students. Please note that while focus group participants will be asked to keep discussions confidential, this cannot be guaranteed in a focus group setting. Student volunteers will also be recruited to participate in individual audio taped interviews. The purpose of these interviews is to allow students to be able to further comment on their experiences in the classroom having experienced the curriculum unit. You or your child may refuse to have their interview audio taped either on the consent form or verbally on the day of the interview. Only with written consent from both the parent/guardian and the child will the study be audio taped. While there are no anticipated negative outcomes from this study, there is a minimal risk that a student may become distressed due to a discussion regarding intolerance. Should that occur, the classroom teacher and researcher, who is also an experienced teacher, will be there to address the situation and arrange for any follow up if required.

Audio files will be transcribed and used as raw data for the study. Your child will not be identified in any recorded data or publicly disseminated information. Pseudonyms and reference to their role in the study (e.g., a student) will be used in all transcripts and written findings. Only myself, Ashley Campbell and Dr. Sonja Grover, my thesis supervisor will have access to the data.

At the end of the study, you and your child will be given the opportunity to remove any of the child's individual interview or group discussion responses and/or photographs of your child's artwork from the data set without adverse consequence. The identity of the persons who generated the interview and group discussion responses and the children's artworks, which were photographed, will be kept strictly confidential in any dissemination of the study findings and fictitious names will be attached to these responses and artworks.

The information from this study will be used for a Masters of Education thesis. I may also use the information to report findings from the study in professional academic journals or at professional conferences, where your child's identity, school and school board information will be kept strictly confidential.

The findings and analysis of this project will be made available to you at your request upon the completion of the study. All information that your child provides will remain confidential and securely stored for five years. After the 5-year period, all multimedia data (electronic, notes, or tape) will be destroyed.

You can contact the Lakehead University Office of Research (807-343-8934) if you have any questions concerning the ethical nature of this study or the ethical conduct of the researchers.

Please sign and complete the attached form. If you have any questions concerning this study, please do not hesitate to contact, myself or thesis supervisor, Dr. Sonja Grover. Thank you for considering your child's participation in this study.

Sincerely,

Ashley Campbell

Ashley Campbell  
MEd Student

Dr. Sonja Grover  
Supervisor  
Faculty of Education

Office of Research

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\*\* It is best to contact Dr. Grover  
by email for a prompt response

## APPENDIX B

### Participant and Parent/Guardian Consent Form

#### A Creative Arts-Based Approach to Using Children's Rights as a Vehicle for Tolerance Education at the Senior Elementary School Level

My signature on this sheet indicates that I agree to participate in a study by Ashley Campbell, MEd student of Lakehead University entitled "A Creative Arts-Based Approach to Using Children's Rights as a Vehicle for Tolerance Education at the Senior Elementary School Level." and that I have read and understand the following:

1. I have read and understood the information letter for the study.
2. I voluntarily agree to participate.
3. While there are no anticipated negative outcomes from this study, there is a minimal risk that a student may become distressed due to a discussion regarding intolerance. Should that occur, the classroom teacher and researcher, who is also an experienced teacher, will be there to address the situation and arrange for any follow up if required.
4. I understand that I/my child is expected to benefit from participation in the study by learning about children's basic human rights under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and by learning concepts relating to tolerance
5. I understand that I/my child is expected to benefit from participation in the study also by having the opportunity to express him/or herself through the arts and by potentially contributing to curriculum initiatives in arts-based tolerance education
6. I can withdraw my child from the study at any time without any adverse academic or other consequence to my child or me.
7. My child can decline to answer any interview question or participate in the focus group discussion at any time without any adverse academic or other consequence.
8. The data my child provides in any form will be securely stored at Lakehead University for five years and then destroyed.
9. I can withdraw any of the photographs of my child's artwork or his/her discussion or interview responses from the data set without adverse consequence to my child or me.
10. I understand I can request a copy of the research findings from Ashley Campbell at [aecampbe@lakeheadu.ca](mailto:aecampbe@lakeheadu.ca) at the conclusion of the study when findings have been analyzed and written-up.
11. My child and I will remain anonymous in any publication or public presentation for research findings.
12. All comments are confidential and will only be presented in aggregate or anonymous form.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Child Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Guardian

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

**If you would like the results of this study please provide your e-mail or mailing address below:**

*Thank you for your participation in this study.*

## APPENDIX C

### Student Focus Group Consent Form

#### A Creative Arts-Based Approach to Using Children's Rights as a Vehicle for Tolerance Education at the Senior Elementary School Level

I \_\_\_\_\_ (participant name) understand that the information discussed in this focus group is confidential. By signing below, I agree that I will not disclose any of the information discussed in focus group with any other individuals.

I understand that I may refuse to answer any questions asked during the focus group discussion and this will not negatively affect me in any way. In signing below, I also agree to give my permission for the focus group discussion to be audio taped. Furthermore, I understand that anything I say during the focus group discussion that is used in a write up will not use my real name. I am aware that the audiotapes and transcripts are confidential and will be locked in storage for five years.

**Please circle YES or NO to the following questions:**

Do you agree to continue to participate in this study?      YES      NO

Do you agree to have this discussion audio taped?      YES      NO

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## APPENDIX D

### Student Interview Consent Form

#### A Creative Arts-Based Approach to Using Children's Rights as a Vehicle for Tolerance Education at the Senior Elementary School Level

I \_\_\_\_\_ (participant name) understand that the information discussed in this interview is confidential. By signing below, I agree that I will not disclose any of the information with any other individuals.

I understand that I may refuse to answer any questions asked during the interview discussion and this will not negatively affect me in any way. In signing below, I also agree to give my permission for the focus group discussion to be audio taped. Furthermore, I understand that anything I say during the interview that is used in a write up will not use my real name. I am aware that the audiotapes and transcripts are confidential and will be locked in storage for five years.

**Please circle YES or NO to the following questions:**

Do you agree to continue to participate in this study?	YES	NO
Do you agree to have this discussion audio taped?	YES	NO

\_\_\_\_\_

Name of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_

Signature

\_\_\_\_\_

Date

## APPENDIX E

TO BE PRINTED ON LAKEHEAD UNIVERSITY LETTERHEAD

### Education Officer Cover Letter

Dear Education Officer,

My name is Ashley Campbell and I am a Masters of Education student at Lakehead University. I am conducting a study that will examine the potential value of arts-based children's rights and tolerance curriculum in Canadian schools. To collect this information, I am looking to work with a grade 6-8 classroom teacher and students. The curriculum unit will involve 4 lesson plans in which student will create artworks that will be digitally photographed. This will be followed up by a focus group with the classroom teacher and students and one-on-one interviews with the classroom teacher and volunteer students. The focus group and interviews will be held at the school during regular classroom hours, at lunch or after school with the principal, teacher and parent's/guardian's written consent. While there are no anticipated negative outcomes from this study, there is a minimal risk that a student may become distressed due to a discussion regarding intolerance. Should that occur, the classroom teacher and researcher, who is also an experienced teacher, will be there to address the situation and arrange for any follow up if required.

All participants, school and school board identities will be protected at all stages of the study and in the dissemination of the findings. **Hence, fictitious names will be attached to all responses and photographs of the children's artwork.** The data collected from the study, including images of students' artworks will be used in a second phase of the study to facilitate a focus group discussion with volunteer pre service teachers that will explore their familiarity with the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child and their perceptions of an arts-based tolerance curriculum. The data collected from this study will be used to prepare a Masters of Education thesis. I may also report the results of this study in professional journals or at professional conferences.

The main purpose of this study is to explore the potential value of an arts- based curriculum approach using content regarding, a) children's human rights under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and b) concepts relating to tolerance to tolerance education in Canadian schools. One of the central objectives of children's rights and tolerance education is to foster respect and understanding among all people and for children's voices to be heard. Students who agree to participate in the study will be encouraged to be active participants in their own learning; working cooperatively with others to create shared learning experiences through the arts that facilitate discussion of important social issues.

