

A Comprehensive Analysis of Child and Youth Experiences within *Shaking the Movers*
Workshops: A Discourse Analysis of Canadian UNCRC Implementation Efforts

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Abstract

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1989) has been ratified by 197 nations, aiming to protect and provide for the rights of all children and young people.

However, signatories such as Canada known as State Parties have mostly failed to adequately implement children's rights (Senate of Canada, 2007; UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, 1995, 2003, 2012, 2022). Instead of widespread implementation efforts across governments and education systems, smaller organizations have been left to take on rights-based initiatives that provide children with safe spaces to facilitate rights-based education and discussions. In 2007, Carleton University's Landon Pearson Resource Centre for the Study of Childhood and Children's Rights (LPRC) in Ottawa, worked to ensure this by establishing their annual Shaking the Movers (herein, STM) workshops. These workshops have engaged young Canadians by providing research and education about children's rights. Over 14 years, these workshops have produced and published 40 reports which consist of the unfiltered and unique perspectives of young people. This qualitative study will use them as data to address the main question: "How are young people in partnership with adult stakeholders involved in the cross-Canada Shaking the Movers workshops understanding and implementing the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child?" The study employs Michel Foucault's (1981) critical discourse analysis as the methodological framework to systematically analyze the STM reports. It has been adapted as a tool to identify and critique children's experiences of rights and recognize how adult power relations impact them (Scraton, 1997). The Foucauldian analysis is guided by the sociology of childhood for a more extensive critical review of this database and to facilitate a wider understanding of children as active agents of their own socially constructed world, rather than passive or incomplete future citizens. This context further acknowledges that understandings of

childhood are ever-changing and vary based upon history, culture, and politics of society (James & Prout, 1997). The findings of this study emphasize the need for better partnerships between children and adults at all levels of Canadian society for better implementation of the Convention.

Keywords: UNCRC, Foucauldian discourse analysis, sociology of childhood, children's rights

Dedication

I would like to acknowledge the invaluable work and insights of the late Honorable Landon Pearson O. C. Her work, dedication and contribution towards children and children's rights has been exemplary as it paved the way for the research in this thesis. It is her legacy that created a foundation for children to actively learn about and experience their rights, and her commitment will continue to impact future generations of children and young people across Canada.

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Chapter One: Introduction

What is the UNCRC?

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1989) is an international human rights treaty which has been signed and ratified by 197 nations and implemented in each of these State Parties with the intent to provide for and protect all children's and young people's human rights (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2011). The Convention consists of 54 Articles in which the social, cultural, economic, political, and civil components of a child's life are acknowledged (Save the Children, n.d.), and is based upon four guiding principles: Articles Two, Three, Six, and Twelve. Article Two expresses that children should never experience discrimination based on factors such as race, gender, sexual orientation, poverty. Article Three describes how the best interest of a child must always be considered regarding all matters that impact them. Article Six obliges governments to ensure every child has the right to life, survival, and development. Lastly, Article Twelve declares that children have the right to be heard and need to be taken seriously; there should not be a failure to acknowledge their voices because of their age (UNCRC, 1989). Each Article of provision stated in the Convention falls into the category of these four guiding principles. Moreover, Articles 1- 42 of the Convention refer to the individual rights for each child to ensure that they can receive a high standard of life. In addition, Articles 43-54 refer to the right-based obligations and responsibilities of the State Parties and their governments to warrant that these rights are adequately being followed and implemented (UNCRC, 1989). The Convention is further organized into three categories of provision, protection, and participation. The Articles regarding provisions are relevant to services and supplies that are required by children to achieve a good standard of living, such as health, education, and housing. The Articles under protection help

prevent children from being harmed, exploited, or abused. Lastly, Articles referring to participation present children with more autonomy to be involved with decisions that relate to them, and it provides them with opportunities to have their voices heard and respected (Bardy, 2019).

Lack of Youth Participation in the Development of the UNCRC

An interesting paradox occurred during the development and interpretation of the UNCRC (1989) with the lack of involvement and participation of children and youth even though its aim was to achieve this exact outcome. The Convention was developed and constructed by adults who used their voices to protect and advocate for children. Even though they recognized the importance of acknowledging the perspectives of children, “children were not directly involved to any significant extent in the drafting of the UNCRC” (Fairhall & Woods, 2021, p. 837). Quennerstedt et al. (2018) noted the lack of child involvement that occurred from the start of the drafting process which began in 1978 when the Polish government proposed a Convention on children’s rights to the UN Commission on Human Rights, a version deemed too representative of the Eastern orientation to rights with its stronger emphasis on socio-economical rights. On the contrary, the Western orientation towards rights meant keeping a focus towards civil and political rights, thus, the redrafting took place with a better balance to align both the Eastern and Western approaches. Then in 1979, the Commission on Human Rights created a working group consisting of state members and NGOs, who were responsible for drafting a newer version based on the consensus of Global North and Global South. There was a need for a considerable amount of negotiation and flexibility between the State Parties in this process. The process failed to include the discussion of any discrepancies or disagreements with children to

ensure that the instrument being made to protect children was fitting for them (Quennerstedt et al., 2018).

The Honorable Landon Pearson, Order of Canada

The Landon Pearson Research Centre for the Study of Childhood and Children's Rights is Canada's premier children's right center for the UNCRC academic exchange. Since opening, it has become a central thinktank for researchers, scholars, policymakers, practitioners, teachers, students, and other children's rights community members (Carleton University, 2023). Launched in 2006, it was founded by former Canadian Senator, the Honorable Landon Pearson O. C. upon her retirement from the Canadian Senate after Carleton University administrators invited her to establish a research center sharing her expertise, experiences, and resources. Senator Pearson had dedicated her life to working towards making changes for children by being involved in numerous government and non-governmental positions. However, Pearson was most widely known for her role as 'Canada's Senator for Children and Youth' (1994-2005) because of her sincere dedication to advocating for the well-being and rights of children. Prior to her time as a Senator, she was involved in the *Canadian Commission for the 1979 International Year of the Child* where she held the positions of the vice-chair and chief editor of the Commission's report *For Canada's Children - A National Agenda for Action*. It was during this same period that widespread understanding of the value of the international *Declaration on the Rights of the Child* transitioned into recognition of a greater need to develop the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* because of the obligations that would come with a more formal treaty and its monitoring processes (Global Affairs Canada, 2018; Landon Pearson Resource Centre, 2006). Pearson's

work on behalf of children has been extremely influential as she has aided in paving a pathway for the future of children that entails having equality and rights that are geared towards them.

Throughout her life, Pearson received numerous awards and significant recognition for the work she did for children (Global Affairs Canada, 2018; Landon Pearson Resource Centre, 2006; The Pearson Centre for Progressive Policy, 2021). Due to Pearson's continued effort to advocate for the rights of children, she became visible to political leaders by 1989 which presented new opportunities to work in collaboration nationally and internationally. During the 1990's, she was invited to go on a delegation to the *United Nations World Summit for Children* with Prime Minister Brian Mulroney and was subsequently appointed to the Canadian Senate in 1994 under Prime Minister Jean Chrétien who provided her with the additional international mandate to speak for all Canadian children. In 1998, she became the Personal Representative of the Prime Minister, and then she led the 2002 delegation for *UN's General Assembly Special Session on Children*. In 2004, she coordinated and produced a response to the special session titled *A Canada Fit for Children* (Human Resources and Social Development Canada, 2004). Additionally, she acquired the support of former Canadian Senator Al Graham who assured her that she was the signatory for every piece of legislation that was relevant to children.

Beyond her role as a Senator, Landon held multiple positions in numerous organizations, such as:

- President and chairperson for *Canada's Council on Children and Youth* (1984-1990)
- Founding member and chairperson of the *Canadian Coalition for Rights of Children* (1989-1994)
- Co-founder and chair of *Children Learning for Living*
- Vice-chair of the *Center for the Study of Children at Risk* at McMaster University

- Member of the Board of the *Canadian Paediatric Foundation*
- Executive Director of the *LPRC*

Furthermore, she continued to remain involved in the *STM* workshops up until the time of her passing in 2023 by taking personal initiative to ensure the reports co-constructed and co-produced by children and young people were received by the legislative and policy 'movers' they identified. In relation to *STM*, such 'movers' referred to those individuals who could most adequately and appropriately respond to the recommendations and concerns they presented. This was her way of making sure that the voices of the young people in the *STM* workshops were being clearly heard.

Her vision for the *LPRC* was to create a safe space for children and young people by promoting their participation in civic and political matters through providing them with opportunities and resources. Additionally, the center also prepares resources and opportunities for educators, decision-makers and advocates to aid in their efforts to facilitate rights-based environments for young people. Such resources include the international *Child Rights Academic Network* (CRAN) and the *Canadian Journal of Children's Rights* (CJCR), and even contain the resources produced by Landon Pearson during her time as the Senator of Canada (*Landon Pearson Resource Centre*, 2006).

What are the *Shaking the Movers* Workshops?

Based on the above history, development, and reporting process, it became obvious in the Canadian context that there was a need to find methods that allowed young people to have a platform to vocalize their unique experiences on the ground in any given nation, and one process through which children in Canada are given a platform is through the *Shaking the Movers*

(herein, *STM*) workshops. These events are organized by the Landon Pearson Resource Centre (LPRC) for the Study of Childhood and Children's Rights at Carlton University in Ottawa (Landon Pearson Resource Centre, 2006). The purpose of these workshops is to provide children and young people with a safe space where they can learn about and facilitate rights-based discussion, allowing them to acknowledge the occurrences they face when attempting to exercise their rights. *STM* workshops achieve this by taking on a youth-led and youth-driven approach and by engaging in a collaborative consultation model with young people. This puts young people and adults in partnership rather than reinforcing age-related power relations, a collaborative consultation approach which aligns with the principles of the sociology of childhood framework by recognizing children and young people as active and intelligent beings rather than passive recipients of the world. Emphasis is placed on youth participation by giving the young people an opportunity to facilitate the workshops, be the decision-makers, and craft the *STM* reports while being in partnership with adult stakeholders by utilizing them as services providers and support systems.

Within the *STM* reports, it is stated that the thematic selection for workshops is one way that youth participation and youth decision making is promoted. At the end of each workshop, the youth participants are consulted and asked what they think the following year's workshop should focus on. This allows the youth to make suggestions to emphasize issues they believe are the most important, and point out what needs to be discussed. The theme is then selected based on these suggestions, and it is finalized and released by the LPRC to the adult and youth facilitators so it can be applied, and the workshops can be appropriately organized.

The process of writing the *STM* reports first involves the selection of the report writer which is often a youth participant who is either an undergraduate or graduate student with good

writing skills. The report writer is given the responsibility of writing and taking detailed notes on the conversations and discussions that occur in the workshops and that includes capturing direct quotes, paraphrasing conversations while accurately presenting the views and perspectives of the other youth participants in the reports. Additionally, the report writer must draw on extra information from notes taken by facilitators and from other material such as posters, skits, etc. that were created during the workshop by the participants. At the end of the workshops, the report writer is given four weeks to complete and submit the reports. These reports are then published and available for public viewing and access on the LPRC website. The *STM* workshops are an annual two-day event that has transpired since their development in 2007 and consist of up to 25 participants aged eight to twenty-five years-of-age, including youth of different backgrounds and genders to make sure there is a presence of diverse experiences. Additionally, there are also *STM* mini-workshops, a current SSHRC-funded *STM* project, and lastly, the *STM* early childhood workshops developed to include the voices of children aged 3-7 years old (Pearson & Caputo, 2021).

For these workshops, the Lead Convener and the Lead Youth Facilitator collaborate to recruit participants. The Lead Convener is an individual who aids in planning the workshops, and they remain involved before and after the end of the workshops. This position is filled by someone knowledgeable and experienced with children's rights and working alongside children. They must be affiliated with an educational institution or organization that is related to children's rights, have access to a network of young people who can act as facilitators during the workshop and are able to create a safe space where children and young people can be involved and interact with each other. This role also comes with the responsibility of handling the logistics for a successful workshop by managing the budget, space, transportation of participants and meals,

while ensuring there are always lines of communication open to address any issues that may arise and keep the workshop organized. The Lead Convener must create a *STM* team which involves a lead youth organizer and a youth facilitator. The Lead youth facilitator is usually 25 years old and assists with administrative workshop planning and facilitation. The youth facilitators are typically high school or university students interested or knowledgeable in children's rights. The youth participants are recruited through social media posts, contacting community organizations with a youth focus, getting in touch with schools/universities that offer a rights-related course, and even encouraging youth to bring their friends or peers for more youth involvement (Pearson & Caputo, 2021). Lastly, there may be biases in the recruitment process of the youth, as the participants of the workshops can be influenced by the location of the workshop. This means that the participants can vary based on who the community consists of and impacted by those who are involved in the community organizations. For instance, if the workshop is held in a predominantly White middle-class community, it is more likely that a majority of participants will be White middle-class youth. Therefore, the views and opinions shared in the workshop may be reflective of that community. However, it is mentioned in the *STM* reports that there is an effort made in trying to have a diverse group of youth participants in order to minimize that bias.

This study will adopt and incorporate a thorough, systematic analysis through utilizing Foucault's (1981) critical discourse analysis of each of the 40 *STM* reports published to date from various locations across the length and breadth of Canada - such as Toronto, Ottawa, Iqaluit, British Columbia, Quebec, and the Maritimes - in both English and French wherever appropriate. This approach builds upon and differentiates from a previous thematic analysis of 15 *STM* reports, which was published for viewing in September 2021 on the LPRC website by

undergraduate students under the supervision of Dr. Daniella Bendo at Western University who highlighted the occurrence of themes related to specific topic relevant to *STM* workshops shared across 5 *STM* reports each (Bendo & Prince, 2021).

Research Rationale and Questions

Research on children's rights is often based on adult understanding and perception of this phenomenon (Swadener & Polakow, 2011); however, it is important to recognize how children understand the Convention that was specially made for them. To achieve this, it is necessary that there is a shift in the approach applied in conducting research on children, to conducting research with children by employing unique methodologies that allow children to present their experiences and views using their own voices that are not distilled or mediated by adults. This research intends to fill in this gap by moving away from using adult voices and assumptions, to instead, utilize the unique voices of over 1095 children and youth aged 4 – 24 years old across 40 *STM* reports from 2007-2021, where they are given “time and space to express and articulate their own concerns and wishes” (Swadener & Polakow, 2011, p. 708), after organizations had reached out to children with opportunities or posting about it on social media (Landon Pearson Resource Centre, 2006). This will assist in providing the most authentic understanding of the experiences, concerns and recommendations of young people. As the aim of this research is to understand how youth in Canada involved in the workshops understand and implement the Convention, the following questions have been crafted to guide the investigation and analysis of this study:

1. How do young people in partnership with adult stakeholders involved in the cross-Canada *Shaking the Movers* workshops understand and implement the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child?
 - a. What types of experiences and challenges do youth face while trying to access their rights?
 - b. What measures can be taken to address the barriers young people face and instead promote children's rights in relation to sociology of childhood?

This research will exclusively focus on the *STM* reports which are available for public access and viewing on the LPRC database rather than scoping out different workshops and organizations. This will maintain consistency between the guidelines of participants being used, the type of involvement youth had, and the consistency between how reports are constructed.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework adopted for this investigation is the sociology of childhood originally discussed by British authors Allison James and Alan Prout (1997). This framework was originally created in order to move beyond the adult-centred views of childhood found within Western bio-medical and developmental approaches which are based on rationality, naturalness, and the universality of childhood experiences. Previously, the dominant field of child developmental psychology was based on a linear understanding of children's maturation into adulthood. Rationality was "seen as a universal mark of adulthood with childhood representing the period of apprenticeship for its development" (James & Prout, 1997, p. 10). Childhood was merely a transition stage in an individual's life where they gained rationality through the skills and knowledge, they developed to be successful in their adult lives. James and

Prout (1997) further implied that childhood needs to be studied as a “biologically determined stage on the path to follow human status i.e., adulthood” (p. 10). The naturalness of the evolutionary model was one of the most dominant lenses to analyze children, and it was marked by universality. This meant that every single child, regardless of their culture, society, and environment, was expected to abide by the same Western-based developmental stages to be considered properly developed, and any child that was disorientated from this linear process was deemed as incompetent, and their success in adulthood was questioned.