Please note that the Lakehead University Ethics Board has approved this study (approval letter attached). In addition, the required school board ethics application forms are attached. The school board and the school will not be identified in any of the write-up and pseudonyms will be used to refer to participants. Data will be securely stored at Lakehead University for five years and then destroyed as per Lakehead University regulations.

A summary of the findings will be available through Lakehead University libraries. If you have any further questions about this study, please do not hesitate to contact my thesis supervisor, Dr. Sonja Grover or myself (please see contact information below).

Sincerely,

Ashley Campbell

Ashley Campbell  
MEd Student

Thunder Bay, ON

Phone: (807) 768-4943  
E-mail: [aecampbe@lakeheadu.ca](mailto:aecampbe@lakeheadu.ca)

Dr. Sonja Grover  
Supervisor  
Faculty of Education

Lakehead University  
955 Oliver Rd  
Thunder Bay, ON  
P7B 5E1

Phone: (807) 343-8714  
E-mail: [sgrover@lakeheadu.ca](mailto:sgrover@lakeheadu.ca)

Office of Research

Lakehead University  
955 Oliver Rd  
Thunder Bay, ON  
P7B 5E1

Phone: 807-343-8934

\*\*\*for a prompt response it is best  
to contact Dr. Grover via email

## APPENDIX F

### Education Officer Consent Form

#### A Creative Arts-Based Approach to Using Children's Rights as a Vehicle for Tolerance Education at the Senior Elementary School Level

I, \_\_\_\_\_ have read the cover information letter and understand that:

1. The child participants, school and school board identities will be protected.
2. All data collected is confidential.
3. The focus group and interviews will be audio taped only with written permission of the participants (including the teachers, children and the children's legal guardians).
4. All data collected will be presented with the use of pseudonyms.
5. Participants may choose not to answer any question as part of the research without adverse consequence.
6. The participants may withdraw from the study at any time without adverse consequence.
7. The child or parent may request redaction of any of their responses or of photographs of the child's artwork without adverse consequence and will be given an opportunity to do so.
8. Should a participant choose not to participate, or withdraw from the study there will be no negative academic or other consequences.
9. While there are no anticipated negative outcomes from this study, there is a minimal risk that a student may become distressed due to a discussion regarding intolerance. Should that occur, the classroom teacher and researcher, who is also an experienced teacher, will be there to address the situation and arrange for any follow up if required.
10. Child participants are expected to benefit from participation in the study by learning about children's basic human rights under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and by learning concepts relating to tolerance.
11. Child participants are expected to benefit from participation in the study by having the opportunity to express themselves through the arts and by potentially contributing to curriculum initiatives in arts-based tolerance education.
12. The participant's parent(s)/ guardian(s) and students and classroom teachers may receive a summary of the study upon request.
13. All raw data from the study (audio tapes, written notes and transcriptions) will be held at Lakehead University in a locked cabinet for five years and then destroyed as per Lakehead University regulations.
14. The data collected will be used to prepare a Masters of Education thesis and may also be used to publish articles in academic journals or for presentation at academic conferences with all participant identities concealed.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Print Name (Education Officer Responsible for School Board Ethics Approval)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature (Education Officer Responsible for School Board Ethics Approval)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date



## APPENDIX G

TO BE PRINTED ON LAKEHEAD UNIVERSITY LETTERHEAD

### Principal Cover Letter

Dear Principal,

My name is Ashley Campbell and I am a Masters of Education student at Lakehead University. I am conducting a study that will examine the potential value of arts-based children's rights and tolerance curriculum. To collect this information, I am looking to work with a grade 6-8 classroom teacher and students. The curriculum unit will involve 4 lesson plans in which student will create artworks that will be digitally photographed. This will be followed up by a focus group with the classroom teacher and students and one-on-one interviews with the classroom teacher and volunteer students. The focus group and interviews will be held at the school during regular classroom hours, at lunch or after school with the principal, teacher and parent's/guardian's written consent. While there are no anticipated negative outcomes from this study, there is a minimal risk that a student may become distressed due to a discussion regarding intolerance. Should that occur, the classroom teacher and researcher, who is also an experienced teacher, will be there to address the situation and arrange for any follow up if required.

All participants, school and school board identities will be protected. The data collected from the study, including images of students' artworks will be used in a second phase of the study to facilitate a focus group discussion with volunteer pre service teachers that will explore their familiarity with the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child and their perceptions of an arts-based tolerance curriculum. The data collected from this study will be used to prepare a Masters of Education thesis. I may also report the results of this study in professional journals or at professional conferences.

The main purpose of this study is to explore the value of children's rights and tolerance curriculum in Canadian schools. One of the main objectives of children's rights and tolerance education is to foster respect and understanding among all people and for children's voices to be heard. Students that agree to participate in the study will be encouraged to be active participants in their own learning working cooperatively with others to create shared learning experiences through the arts that facilitate discussion of important social issues.

Please note that the Lakehead University Ethics Board and the Lakehead Public School Board have approved this study. The school board and the school will not be identified in any of the write-up and pseudonyms will be used to refer to participants. Data will be securely stored at Lakehead University for five years and then destroyed as per Lakehead University regulations.

A summary of the findings will be available through Lakehead University libraries. If you have any further questions about this study, please do not hesitate to contact my thesis supervisor, Dr. Sonja Grover or myself.

Sincerely,

Ashley Campbell

Ashley Campbell  
MEd Student

Thunder Bay, ON

Phone: (807) 768-4943  
E-mail: [aecampbe@lakeheadu.ca](mailto:aecampbe@lakeheadu.ca)

Dr. Sonja Grover  
Supervisor  
Faculty of Education

Lakehead University  
955 Oliver Rd  
Thunder Bay, ON  
P7B 5E1

Phone: (807) 343-8714  
E-mail: [sgrover@lakeheadu.ca](mailto:sgrover@lakeheadu.ca)

Office of Research

Lakehead University  
955 Oliver Rd  
Thunder Bay, ON  
P7B 5E1

Phone: 807-343-8934

## APPENDIX H

### Principal Consent Form

#### A Creative Arts-Based Approach to Using Children's Rights as a Vehicle for Tolerance Education at the Senior Elementary School Level

I, \_\_\_\_\_ have read the cover information letter and understand that:

1. The child participants, school and school board identities will be protected.
2. All data collected is confidential.
3. The focus group and interviews will be audio taped only with permission of the participants.
4. All data collected will be presented with the use of pseudonyms.
5. The child or parent may request redaction of any of their responses or of photographs of the child's artwork without adverse consequence and will be given an opportunity to do so.
6. Should a participant choose not to participate, or withdraw from the study there will be no adverse consequences.
7. Participants may choose not to answer any question as part of the research without adverse consequence.
8. The participants may withdraw from the study at any time without adverse consequence.
9. Should a participant choose not to participate, or withdraw from the study there will be no negative academic or other consequences.
10. While there are no anticipated negative outcomes from this study, there is a minimal risk that a student may become distressed due to a discussion regarding intolerance. Should that occur, the classroom teacher and researcher, who is also an experienced teacher, will be there to address the situation and arrange for any follow up if required.
11. Child participants are expected to benefit from participation in the study by learning about children's basic human rights under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and by learning concepts relating to tolerance
12. Child participants are expected to benefit from participation in the study by having the opportunity to express themselves through the arts and by potentially contributing to curriculum initiatives in arts-based tolerance education
13. The participant's parent(s)/ guardian(s) and students may receive a summary of the study upon request.
14. All raw data from the study (audio tapes, written notes and transcriptions) will be held at Lakehead University in a locked cabinet for five years and then destroyed as per Lakehead University regulations.
15. The data collected will be used to prepare a Masters of Education thesis and may also be used to publish articles in academic journals or for presentation at academic conferences with all participant identities concealed.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Principal

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Principal

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## APPENDIX I

TO BE PRINTED ON LAKEHEAD UNIVERSITY LETTERHEAD

### Teacher Cover Letter

Dear Teacher,

My name is Ashley Campbell and I am a Masters of Education student at Lakehead University. I am conducting a study that will examine the potential value of arts-based children's rights and tolerance curriculum. To collect this information, I am looking to work with a grade 6-8 classroom teacher and students. The curriculum unit will involve 4 lesson plans in which student will create artworks that will be digitally photographed. As the researcher, I will work closely with the classroom teacher to help negotiate the implementation of the curriculum unit. At the end of the unit, there will be a follow up by focus group with the classroom teacher and students, as well as one-on-one interviews with the classroom teacher and volunteer students. The focus group and interviews will be held at the school during regular classroom hours, at lunch or after school with the principal, teacher and parent's/guardian's written consent. While there are no anticipated negative outcomes from this study, there is a minimal risk that a student may become distressed due to a discussion regarding intolerance. Should that occur, the classroom teacher and researcher, who is also an experienced teacher, will be there to address the situation and arrange for any follow up if required.