The sociology of childhood is based on six key components that outline how this framework can be understood and adopted in research (James & Prout, 1997, p. 8):

1. Childhood is socially constructed. It is based on the social and cultural aspects of society; hence it is not universal. Childhood should be seen as something that is distinct from biological immaturity.
2. Childhood should be seen as its own variable for social analysis. However, it cannot be completely separated from other social variables.
3. Children and childhoods should be seen as worthy of study in their own right.
4. Children should be considered as active social agents in their lives, the people around them and the society they belong to.
5. Ethnography is the best research methodology for studying childhood. This allows children to use their direct voice and participate in the research.
6. The new paradigms of childhood should engage and respond to the process of childhood that is being reconstructed.

Through these six components, James and Prout (1997) contrasted the developmental paradigm that assumes children are “unfinished products in terms of physical and psychological development” (Gu, 2021, p. 479), indicating that they are only passive recipients of the experiences in their social world (Gu, 2021). Instead, sociologists of childhood created an analytical approach and a different lens that aids in re-contextualizing childhood experiences and understanding of children themselves as experts and co-constructors of their own worlds. The sociology of childhood approach gives attention to aspects of childhood that have mostly been neglected, ignored, or dismissed within psychologically dominant frameworks. Their contributions shifted the recognition of researchers and educators to a greater appreciation of the importance of social, political and historical influences on children, and the way that children as agents and competent beings in turn impact their own cultural and social worlds (James & Prout, 1997). This way of conceptualizing and analyzing children's experiences in research and education considers the wrongs that many children face through their lower status as a social group (Mayall, 2000), additionally, bringing awareness to the fact that childhood is often simply a reflection of adult agendas and systems of control. “How children live their childhoods looks heavily structured by what adults want of childhood” says Mayall (2000, p. 248). In the current era, adult understandings are no longer enough to define what children need and desire, as their own views can serve to fulfill their own intentions and purposes, especially in implementing new social policies and practices. This framework assists in illuminating how the naturalness associated with childhood can be used to justify the control that adults have on children based on potential positive outcomes and pre-conceived societal expectations. The sociology of childhood further respects how children and childhood vary across different times and social structures (Mayall, 2000).

In this regard, the conceptual framework based on the works of James & Prout (1997) allowed this research to move away from adult-centered understandings of children and childhood, and instead allowed me as the researcher to take on an approach that understands the importance of acknowledging the unique voices and experiences of children. This approach is the most is appropriate to conduct deeper critical analysis of the various youth voices contained in the 40 *STM* reports, and particularly in consideration of the different provincial and territorial locations of workshops over the past 15 years. During these years, it could be expected that each child and young person involved in the workshops would bring very different experiences of rights based on the social characteristics of where they were situated. Overall, the sociology of childhood allows a more complete understanding and analysis of these cross-national, rights-based workshops as a unique and separate discourse within the Canadian political context.

Overall, this chapter intended to provide crucial background information on the UNCRC and the Shaking the Movers workshops, both of which are essential for the context of this study. It highlights the central research question “How do young people in partnership with adult stakeholders involved in the cross-Canada Shaking the Movers workshops understand and implement the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child?”, Lastly this chapter provides insight into utilizing sociology as the theoretical framework for this study.

In the following chapters, this thesis will go into a comprehensive exploration of how young people involved in the cross-Canada *Shaking the Movers* workshops understand and experience their rights. Chapter 2 will provide a thorough review of the relevant literature by delving into the present experiences that children have with their rights. This review includes an examination of the different factors that create barriers and impact children’s ability to access

their rights. Additionally, it provides broader global context by specially drawing upon studies that are focused on Nordic regions, global South and North America to explore how children's rights are implemented across different state parties.

Next, chapter 3 will present how a Foucauldian discourse analysis (FDA) employed as the methodological framework, which was applied through the utilization of Willig's (2013) six-stage approach. This chapter additionally goes in-depth about the data analysis procedure and analytical techniques used to address the research questions.

Chapters 4 and 5, will present the findings of the study in a coherent manner. Chapter 4 will focus on the five themes that were found through conducting the Foucauldian discourse analysis. It will offer in-depth insights into how children do and do not discuss their rights, and how deeply the power dynamics between children and adults impact children's ability to access their rights. Chapter 5 will then shift the focus to discussing the findings in relation to sociology of childhood to further deepen the understanding of how adult perceptions on children and childhood can influence with behaviours and attitudes towards children and their rights.

Finally, chapter 6 will draw conclusions from the study's findings, and mention their implications to the field of children's right and discuss the limitations and future direction for this study.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

The UNCRC was ratified and implemented to serve and protect all children and young people (UNCRC, 1989); however, in all State Parties, successful implementation requires partnership between young people and adults due to the responsibilities and obligations placed on adults. Obviously, key adult stakeholders play impactful and significant roles in determining

how much awareness and how accessible rights are to children themselves. Though such partnerships are more often constrained by age-related power relations, many adults make these rights more difficult to access because of barriers that are created needlessly. For instance, in Canada, the UNCRC was ratified in 1991, however, it is still not a well-known Convention. “Repeatedly since that time the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child has recommended ‘nationwide education’ be undertaken to inform both children and adults regarding ‘the principles and provisions’ of the treaty” (Mitchell & McCusker, 2008, p. 160). Multiple reports such as those under UNCRC (1989) Articles 44 and 45 from the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child Concluding Observations, human rights reports, and non-governmental organizations collectively indicate that adults, and governments of State Parties, have failed to fulfill these responsibilities (Lansdown, 2009; Vaghri et al., 2022), as “many governments do not take their responsibilities seriously and others are slow to implement change” (Reading et al., 2009, p. 229), which results in children’s rights being valued differently within each State Party. This is an indication that there is a different level of respect attributed to them around the globe. Various factors such as history, society, culture or politics of a State Party can influence how children’s rights are understood and respected. One example is in Canada, the ratifying of the Convention indicates that Canadian society recognizes that children are important. However, historically, there has always been an understanding that children are the future, which means the policies and legislations regarding children are made to reflect this and benefit them in the future, when they reach adulthood. This understanding further reinforces the idea that children are “objects of concern to be protected,” which creates barriers in fostering an environment and “culture of rights and responsibility” (Senate of Canada, 2007, p. 24).

To begin with, the understanding that children are the future is evident in the way research has shown young people and adults to perceive children's rights. To fully explore the phenomenon of children's rights, it is necessary to address the obligations and responsibilities adults have towards children, factors that impact children's rights, and how children's rights are perceived in different parts of the world, aiding in understanding the fundamental lack of awareness there is around rights. Previous research, including systematic literature reviews, research surveys and official organizational reports, have acknowledged and explored these issues, and much of this research indicates that "there is very little knowledge of the Convention outside academic and advocacy circles" (Senate of Canada, 2007, p. 195). Children and adults lack even a fundamental awareness due to minimal education about children's rights at all levels (Mitchell, 2005, 2010, 2015; Senate of Canada, 2007) which is often the root cause of the violations young people face regarding their rights (Senate of Canada, 2007). These concerns have been raised repeatedly over the years in UN Committee Concluding Observation reports on Canada (1995, 2003, 2012, 2022), which has been done accordingly with the reporting principles article 44 and 45 of the Convention (1989).

UNCRC Reporting Process

The reporting cycle refers to the obligations that State Parties have to submit reports regarding their implementation efforts to the Committee. It is created on the basis of Article 44 and 45 of the Convention which are referred to as the reporting principles. Article 44 mandates that State Parties report the measures they have taken and the progress they made to adopt the Convention, and this must be done every five years. Article 45 states that to ensure proper implementation of the Convention, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child can provide

State Parties with recommendations and concerns relevant to better implementation efforts. This makes it necessary for each signatory to submit a report regarding their implementation of the Convention to the Committee. The Committee consists of eighteen members who are considered to have a high moral standing and an adequate understanding of the Convention, and once Committee members are elected, they serve for a term of four years. The Committee is created in accordance with Article 43 of the Convention which provides guidelines such as how many members the Committee will be comprised of, who should be elected, how they should be elected to promote geographical equitability, and how long members can serve (UNCRC, 1989).

The reporting cycle is what allows the Committee to monitor the progress of each State Party and how well they are implementing the Convention. Within each reporting cycle, State Parties submit written reports based on a series of questions related to the issues and successes related to children's rights (Child Rights Connect, 2019). There is still no mandatory requirement of youth voices and experiences. Instead, the Committee now welcomes additional written or oral reports/information that is submitted by child organizations or children's representatives. Additionally, "it must be recognised that the child's participation in the review process is a right, not an obligation" (Vaghri et al., 2022, p. 188), which means a young person's participation should be completely up to their own discretion, and it should not be forced upon them. These reports are then reviewed by the Committee. In this review process, children have the opportunity to contribute by participating in pre-sessional working groups or in private meetings with Committee members. Furthermore, the Committee even draws on children's voices through consultations and online surveys to gather the perspectives of children during the drafting process of the general comments. After obtaining sufficient information, the Committee discusses and presents recommendations on how to better follow the rights-based obligations that

are presented in the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child Concluding Observations reports. Although there is involvement of children in the reporting process, the 2019 *Global Status of Engagement in Reporting to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child* has still reached the conclusion that within the reporting process “child participation continues to remain limited, ad-hoc and is rarely child-led” (Dimmock, 2021, p. x), and it often occurs for the specific purpose of including child participation (Dimmock, 2021).

The fundamental lack of awareness, and education on the Convention has been reported in the 1995, 2003, and 2012 UN Concluding Observations Reports, and once again cited in the most recent 2022 UN Concluding Observations Report on Canada by the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child which explicitly stated that there is still an “insufficient awareness of the Convention among adults and children in the State party” (para. 14). Specifically in Canada, there needs to be work done at the “federal and provincial and territorial levels to ensure that the Convention and the Optional Protocols thereto are widely known by the public, including parents and children themselves” (para. 14). The nearly complete lack of awareness of the UNCRC extends to all those currently employed in systems with children “including government officials, judicial authorities, and professionals who work with children in health and social services” (para. 14). The presence of continuing serious concerns surrounding failed responsibilities of adult gate keepers in Canada has been noted by the UN Committee over decades and emphasizes the importance of this study. The consequences of similar local actions could actually make “the principles and provisions of the Convention widely known by appropriate and active means” (Article 42; see also Mitchell, 2005, 2010) and offer an understanding of how better implementation of the Convention can occur.

Lack of Awareness and Education

An overarching global issue pertaining to children's rights is the lack of overall awareness surrounding the treaty in so many settings. "This global unawareness of children's rights indicates that UN member states have failed" (af Ursin & Haanpää, 2017, p. 1438). State Parties across the world according to af Ursin and Haanpää (2017) have been unable "to accomplish the goals of educating all children about their human rights" (p. 1438) and this is extremely problematic as this lack often translates into complete inaccessibility to rights for so many groups of young people. "Rights holders must have knowledge of their rights and knowledge of how to exercise them if those rights are to be meaningful" (Vaghri et al., 2022, p. 425). In other words, if children are not aware of their rights, they cannot exercise or speak up against violations of those rights. A study was conducted by Orr et al. (2016) to survey 1606 children across 60 countries around the world in order to gain insight into how young people understand their civil and political rights. The results of the study indicated that children lack education and knowledge, but they have a desire to learn about their rights and "are interested in engaging in civic action in order to improve their lives" (Orr et al., p. 2) by exercising their civil and political rights. However, they believe "adults often act as gatekeepers to these activities, deciding whether, how and when children get to engage in civic action" (Orr et al., p. 2), and this gives adults the power to create barriers to prevent them from being able to access their rights. Children believe that they must rely on adults to access their rights due to an unequal distribution of power between young people and adults because "children reported a dependency on adults to source information they needed" (Orr et al., p. 23). In the role of a caregiver or authority figure, adults have the ability to decide when, how, and to what extent a child can exercise their rights, and this means "actions that are open to adults are often restricted for children due to others'

concerns about their competence or safety” (Orr et al., p. 2), making rights-based opportunities and spaces inaccessible.

Moreover, children can also be dependent on adults to understand their rights. For instance, before the introduction of child-friendly versions of the Convention (UNCRC, 1989), the legal language used to write it was too complex for many young people to fully understand. “Children reported a need for adults to translate information in ways that they would understand it” (Orr et al., 2016, p. 25). This meant that they had to rely on adults to break it down and simplify it for them so that they could access it, and initially, this occurred because of the lack of youth participation in the development process and creation of the Convention (Fairhall & Woods, 2021). Such issues can persist due to added obstacles such as language barriers, while there is also a possibility that children are not able to obtain the Convention in their language. Further, not every child has the privilege to access resources like the internet, which means some “children have restricted access to information” (Orr et al., 2016, p. 2), thereby creating the prospect of them not being able to acquire any knowledge of the UNCRC. Such levels of dependency that children have on adults can result in the absence of the same types of opportunities for all children (particularly those deemed to be vulnerable) to exercise and participate in their rights as their adult family members and neighbours. This makes it vital for children to have the support of the adults around them, such as numerous professionals who work with children and parents, or even increasing the visibility of NGOs and small initiatives (Orr et al., 2016). This could make an immense difference regarding being aware of their rights and the opportunities to participate in them.

Adult Responsibilities and Obligations

Adults are an essential determinant of how children can access their rights, as the concept and understanding of children's rights often begin with the perspectives that adults have, which can become the foundation of the knowledge that children obtain. Adults hold a level of power that allows them to determine what is best for the child, however "the adults' perspective as a starting point for the best interests of the child is at odds with children's active participation" (Jevtic & Visković, 2021, p. 59). The beliefs that adults have about what is in the best interest for children can create barriers and prevent children from being able to participate and access their rights. Adults can use their perspectives to undermine a child's understanding and beliefs of what is in their own best interest through the justification that a child's biological immaturity renders them incapable of understanding what is best for them, and that adults themselves know better (Jevtic & Visković, 2021). This implies that children's understanding of their rights can be an extension of adults' values. If children are in a space where their rights are not valued, it is more common for children to disregard the importance of their own rights. Dunhill (2018) has found that "the children who did not participate in the rights-based education programme acknowledged rights in terms of 'wants'" (p. 18). Their lack of understanding, access, or education about their rights can put them in a position where they can begin to see rights as a privilege rather than a need, or in other cases, they may not even realize they have rights.

The lack of awareness and inconsistency of how children learn and understand their rights violates Article 42 of the Convention. According to Article 42 of the Convention, adults are required to take all appropriate measures to make the Convention known to other adults and children, as the knowledge of the Convention is what makes it accessible to society. "Child rights efforts will fail if the adults who nurture and care for children are not cognizant of their rights and familiar with their obligations as duty-bearers to children" (Vaghri et al., 2022, p.

428). Therefore, adults in governmental and authority positions are obliged to ensure that children are protected from abuse and exploitation, can participate in society, and are given the necessary provisions to live a good quality of life (UNCRC, 1989). Children not being aware of their rights is a direct result of adults not being able to fulfill their responsibilities and obligation of taking appropriate measures to ensure that children understand their rights. Since they are not fully aware of their rights, they will not be able to speak up against any rights violations they face. In the discussion of the violation of Article 42 (UNCRC, 1989), Fairhall and Woods (2021) brought up an important question of “if many children do not know about them, or feel adults know and/or respect them, how can they be truly protected, provided and promoted?” In contrast, Dunhill (2018) describes how an adequate understanding of the Convention can put young people in a position to recognize when their rights are being infringed, demand change and stand up for themselves. This can further create spaces for them to discuss their rights with other like-minded youth and adults. When children are in a space that values rights, they begin to understand that they are important and necessary for their well-being.

Adult Perceptions of Children’s Human Rights

Since adults consistently fail to fulfill their obligations and responsibilities towards children, it becomes vital to recognize their perceptions of children’s rights. The majority of adults hold on to an understanding of children as innocent beings who must be protected, causing them to believe that they can better make decisions for the child, in relation to their best interest, compared to the child themselves. “Childhood as social status is defined within the generational order as inferior to adulthood” (Mayall, 2000, p. 248). This understanding stems from adults thinking about children being incompetent, emotionally unstable and unreliable, resulting in

them denying children their rights. Although this denial may not be a conscious effort, it is rooted in their lack of trust in the child's development and maturity (Mayall, 2000). For example, adults may not take children seriously and dismiss their thoughts or questions. In other cases, adults can hold firm beliefs that children should not be exposed to sensitive topics because the child may not be able to handle them. This creates barriers preventing children from receiving education and knowledge about their rights or issues pertaining to them. According to Orr et al. (2016),

Some children in the FGDs (focus group discussions) also reported that there were additional difficulties accessing information on issues that are sensitive. Sometimes the challenge was getting that information (one example related to the reasons why children drop-out of school). In other instances, the barrier was that adults such as their parents and community elders did not take them seriously when they asked for information or thought that they should not be discussing certain issues and discouraged them from seeking information. (p. 25)

Issues that are difficult to address can be completely dismissed by adults. This attempt to protect children often turns into preventing them from understanding the whole truth. In Orr et al's (2016) study, a child stated that, "some issues like child marriages are difficult to address, even community elders do not encourage us to discuss those" (p. 25), so child marriages are not discussed because they are difficult to talk about. Orr et al. found that even though children were the ones who are directly impacted by this, there was a refusal to discuss or inform them about it because adults believe that by doing so, they are helping the child stay safe. However, in reality, this scenario reflects the power relations between adults and children, where children are

expected to do as adults say because adults assume that they know what is best for the child. It must be acknowledged that this cognizance can derive from the historically constructed and widely believed understanding of children as innocent beings who must be protected because of the “expectation for what children’s experiences “should” be like” (Garlen, 2019, p. 55).

Therefore, adults believe they need to maintain responsibility for children to ensure that they become fully functioning members of society. They believe this is done by taking away their agency and telling them what to do rather than giving them more independence. These strongly held and outdated beliefs can make it difficult for adults to re-conceptualize their understanding of children as innocent beings to children as capable rights holders (Garlen, 2019).

Adults may be hesitant and create additional barriers for children due to fears which stem from their misunderstanding that giving children too many rights may result in them losing their power over children. This loss of power takes away their ability to ‘protect’ the children. This further redistributes the power between adults and children and compromises their adult-ist understanding of children, making them fear that children may be corrupted with more agency and independence (Garlen, 2019). However, Dunhill (2018) states, “these criticisms are from misinterpretations as nowhere in the Convention does it state that children should be educated to have responsibilities, nor does it say that the rights of the child eliminate the rights of parents” (p. 18). Creating more access for children does redistribute the power between children and adults. However, this occurs with the purpose of preventing children from being exploited and abused by those in power. Creating more access to rights-based education for children will not result in youth being unruly or corrupted (Garlen, 2019).

Factors Impacting Children’s Rights

Access to children's rights can be determined by the different historical, cultural, political and economic states of State Parties, which may result in rights being treated as a privilege rather than a necessity for children. In one extremely complex situation, the perspectives adults and children have on their rights can be a reflection of their circumstances. For example, suppose children belong to State Parties with a population who predominantly has a very low Socio-Economic Status (SES). These children may be subjected to child labour, face significant abuse and exploitation, and be denied provisions such as health care, education or even proper nutrition. In this case, adults may not see the value in children's rights because, in their perspectives, "Children are constructed as objects of development, as adults in the making, valued for future economic contributions, rather than considerations of children's rights and social justice" (Nolan & Pells, 2020, p. 121). They may understand that providing children with access to their rights can result in significant loss for them and the economic growth or progress of their State. Instead of being seen as rights-bearing citizens, children are viewed as human capital, so they become an investment for the economical production and growth of the country. Children can be used as a tactic to contribute to poverty reduction (Nolan & Pells, 2020). This perception of children can justify the exploitation of children for a country's financial gain because the country's economic state is deemed more important than ensuring children have access to their rights. Additionally, even if children or adults may be aware of the Convention, they can be put into a position where they cannot appreciate the value of the Convention because, to them, choosing their rights can mean losing their daily source of income, especially when children are the sole providers of their family. Overall, the relationship between children's rights and low SES is an extremely under-studied domain; very limited literature and research exist that can help aid in addressing these issues (Nolan & Pells, 2020, p. 117). There is a level

of involvement needed from both State Party actors and non-state-party actors because “Child poverty can be approached as both a cause and consequence of ESR (economic-social rights) violations” (Nolan & Pells, 2020, p. 117). The lack of funding and resources and the deep-rooted economic structures in the country can result in children not being able to access rights (Nolan & Pells, 2020).

Children’s rights and culture can be a very complicated domain. Different societies have different cultural and historical beliefs, traditions, and values, which in reality can be very harmful practices toward a child. They can directly contradict Article 18 of the Convention, which states that adults must act in the child’s best interest. Instead of honouring this Article, parents or caregivers abuse their power over their children by committing harmful practices on “very young children or infants, who are clearly lacking the capacity to consent or to refuse consent themselves” (Becker et al., 2012, p. 1). These can be babies, or very young children, who are powerless against the adults who force these acts upon them, so their consent is not even considered. Some of these harmful cultural and traditional practices include but are not limited to child marriages or female genital mutilation (FGM), which can be justified for their protection, even though they can endanger the child’s life (Becker et al., 2012, see pages 19 - 39). Further normalizing and justifying extreme violence on a physical and mental level toward children (Becker et al., 2012). However, in turn, the UN committee make it an obligation that all effective measures are taken “to abolish traditional practices harmful to child health” (Vaghri et al., 2022, p. 213). Lastly, Little et al. (2014) touches on the consequences of rejecting cultural norms and traditions which builds upon how opposing these practices can be extremely difficult because that can mean rejecting a culture that has been supported and reinforced intergenerationally through history or through religion. These actions can then lead to a life of isolation and

ostracization of children because these acts hold significant value as they are created and continued based on social consensus. The social acceptance of these harmful practices is used to govern children even though they can negatively impact them.

Perceptions of Children's Rights in the Global South

Recognizing the different ways children's rights are perceived around the globe is valuable to this research, as it provides broader context to this Canadian study. It provides information on how widely children's rights are respected, and how successfully they are being implemented. To begin with, a study conducted by researchers Jamieson, Collins and Wright (2022), in association with the International and Canadian Child Rights Partnership (ICCRP) focused on participants from Brazil, China and South Africa to better recognize the perspectives surrounding children's rights in the Global South. ICCRP was established in 2015 after an international conference exploring children's rights to participation and protection was held at Toronto Metropolitan University (TMU). This organization now involves 39 researchers and 30 partner organizations from different universities, NGOs, major human rights institutions, and governments in Canada and multiple countries across North America, Africa, Europe, Asia, and Oceania. The organization has a primary focus of analyzing how "intergenerational relationships can transcend current barriers to implementing children's rights through intergenerational partnerships, in research, policy, and practice" (ICCRP, 2022, para.1). Their website is organized by TMU, which consists of additional news and resources published for public access.

During this investigation, Jamieson et al. focused on the voices of children and adults in three different contexts to gain an understanding of their perspectives and experiences of 'participating together' by conducting case studies. The word 'participation' was conceptualized

differently within each country and was based on the social location of the participants to make it more relevant and specific to them. ‘Participating together’ in China was related to education and “respect for parents’ decisions about their lives” (Jamieson et al., 2022, p. 56). In South Africa, it was relevant to “respect and duty to elders and community,” and in Brazil, it was associated with “young people’s autonomy and public policy” (Jamieson et al., 2022, p. 56). Thus, participation was relevant to and constructed by each country’s respective cultures and societies.

Results further indicated that the “participants in the Chinese case stated that children’s participation reflects the priorities of Confucianism” (Jamieson et al., 2022, p. 63). In explaining the term Confucianism, Angle (2022) simplified the term by describing it as “a way for humans to live together in our world: a way characterized at its best by joy, beauty, and harmony” (p. 5), and this aligns with collectivist values. Jamieson et al. (2022) found that the goal of this community was not so much to facilitate autonomy for children, but to find ways to fulfil the needs and requirements of the collective community. In this national context, children’s perceptions about their rights “were linked with their parents’ acceptance and priorities” (p. 64). Those in the study recognized that their right to participation is relevant to fulfilling their duties towards the adults in their lives. This means respecting and supporting the decisions and concerns adults have regarding their lives (Jamieson et al., 2022). On the other hand, due to the collective nature of that particular Chinese community, it was also implied that adult perceptions of children’s rights and participation are indeed understood in relation to the entire society, not solely for their children. It is instead a matter of prioritization, where the overall needs of the society hold more value than just the children. Once the community’s main priorities are addressed and solved, the concerns revolving around children’s rights can be addressed. Children’s perception of their rights reflects what adults teach them to value. In the case of China

specifically, children are taught to value the needs of their community over themselves. This collectivist approach can be beneficial for those who fit into the majority, as their needs are prioritized; however, it can create issues for those who are a minority because a smaller percentage of the community will have the same needs, so they are less likely to be addressed (Jamieson et al., 2022).

These collectivist views were also reflected in China's UN Committee on the Rights of the Child Concluding Observation report (2005). As there is a stronger value placed on community rather than social group, the laws and policies reflect that "While welcoming the significant progress made with respect to legislative reform in mainland China, the Committee is concerned that not all laws applicable to children fully conform to the Convention" (para. 10). The laws in China do not always respect the Convention, and they can work to benefit the entire society rather than ensuring respect for children's rights. In fact, "children and parents themselves, have limited awareness and understanding of the Convention" (para. 24), in addition to professionals who work with children; therefore, they may not be sensitive about violating laws that are justified for the greater good of everyone. As they do for many countries including Canada, in order to resolve this, the Committee recommends systematic training about children's rights and the adoption of children's rights material in schools and expanding non-governmental organizations that promote and advocate for children's rights (UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2005). Such changes can better teach the population about the importance of children's rights and why they should not be sacrificed for the community's needs.

In South Africa, Jamieson et al. (2022) found some similarities to China in that there were also strong values centred in the collective community. However, in South Africa there was a "we are all in this together approach" (p. 70) which meant that both children and adults valued

a space where everyone was included, both the privileged and unprivileged, and they believed that working together would allow them to fulfill their needs. Furthermore, in South Africa, children and adults understood that participation is fundamental to fulfilling the rest of their rights, such as protection and an acknowledgement that both children and adults must work together to accomplish this. However, some adults were supportive and in favour of children's rights while some perceived children's rights from a more pessimistic viewpoint. They viewed the concept of rights as a way to diminish the power of adults and take away their respect and roles as authority figures. They did not believe that children should be equal to them as some adults explicitly stated that, "you're giving too much power to children to be equal to us, what will be our authority be over them, how will we separate ourselves, how will we hold onto that notion of respect?" (Jamieson et al., 2022, p. 10), an expression of fear of losing control and power over children once children were given rights.

The 2016 UN Committee Concluding Observations of South Africa observes that children's rights are not treated as a priority, but notes that efforts are still being made to implement the Convention. The Committee appreciates that there has been an "adoption of a number of new legislative acts and institutional and policy measures related to children's rights since its last review" (para. 4), in addition to the ratification of the optional protocol that has occurred. This displays a changing attitude towards children's rights and increased value and understanding of the importance of the Convention. There are still concerns regarding the success of those policies, and further changes are required for successful implementation. Successful implementation can occur through better systematic collaboration between civil society and organizations that work on and develop "laws, policies and programmes relevant to the implementation of the Convention" (para. 17a), but this can be difficult due to the limited

number of resources that are available to them. Overall, there are still many concerns and recommendations posed by the Committee. Still, the Committee also noted that there have been changes and efforts to better implement the Convention in South Africa.

Lastly, in Brazil the results differed as there were adults who viewed rights as a threat to children's safety which led them to be unsupportive towards their children's participation and involvement in their community on a political level. Parents thought their child's right to participate in society would make them more vulnerable to "be exploited by politicians" (Jamieson et al., p. 64), or get involved with people who were not socially accepted, such as children from other religions or children who would be 'bad influences.' Additionally, some parents did not recognize the benefits that children could achieve from being able to participate in the community. Children faced the challenge of the need to choose between acting in their right to participate or receiving parental approval.

The most recent UN Concluding Observations report for Brazil (2015) reflected the views that adults had for children's safety in relation to their rights, and most relevant to violations and recommendations for improvement the Committee suggested. In Brazil, significant violence occurs against children, particularly by the police. The Committee pointed out the need for better efforts towards "prohibition on the arbitrary arrest of children in street situations and their institutionalization without judicial authorization" (para. 84a), and torturing them physically, sexually, and emotionally at police stations and detention centers. These concerns relating to violence towards children by the police justifies why Brazilian parents in the Jamieson et al.'s (2022) study stated that they are afraid of their children participating in society, as this exposes them as greater targets for exploitation from police officers. When children

participate in society, this can mean speaking up against adults in power, which can result in the use of force to shut children down.

Furthermore, the Committee stated that Brazil needs to take children's rights more seriously, especially regarding policy, with proposed policy changes not being well thought-out. As is the case in many regions, there is a need for enhanced efforts towards creating awareness about the Convention across Brazilian society to inform the children that they have rights and can better recognize when those rights are being violated. Overall, in Brazil, the Committee noted the need for better collaboration between civil society and the Convention for fewer child rights violations. Children should be able to participate in society and their rights without needing to fear for their life (UN Concluding Observations on Brazil, 2015).

Perceptions of Children's Rights in Nordic Regions

The Nordic Council of Ministers (2020) crafted a report entitled *Do Rights! Nordic Perspectives on Child and Youth Participation* revealing how Nordic countries are making strong implementation efforts of the Convention to protect children's rights. This report breaks down the perspectives of child participation in nine different countries, noting how each country achieves their individual efforts in unique ways despite having similar cultures. Examples of this approach to implementation come from Iceland, Norway and Finland who have each incorporated the Convention into national laws and thus, have formally committed to applying the Convention directly in the lives of both adults and children. This indicates that the adults in these countries understand that protecting and making children's rights accessible is an obligation they must fulfill. They further hold an "understanding of the fact that children and

young people are fellow citizens, have rights, and are equal members of our democracy” (Nordic Council of Ministers, p. 11).

In these nine Nordic countries, there is also an indication that adults perceive children’s rights with value. They believe that children should be able to access and participate in their rights which has resulted in the Danish government creating the National Council for Children which is “a government agency set up to promote and protect children and young people’s rights” (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2020, p. 15). The presence of such designated local councils also allows for the creation of public spaces to discuss children’s rights and issues while making room “to give children a distinctive voice in public debates” (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2020, p. 15). The adults understand that the voices and views of children discussing their experiences will provide everyone with unique insights emphasizing the importance of involvement of all children. By not including those in minority group, it excludes certain voices, for example, “by not having an LGBTQ perspective, they were excluding certain young people” (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2020, p. 63). It is necessary to include all youth in order to address and fulfill the needs of all children. Additionally, “the Nordic Council of Ministers seeks to protect and promote the rights...and to provide opportunities for them to exercise these rights and participate in society” (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2020, p. 5). Adults further mentioned how making children’s rights accessible is not only about creating spaces and opportunities. It is also about children taking the initiative to act and participate in society when given opportunities. Lastly, some adults mentioned they are beginning to realize that “We are in the midst of a paradigm shift. We are beginning to see children as the ones with the most knowledge about their own lives” (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2020, p. 59). This acknowledgement emphasizes how important it is to listen to children’s voices, and no longer treat them as an

afterthought. Their involvement is slowly shifting into a priority especially in matters that are directly related to them.

There was also recognition that a lack of access to children's rights can stem simply from children's rights not being prioritized. Even if adults believe in and support children's rights, if they are not a priority, the concerns surrounding children's rights will fall behind or be dismissed (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2020). This report mentions three ways that children's rights can fall behind. The first is due to the lack of assessments that "listen to the views of the children who are directly or indirectly affected" by societal issues. The second way is related to children not being involved in societal processes until it is too late. For instance, during the development process of a town "children are not brought in until the process is finished or almost finished" so their views are not taken into account. Lastly, there is minimal effort to obtain feedback from children to ensure that their views are heard and respected (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2020, p.81). In other cases, adults acknowledge that there can be concerns with making children's rights accessible due to the limited knowledge children and adults have. When people are unaware that children have rights, they cannot work toward making them accessible, and they are unintentionally infringed on. In some cases, it is not always about "the lack of will, but lack of knowledge" (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2020, p. 39). Knowledge about rights gives adults and children the power to access and participate in their rights. Children depend on adults to learn about their rights, so adults must ensure they have a full understanding of their rights to educate them. "Children and young people must be provided with full, accessible, diversity-sensitive and age-appropriate information" about their rights (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2020, p. 10). The tools and resources adults use to teach children about their rights must be accessible to them in a manner where children can understand these materials.