All participants, school and school board identities will be protected at all stages of the study. The data collected from the study, including images of students' artworks will be used in a second phase of the study to facilitate a focus group discussion with volunteer pre service teachers that will explore their familiarity with the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child and their perceptions of an arts-based tolerance curriculum. The data collected from this study will be used to prepare a Masters of Education thesis. I may also report the results of this study in professional journals or at professional conferences with all identities concealed.

The main purpose of this study is to explore the value of children's rights and tolerance curriculum in Canadian schools. One of the main objectives of children's rights and tolerance education is to foster respect and understanding among all people and for children's voices to be heard. Students that agree to participate in the study will be encouraged to be active participants in their own learning working cooperatively with others to create shared learning experiences through the arts that facilitate discussion of important social issues.

Please note that the Lakehead University Ethics Board and the Lakehead Public School Board have approved this study. The school board and the school will not be identified in any of the write-up and pseudonyms will be used to refer to participants. Data will be securely stored at Lakehead University for five years and then destroyed as per Lakehead University regulations.

A summary of the findings will be available through Lakehead University libraries. If you have any further questions about this study, please do not hesitate to contact myself, or my thesis supervisor, Dr. Sonja Grover.

Sincerely,

Ashley Campbell

Ashley Campbell  
MEd Student

Thunder Bay, ON

Phone: (807) 768-4943  
E-mail: [aecampbe@lakeheadu.ca](mailto:aecampbe@lakeheadu.ca)

Dr. Sonja Grover  
Supervisor  
Faculty of Education

Lakehead University  
955 Oliver Rd  
Thunder Bay, ON  
P7B 5E1

Phone: (807) 343-8714  
E-mail: [sgrover@lakeheadu.ca](mailto:sgrover@lakeheadu.ca)  
\*\*it is best to contact Dr. Grover  
via email for a prompt response

Office of Research

Lakehead University  
955 Oliver Rd  
Thunder Bay, ON  
P7B 5E1

Phone: 807-343-8934

## APPENDIX J

### Teacher Consent Form

#### A Creative Arts-Based Approach to Using Children's Rights as a Vehicle for Tolerance Education at the Senior Elementary School Level

I, \_\_\_\_\_ have read the cover information letter and understand that:

1. The child participants, school and school board identities will be protected.
2. All data collected is confidential.
3. The focus group and interviews will be audio taped only with permission of the participants.
4. All data collected will be presented with the use of pseudonyms.
5. Participants may choose not to answer any question as part of the research without adverse consequence.
6. The participants may withdraw from the study at any time without adverse consequence.
7. Should a participant choose not to participate, or withdraw from the study there will be no negative academic or other consequences.
8. While there are no anticipated negative outcomes from this study, there is a minimal risk that a student may become distressed due to a discussion regarding intolerance. Should that occur, the classroom teacher and researcher, who is also an experienced teacher, will be there to address the situation and arrange for any follow up if required.
9. Child participants are expected to benefit from participation in the study by learning about children's basic human rights under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and by learning concepts relating to tolerance.
10. Child participants are expected to benefit from participation in the study also by having the opportunity to express themselves through the arts and by potentially contributing to curriculum initiatives in arts-based tolerance education.
11. The participant's parent(s)/ guardian(s) and students may receive a summary of the study upon request.
12. All raw data from the study (audio tapes, written notes and transcriptions) will be held at Lakehead University in a locked cabinet for five years and then destroyed as per Lakehead University regulations.
13. The data collected will be used to prepare a Masters of Education thesis and may also be used to publish articles in academic journals or for presentation at academic conferences with all identities held strictly confidential.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Teacher

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Teacher

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## APPENDIX K

### Curriculum

#### Children’s Rights and Tolerance Education: Learning through the Arts

##### Curriculum Overview:

The following curriculum is designed to introduce children to the topic of children’s rights and the concept of tolerance in Canadian society. The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms outlines basic human rights that are to be afforded to all people. Canadian society places a great deal of value on these rights and their importance to life in a free and just society. Children (any person under the age of 18 years of age) are persons in their own right, but because of their age are considered to be a vulnerable group of persons, and as such Canada and its provinces made a commitment to children and the international community to ensure the protection and freedom of all children by signing and ratifying the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).

The “Children’s Rights and Tolerance Education: Learning through the Arts” curriculum is founded on the principles outlined in the Convention and gives voice to children and children’s rights, while emphasising the importance of respect and understanding in a multicultural society. Children are persons and therefore, it is important they are educated about their basic human rights. Educating children about their rights aims to ensure better protection of children against potential harm and/or exploitation, healthy development and participation in society. Children have the right to be heard, and as Article 12, Section 1 of the Convention (1989) states:

1. States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, **the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.**

Children have the right to express their opinions and to participate in decision-making that affects their lives, and children need to be made aware of their rights. The “Children’s Rights and Tolerance Education: Learning through the Arts” curriculum is aimed at educating senior elementary students about their rights as outlined in the UNCRC, giving them a voice to better be able to communicate their thoughts and ideas.

Children have basic human rights, but still need the support and guidance of adults to ensure their protection, encourage their healthy development and participation in society, as is outlined in the UNCRC. The following curriculum recognizes the importance of parents, family and other adult figures in a child’s life. Students should be encouraged to share their ideas with others not only in the classroom, but also outside of school and in the home. The role of parents/legal guardians is outlined in the Convention. Article 18, Section 1 of the Convention (1989) states:

1. States Parties shall use their best efforts to ensure recognition of the principle that both parents have common responsibilities for the upbringing and development of the child. Parents or, as the case may be, legal guardians, have the primary responsibility for the upbringing and development of the child. The best interests of the child will be their basic concern.

Parents should be encouraged to be active participants in their child's education with respect to their child's individual rights and development. Families and communities are very important in a child's life and education, and children coming from different backgrounds may have very different worldviews. The curriculum emphasizes the importance of respect and tolerance of these differences. The aim of the curriculum is to provide a safe and caring environment that recognizes and respects the multicultural reality of today's classrooms.

As a state party to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, Canada agreed to ensure all children the right to an education and to actively raise awareness about children's rights, which is the focus of this curriculum. The curriculum will provide children with the opportunity to voice their opinions and share their ideas in a positive, non-competitive environment that fosters creativity, imagination and respect for all people. Article 29, Section 1 of the Convention (1989) states "the education of the child shall be directed to:"

(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.

The Convention outlines the child's right to an education that promotes values of tolerance and understanding. It also highlights the child's right to enjoy and participate in cultural and artistic activities. Article 31, Section 2 of the Convention (1989) states:

2. States Parties shall respect and promote the right of the child to participate fully in cultural and artistic life and shall encourage the provision of appropriate and equal opportunities for cultural, artistic, recreational and leisure activity.

The curriculum encourages students to think both critically and creatively. Students will be given creative freedom to express their thoughts through various arts-based activities, including role-play, drama, dance, creative writing, drawing, painting and mixed media. The goal in using the arts is to create a non-competitive and inclusive environment. Throughout the curriculum students will be encouraged to work cooperatively with their classmates and classroom teacher to build meaningful learning experiences that create enduring understanding that can be related to real life situations.