Interestingly, in this 2020 report, children's perceptions of their rights are related to the benefits and value of participation. Nordic findings differed significantly from children's perceptions in Brazil, South Africa and China, and demonstrate ways through which their governments and societal structures actively advocate and promote the understanding that participation is essential and valuable. Participation can be empowering, giving children a sense of purpose and an opportunity to feel like they matter, and their voices make a difference. Children discussed how participating in society is valuable because it can provide a unique child-centred experience, which differs from the adult experience. "The only way to get the child's perspective on an issue is to listen to the child" (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2020, p. 8). However, young people believe their participation should not occur for the sole purpose of including children, but there needs to be intention to take the young people seriously. Children can also feel that adults have too much control over their lives and need more agency. Participating can allow them to take more ownership of their lives and feel less like their lives are entirely dictated by adults, especially when adults mistreat them. Such poor treatment can make children feel like the adults do not think they are capable or worthy of sharing their opinions, thereby creating barriers for them to access their rights.

According to the recent UN Committee on the Rights of the Child Concluding Observations of Iceland (2022), this State Party has made apparent efforts to successfully implement and apply the Convention through its "efforts to promote child participation in decision-making processes, including the preparation of the State Party's report" (para. 17). This is a clear indication of the value of children's rights in the State. Since adults understand that children's rights are essential and valuable, they have woven a path to make it possible for children to participate in their rights. Adults' perceptions of children's rights are reflected in their

actions and the observations made by the Committee. However, one concern that the Committee notes in the Concluding Observations is “that younger children are not always given the opportunity to have their views heard in all matters concerning them” (para. 17). This means there can be situations where the voices of all children are not heard, and this is true in the case of younger children. Due to age and assumed biological maturity, the voices of older youth can be prioritized over younger children. Instead, they should be treated as equally valuable because they both provide insight into the experiences of childhood.

Perceptions of Children’s Rights in North America

In North America, children’s rights are treated very differently in Canada and the USA; however, they both have a common trait of not giving enough value to the Convention. Even though the Convention was signed and ratified in Canada, the country is still slacking in its implementation efforts. In 2007, the Final Report of the Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights called *Children: The Silenced Citizens Effective Implementation of Canada’s International Obligations with Respect to the Rights of Children* was published. This report contains a comprehensive study on Canada’s international obligations towards the UNCRC and children’s rights. This study assessed Canada’s implementation efforts, how Canadian children were benefiting from the Convention and whether the Convention was being used to address the issues of Canadian youth. The results of this study further proved Canada’s failure to implement the Convention and respect children’s rights. Due to this, many children and “Canadians are too often unaware of the rights enshrined in the Convention” (p. 193), because of the lack of education they receive about the Convention. Furthermore, they do not know what to do or whom to go to when their rights are violated. In the study, it was reported that “Youth appearing

before our Committee also emphasized that they do not know about the resources, services and complaints mechanisms available for youth” (Senate of Canada, 2007, p. 199). Children feel as though they are not taken seriously when they try to participate in society and use their voices. They are often dismissed based on their assumed biological immaturity and age, which directly violates the Convention. Lastly, children in Canada feel they lack spaces to have rights-based discussions about rights, and “they may not be given space to voice their concerns either” (Senate of Canada, 2007, p. 30), preventing them from learning about their rights and stating their concerns or recommendations.

Children’s understanding of their rights stems from the value adults place on their rights and how successfully they can fulfill their obligations under the Convention. In Canada, adult stakeholders such as policymakers, politicians and educators often lack knowledge about children’s rights. The report states that “numerous witnesses emphasized the need to provide better training for all professionals dealing with children and children’s issues” (Senate of Canada, 2007, p. 201). They lack the necessary knowledge to be able to respect and teach children about their rights. These adults further treat children’s rights as a privilege rather than a necessity based on their lack of effort to ensure the Convention is being implemented. The societal structures in Canada support this, as many of them do not even incorporate or consider the Convention. For example, there is still no policy mandating that children learn about their rights in school, even though it is one of the most influential and important social institutions that children partake in, and previous Concluding Observation reports have already recommended that “human rights education, including in children’s rights, is incorporated into the school curricula” (UN Concluding Observations on Canada, 2003, para. 45b), which means there is no guaranteed way for children to learn about their rights. However, there is a slight shift in this as

NGOs and smaller initiatives such as *STM* workshops have taken the responsibility to advocate for children and create rights-based spaces for children, but a concern is that they may not be accessible to all children.

The 2022 UN Committee Concluding Observations report for Canada reiterates a significant lack of awareness of the Convention from adults, children and professionals who work with children. The report has noted, “the insufficient levels of awareness of the Convention among adults and children in the State Party” (para. 14). The lack of awareness is a significant factors that makes rights violations possible. If children or adults do not know what rights children have, they cannot advocate or stand up for violations against them. The Committee also states that in order to make changes that allow children to better access their rights, changes must be made across all levels of government by adopting “a national strategy that provides a comprehensive implementation framework for the federal, provincial and territorial levels of government” (para. 8). Such framework can allow Canada to better fulfill its responsibility and obligations towards the Convention and children. When the government works in cooperation with civil society, such as organizations and initiatives that advocate for children’s rights, more awareness of the Convention can be possible. Canada's failure to make policy changes and create more awareness about the Convention reflects the value that adults attribute to the Convention. They do not recognize it as a priority; therefore, the necessary steps to ensure awareness are not taken.

Although Canada has poorly implemented children’s rights, the USA is in a much worse state for respecting them. For instance, the USA, one of the most influential countries in the world, is now the only country that has signed but not ratified the Convention. One of the most significant arguable reasons why USA adults object to ratifying the Convention is because

American critics perceive the Convention and access to children's rights "as threatening parental rights" (Perry-Hazan, 2021, p. 922) and their power over children. They feel as though these rights will give children too much power, thus causing them to lose control over them, and once they lose power, the children will not be containable.

In the USA, children do not have positive or strong perceptions of their rights due to their limited rights. The Convention not being ratified significantly impacts the experiences children have and the types of discrimination they face because there are minimal structures put into place to advocate and stand up for the rights of children (Perry-Hazan, 2021). A study conducted by Rovner (2021) explored children's rights in one American societal structure: the youth justice system. It was found in 2021, only 25 states in the USA have banned juvenile life-without-parole sentences; this means that people who commit crimes under the age of 18 are given life without parole sentences, even though "the Supreme Court of the United States establishes and upholds the fact that children are constitutionally different from adults in their levels of culpability" (p. 1). This is based on their developmental differences. This means that children in adult prisons face significantly more severe punishments than they should receive. Additionally, Reid (2018) builds upon this by bringing up other concerns in America that violate children's rights, such as children living in poverty, lack of access to education, and discrimination based on racial or immigration status. Overall, there are significant violations and abuse against children in the USA.

The USA has only submitted reports of Optional Protocols to the Committee; hence the Concluding Observation reports presented by the Committee only discuss concerns surrounding those. However, even the most recent 2017 UNCRC Optional Protocols Concluding Observation report clearly states that the USA must make better efforts at ratifying the Convention, and it has

done an inadequate job at protecting children. “The Committee is concerned that the State party, despite multiple recommendations made in previous concluding observations to accelerate its ratification process of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, has not made progress in that regard” (para. 4). Limited cooperation from the USA makes it difficult to assess precisely how this State has violated the non-optional rights under the Convention and what recommendations the Committee believes are needed to make progress in rectifying the extreme violation of children’s rights.

Overall, it can be noted that the perceptions of children’s rights by children and adults in each State Party were reflected in their Concluding Observation reports despite the data being published on different dates. This indicates that, for the most part, there have not been drastic changes among the State Parties in their efforts to implement the Convention. This is even explicitly stated in the 2022 Canadian Concluding Observation report when the Committee reiterates that State Parties must better address the previous recommendations. If State Parties were serious about their implementation efforts, they would have tried to overcome the existing barriers by addressing those concerns and recommendations. However, this should not undermine the fact that changes have slowly been occurring. More prioritization and recognition of children’s rights being fundamental to children’s well-being can allow this progress to continue. Lastly, the Concluding Observation reports provide insight into the changes that adults believe are necessary for better implementation efforts, and it is now equally important to acknowledge the voices of youth and the concerns and recommendations they have.

This study will narrow its focus to specifically analyze the experiences that young people in the cross-Canada *Shaking the Movers* workshops have with understanding and experiencing their rights.

Chapter Three: Research Methodology and Research Design

Foucauldian Discourse Analysis (FDA)

What is a Foucauldian Discourse Analysis?

This research will take on a qualitative approach known as a discourse analysis as per Michel Foucault (1981). It aims to conduct a critical discourse analysis of the *STM* reports to understand the experiences that children have based on their dialogues and reports they have co-created. Analyzing these dialogues, experiences and perspectives of participants of the *STM* workshops will allow this study to investigate and deeply understand the research subject to create meanings and come to conclusions about the socially constructed reality of children's rights without hypothesizing or predicting inaccurate outcomes (Tomaszewski et al., 2020, p. 1).

A Foucauldian discourse analysis is an interpretive lens created by French philosopher Michel Foucault (1981). It has a focus on recognizing how meanings of social actions and practices are constructed while considering the elements of power relations. This analytical framework goes beyond simply analyzing dialogue around the experiences of participants and additionally allows researchers to analyze the ways participants discuss their experiences being reproduced or disrupted (Khan & MacEachen, 2021). Simultaneously, this framework takes into account the tone of their dialogue and considering what is and what is not being said to fully understand the implicit and explicit messages behind the discourse (Willig, 2013, p. 385). A FDA aims to analyze the language used to ask questions related to discourses, subjectivity and practices. How do individuals think or feel about a discourse, what practices people engage with in their experience of the discourse, and what are the conditions around those experiences?

Foucault regards discourses as a body of knowledge. Discourses are predictable and regulated by a set of rules, thus strongly connected to relations of power. Dominant discourses work to privilege certain social realities. “They privilege those versions of social reality that legitimate existing power relations and social structures” (Willig, 2013, p. 380). Dominant discourses structure the way individuals see reality and the practices they engage in to keep it in circulation. Some discourses may be so entrenched that they become common sense (Willig, 2013, p. 380). Foucault mentions that “Discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines it and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it” (Foucault, 1990, p. 101). Discourses can strongly influence the ways in which a phenomenon is discussed in terms of who can say what and where it can be said. This construction further creates a way of seeing and a way of being in the social world, which translates into legitimation and power (Willig, 2013). For instance, when the discourse on children’s rights is perceived as a method to take away power from adults, it can create censorship. This understood reality prevents discussion of children’s rights from being a prioritized topic in educational institutions due to the backlash from adults in parental roles or governmental positions (Dunhill, 2018, p. 18). Events such as these transmit and reinforce the lack of education and awareness children have about their rights. However, this perception is also what allows individuals to resist power. Workshops such as *STM* work directly against this and resist power by providing children and young people with spaces to facilitate rights-based discussion; this allows children to be more educated. Once children are fully aware of how their rights are being infringed, they are able to take on a position to oppose and speak up against the adults who create barriers, allowing them to thwart those power relations and decrease the circulation of that perceived reality around

children's rights. It can then shift the perception of the discourse on children's rights as something that benefits children rather than something that negatively impacts adults.

Foucault considers language to be distinct from discourse. Discourse is, instead, a tool that can be used to analyze bodies of knowledge to recognize the socially constructed reality around a phenomenon. Foucault believed that meaning is not always tied to the structure of the language but to the conditions that exist around it, such as the rules for or against discussing the phenomena. "...discourse should be seen as a system which structures the way that we perceive reality" (Mills, 2003, p. 55). For example, there is more language dedicated to something that is valued and significant to a society. Mills (2003) mentions when a culture values something, it will have specific language to appreciate the differences and details of the phenomena, whereas a society that has less value for that phenomenon will have less language to distinguish and describe it. This does not indicate that those individuals know less; however, there is not enough significance to appreciate small details and features. Mills (2003) exemplified this using colour. A society that values colour will have a plethora of words to describe different shades and colours, but a society that has less value in colour is more likely to have a smaller range of words to describe those colours because it is not important enough to distinguish. This understanding acknowledges the societal influence around how that phenomenon is perceived by others, which can position people in a certain way toward that discourse (Mills, 2003, p. 55). On the other hand, some discourses can be considered taboo and therefore be strongly frowned upon and discouraged from being discussed or acknowledged. In some non-western cultures, children questioning the actions of adults can be seen as a taboo act or an act of disrespect rather than a way for young people to advocate for themselves and their rights, making it even more difficult for them to have these discussions and challenge barriers. Willig (2013) further adds how the

perceptions or language used in relevance to a discourse can both create or limit possibilities of understanding a phenomenon based on the position that an individual takes.

There is also an element of power within a discourse analysis that must be considered since language creates knowledge, and knowledge creates an expression of truth; that truth then becomes the norm that is supported through reinforcement and societal power. Foucault (1980) believed social structures and institutions may have strong varying effects on members of the society. However, individuals play the most important role of either further affirming or resisting those impacts. Power does not only repress and constrain people, but in fact, power can be productive and encourage people to act in certain ways (Mills, 2003). Power can be seen in the daily interactions between people and institutions, such as members of society partaking in norms and following the rules. “Power needs to be seen as something which has to be constantly performed rather than being achieved” (Mills, 2003, p. 35). Members of society can act in a way that reinforces social norms on a daily basis, which gives these truths more power. Gutting (2006) mentions how this power is best understood when the norms are broken or rejected because of the dismay it creates. Foucault (1980) stated that,

Power must be analysed as something which circulates, or rather as something which only functions in the form of a chain...Power is employed and exercised through a net-like organisation. And not only do individuals circulate between its threads; they are always in the position of simultaneously undergoing and exercising this power. They are not only its inert or consenting target; they are always also the elements of its articulation. In other words, individuals are the vehicles of power, not its points of application. (p. 98)

Foucault explains that power relations exist because of consistent systems of relations that occur in a society; it is not as simple as the relationship between the oppressed and oppressors. Children simply do not face barriers in accessing their rights because adults gatekeep them; however, societal structures support the creation of these barriers through the lack of prioritization of children's rights, resources and opportunities for children to access their rights. Additionally, members of society need to be acknowledged as a space where power is reinforced or resisted based on the ways they act. They can reinforce power by acting accordingly to the norms, or they can resist the power by breaking or questioning norms. The *STM* workshops provided a platform where children are given the opportunity to resist the power relations between children and adults and speak up about their experiences with their rights rather than reinforce and continue the cycle of not having education or awareness of their rights that are being infringed.

Foucauldian Discourse Analysis Procedure

This research adopted Willig's (2013) six-stage approach of conducting a Foucauldian discourse analysis. The six stages are:

1. Discursive constructions
2. Discourse
3. Action Orientation
4. Positioning
5. Practice
6. Subjectivity

Discursive Constructions

Stage one of Willig's (2013) approach referred to the process of identifying the ways in which discursive objects were constructed. Since the topic of this research was to understand how children involved in the *STM* understood and implemented the UNCRC, the discursive object was considered children's rights. Hence, the first step was to analyze the *STM* reports to recognize the different ways that children's rights were constructed by highlighting all the different ways the children and young people referenced their rights. This occurred on the basis of the implicit and explicit messages that were shared in the reports, which referred to the way that children did or did not reference their rights. "The fact that a text does not contain a direct reference to the discursive object can tell us a lot about the way in which the object is constructed" (Willig, 2013, p. 385). There was much value in considering how a discourse was not talked about as it can provide insight into what is unknown, what gaps exist, or what is considered unspeakable. The discursive construction was guided by the shared meanings that children had about accessing their rights. A discursive construction refers to the way children's rights are discussed.