The "Children's Rights and Tolerance Education: Learning through the Arts" curriculum is based on a children's rights model that encourages active participation. Canada's multicultural classrooms can provide a rich learning environment where students from diverse backgrounds can come together to share their different lived experiences and world perspectives. The curriculum teaches concepts of tolerance and respect as prerequisites for peace. Furthermore, the children's rights and tolerance curriculum emphasizes the importance of children's participation in society with respect to family and community values, and encourages children to act as members of society, using their creativity and imagination to express their ideas and opinions.



## **Multiculturalism and the Ontario Curriculum**

The Arts (2009), Ontario Curriculum, Grades 1-8, highlights the importance of the arts to a child's learning and the promotion of values such as understanding in a multicultural society. Under "Guidance in Art Education," the Ontario Curriculum reads:

Research shows that learning about and participating in the arts improves self-esteem, empathy, confidence, and self-motivation. As well, learning through participation in the arts can benefit students across the spectrum of ability, achievement, and interests. Research also shows that, when the arts are an integral part of the school environment, students have better attendance, are more motivated to learn, have improved multicultural understanding, and are more likely to stay in school and graduate (Ontario, 2009, p. 59).

In an overview of the expectations for grades 4 to 6, the Ontario Curriculum states:

The expectations for Grades 4 to 6 focus on the development of students' knowledge and skills in the arts and their ability to use the arts to understand, explore, and communicate feelings and ideas from and about their multicultural, multimedia environment (Ontario, 2009, p. 97).

Again, listed under the expectations for grades 7 and 8, the Ontario curriculum emphasises the importance of the arts in students' ability to communicate their ideas and feelings towards today's multicultural reality.

The expectations for Grades 7 and 8 focus on the consolidation of students' knowledge, skills, and strategies in the arts and their ability to use the arts independently and effectively to enhance their learning in school and to communicate feelings and ideas about their multicultural, multimedia world.

An overview of the curriculum expectations found in the Ontario Arts Curriculum can be linked to concepts found in the "Children's Rights and Tolerance Education: Learning through the Arts" curriculum. The overall objectives of both curricula are to increase understanding and respect through the arts for life in a multicultural society.

### **Curriculum Expectations:**

#### **Overall Expectations:**

The overall objective of the curriculum "Children's Rights and Tolerance through the Arts" is to familiarize students with United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) with a particular emphasis on tolerance and understanding. Students will be asked to define what children's rights and tolerance means to them living in a multicultural society like Canada based on their understanding of the Convention. The main objective of the unit is to raise awareness about children's human rights and to promote understanding and respect for all people. The arts

will be used as a tool to facilitate discussion. Furthermore, the arts encourage individual expression and offer students the opportunity to share their experiences and learn from others. Students will be encouraged to use their creativity and imagination to communicate their ideas, working with their classmates and the classroom teacher to build understanding that reinforces a stronger sense of community within the classroom.

### **Anticipated Outcomes:**

- Students develop an understanding of the meaning of children’s rights and become familiar with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
- Students consider the meaning of tolerance in order to develop a personal definition and understanding of its importance to life in a multicultural society
- Students actively participate in classroom discussions and activities (children may chose to represent their ideas through various creative and artistic media)
- Students are able to relate concepts learned in class to real life situations
- Students work cooperatively and are respectful of their classmates
- Students are able to share what they have learned in the classroom with friends and family, emphasising the importance of family in their life and healthy development
- Students demonstrate respect and understanding of different student perspectives and worldviews
- Students use critical thinking and problem solving skills to resolve potential conflicts or disagreements
- Students work together to build a stronger sense of community within the classroom

### **UNCRC Resources:**

United Nation Convention on the Rights of the Child (English Version):

<http://www2.ohchr.org/english/law/crc.htm>

Convention of the Rights of the Child (Child-Friendly Version):

<http://www.unicef.org/magic/briefing/uncorc.html>

The Rights of the Child Photo Essay:

<http://www.unicef.org/photoessays/30048.html>

<http://www.unicef.org/photoessays/30556.html>

### **Specific Expectations:**

#### ***Communication:***

The arts will be used as a tool to help facilitate discussion to allow children to communicate their ideas through various artistic media. Students will be encouraged to think both critically and creatively, and to use their creative imaginations as a means to better express their thoughts, feelings and opinions. Students may choose from a variety of media, including: Performance (drama, dance), acting out situations (role play), creative writing, and visual representations (drawing, sculpture, painting) that they feel may best represent their thoughts, feelings and understanding of the concepts learned in class. Furthermore, students will be asked to consider

what they learn in class and to try and make connections to real life situations. All students should have the opportunity to share their ideas, but also be encouraged to be respectful of other students' perspectives, giving everyone in the class an equal opportunity to share their thoughts and ideas.

***The role of the teacher ('teacher' hereafter refers to the researcher who is a certified experienced teacher):*** The teacher should help guide students in their learning and work cooperatively with students to develop guidelines for behaviour and performance in the classroom with respect to children's individual and group rights.

### ***Cooperation:***

Students will be encouraged to work cooperatively with their classmates and the classroom teacher, to share their thoughts and ideas and to make connections to real life situations, looking for commonalities that link their ideas together. Students will also be encouraged to work together to build understanding of concepts that reflect multiple perspectives. A very important goal of cooperative learning is to build a stronger sense of community among all students from different backgrounds and with diverse lived experiences. Students may have very different worldviews, but one of the main objectives of the curriculum is for students to work together and to listen to other perspectives in a manner that is respectful, even if students do not agree with what someone else's point of view. Students will consider alternative perspectives, and be encouraged to act in manner that is respectful and encourages the participation of all students. Concepts of fairness and equality will also be addressed.

***The role of the teacher:*** The role of the teacher is to help encourage cooperative learning between students in order create an inclusive environment that values all students as unique and creative individuals who are equal members of the classroom community.

### ***Understanding:***

Students will have the opportunity to demonstrate their understanding of concepts through multiple artistic media. Particular attention will be made to the process, students' ability to think, plan and execute their planned artworks. Students will be given time to reflect both individually and in a group setting on topics discussed in class. Small group and class discussion where students can ask questions and share their ideas may also serve to support students' understanding of concepts. Students will be able to discuss the significance of their artworks and be encouraged to reflect on their choices. Students may also keep journals in order to help organize their thoughts and support their ideas. Journal entries may be notes or sketches. Recognition of the creative process is extremely important in helping students to develop their understanding of concepts and being able to relate concepts to real life situations.

***The role of the teacher:*** The teacher will encourage student discussion by asking questions (e.g. Why do you think that? Can you give an example of a real life situation?), that helps direct students learning and encourage them to consider their own and others' responses and understanding of learned concepts.

### **Overview of Potential Curriculum Unit Lesson Plans:**

\* Lesson plans will be constructed with the input of the classroom teacher and students and with consideration to the available classroom resources. Lessons may also be modified to meet the learning needs of a specific age group of children and children with special needs.

Prior to beginning the lesson the classroom teacher and students will set guidelines for discussion, highlighting the importance of respect when listening to others and allowing everyone their turn to speak.

#### **Lesson #1 – Introduction to Children’s Rights and Tolerance**

- Students will be asked to share what they know about children’s rights (e.g. What do you think children’s rights are?)
- Students will be asked about what they think the word tolerance means (e.g. What do you think the word tolerance mean? Can you give an example of what it means to be a tolerant person?)
- Students will be introduced to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Please see UNCRC resources listed above)
- Students will be given specific Articles in the convention to discuss in small group or as a class
- Students will be given activities to complete individually and as a class (e.g. Students create rough sketches or word maps of related terms; Questions: What do children rights “look” like? What words or images come to mind? Can we write some words down/ draw a picture?)
- Students will be asked to consider the importance of children’s rights in today’s society and make connections (Why do you think children’s rights are important to children in Canada?)