Discourse

Next, within Willig's (2013) second stage, the focus shifted toward the differences that existed between these discursive constructions. The goal was to locate the various discursive constructions that existed within the broader discourse of children's rights. This translated into discussing the different ways that the youth discuss their rights in the *STM* reports. Some examples of the different ways youth discuss their rights can include suggestions that children had to make their rights more accessible, the barriers adults created, or even the lack of education they had.

Action Orientation

The third stage consisted of a closer examination of the discursive contexts of the different constructions of children's rights. Willig (2013) suggested that an action orientated approach should be taken to analyze the text in a manner that considered what can be gained from constructing the object of children's rights in a specific way, the functions of the different constructions, and question how the different constructions of children's rights related to each other. This ultimately helped create the clearest understanding of what the different constructions of children's rights were able to achieve. For instance, how the suggestions that children had for adults regarding better accessibility could help adults implement policy changes that better aligned with their needs. This can further create more opportunities for children to be educated about their rights (Willig, 2013, p. 386).

Positioning

The fourth step involved analyzing the subject's position. Willig (2013) states, "discourses construct subjects as well as objects and, as a result, make available positions within networks of meaning that speakers can take up" (p. 387). This means that it was important to identify the different positions that the subjects took regarding the different meanings that were created around children's rights and the roles that the subjects played. Particularly, a position that children could take believed that the age-related power differences between children and adults resulted in children's rights being inaccessible. In this position, children could play the role of being powerless against adults, and adults could play the role of gatekeepers that used their power to make rights inaccessible.

Practice

Willig's (2013) fifth stage is related to understanding the types of relationships between discourses in practice. This related to how creating certain versions of discourses and the subject

position could either create or limit what could be said and done. For example, if children exclusively talked about how the power inequalities with adults hindered their ability to access their rights, it guided the dialogue in that specific way. It could create opportunities for youth to talk about ways to reduce those power imbalances. However, it could also limit them by reducing the likelihood of them recognizing the advocacy work of some adults who tried to make rights more accessible.

Subjectivity

The last stage was subjectivity. The stage explored the relationship between discourse and subjectivity. This related to how discourses could construct ways of understanding and existing in the world. This further analyzed the consequences of taking up specific positions for the subjective experiences that people can have. This was related to what could be felt, thought, and experienced from the subject's position (Willig, 2013, p. 388). This framework of conducting a discourse analysis provided this study with a roadmap for analyzing the *STM* reports and allowed this research to gain an in-depth understanding of how children involved in the *STM* workshops experienced their rights, including the concerns and recommendations they may have.

Application of Methodological and Theoretical Framework

In the context of this UNCRC research, it is important to highlight that while the theoretical framework employed is the sociology of childhood, a Foucauldian discourse analysis was chosen as the methodological approach. This decision was made despite the fact that use of ethnography as the methodological framework aligned with the core principles of sociology of childhood. The rationale for this decision is based on the understanding of ethnography primarily

relying on participant observation where direct engagement and involvement from the researcher occurs (Reeves, Kuper, & Hodges, 2008). However, since this research is based on existing reports, there is no direct interaction with the *STM* participants or workshops. Consequently, it was deemed more beneficial to use a methodological framework such as a Foucauldian discourse analysis which could facilitate an in-depth analysis of the *STM* reports.

Furthermore, the framework sociology of childhood provides a complementary understanding that supports the methodology of discourse analysis since successful implementation of children's rights in any setting also requires an adequate understanding of social conditions. "Human rights—for that is what children's rights are—include the whole range of civil, political, social, economic and cultural rights" (Freeman, 2007, p. 7). The common assumption that children lack competence causes so many children and young people to be treated differently. "Some of those who argue against children's rights make a more fundamental objection. They argue that children are just not qualified to have rights; they lack the capacity to do so" (Freeman, 2007, p. 12). For example, in terms of their experiences of rights when children are seen as incompetent, this justifies actions of many adults in violating individual rights and reinforcing abusive power relations. This causes many adults to be more likely to respond to their own rights compared to children's rights (Scruton, 1997). It makes it seem as though it is not important to think about the concept of human rights in relation to children, but rather, this concept should be "reserved for adults" (Freeman, 2007, p. 11) However, this sociological approach allows an analysis and arguments that support the fact that children possess all they need in order to understand their rights and have them respected (Freeman, 2007; Quennerstedt & Quennerstedt, 2014). Additionally, the Foucauldian discourse analysis brings light to how the

social influences around children's rights are impacted by power and power relation, therefore affecting the way people think and act towards children's rights (Mills, 2003).

Data Analysis

Data Analysis Procedure

The process of data analysis for this research began with an in-depth cycle of immersion, reading, and re-reading 40 *STM* reports (see Appendix I). As the researcher, I found that familiarizing myself with the data was the most important part of the analysis. As the *STM* reports were being used as data, as suggested by Flick (2018), it was vital that I deeply immersed myself in the reports to be able to work closely with the words of the young people to correctly convey their messages to produce meaningful results. To do this, I went through four cycles of analyzing the reports. The first cycle consisted of me reading the reports with the sole purpose of gaining an understanding of what was in them, how they were constructed and how the voices of young people were used. This allowed me to recognize which aspects of the reports were more relevant to my research. For instance, for the analysis, I focused on using parts of the reports where children described and talked about their experience, and I did not use sections of the reports that used adult voices to explain what adults thought about children's rights or what adults were observing because the goal of my research was to focus on the voices of young people to understand how they were experiencing their rights.

Next, during the second cycle of reading the reports, I focused on highlighting and making note of the main ideas and key themes within each report with the goal of mapping out how I would organize the reports for a deeper analysis. This allowed me to come up with potential themes based on the topics of each report. Although this second cycle assisted me in organizing and brainstorming themes, I needed a more integrated approach to finding the key

themes across the reports rather than treating each report as an individual piece of data. To analyze the *STM* reports to find the emerging themes and patterns across the 40 reports, I needed a more structured way to conduct the analysis.

This led to my first cycle of coding the data. In order to code successfully, I needed an analytical framework to provide me with guidelines on how 40 reports could be coded and organized in a manner that allowed me to uncover the most consistent key themes and experiences. The best fit for my research was Grounded Theory coding. Using this framework, in addition to following the guidelines of *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers* by Saldana (2012), who provided more specific details and useful tips on how to carry out the coding process. I was able to engage in my first cycle of qualitative coding of the reports using the principles of open coding, axial coding and selective coding using the NVivo software. This entailed a lengthy process of reading each report and taking a combination of the sentence-by-sentence approach and paragraph-by-paragraph approach to saturate and successfully code the reports. Utilizing axial and selective coding, I was able to group and categorize all the codes produced in the open coding stage (Flick, 2018). This resulted in me ending with five core themes that persisted across majority of the reports and allowed me to gain an understanding of the most common experiences of young people in Canada while trying to access their rights.

Based on the instructions of Flick (2018), a second cycle of coding was conducted to further strengthen the core themes through axial coding. This process entailed going through the data set with the intention of making more connections to the five-core themes to ensure I was able to saturate the dataset. This allowed me to make more meaningful connections and recognize additional variations of how the central phenomenon was being referenced in the reports. Using a more selective approach to coding allowed me to close any existing gaps

between the core themes, central phenomena, and the research question. Once the core themes were established, and there was satisfaction in the coding process, this allowed me to begin the process for a more critical analysis of the core themes using a Foucauldian discourse analysis.

Step one of this FDA analysis using Willig's (2013) six-step approach started with putting together a cohesive narrative for each of the themes. In order to do this, I needed to go through each code within the larger themes and group them into different categories based on what aspect of the theme they focused on. For example, in the theme of lack of awareness and education about children's rights, I grouped the codes into five different categories; how education about rights can be made more accessible, how to create awareness and educate young people about their rights, the lack of knowledge youth has about their rights, the importance of rights education and how young people can be given more education about their rights. Although these sub-themes are similar, they have distinct differences that are important to consider. This paints a complete narrative of how each theme is discussed and how young people do and do not reference their rights. Lastly, for each sub-theme, a relevant quote was chosen that best represents the experience of youth. This process was taken for each of the themes. Once these mechanisms were found, it built a foundation for the FDA to take place, and Willig's six-stage approach was applied. These stages were woven through the analysis, rather than conducting six distinct steps for each theme. Overall, these steps allowed me to successfully conduct a FDA.

Ethical Considerations

To begin with, this research acknowledges both the Tri-council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (2018) and the guidelines of Ethical Research Involving Children (herein, ERIC) by Graham et al. (2013). These frameworks provided me with a method to conduct research while acknowledging the rights, wellbeing, and dignity of children

through taking into account the core principles of both conducts: respect for persons, concerns for welfare, justice, benefit and respect (Graham et al., 2013; Interagency Advisory Panel on Research Ethics, 2019). Although all principles are complementary and interdependent, for their application it is necessary they are specifically addressed. When the participants are respected within research, it allows them to be dignified throughout the research process, it ensures the research is done with meaning and purpose, and that there is informed and ongoing consent. Additionally, it allows the acknowledgment of how the welfare of vulnerable groups can be impacted in both a positive or negative way, and this can assist in diminishing the risks and harm associated with the research. Incorporating justice in research can aid in treating the participants and their concerns with respect and fairness. This is especially beneficial for participants, such as children, who belong to minority or vulnerable groups and have been excluded from past research (Interagency Advisory Panel on Research Ethics, 2019). However, it is necessary to remain aware of the power imbalances between the researcher and participants to allow fair and equitable treatment to occur. Lastly, the compendium ERIC by Graham et al. (2013) explains when there is acknowledgment of children's rights, it ensures that their rights are being respected and followed throughout the entire research process, while appreciating the status that young people have as children so their voices can be taken seriously.

Using publicly available and accessible data provided by the LPRC database such as the published *STM* reports, and interviews allows this research to have minimal ethical concerns. The ethical concerns do not relate to youth participating in this study because their interviews and reports were previously published with full ethical consent and accountability. This research will continue to respect the privacy and anonymity of the youth by ensuring that no identifiable traits are being used for those young people who chose to remain anonymous. In order to do this,

the first or last name of those youth will not be mentioned, in any direct quotes cited with the names of the participants. Those names will be removed in an attempt to create a barrier in locating exactly who said what, and there will be no references made to the images of the participants that exist in the *STM* reports. Instead, the youth who desire to remain anonymous will only be referenced through pseudonyms. This will aid in keeping the youth and their family safe and making sure they are not being harmed or compromised through this research (Graham et al., 2013).

The rights-based approach taken in this research raises the question whether it is unethical to conceal the identities of those youth who chose not to remain anonymous. It can be argued that some youth allowed their names and identities to be published in the *STM* reports as a way for them to take ownership of their words, ideas and experiences. “Anonymisation may act to separate individuals from their contributions” (Godfrey-Faussett, 2022, p. 10), and instead give me, as the researcher ownership over the data. This way, anonymization can work towards further silencing those voices that are already overlooked and marginalized (Godfrey-Faussett, 2022). For this reason, this research will not actively work to conceal the identities of those youth who chose to have their identities known. Although their names will not be used in this study, they can be identified when locating the direct quotes used in chapter four and five. I believe that the most ethical approach towards incorporating young people’s voices in this research is one that respects their agency in choosing whether to be anonymous or not.

The majority of ethical concerns are relevant to researcher reflexivity and the ways that the voices of the youth are being utilized. “Reflexivity refers to the researcher’s ‘ability to think’ and ponder the positionality of researcher and participant...and how these may impact on the knowledge produced” (Canosa et al., 2018, p. 402). As a researcher, I must remain aware of how

my positionality as a young South Asian female in university can impact my research based on the expectations I may create related to my beliefs, values, interests and purpose for engaging in this topic. Furthermore, even being conscious of my subjectivity to recognize the biases I may engage in while interpreting the messages of the children during the critical analysis process. This can allow me to practice ethical mindfulness by remaining sensitive to myself and others while recognizing the emotional nature of this research (Warin, 2011; Graham et al., 2013).

Additionally, I must ensure that I am interacting with the voices of the children and young people with dignity by only utilizing them as they are intended in the interviews to accurately portray their stories. This means working alongside the messages behind the personal experiences they have shared instead of re-negotiating the meaning of their words for the benefit of this study. This can aid in preventing situations that continue to silence the voices of the youth (Canosa et al., 2018). Such as, if children talk about feeling misheard, my analysis should reflect their feelings rather than re-negotiate the meaning behind those statements to silence their reality and instead reinforce my assumptions of them being given a good space to feel heard. This can prevent me from creating any misinformed conclusions that can cause any harm or distress to the youth whose voices have been used.

Chapter Four: Findings

After an in-depth immersion of 40 *STM* reports through Willig's (2013) six-stage approach of Foucault's (1981) Foucauldian discourse analysis, five core themes were drawn from the dataset. This chapter aims to execute an in-depth exploration of the themes. These themes best capture how children involved in the *STM* workshops are experiencing their rights

and what factors influence their ability to access their rights. Tables 1 – 5 provide a summary of findings for each of the themes which includes quotes that best represent the theme, a description of how they relate to the theme, and which *STM* reports the quotes can be found in. Furthermore, each quote comes directly from the youth participants of the *STM* workshops, however some have resulted through dialogue or discussions, and others during the writing process of the reports. The five core themes are the following:

1. Influence of Adults on Children’s Rights
2. Lack of Awareness and Education Around Children’s Rights
3. Children’s Rights in the Education System
4. More Inclusion of Youth Voices and Participation
5. Discrimination Against Children and Their Rights

These five core themes are all related to distinct factors that impact how young people experience their rights; however, they are all relevant to each other. The overall ability of children being able to access their rights is very interdependent on all these factors, and they cannot be completely separated from one another. Through utilizing the Foucauldian discourse analysis framework, this section will discuss each theme with more depth by focusing on analyzing how children do and do not talk about their experiences by applying stage one (discursive constructions) of Willig’s (2013) approach. The explicit messages give insight onto the obvious experiences that young people have. However, Willig (2013) mentions that implicit messages give additional critical insights into the themes and the phenomena of children’s rights.

Interestingly, the experiences that the participants discuss reinforce the experiences that have already been documented in previous research. This is a strong indication that these are not unique experiences, and they have been occurring for a significantly long time, so it brings up

the question of why they have not been addressed. Why are the experiences of young people not being taken seriously? Why are children who participated in the 2009 *STM* workshops facing similar barriers to the children who participated in the 2021 workshop? Eleven years should have been enough time to implement the necessary changes, however these barriers are continuously being ignored.

Influence of Adults on Children's Rights

Table 1

Summary of Findings for Theme One: Influence of Adults on Children's Rights

Sub-Theme Description	Quotes	<i>STM</i> Report
Adults referring to youth as future leaders undermines their capabilities at their currently developmental level. Youth resist the idea of them only being capable in the future.	I'm not a future leader; I'm a leader now. I put down future leader as who I am not because right now I'm a leader—I don't need to be someone in the future. Adults will always say you'll be something in the future and I'm someone now	Shaking the Movers, 2018e, p. 3
Adults in positions of power can mistreat children due to the prejudices and stereotypes they hold. This results in not all youth being exposed to the same level of safety and well-being. Such treatment can make it difficult for children to trust adults.	So, what you're basically saying, we want the police to act the same way as they act with White people. (...) In some situations, police might assume that we have something so when we pull out something, they think it is a gun and they start shooting everywhere, but it could be a brush, a tooth brush or it could be anything. We are innocent people, you know, it hurts	Shaking the Movers, 2018a, p. 27
Not all adults involve young people in the decision-making process that impacts their lives. Adults make decisions on behalf of a child, which can prove to be more harmful and less likely to meet their needs.	I wasn't in the discussion and my parents decided for us (my brother and I) to not go to school until after Christmas in 2020... It was a lot, to be that much time in online school, so after Christmas we spoke to my parents, and they let us go back to school. I didn't agree with the original decision, it was very damaging to my mental health at the time...	Shaking the Movers, 2021e, p. 12
Young people are frustrated from the level of support they are receiving from the	I think the Canadian Government is absolutely pathetic, because people say oh it's a free country and you have so many rights, but if you	Shaking the Movers, 2018f, p. 17

government. Despite the power and influence the government has over making rights more accessible, they are putting in minimal effort to do so.	really live in Canada, you would see that none of that really falls into place. There is racism everywhere you go, there is discrimination everywhere you go. It just makes me so angry, because if you look at the residential schools, that was only brought up in the curriculum this year	
Due to the lack of effort the government is making to support youth, they feel like they must take on the responsibility themselves to take action towards the changes they want to see.	Certain youth need to step up and take it upon themselves to continue to push for equal representation and to continue to push till discrimination isn't such a prevalent issue in our society. So, what is you're basically saying if the government doesn't happen to take us seriously now, we have to keep persisting over and over until they do	Shaking the Movers, 2018f, p. 20

Throughout the analysis of the *STM* reports, it was notable how young people were constantly referring to the experiences they had with adults in relation to their rights. This emphasizes how adults have a very strong influence on how young people understand and access their rights. Within this theme, young people make references to the importance of partnership between children and adults, the experiences they have with different authority figures, and the barriers that adults can create for children.