#### **Lesson #2 – Tolerance in a Multicultural Society**

- Review of children’s rights (e.g. What is the UNCRC? What are children’s rights)
- Students will be asked to consider the meaning of multiculturalism in Canadian society
- Students will be asked to apply prior knowledge of children’s rights and tolerance and it’s relation to Canadian society
- Students may wish to share their understanding of culture and what it means to them personally
- Children will be encouraged to think of instances of intolerance in society and its consequences
- Students will be encouraged to reflect on the topics and participate in a variety of activities and discussions

#### **Lesson #3 – Art and Social Justice**

- Review of topics: children’s rights, tolerance and multiculturalism
- Students will be asked to consider how art can be used as a form of communication

- Student will look at a variety of age appropriate artworks and discuss what meaning or message that work portrays (e.g. UNICEF, Photo Essays: [http://www.unicef.org/rightsite/media\\_328.htm#](http://www.unicef.org/rightsite/media_328.htm#))
- Students will be encouraged to think of how the arts influence their lives (e.g. Music, movies, etc...)
- Students will be encouraged to think of how the arts may be used to communicate messages of social justice or fairness
- Student will look at examples of artworks that have a social justice message

#### **Lesson #4 – Social Change and You**

\* The final lesson will involve children creating their own artworks, which maybe divided into several classes depending on the classroom time allotted

- Students will review concepts from previous classes
- Students will be asked to think of how they might use the arts to express their own ideas
- Students will be asked to consider the value of the arts in communicating their own thoughts, feelings and ideas
- Students should be encouraged to consider how the arts can give a voice to children’s rights
- Students will look at artworks created by other children on the topic of children’s rights (See Voices of Youth: <http://www.unicef.org/voy/>)
- Students begin planning their own art projects that communicate their personal understanding or ideas related of the topics discussed in class
- Students create individual artworks
- Students create responses to their artworks

#### **Art Projects**

For the purpose of the proposed study, “A Creative Arts-Based Approach to Using Children's Rights as a Vehicle for Tolerance Education at the Senior Elementary School Level,” students will be asked to create individual artworks that may include sketches, drawings, paintings, photographs, digital images and collage. Students will be given creative freedom to choose from the materials available to them, but should follow certain guidelines listed below:

- Students will be asked to consider what images or symbols best represent their understanding of children’s rights and tolerance and how they might communicate that message through a visual media
- Student will carefully plan and prepare an outline for their work
- Students will not use photographs or other images that may reveal their personal identity, or that of their classmates or other persons
- Throughout the planning process students will be challenged to think both critically and creatively about how they choose to represent the their ideas
- Students will be asked to consider what media can best be used to represent their ideas and desired outcome

- Students will be encouraged to work cooperatively, to share their ideas with their classmates and to engage their peers in discussion about their decisions
- When students have completed their planning and outline, they may begin to gather the materials provided to begin work
- Upon completion of their projects, students will be asked to take time to individually reflect on their creations

### References

United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, (1989). Retrieved from <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/law/crc.htm>

Ontario Ministry of Education (2009). *The Ontario Curriculum, Grades 1-8, The Arts*. Retrieved from <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/curriculum/elementary/arts.html>

## APPENDIX L

### LESSON PLAN #1 Introduction to Children's Rights and Tolerance

#### **Expectations:**

#### **Ontario Curriculum -The Arts (Grade 7)**

#### **Visual Art:**

#### **Overall Expectations:**

D 2 – Reflecting, Responding and Analyzing

D 3 – Exploring Forms and Cultural Contexts

#### **Specific Expectations:**

D2.1 -Interpret a variety of art works and identify the feelings, issues, themes, and social concerns that they convey

D3.1 - Identify and describe some of the ways in which visual art forms and styles reflect the beliefs and traditions of a variety of cultures and civilizations

#### **United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child**

#### **Article 29, Section 1**

The education of the child shall be directed to:

(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.

#### **Materials:**

- PPT "Homelessness"
- World Map
- UNCRC Pamphlets
- "Rights" tickets
- Blank word cards and tape
- PPT "What do rights look like?"
- Poster paper
- Markers

#### **Resources:**

- United Nation Convention on the Rights of the Child (English Version):

<http://www2.ohchr.org/english/law/crc.htm>

- Convention of the Rights of the Child (Child-Friendly Version):

<http://www.unicef.org/magic/briefing/uncrc.html>

- UNCRC Photo Essay (<http://www.unicef.org/crc/>)

Part I - <http://www.unicef.org/photoessays/30048.html>

Part II - <http://www.unicef.org/photoessays/30556.html>

**Introduction:**

- Student NAME TAGS
- Teacher Introduction - Art and teaching experience (homelessness project)
- About the research
- Q&A

**Body of Lesson:**

**Classroom rules for discussions: RESPECT**

**Class Discussion:**

- Students will be asked to share what they know about children's rights  
(What do you think children's rights are?)

**Activity #1:****Word Collage**

- Students will be asked to think of words they associate with "rights" and to write them on blank word cards to be taped on the blackboard

**Activity #2:****Introduction to the UNCRC**

- Students will be given (draw) articles from the Convention to discuss in small groups
- (Paper and pencil needed)**
- In their groups they will be asked to think of how their article applies to children in Thunder Bay/ Canada (connect to real life situations)
- Each group will be asked to discuss their article with the class
- United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child **PAMPHLETS**

**Do we want to add/remove words from the blackboard?**

**Presentation:**

Imagining Children's Rights: How Youth Around the World See their RIGHTS

- Images of art works created by youth around the world that portray their interpretation of children's rights

**Activity #3:**

- Students will be asked about what they think the word tolerance means (e.g. What do you think the word tolerance mean? Can you give an example of what it means to be a tolerant person?)
- **GRAFFITI ART**

**Conclusion:**

- Students will be asked to consider the importance of children's rights in today's society and make connections (Why do you think children's rights are important to children in Canada? Why is tolerance important?)

**ALTERNATIVE ACTIVITIES:****Journal reflections:**

Possible Questions: What does tolerance mean to you? Why is tolerance important? What makes you unique? What do you like? What are your talents?

**Read Aloud:** "The Sneetches" (topic: discrimination/multiculturalism)



### References

Convention on the Rights of the Child, (1989). Retrieved from  
<http://www2.ohchr.org/english/law/crc.htm>

UNICEF (2011). *Convention on the Rights of the Child, Child Friendly Version, English Flyer, "What Rights?"* Retrieved January, 2010 from  
<http://www.unicef.org/magic/briefing/uncorc.html>

UNICEF (2008). *Photo Essay, The Rights of the Child, I of II.* Retrieved January, 2010 from  
<http://www.unicef.org/photoessays/30048.html>

UNICEF (2008). *Photo Essay, The Rights of the Child, II of II.* Retrieved January, 2010 from  
<http://www.unicef.org/photoessays/30556.html>

## LESSON PLAN #2

### Tolerance in a Multicultural Society

#### **Expectations:**

#### **Ontario Curriculum -The Arts (Grade 7)**

#### **Overall Expectations:**

#### **Visual Art:**

D 2 – Reflecting, Responding and Analyzing  
D 3 – Exploring Forms and Cultural Contexts

#### **Drama:**

B 1 – Creating and Presenting  
B 2 – Reflecting, Responding and Analyzing

#### **Specific Expectations:**

#### **Visual Arts:**

D2.1 - Interpret a variety of art works and identify the feelings, issues, themes, and social concerns that they convey  
D3.1 - Identify and describe some of the ways in which visual art forms and styles reflect the beliefs and traditions of a variety of cultures and civilizations

#### **Drama:**

B1.1 - Engage actively in drama exploration and role play, with a focus on examining multiple perspectives related to current issues, themes, and relationships from a wide variety of sources and diverse communities.  
B2.1 - Construct personal interpretations of drama works, connecting drama issues and themes to their own and others' ideas, feelings, and experiences.