Partnership Between Children and Adults

The partnership between children and adults is arguably one of the most important factors impacting the way children are able to experience their rights. It begins with adults first learning about children's rights themselves and then fulfilling their rights-based responsibilities and obligations. Adults need to ensure that youth are aware of their rights, and they must make efforts to implement rights-respecting practices in their daily life. This comes with acknowledging that youth are rights-bearing citizens and that their voices and the experiences they have are valuable and, therefore, important to take into consideration. "Giving children a voice as a collectivity amounts to representing them on equal terms of the other groups in

society” (James & Prout, 1997, p. 87). When children are recognized as being equals, it positions adults to be able to go beyond their adultist “conception of children as subordinates” (James & Prout, 1997, p. 87). Additionally, there must be acceptance around the fact that young people’s views can help provoke others to think about society in ways that they would not have been able to do otherwise, and this attributes a greater degree of value to young people’s voices. Adults can start this partnership by creating environments to build rapport and relationships with children, so they feel comfortable enough to talk to adults, and when young people reach out, adults must listen to what they are saying. However, in the *STM* reports the youth simply stated that “listening isn’t enough; adults must act on our concerns” (Shaking the Movers, 2007, p. 5) and fulfill any promises that are made.

There are multiple different ways for adults to work in partnership with children. The most obvious way is to engage in conversation with young people to understand the prevailing issues of their lives and how they are experiencing the world. This discussion can provide them with space to have consistent communication, collaborate and negotiate until effective solutions are found. In this process of trial and error, it is important that both children and adults have enough trust in each other that they can learn and embrace the suggestions being made until they find what works. “If children trust adults, they ask questions. If adults trust children, we ponder their questions with seriousness. In doing so, together we open the door to meaningful change (as stated by Hall & Rudkin, 2011, p. 48 in Shaking the Movers, 2019d, p. 28). When adults witness the benefits of collaborating with young people, it can encourage them to continue and widen this partnership. This partnership places them in a position where they can work based on the strengths of young people in an attempt to move towards a better and more inclusive society.

Adults can strengthen their partnership with young people by acting as allies themselves or by ensuring that other adult allies are present to help youth when necessary. Young people mention that they want access to adult representation through a “youth ombudsman in every city, somewhere to go if they feel their rights are being violated” and “youth participants stress again and again, the need for a children’s commissioner whose job it is to provide follow up and adequate support to children and young people” (Shaking the Movers, 2007, p. 13). There must also be adult allies present in the government or accessible members of parliament (MP) in their community. It is important that children are able to reach adults who are willing to listen to them instead of being dismissed by someone who only listens to other adults (Shaking the Movers, 2007). It is important that young people have access to these support systems. However, the reality is that young people feel like they do not have enough adult allies who can help them overcome the barriers they face, but rather they are usually shut down due to their age.

I’m not a future leader; I’m a leader now. I put down future leader as who I am not because right now I’m a leader—I don’t need to be someone in the future. Adults will always say you’ll be something in the future and I’m someone now. (Shaking the Movers, 2018e, p. 3)

Young people mention how adults often treat and refer to them as future leaders. When adults give youth this label, it can be a method for adults to take power over children. They refer to children as future leaders because they question the capabilities of youth at their current developmental level. They may not believe that children have the ability to make the best decisions; however, in the future when they reach adulthood they will, hence they will be future leaders. When applying Willig’s (2013) approach, it can be understood that in this passage, the

youth is taking on the position of resisting the identity of being called a future leader and claims their power by taking on the identity of a current leader. When the youth states, "...I don't need to be someone in the future..." (Shaking the Movers, 2018c, p. 3), they are asserting the fact that they are equal and as capable as adults. When young people are able to assert themselves as capable and powerful individuals, it gives them more agency over their lives, giving them the confidence and empowerment to take on roles that reflect this. Young people are the future, and that cannot be dismissed, but they also exist in the present. The present is what makes the future, so it is important that youth are included in the decision-making process geared towards the creation of their future to assist in creating a space where they can best succeed. Such actions and decisions being made all have a direct impact on the lives of youth, making it vital that they are taken into consideration. This passage is a reference to how young people want adults to take their voices seriously.

Interestingly, the application of Willig's (2013) six-stage approach made it apparent how youth talk about their lack of partnership without explicitly mentioning it in this passage. When considering the way that young people do not refer to the discursive construction in stage one, it can be analyzed that young people are implicitly holding adults to their obligation of needing to take young people seriously and valuing their current experiences. This is done by mentioning how adults have a very future-orientated approach to how young people can only do something impactful in the future, but young people recognize their value and know that this approach is not entirely accurate. Young people also do not refer to the fact that they require partnership with adults to best access their rights. There are certain changes that children need adults to make; however, due to the way that children are consistently being treated by adults, it can be argued they have lost faith, so they no longer trust that adults are willing to address their concerns.

Overall, youth want adults to be held accountable for dismissing them based on their age, but they do not bring up the need for partnership or how adults must better support them. They may no longer believe that adults can fully work in partnership with them. Young people can limit the expectations they hold of adults to the single responsibility of not thinking of children as future citizens but acknowledging them as complete citizens right now.

Lastly, it is important that adults take more accountability towards the way they treat children and their rights. “Creating more systems of accountability” can help “deter people from abusing power” (Shaking the Movers, 2007, p. 13) over children. For instance, if adults try to filter and avoid talking to young people about taboo topics, they need to ask themselves why. Is it because they think it is damaging for the child to partake in that conversation, or is it because having that conversation makes them uncomfortable? Taking accountability can then allow them to recognize the implications behind their actions. A young person stated that, “il faudrait ne pas avoir de sujets tabous on ne parle pas de ça tu es trop jeune, parce que souvent le jeune, qui ne va pas comprendre, va soit entendre des choses fausses ou il ne va pas comprendre que ce qu’il dit ce n’est pas bien” (Shaking the Movers, 2020a, p. 12), which translates to “there should be no taboo subjects: ‘we don’t talk about that, you’re too young,’ because often times, the young person, who is not going to understand, is going to either hear false things or he is not going to understand that what he says is not good.” If adults refuse to have certain discussions with young people, it can lead them to seek that information elsewhere such as social media and end up with misunderstandings and false information, and this can be damaging for the children. In this case, accountability can help adults understand why they must put their own feelings aside and focus on doing what is best for the child, which would be having open discussions about all topics in a safe and controlled environment. Here, they can ensure that young people are getting the right

information and clear up any misconceptions they may have. Accountability can also come in the form of adults understanding that they need to give young people more autonomy over their lives. It allows adults to question the underlying reason why they are trying to tell young people what to do and make decisions on their behalf. Instead of restraining children, it is important that they are given the time and space to make their own decisions, as it allows them to find their voice, develop skills and talents they have, and teach them independence, however, “autonomy does not mean leaving them to act and decide on their own” (Shaking the Movers, 2021d, p. 14). It positions adults to be “available as a support and guidance when needed” in a way where children are still able to “engage in their own process” (Shaking the Movers, 2021d, p. 14). In this way, partnership is giving young people more freedom to do what they desire, instead of adults constantly expecting young people to fulfill their expectations.

Young People’s Experiences with Authority Figures

Young people have varying experiences with authority figures, whether they are police officers, governmental figures or family members. The experiences are heavily based on where the young person is situated in society, as they can face more barriers if they belong to a visible minority compared to youth who resembles those in positions of power. At times, the unjust and unequal treatment occurs so blatantly that children begin to pick up on these patterns. They make connections to the fact that their skin colour or minority status can result in authority figures treating them differently and often more harshly than those around them.

So, what you're basically saying, we want the police to act the same way as they act with White people. (...) In some situations, police might assume that we have something so when we pull out something, they think it is a gun and they start shooting everywhere,

but it could be a brush, a tooth brush or it could be anything. We are innocent people, you know, it hurts. (Shaking the Movers, 2018a, p. 27)

Power relationships between children and adults can result in young people being subjected to poor treatment due to prejudices and stereotypes held by adults and police officers with racial biases. A young person's innocence can be questioned because of their race. Police officers must ensure that they treat all young people the same because they are all entitled to the same type of safety and well-being regardless of the social variables surrounding their lives (Shaking the Movers, 2018a). Applying stage three: action orientation and stage four: positioning of Willig's (2013) approach can allow there to be an understanding that when young people point out this mistreatment and position themselves as victims to this, it allows them to question why this occurs. This allows them to attempt to resist power through calling out these actions. Only when they are acknowledged and pointed out, can they be changed.

Further analyzing this passage through stage one of Willig's approach and focusing on what is not being said, it can be seen that young people are making implicit references to their safety. They no longer feel safe around police officers because of their skin colour, instead of feeling safe or protected, they find the need to assume the worst. Black youth can face the most violence from police officers; the whole social movement of Black Lives Matter made it apparent to what extent police brutality actually occurs and how "systemic racism goes beyond police brutality" (Shaking the Movers, 2020b, p. 21), which means that police brutality is only one of the many consequences of systemic racism. When the youth participant states "...in some situations, police might assume that we have something so when we pull out something, they think it is a gun and they start shooting everywhere, but it could be a brush, a tooth brush or it

could be anything...” (Shaking the Movers, 2018a, p. 27), this is an indication that they have accepted the fact that there is a possibility that they can be mistreated or treated violently because of misinterpretations of police officers. As noted in the reports, the violent treatment of these adults is justified through the assumption of there being a weapon. Police officers have created this discourse that allows them to believe it is okay to physically hurt a child because they might have a weapon. They are abusing their power to perpetuate violence and mistreatment and then justifying it rather than admitting to their mistakes and finding ways to prevent them from occurring again.

Utilizing this experience to understand the relationship between discourse and subjectivity in stage six of Willig’s (2013) approach, it becomes obvious that racialized young people have adopted an understanding of the world where violations from the police are expected and not uncommon. It should be alarming that youth talk about their need for safety and more support for protection by comparing the treatment they receive to the treatment that other youth are getting. This in itself indicates the occurrence of many rights violations. Firstly, they are being discriminated against because of their race or age. A youth states, “professionals and people in authority are sometimes the very ones who are violating our rights” (Shaking the Movers, 2007, p. 11). The very people in charge of protecting them are the ones who are jeopardizing their safety, and not all young people are getting equal treatment. This unequal treatment can have lasting effects on their safety and well-being. This is also a cry for the necessity of social change and a reconsideration of power relations in society. Based on the experiences that young people have expressed within the *STM* reports it raises the question of why police officers get to decide that young people are dangerous, rather than young people being the ones to decide that police officers are dangerous due on their experiences.

Additionally, this positionality points out the need for more diversity and sensitivity training in law enforcement as young people suggest “that police officers should also be taught about racism” (Shaking the Movers, 2018f, p. 19) in attempt to prevent them from using their biases to mistreat marginalized youth, and this can be the first step to de-normalizing the poor treatment of marginalized youth such as those who belong to racial minorities.

The *STM* participants pointed out multiple negative experiences with police officers. Young people state that in order to build trust, police officers must learn to better respect children’s rights and act in the best interest towards children to build partnership. For this to occur, it is necessary for them to get more sensitivity training for different cultures and races so they can help create a safe and more welcoming environment for all young people (Shaking the Movers, 2018f). The young people mention how they feel like police officers need to focus more on rehabilitation for young people by emphasizing “the responsibility of police to take action and address violence and safety concerns, while prioritizing rehabilitation and institutional transparency” (Shaking the Movers, 2018k, p. 22). Additionally, the “police should be approaching things in a way that doesn’t criminalize” youth and put them through the youth justice system (Shaking the Movers, 2018k, p. 22). This would mean that police officers must refrain from automatically jumping to conclusions and assuming the worst of children, as these assumptions are what lead to unfair treatment and biases.

Young people calling out the negative experiences and unjust treatment they face from authority is also a congruent, rights-based position for them to take. It implies how adults violate children’s rights by abusing their power in the different types of roles they hold. Young people can feel like they have no other choice but to obey authority figures due to the fear instilled in them as one young person even states “as a youth, I feel I have no power and my only option is

to obey authority” (Shaking the Movers, 2012a, p. 10) in reaction to learning about how other youth in the justice system are treated. The broken trust that the young people have towards police officers makes them feel as though they need a different enforcement system to go to. They question who they are supposed to go to when the very people who enforce laws and policies are the ones violating them. This has resulted in young people admitting that they are hesitant to go to the police and ask for help because, in some cases, they feel like the police will do them more harm than good (Shaking the Movers, 2012). Young people can feel like they are powerless against adults.

When police officers start taking responsibility towards their actions and recognizing how they are impacting young people, it can help decrease their negative treatment towards youth. They must learn how to interact with young people in more calm and approachable ways because youth state that often times “...on ne sait pas ce qu'on a fait. On est stressé. La façon qu'ils nous approchent, c'est comme violent” (Shaking the Movers, 2018a, p. 26) which translates to “...we don't know what we've done. We're stressed out. The way they approach us, it's like violent.” This can occur through increasing the amount of dialogue police officers have with young people, being transparent about what they are doing and what is happening and giving young people opportunities to learn from their mistakes. It is important that police officers “...put effort into building positive relationships...” (Shaking the Movers, 2018k, p. 22) and trust with the community and neighbours that they regularly come in contact with (Shaking the Movers, 2018k). This can alleviate the stressors that young people face to help them feel safer.

Parents are other authority figures that impact the way young people access their rights. It is important that parents respect children's rights at home, however, in some cases, they may have misconstrued views of children's rights and, therefore negatively perceive them because

some “parents and adults have a fear of giving children too many rights” (Shaking the Movers, 2007, p. 6). This can occur in situations where rights do not align with the family’s cultural or traditional beliefs and to prevent this, children state that rights-based ideas need to be framed in a “culturally relevant way so those who may fear rights learn to understand them better” (Shaking the Movers, 2007, p. 6). Children look up to their parents and model their behaviours. When parents model behaviours that give value to the child, they begin to accept them, whereas if parents model poor behaviours, children learn to adapt to those. Due to the trust that most children have in their parents, they take the teachings of their parents as a truth and apply them to their lives. The children in the *STM* reports admit to recognizing how their parents may not always know what is best. Parents can disapprove and create barriers to rights because rights may oppose their own beliefs or because they disapprove (Shaking the Movers, 2009). When children take on this understanding, they begin to separate themselves from their family and start to desire more autonomy in their lives. They feel as though they cannot go to their parents for rights-related matters, and that leads to them wanting to be able to decide how much they include their parents in their lives and be in control of how much they share with their parents.

I wasn’t in the discussion and my parents decided for us (my brother and I) to not go to school until after Christmas in 2020. We weren’t included in that discussion, it was more between my parents and my grandparents because they wanted to see my parents more. It was a lot, to be that much time in online school, so after Christmas we spoke to my parents, and they let us go back to school. I didn’t agree with the original decision, it was very damaging to my mental health at the time. I wasn’t online all the time, and I didn’t get to see any of my friends, I only got to see one of them outside once a month with masks on from six feet apart. So it was very damaging to my mental health cause I didn’t

know anybody in my online class, I didn't know anybody at school, and all I did all day was online school, that's all I was allowed to do. (Shaking the Movers, 2021e, p. 12)

The position of this discursive construction highlights the importance of adults involving young people in decisions that impact their lives. The passage represents a case when parents unintentionally violate the rights of their children when they make decisions on behalf of their children without consulting them or asking for any input. Parents may believe that they are making the best decision for their child, but they must start to acknowledge that only their child can express their needs and what they think is best for them (Shaking the Movers, 2021e). This passage is a depiction of an experience that many children have similarly gone through. When parents make such decisions, there is a possibility that it can end up negatively impacting the child rather than there being positive effects as the parents intended. Parents need to make distinctions between their fears and what is in the best interest of the child. By the time adults try to correct their original decision and mistakes, the young person may already be facing the repercussions, in addition to facing a decreased sense of agency.