#### **United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child**

#### **Article 29, Section 1**

The education of the child shall be directed to:

(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.

#### **Materials:**

- World Map
- Blank cards
- Poster paper
- Markers
- Journals (or blank paper)
- Props for drama (wigs, hats, noses, etc...)

**Resources:**

- Power point presentation “A World Coloured Beautiful” or <http://nadjasblackbook.blogspot.com/>
- Book: “The Sneetches” by Dr. Suess or YouTube Video <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v3yJomUhs0g>
- UNCRC Photo Essay (<http://www.unicef.org/crc/>)  
Part I - <http://www.unicef.org/photoessays/30048.html>  
Part II - <http://www.unicef.org/photoessays/30556.html>
- Homeless photographs

**Introduction:**

- Student NAME TAGS
- Read Aloud “A World Coloured Beautiful” <http://nadjasblackbook.blogspot.com/>

**Questions:**

1. Why do you think the images are black?
2. How is this book different from other books you’ve read?
3. What can we learn when we look at things from a different perspective?

**Revision:****Children’s Rights:**

1. What are children’s rights?
2. Why are children’s rights important?
3. What does the word tolerance mean to you?
4. How can we learn about children’s rights/tolerance?

**UNCRC Photo Essay**

<http://www.unicef.org/crc/>

Part I - <http://www.unicef.org/photoessays/30048.html>

Part II - <http://www.unicef.org/photoessays/30556.html>

**\*\*\* Students will be given time to complete their graffiti art from last class and present their work to the class**

**Body of Lesson:****Activity #1**

- Book: “The Sneetches” by Dr. Suess or YouTube Video <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v3yJomUhs0g>

**Question for discussion:**

1. What did you think about the video/book?
2. Can you relate “The Sneetches” to a real life situation?
3. How might you relate the concept of tolerance/intolerance to the book/video?

**Activity #2****Multiculturalism (individual work, small group and class discussion)**

- Students may wish to share their understanding of culture and what it means to them personally
- Students will be asked to apply prior knowledge of children's rights and tolerance to its importance to life in Canadian society

**JOURNAL ENTRIES (personal narrative/ creative writing/ sketches)**

1. What is culture? What does multiculturalism mean to you?

**Small Group/ Class Discussion**

2. What does multiculturalism mean to Canada?
3. Why are children's rights important in a multicultural society?
4. Why is tolerance important in a multicultural society?
5. What are the consequences of intolerance?
6. Can you think of any real life situations?

**Activity #3****DRAMA: Role Play, Improvisation Theatre and Tableaux**

- Children will be encouraged to think of instances of tolerance/intolerance in society and its benefits/consequences to children's well-being

**Role Play and Improvisation Theatre**

- Students will be asked to arrange chairs and to sit in a circle
- Students will be asked to reflect on how tolerance/intolerance can have a positive/negative impact on children
- Student volunteers will be selected to enter the circle
- Students will be given a scenario and props to use (students will help construct scenarios that model tolerance/intolerance) to act out a scene
- When the teacher calls "FREEZE" students will pause for discussion led by the teacher

**Tableaux**

- Students will be divided into groups
- In groups students think up scenarios that model tolerance/intolerance
- Students will choose one scenario and create a tableau
- Students will share and discuss their tableau with the class

**Conclusion:**

- Students will be asked to consider the importance of children's rights and tolerance in a multicultural society and to make connections to their own lives

**Alternative Activities:**

**Journal Reflections:** Think of a scenario of tolerance/ intolerance and explain how the situation might make you or someone else feel

**References**

Campbell, A.E. (2010). *A World Coloured Beautiful*. Retrieved from <http://nadjasblackbook.blogspot.com/>

Dr. Suess. (2010, Dec. 4). Dr. Suess' The Sneetches [video file]. Retrieved January, 2010 from <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v3yJomUhs0g>

Dr. Suess. (1989). *The Sneetches and Other Stories*. New York: Random House.

UNICEF (2008). *Photo Essay, The Rights of the Child, I of II*. Retrieved January, 2010 from <http://www.unicef.org/photoessays/30048.html>

UNICEF (2008). *Photo Essay, The Rights of the Child, II of II*. Retrieved January, 2010 from <http://www.unicef.org/photoessays/30556.html>

## LESSON PLAN #3

### Art and Social Justice

#### **Expectations:**

**Ontario Curriculum -The Arts (Grade 7)**

#### **Overall Expectations:**

##### **Visual Art:**

D 2 – Reflecting, Responding and Analyzing

D 3 – Exploring Forms and Cultural Contexts

#### **Specific Expectations:**

##### **Visual Arts:**

D2.1 -Interpret a variety of art works and identify the feelings, issues, themes, and social concerns that they convey

D3.1 - Identify and describe some of the ways in which visual art forms and styles reflect the beliefs and traditions of a variety of cultures and civilizations

#### **United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child**

##### **Article 29, Section 1**

The education of the child shall be directed to:

(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.

#### **Materials:**

- Guitar
- PowerPoint “Exploring TOLERANCE through the Arts”

#### **Resources:**

The UNICEF Anthem:

Honouring the 20th Anniversary of the Convention of the Rights of the Child

Composed by UNICEF Canada Ambassador Steve Barakatt

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vza57EVpta8>

#### **Introduction:**

- Student NAME TAGS

The UNICEF Anthem:

Honouring the 20th Anniversary of the Convention of the Rights of the Child

Composed by UNICEF Canada Ambassador Steve Barakatt  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vza57EVpta8>

SONG: "Streets of London"

**Questions for discussion:**

1. Why do you think of the images?
2. What message did the images/music convey to you?

**Revision:**

**Children's Rights:**

- Students will be asked to consider how art can be used as a form of communication

1. Why are children's rights and tolerance important in a multicultural society?

**JOURNAL ENTRY RESPONSES**

2. What art forms have we looked at so far? (visual arts, media arts, drama, music...)

- "Homeless" photographs
- Youth Posters and Art
- Black Book
- "The Sneetches"

**Body of Lesson:**

**Activity #1**

**PowerPoint:** "Exploring TOLERANCE through the Arts"

**Small group and class discussion**

- Student will look at a variety of age appropriate artworks and discuss what meaning or message that work portrays
- Students will be encouraged to think of how the arts influence their lives (e.g. Music, movies, etc...)
- Students will be encouraged to think of how the arts may be used to communicate messages of social justice or fairness
- Student will look at examples of artworks that have a social justice message

**Conclusion:**

- Students will be asked to consider the importance of children's rights and tolerance in a multicultural society and how art can be used as a form of communication

**References**

Barakatt, Steve. (2009, Nov. 18). Lullaby, The UNICEF Anthem [video file]. Retrieved January, 2010 from <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vza57EVpta8>

## **LESSON PLAN #4**

### **Social Change and YOU**

#### **Lesson #4 – Social Change and You**

\* The final lesson will involve children creating their own artworks, which may be divided into several classes depending on the classroom time allotted

- Students will review concepts from previous classes
- Students will be asked to think of how they might use the arts to express their own ideas
- Students will be asked to consider the value of the arts in communicating their own thoughts, feelings and ideas
- Students should be encouraged to consider how the arts can give a voice to children rights
- Students will look at artworks created by other children on the topic of children’s rights (See Voices of Youth: <http://www.unicef.org/voy/>)
- Students begin planning their own art projects that communicates their personal understanding or ideas related of the topics discussed in class
- Students create individual artworks
- Students create responses to their artworks

#### **Art Projects**

For the purpose of the purposed study, “A Creative Arts-Based Approach to Using Children's Rights as a Vehicle for Tolerance Education at the Senior Elementary School Level,” students will be asked to create individual artworks that may include sketches, drawings, painting, photographs, digital images and collage. Students will be given creative freedom to choose from the materials available to them, but should follow certain guidelines listed below:

- Students will be asked to consider what images or symbols best represent their understanding of children’s rights and tolerance and how they might communicate that message through a visual media
- Student will carefully plan and prepare an outline for their work
- Students will not use photographs or other images that may reveal their personal identity, or that of their classmates or other persons
- Throughout the planning process students will be challenged to think both critically and creatively about how they choose to represent the their ideas
- Students will be asked to consider what media can best be used to represent their ideas and desired outcome
- Students will be encouraged to work cooperatively, to share their ideas with their classmates and to engage their peers in discussion about their decisions
- When students have completed their planning and outline, they may begin to gather the materials provided to begin work
- Upon completion of their projects, students will be asked to take time to individually reflect on their creations

#### **References**

UNICEF. (2011). *Voices of Youth*. Retrieved January, 2010 from <http://www.unicef.org/voy/>



## APPENDIX M

### Interview and Focus Group Guide

#### Potential Student Focus Group/Interview Questions:

1. What do you know about children's rights?
2. What does the word tolerance mean to you?
3. Do you think it is important to learn about children's rights?
4. Do you think it is important to learn about tolerance?
5. What did you learn from this unit?
6. What did you like best or least about the unit?
7. What did you create for your final project?
8. Would anyone like to share or talk about their artwork?
9. Did you enjoy the making art?
10. What were some of the challenges/ benefits of using art to express your ideas?
11. Do you think it is important for other students to learn about children's rights/ tolerance at school?

#### Potential Teacher Interview Questions:

1. Were you familiar with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) prior to the study?
2. Do you believe that children rights and tolerance curriculum has value in Canadian schools?
3. Do you believe that there is a need for such curriculum in your school?
4. How did the students in your class respond to the tolerance curriculum?
5. Do you feel after having taught the unit that arts are an effective learning tool in the classroom for learning about different social issues?
6. How did the students respond to the unit?
7. What were your impressions of the artworks students produced?
8. Do you believe the students in your classroom benefited from the unit?
9. Do you believe the unit on children's rights and tolerance encourages students to think critically about their role in society and the rights they have as human beings?
10. Would you considering using the unit again with a different group of students?
11. How would you improve the unit, based on your experience?

#### Potential Pre Service Focus Group Questions:

1. Are you familiar with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child?
2. Do you believe it is important to have social justice curriculum in Canadian schools?
3. Do you think there is a need for tolerance education in today schools?
4. Do you think the arts can be used as a tool for learning in the classroom?
5. Do you think it would be possible to implement a tolerance curriculum in schools? Why or why not?
6. Having previewed the curriculum unit and viewed the children's artworks, what are your impressions of the unit and what the students created?
7. Do you think the children's works demonstrate critical thinking and an ability to understand the concept of tolerance?
8. What do you think about the children's comments? Do they demonstrate a genuine understanding of the concepts?
9. How might you have improved the unit?
10. Would you consider implementing a similar unit in your classrooms?
11. What challenges, if any, do you think you might experience as a teacher trying to implement a similar curriculum?
12. Do you think that the creation of art is the best way to teach tolerance in the classroom?

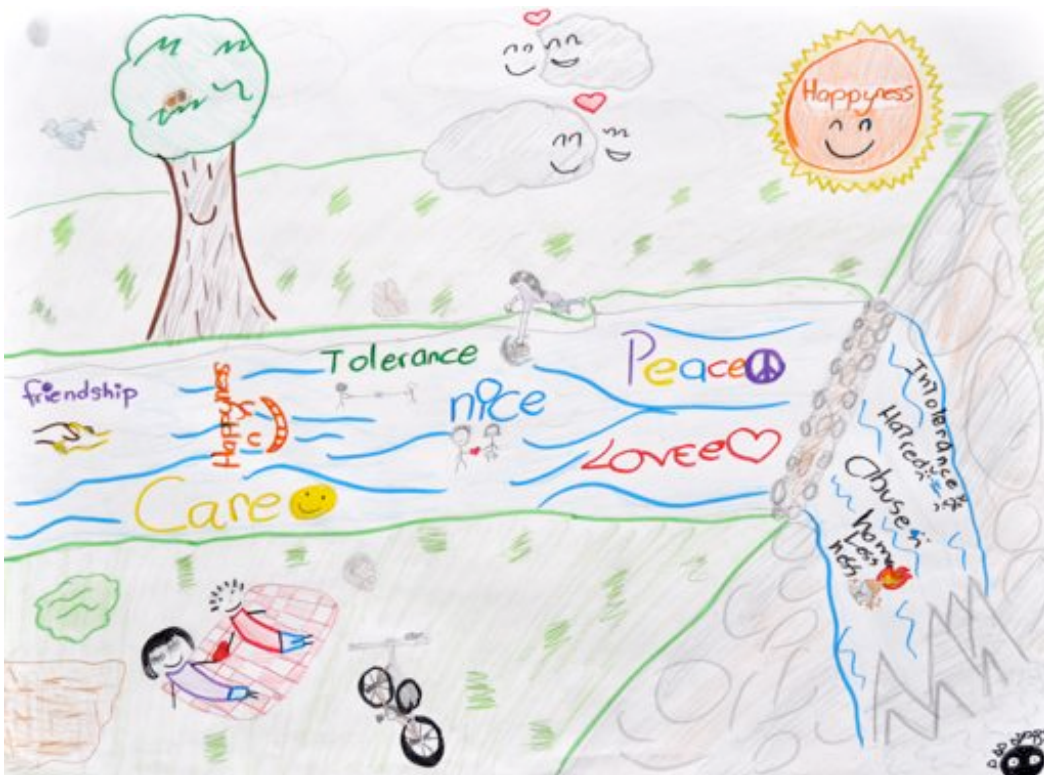
## APPENDIX N

Students' Artworks

Noah (2011)



Isaac (2011)



Carly (2011)



David (2011)



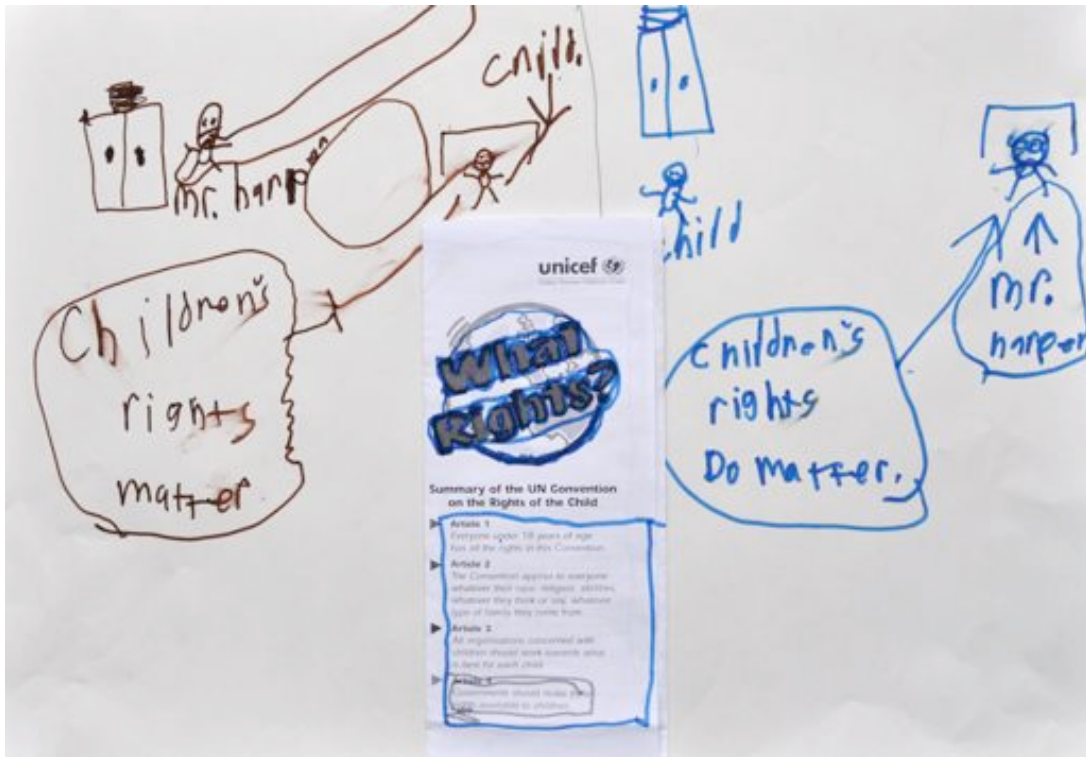
Paul (2011)