Not all young people are fortunate enough to have parents who work towards creating a safe and healthy environment where they can successfully develop. In some homes, children express that they face negligence, and violence, or are exploited by their parents. Not all parents are "capable of properly caring for their children" (Shaking the Movers, 2018i, p. 8). Some parents deal with drug addictions, and that can lead to them neglecting their child and their children's need in order to fulfill their own. Other parents, including teenage parents (Shaking the Movers, 2018i, p. 8) may not have the emotional capacity or adequate resources to raise a young person. This can end with parents taking out their stress and frustration on their children

and potentially physically abusing them. In these situations, it can be extremely difficult for a young person to get help because law enforcers can get involved. There is “resistance to the idea of going to the police for help because of fear that the police would separate the family” (Shaking the Movers, 2018i, p. 8) and the young person may end up in foster care. Family separation can take a significant toll on the young person. They want solutions to their problems, not to be removed from their homes (Shaking the Movers, 2018i). Although there can be an effort to raise the child, when the child is not getting proper care, it is a violation of their rights.

In a broader context, this passage is a window into how societal structures can impact young people. In this case, it can be understood that the education system does not always work to support children or create the best learning environment for them. Instead, it creates a whole system and a way of being without considering any input from young people. This is a further reflection of the deeply entrenched power relations that exist in society and their influence on children’s rights. It can be extremely difficult to challenge and resist the power of adults who are in a decision-making position within the education system. They have the ability to control how young people experience school, whether it is online or in person, and the degree of peer interaction they get in school. Online classes can be a very isolating experience for youth, where they do not have any community or peer support, and it can be difficult to change this (Shaking the Movers, 2022). This points to the importance of having societal support in making children’s rights more accessible.

The last and the most significant authority figure that impacts young people's experiences of their rights are adults who are in governmental positions. The government is able to impact young people on a much broader level than their parents or police officers. The government has the ability to determine how rights are implemented on a societal level. However, young people

feel that the government does not do enough for them, and the support they receive is superficial, as the government fails to act on their concerns. When referring to the willingness of the government respecting children's rights in relation to climate change, youth state that "the government is not helping, so it is up to us" (Shaking the Movers, 2016, p. 12). This has made young people feel neglected and feel like they must hold themselves responsible for seeing the changes they want. This means that they have to be persistent and keep fighting until the government listens to them. They believe that "if the government doesn't happen to take us seriously now, we have to keep persisting over and over until they do" (Shaking the Movers, 2019e, p. 21, Shaking the Movers, 2018f, p. 20). The government tends to prioritize and keep focus on non-children's rights-related issues, which can end up violating their rights.

In conversation, children were very firm in their need for the government to take more action to better implement children's rights. Youth state that "[There is a] difference between writing things down and putting them into action. We want the government to actually act upon these problems!" (Shaking the Movers, 2018f, p. 20). When young people notice a pattern in the way that the government constantly fails to meet their expectations, it causes them to lose trust, and they begin to see how unwilling the government actually is towards helping young people. The lack of action that the government takes for children's rights reflects how much they prioritize them (Shaking the Movers, 2016). It shows that members of the government and other politicians are not willing to listen to and act on what young people say. Young people believe that some type of legal consequence for governments is needed to better motivate them to fulfill their obligation towards rights and enforce these changes. It is important that the government takes action, as it is the most effective way to "implement legislations to encourage and enforce"

(Shaking the Movers, 2018h, p. 15) the changes young people require, making it significantly more important towards having governmental support.

I think the Canadian Government is absolutely pathetic, because people say oh it's a free country and you have so many rights, but if you really live in Canada, you would see that none of that really falls into place. There is racism everywhere you go, there is discrimination everywhere you go. It just makes me so angry, because if you look at the residential schools, that was only brought up in the curriculum this year. (Shaking the Movers, 2018f, p. 17)

The tone of this text best represents how young people feel about the government's support towards them. The young people are rightfully angry and frustrated due to the experiences they have had with the Canadian government. There is a misunderstanding about Canada being a free and rights-respecting country; this reality is only experienced by those who are living with more privileged identities. Using racism, this passage indicates that different young people in Canada experience this country and their rights differently, and these people can best explain how rights respecting Canada actually is. For instance, people who belong to minority groups, such as racial minorities, deal with different types of discrimination and systemic oppressions that can make it extremely difficult for them to succeed, compared to their counterparts who belong to majority groups.

The Canadian government has done an excellent job covering up the oppressions and discriminations that they have created. The lack of education and awareness of Indigenous history and experiences is a very significant example (Shaking the Movers, 2018f). Others may think Canada is extremely rights respecting when in reality, some young people do not even have access to clean water, which is one of the most basic necessities they need for survival (Shaking

the Movers, 2021e). In Canada, the truth is that people live very different types of lives; the ones in power are those who present Canada as a rights-respecting state, and they have the most access to their rights. Those individuals who face oppression are the ones who are silenced and ignored, making it very difficult for them to bring forth the reality of the Canada they experience.

Again, this is a passage that is reflective of the power that the government holds over children and their rights. The government influences the education system on the basis of the content that is taught to the children. As Foucault (1990) mentions, knowledge is power, and so essential knowledge about Indigenous history is being kept from children. In the quote above, the *STM* participant explicitly expressed their frustration by stating that “...It just makes me so angry, because if you look at the residential schools, that was only brought up in the curriculum this year” (Shaking the Movers, 2018f, p. 17). They had minimal knowledge about residential schools because they felt they were not properly taught about them in school. Due to their lack of knowledge regarding this troubled history, they have no reason to question the doings of the government. Only when children begin to recognize the wrongs that have occurred can they be in a position that demands better from the government. In this way, the government holds the ability to shape how young people think about the society and what they believe about the government. If they are only being told how the government is benefiting them, they will believe that. If young people are not educated about the experiences of Indigenous people, they will not think that any wrongs have occurred. This further connects to the responsibility that adults have to educate young people about the entire narrative, so they have proper knowledge about what is occurring and what has occurred historically. This puts young people in a position where they need to be questioning the information they are being given. They should question whose agenda and what purpose that information is serving.

Certain youth need to step up and take it upon themselves to continue to push for equal representation and to continue to push till discrimination isn't such a prevalent issue in our society. So if the government doesn't happen to take us seriously now, we have to keep persisting over and over until they do. (Shaking the Movers, 2018f, p. 20)

Due to the importance of needing governmental support for better access to rights, young people are aware that they must be persistent and keep fighting for their rights and against the oppressions they face. This comes back to young people feeling like they are the ones who need to take action for them to be able to see the change that they need (Shaking the Movers, 2018f). Adult partnership is necessary; however, they do not always receive it. The way young people say “we have to keep persisting over and over until they do” (p. 20) indicates that they see themselves as being powerful enough to resist power that is being used to silence them and instead, get the attention of those in positions of power. If they keep making noise, they will eventually be heard. If adults do not willingly listen to young people, they must find other ways to get the attention of adults and media, as that may be the only way for their concerns to actually be heard and hold the government accountable for their obligations. Youth must use their abilities to take ownership of their agency and act in ways to see the changes they want.

The youth participants discuss the actions that governments can take to better support them. This starts with finding ways to make it easier for young people to voice their concerns to adults in governmental positions. The government needs to be open to listening to children's voices and be willing to bring their concerns to the table. This can be the first step to making their concerns known. However, it can be difficult to get the attention of politicians to ensure that they are aware of children's concerns. Additionally, politicians should be working on partnerships with young people by maintaining communication, having enough knowledge about

rights that they can inform young people, and the youth believe that “politicians should be asking for our feedback” (Shaking the Movers, 2020b, p. 15) to allow their inputs to be added in matters being discussed. This can be done by increasing the number of in-person participation opportunities between children and adults (Shaking the Movers, 2018k), eliminating the need to rely on others, and decreasing challenges created by online communication barriers (Shaking the Movers, 2020b). When governments and politicians refuse to listen to children and take them seriously, it sends a message that they are not important, and their voices are not valued. This can turn into a way to continue to silence children; when they feel like they are not being taken seriously, it may demotivate them to step up. However, this is also a reason why young people should learn to understand that they do have value and their voices do matter, so when adults mistreat them and refuse to listen, they are finding other ways to have their voices heard through being persistent (Shaking the Movers, 2018f).

Another way that governments can better support young people is by creating better lines of communication between children and adults in governmental positions, as well as politicians. The decisions that impact youth and the information they would find necessary are passed down very slowly to young people. Often time, young people do not even know what is going on until the decision has been made, taking away all opportunities for them to be involved in that decision-making process. When these decisions are talked about in the media, the government does not even address young people, the young participants state how politicians and governmental figures “don’t actually say anything directly to us” (Shaking the Movers, 2022, p. 9), these messages are instead addressed to adults. This makes youth feel like there is no consideration given to how these decisions impact them, and it reinforces their feeling of being neglected by the government, as they explicitly state that they “feel like we’re kinda neglected in

a way when it comes to the government” (Shaking the Movers, 2022, p. 14). The government needs to work to better acknowledge the youth.

Lastly, the positionality that young people take in terms of their relationship with adults positions them in a manner where they are able to clearly state how adults create barriers for them in their experiences with their rights. These barriers occur because of the power dynamics between children and adults. Society is built on a structure that centers around adulthood; children are expected to learn and develop skills for their future, they are put through an entire educational institution that aims to socialize them to help them become productive citizens in their adulthood, and adults are the people who take up positions of power. When everything is so future-orientated and focused on adults, it sends an implicit message that adulthood is the most important time in a person’s life; therefore, the most value is attributed to that.

When adults have power over young people, this can turn into control over their lives. Their power can lead to them making decisions or acting on behalf of children because they believe they can make better decisions for the child, better than the child themselves. This aligns with James and Prout’s (1997) understanding that adults undermine children because of their developmentally rooted understanding of childhood that correlates with age and ability. In this understanding, “the concept of ‘development’ inextricably links the biological facts of immaturity, such as dependence, to the social aspects of childhood” (p. 10), hence why adults question and lack faith in the abilities of children. Often time, the decisions that adults make for children can prove to be a burden to them because of the knowledge gaps that exist between the adult's understanding of a young person's needs compared to the reality of what the young person’s needs are (Shaking the Movers, 2021e). This can lead to adults preventing children from having autonomy through resisting the decisions that children make. Children state that

they want to be able to make decisions about their lives, and they need adults to respect them even if they do not understand or agree with those decisions. However, when “youth referenced dietary choices, religion, clothing, and privacy, as areas of their life where they wanted more autonomy” they “had been met with resistance from adults when attempting to make their own choices” (Shaking the Movers, 2018k, p. 15). In order to overcome this barrier, adults need to learn how to give up control of the child by giving the young person opportunities to make mistakes, struggle and learn from them, as this is a part of the learning process.

Lack of Awareness and Education Awareness Around Children’s Rights

Table 2

Summary of Findings for Theme Two: Lack of Awareness and Education Around Children’s Rights

Sub-Theme Description	Quotes	STM Report
Many youth across Canada lack awareness about the Convention and their rights due to the lack of education they receive.	Before this event I didn’t know young people have a legal document (the Convention) that protects them and where their rights are guaranteed. I was very surprised to learn that the Convention celebrated its 30th anniversary this year and that I had never heard of it before...	Shaking the Movers, 2020c, p. 7
The normalization of children not being aware of their rights causes them to believe it is their responsibility to educate themselves.	I didn’t know about my rights. I thought that if you want to know your rights, it’s your job to find out, but actually, I have the right for someone to teach me about them	Shaking the Movers, 2018e, p. 11
Youth believe they must find ways to educate themselves and their peers about their rights to ensure they can work in partnership with society to create a future where they can succeed.	It is important for children and youth to know their own rights because we are literally the future of the planet and we have to make decisions that will benefit us and benefit society and overall make a positive change in the world and knowing your rights is important. It becomes educating yourself, educating others	Shaking the Movers, 2020b, p. 24

<p>It is important for young people to unify so they can come together to learn and discuss rights.</p>	<p>They create a safe environment for people to discuss whatever concerns, like their own community, and it's also a good way for people to meet people who identify in a similar way. And also, for people who don't belong to certain communities who engage with different issues or events that would concern them. I think it's a really good opportunity for spreading awareness, be able to communicate in a safe and controlled environment at school, and for also discovering new interests and passions</p>	<p>Shaking the Movers, 2021e, p. 21</p>
<p>Clubs provide young people with safe spaces for them to learn and fill in knowledge gaps that may lead to discriminatory mistreatment of others due to ignorance. Clubs additionally help create more awareness towards the issues that young people face.</p>	<p>One of the main purposes of these clubs is to have an environment that builds a community where people in those communities can share each other's ideals in a safe space. And also in general for education cause these things like racism are a result of ignorance. So, the clubs are a foundation and starting point for that education cause if you educate one person and that person can talk to someone else about it and in the long run at least everyone hears about it so it's a good starting point to spreading awareness</p>	<p>Shaking the Movers, 2021e, p. 21</p>

Youth Lacking Education and Awareness about Rights

Another theme that was produced through the data analysis was the lack of awareness and education that children have about their rights. The children in the *STM* workshops reference their lack of awareness and education in five ways. The first is through explicit references to how they do not have awareness nor receive proper rights education, and this is a factor that strongly impacts their ability to access their rights. When children are not receiving proper rights education, it leaves them unaware of what rights they have, how to access them, when they are being violated and where to get support for rights violations. Additionally, the youth participants discuss how “they are not informed on how to engage in the political system, and do not have

any knowledge about the procedures that exist that allow for one to have their voice heard” (Shaking the Movers, 2020c, p. 11). This lack of education and awareness prevents young people from being able to interact with societal systems to demand more accessibility and rights-based changes.

Before this event I didn’t know young people have a legal document (the Convention) that protects them and where their rights are guaranteed. I was very surprised to learn that the Convention celebrated its 30th anniversary this year and that I had never heard of it before... (Shaking the Movers, 2020c, p. 7)

One child in the workshop stated how they did not even know that their rights were under the protection of a legal document. Concerningly, it is notable how a majority of the youth throughout the *STM* reports expressed being surprised to learn about their rights and that they should be protected by the UNCRC. This expression was more consistent than young people stating their disappointment or being upset at Canada’s failure towards their rights. When the young participant stated “...I was very surprised to learn that the Convention celebrated its 30th anniversary this year and that I had never heard of it before... (Shaking the Movers, 2020c, p. 7) it points out that in 2019 it had been 30 years since the implementation of the UNCRC; this means that there should have been 30 years of implementation efforts towards children’s rights. If children’s rights were prioritized and taken seriously, three decades could have been enough time to widely incorporate the UNCRC into Canadian society. This is an indication of Canada’s willingness to ignore and continuously fail to prioritize taking children and their rights seriously.

This discursive construction found that utilizing Willig’s (2013) approach emphasizes the shift that is needed in Canada’s prioritization of children’s rights. Rights must be taken more

seriously in order for children to be able to access them successfully. The first step of this would occur by bringing awareness to the fact that the UNCRC (1989) exists, which is a legal document that guarantees children a special set of rights meant to protect and allow them to have their needs met. Children are in the unknown, and they have a dependence on the State Party to fulfill its responsibility toward them. When Canada continues to fail to properly implement the Convention, it takes on the role of a gatekeeper that prevents children from being able to access their rights, and more often, children are not even aware of this violation. In reference to this lack of education, a youth states, “if you don’t know what they are, how do you know what you’re not getting?” (Shaking the Movers, 2007, p. 11). As this results in children being completely powerless against these violations because they do not even recognize they are occurring, which leaves them unable to resist and speak up for themselves. This version of the discursive construction guides the understanding of the discourse in a manner that emphasizes the need for Canada to step up and fulfill the responsibility it has towards children. It should be alarming that there are still children who have not been able to learn about the Convention even though it has been implemented for three decades. However, this direction of understanding the discourse should not take away from workshops like *Shaking the Movers*, who have taken on the burden of fulfilling the obligations that the Canadian governments and authority figures should be working towards. Rather, this version of the discourse should be seen as a much-needed push to take on a more widespread approach and goal of education and creating awareness about children’s rights, similar to what the *Shaking the Movers* workshops are doing.