Carrie (2011)



Jonathan (2011)



Joseph (2011)



Robert (2011)



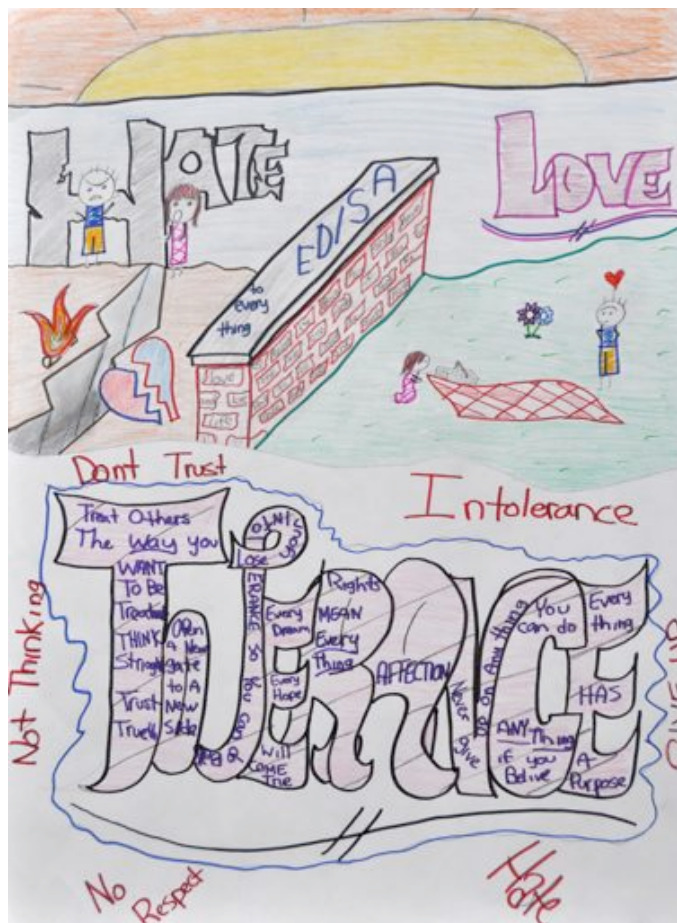
Stephen (2011)



Tyler (2011)



Aidan (2011)

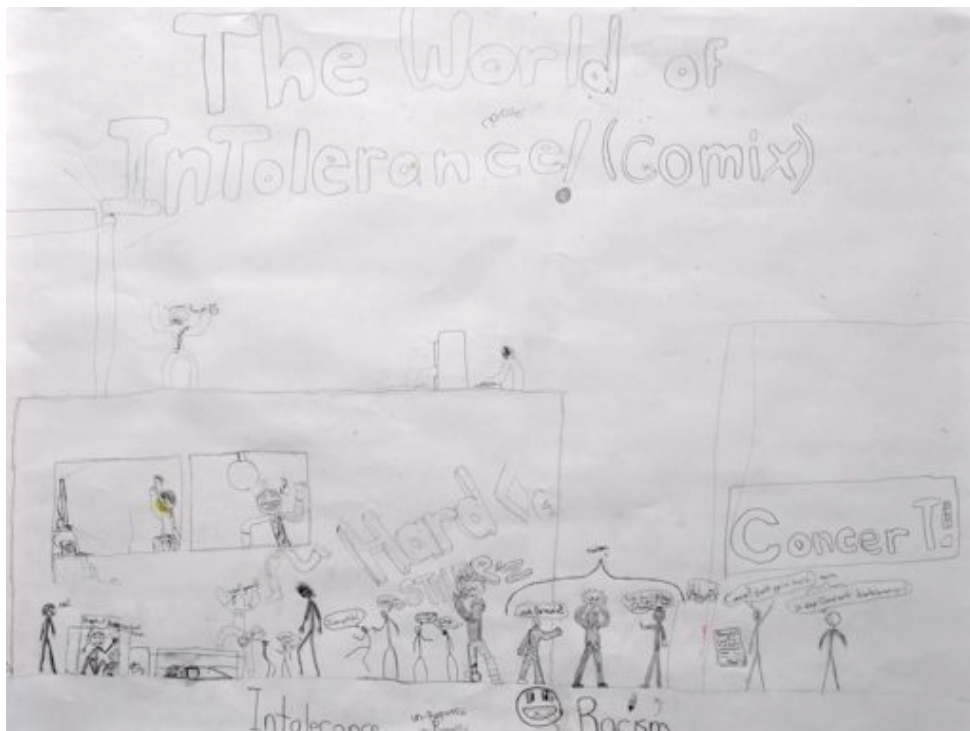


Elizabeth (2011)

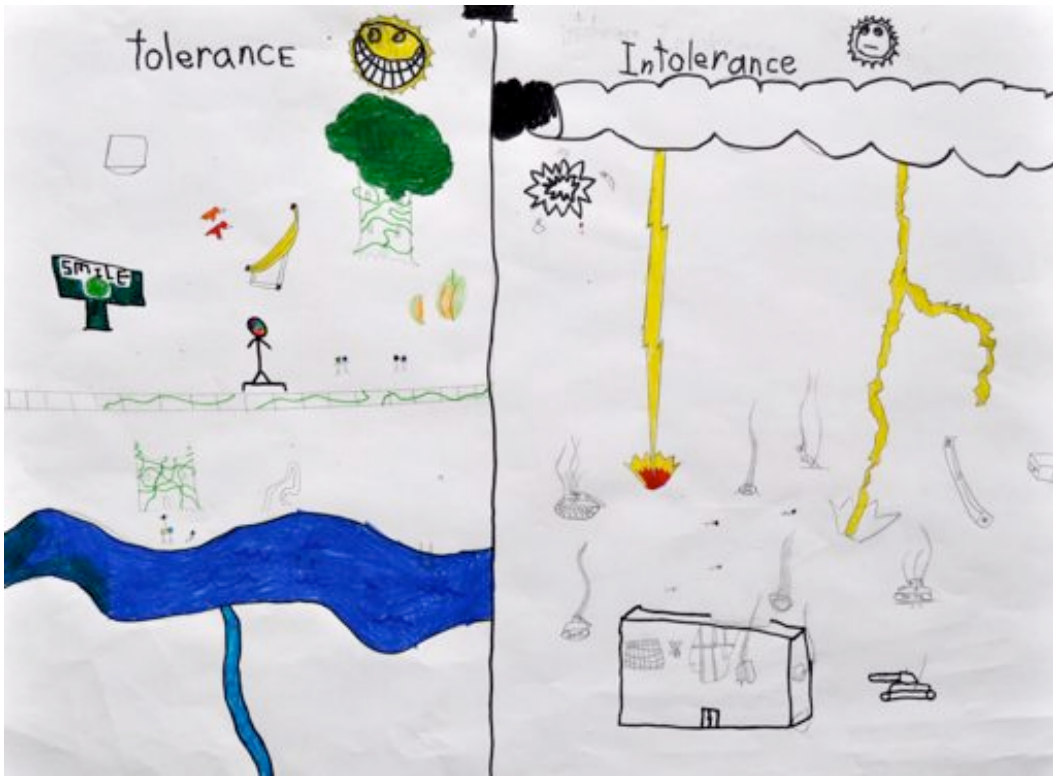




Christopher (2011)



Thomas (2011)



Guss (2011)



Mariah (2011)



Philip (2011)



Brodie (2011)



Donald (2011)



Jillian (2011)



Patricia (2011)



Anthony (2011)



Frederic (2011)



Serena (2011)