When analyzing how children do not talk about their lack of awareness and education about their rights, it should be pointed out that young people do not question why they have not learned about them. Nor do young people question why they have only learned about the

Convention after participating in the *Shaking the Movers* workshop, a designated rights-based space, even though the Convention has been signed and ratified for 30 years in Canada. This strongly connects to the systematic and structural failures of Canadian society's ability to implement and respect the Convention. In addition to emphasizing the concerning reality of how little education and awareness children actually have about their rights. Unless they are in a designated space to learn about rights, they are not given opportunities to learn about them. Young people are not questioning the failure of Canada's implementation efforts because they do not even know what they should be receiving or the responsibilities that the State Party has towards them (Shaking the Movers, 2007, p. 11).

The lack of education and awareness around rights can put young people in a position where they begin to believe that the onus is on them to learn about their rights, when in reality, they have the right to be receiving this education from adults. The *STM* workshop participants mention that "It's important to educate yourself on your own rights" (Shaking the Movers, 2020b, p. 23) because they find themselves needing to take on the responsibility for themselves, or they must rely on outside sources such as the media to educate themselves. When children are aware of their rights, it helps them feel more empowered and encourages them to continue learning so they can make sure their rights are not being violated (Shaking the Movers, 2018c). Although this initiative can be insightful, it may also lead to misconceptions or misunderstandings about rights, as the sources young people utilize may not be completely reliable or accurate because "they have not been educated about how to analyze or evaluate information, or how to pick out reliable information" (Shaking the Movers, 2010, p. 13). This makes it vital that all adults, including parents, educators and working professionals, are aware of the Convention and make an effort to implement it. This best helps ensure that children's

rights are respected and met. However, the problem then becomes the fact that some adults do not have this knowledge and when they themselves do not know, they are in no position to either educate or respect young people's rights which is a direct violation of Article 42 under the UNCRC (1989), which states that all young people and adults must know about the Convention. Adults not being able to properly educate young people about their rights proves to be problematic in multiple ways.

I didn't know about my rights. I thought that if you want to know your rights, it's your job to find out, but actually, I have the right for someone to teach me about them.

(Shaking the Movers, 2018e, p. 11)

When the child in the *STM* workshop references their rights and states, "I have the right for someone to teach me about them" (Shaking the Movers, 2018c, p. 11), they are not putting the responsibility directly on adults. The term 'someone' is very broad, and it can refer to a wide range of people, including other children, adults, workshops, and organizations. When children do not directly address adults and put that responsibility on them, it takes away a level of expectation for them to fulfill their obligations. It can be argued that the use of the term 'someone' instead of 'adults' is intentional and representative of the trust that children have in adults to be fulfilling their responsibilities. The child recognizes that they have not been taught about their rights by the adults in their lives even though they have the right to this knowledge. Instead, now they depend on anyone, including different organizations, workshops, initiatives or even peers with rights knowledge, to educate them rather than only depending on adults.

The discursive construction of youth lacking education and awareness about their rights points out how there needs to be better partnership between children and adults in order for them

to successfully learn about their rights. Children must be able to depend on adults to educate them, and this means that adults must ensure they are respectful and educated about children's rights, and this knowledge can ultimately allow them to better access them. When adults fail to fulfill their responsibility towards children, and children lose their trust in adults, it results in adults taking on a gatekeeping role which prevents children from accessing their rights. Young people state that "parents are responsible for teaching children too, and they have to be encouraging for rights education to work" (Shaking the Movers, 2009, p. 26). This positionality helps to point out how important it is for adults to have rights education. When there is acknowledgement towards this failed obligation, it can help create more dialogue directed toward the steps needed for better rights accessibility. It also addresses the issue of both children and adults needing to be educated about children's rights, encouraging everyone to find a solution to this lack of education.

Importance of Rights Education and Awareness

The second way children refer to this discourse is by mentioning how they require more education and awareness about their rights. Here, the young people go in-depth about how they should learn and "know about their rights at a much younger age" (Shaking the Movers, 2007, p. 6) to allow them to better recognize when they are facing rights violations. Rights education lasts a lifetime, which fosters a sense of respect and importance towards children's rights, and this motivates them to continue respecting these rights as they enter adulthood. Rights education allows children to understand that their rights should be considered as needs to their well-being and not just as wants. Rights are not a privilege for young people, but they are essential to them. Young people state their concerns about all the children not being given the same opportunities to receive rights education as they acknowledge that "depending on who you are, you don't have

the same opportunities” (Shaking the Movers, 2018e, p. 22). It is vital that all children are learning about their rights, and this must include children from minority groups, newcomer youth, and Indigenous youth. This education must be culturally relevant (Shaking the Movers, 2007, p. 6), so it is accessible and applicable to all children. Education and awareness are the steppingstones that make it possible for young people to be able to participate in society and make informed decisions.

It is important for children and youth to know their own rights because we are literally the future of the planet and we have to make decisions that will benefit us and benefit society and overall make a positive change in the world and knowing your rights is important. It becomes educating yourself, educating others. (Shaking the Movers, 2020b, p. 24)

One young person in the *STM* report mentions how the only way change can occur is through education. Young people must be aware of the problems that exist in order to solve them in a way that can benefit both youth and the society they live in. Education empowers young people because “knowing their rights gives them confidence in who they are and what they can do” (Shaking the Movers, 2018i, p. 9). It can further encourage them to take those steps that aid in creating spaces where youth can engage in partnership with others who can allow them to build a future where they can succeed. Education helps foster a sense of responsibility in children, where they recognize the importance of teaching their peers about the Convention, and this can widely help spread the awareness that exists around children’s rights.

The text above is meaningful, especially while considering the lack of mention of the partnership that children should have with adults in creating rights awareness and educating

others. Instead, the young person understands this as a responsibility of their own for “educating yourself” and “educating others” (Shaking the Movers, 2020b, p. 24). This will then allow them to make the positive changes they want to see in the world. Arguably, this is a representation of the generational change that young people want; they must become the change they want to see in the future regarding their rights. Children are the future, and in the future, they can become rights respecting adults who work in partnership with young people. Additionally, children do not mention adults when referencing the need to make decisions that will benefit them and society for positive change. This is an indication of the trust that young people have in adults. Due to the mass failure of adults in fulfilling their responsibilities and obligations toward children, children no longer count on adults to be able to help them. They instead vouch for a more individual path where they themselves are responsible for achieving the changes they want to see.

Children believe that one way to get more rights education is through learning about all matters that concern them or are relevant to them. Each social or societal issue can be connected to rights-related issues. Throughout multiple STM reports it was notable that young people expressed interest in receiving more education about issues related to the age of consent, multiculturalism, gender identities, and disabilities. Young people also want more education about the individual rights they have under the UNCRC, so they can understand exactly how they are protected and what is guaranteed to them. In this way, knowledge is power; it helps them use their rights and apply that information in multiple different spaces, such as in educational settings, community settings or even political settings. This teaches young people that they can use their voice to state their opinions, speak out when necessary and stand up against rights violations. Youth discuss that education helps prevent children from being

exploited or violated by stating “awareness is key, we need to teach kids about their rights” (Shaking the Movers, 2014, p .14) and “[To prevent exploitation we need to] learn more about the topics and how it affects people, how dangerous exploitation is” (p. 16). Additionally, education can even increase tolerance and acceptance among young people towards diversity. Children even have reported “that learning about their rights made them feel safe and secure, and “like [they have] more of a voice” (Shaking the Movers, 2018i, p. 7).

Partnership for More Rights Education and Awareness

Employing Willig’s (2013) approach allows there to be understanding that this discursive construction further reinforces the lack of partnership that exist between children and adults regarding matters that relate to their rights. Instead of demanding adults to better support young people, they take on a position where they depend on themselves to create the changes they want to see. In the present, they put the responsibility on themselves to learn about their rights and spread awareness so they can carry it on in the future (Shaking the Movers, 2020b). Children may begin to believe that the most beneficial and successful way for them to be able to access their rights will be if they fight and work to overcome barriers themselves. In this position, when children are more dependent on themselves, they take on a role where they are not powerless against adults. Instead, when young people unify, it can make them so powerful that they can accomplish their goals regardless of the amount of adult support that is available to them. Although this is a powerful position that young people take, not acknowledging the roles that adults must play in making rights accessible can further the gap that prevents partnership between children and adults. It can negatively impact children as they may be left in a position where they are unwilling and untrusting of adults who have every intention of being supportive or resourceful to children, and that can hinder their ability to accomplish their goals. Using stage

six of Willig's approach: subjectivity, it can be seen how this can cause young people to construct an understanding of needing to find ways to exist and be successful in the world without depending on adults in relation to their rights. It is necessary that adults work to better their partnership with children and support them in accessing their rights before all young people reach a state where they act on the lack of trust they have towards adults and take matters into their own hands. The partnership between children and adults is what allows there to be a maximum number of opportunities for children to learn about their rights and participate in society to the best of their ability. Children must trust adults for this relationship to work out in the future.

When considering how more rights awareness and education can be created, it brings up the importance of societal partnership towards children's rights. This means that the different systems in society, the community, adults and children, must work together and "only together can we make a difference and build something new" (Shaking the Movers, 2020c, p. 7), such as working in partnership to create more rights awareness. One way more awareness can be created is through implementing rights education in the education system. For instance, "teachers should be taught the Convention at teacher's college" (Shaking the Movers, 2009, p. 25), so all future teachers are equipped with the proper knowledge to be able to pass information about the Convention to their future students, in addition to teaching them how to respect children's rights. Then this rights education must be incorporated into the curriculum to guarantee that all children are receiving age-appropriate rights education. When children are learning and seeing their rights being implemented on a daily basis, it reinforces the understanding that their rights are important, and it can help them internalize rights-based values that can be applied to their lives (Shaking the Movers, 2009). However, it is important that when adults pass on rights

information to children, the “information should be developed in accessible language without dumbing things down” (Shaking the Movers. 2007, p. 6) so it is accessible to all young people. This means using both child-friendly languages and having this education available in different languages. This allows the youth to gain the strongest understanding of their rights without feeling like adults are ‘dumbing’ down the Convention for them.

Young people list other ways to create more awareness about their rights, and this can be done by increasing their understanding of the Convention through increasing “opportunities for informal discussion on Children’s Rights to normalize the concept” (Shaking the Movers, 2018k, p.24), which will lead to young people being able to engage in rights-related conversations with those around them. Awareness can even occur through situations where young people unintentionally violate someone else’s rights or have their rights violated. In this case, young people need education to help them recognize when their own actions are violating children’s rights. Young people must know how to act on their rights, they need to be taught what to do when their rights are being violated and how to file complaints about those violations.

Discussing how to create more awareness and education on rights is an important conversation for this discourse. For this to occur, there needs to be a safe space for young people to get together with other like-minded individuals where they can have open and honest conversations about their needs, concerns and expectations. A space that can provide young people with an environment like this can be clubs, whether they are school clubs or community-based clubs (Shaking the Movers, 2021e).

They create a safe environment for people to discuss whatever concerns, like their own community, and it’s also a good way for people to meet people who identify in a similar way. And also, for people who don’t belong to certain communities who engage with

different issues or events that would concern them. I think it's a really good opportunity for spreading awareness, be able to communicate in a safe and controlled environment at school, and for also discovering new interests and passions. (Shaking the Movers, 2021e, p. 21)

In this passage, young people implicitly refer to the importance of unification between young people. It is important that young people come together to learn and discuss their rights. This can create an understanding of the challenges they face, which areas they want more education and even discuss the best way for them to receive rights education. Effective education comes in a form that is appealing to youth. It may be more appealing to them when they are not being talked at but rather talking with others their own age or with similar experiences to them because "with peer-to-peer participation, young people feel more comfortable expressing themselves" (Shaking the Movers, 2007, p .5) due to the sense of trust and comfort they have. Creativity and the use of relevant resources such as technology can make rights education more accessible to youth. On the other hand, when young people are asked for suggestions on how they believe rights awareness can be more accessible, this allows them to start thinking about what their needs are and the obstacles they face and then explicitly mention them. This gives very direct direction to how rights awareness can be more accessible to youth.

One of the main purposes of these clubs is to have an environment that builds a community where people in those communities can share each other's ideals in a safe space. And also in general for education cause these things like racism are a result of ignorance. So, the clubs are a foundation and starting point for that education cause if you educate one person and that person can talk to someone else about it and in the long run

at least everyone hears about it so it's a good starting point to spreading awareness.

(Shaking the Movers, 2021e, p. 21)

Not only do clubs create safe spaces for youth, but it also creates a space for them to be able to fill in knowledge gaps that may lead to children mistreating others. As the young person mentions, a lack of education and knowledge can cause youth to face issues that stem from ignorance, such as racism or discrimination. A lack of education can mean that a young person may not know the implications behind their actions. For example, if they notice everyone treating one individual differently for a factor such as their race, they can be inclined to do the same thing. However, they may not consider why that differential treatment is occurring and how that impacts someone. Education can help young people recognize that excluding someone based on their race is a type of discrimination, and that is a rights violation, and it is a result of systematic racism. With this information, they can become more mindful of the way they behave with others and be empowered to correct any rights violations they recognize. In this way, rights education can help young people learn about the experience of other youth that occurs from rights violations.

The discursive construction draws light to the importance of recognizing the needs of children and acting upon them. Aside from adult partnership, children have a criterion of needs that must be met in order for them to receive effective education and awareness of rights. Education is not only about passing information, but it is also about ensuring that the information young people are getting is accessible to them and questioning if they fully comprehend what is being told to them. However, “youth recommended that there be more accessible information and resources about all their rights including training to help them advocate for themselves and others in schools, at home and in the community” (Shaking the Movers, 2013, p. 13). Youth not

only want information about their rights, but how they can use and stand up for those rights in society. Once young people obtain the appropriate education, the initiatives they take to help other youth become more aware of their rights through discussion can make a significant impact. For example, if one child finds resources to educate them about their rights, they can pass out this information to their peers, who can then extend it to their family. This collective effort allows children to be able to create awareness and gain access to their rights.

Furthermore, this creates an understanding of how children should be at the center of the phenomena of children's rights, whether they are getting the education they need and if they are receiving the education in a manner that is accessible to them. Unfortunately, this is more often dictated by how willing adults are to uphold their responsibility towards children, so instead of children being in the middle, it ends with the partnership and willingness of adults. There is a need for a shift from what adults are willing to do for children, to focus more on the needs that children have which must be met for them to be able to access their rights. This understanding then proves the importance of partnership between children. If children are unable to find adults who are willing to fulfill their responsibilities, children should be well-equipped to find other methods to learn about their rights. They should be able to seek out resources that can better help them to create spaces for themselves in partnership with organizations and adults who are willing to work with them such as the *STM* workshops and the affiliated adults.

Children's Rights in the Education System

Table 3

Summary of Findings for Theme Three: Children's Rights in the Education System

Sub-Theme Description	Quotes	<i>STM</i> Report
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Youth require adults in positions of power in school to do a better job of listening to them and acting on their concerns.	Teachers and principals and vice principals [should] actually listen to what you're saying and act on what children mean. And actually listen instead of just ignoring them	Shaking the Movers, 2018k, p. 20
More knowledge on rights allow youth to recognize how their rights are being violated and how not all children are able to equally access and participate in their rights.	Before the Shaking the Movers weekend, I knew basic rights but I got to learn how rights are being violated everywhere especially among students in school. I heard a lot of stories about not being able to use that right even though everyone has equal "rights"	Shaking the Movers, 2018d, p. 14
Adults in positions of power must ensure they are working with, and not against children by believing them and providing them with the support they need.	One participant explained how a teacher refused to give them notes because the teacher felt the student had "decided to stay home" rather than recognizing that this student has a serious mental illness	Shaking the Movers, 2018e, p. 23
Young people are often excluded from communication/ conversations about them. Adults often talk about children and what they need instead of talking to children to ensure their needs are being met.	A rift in communication: A gap exists in the education system, in that it is always parent to teacher or teacher to parent communication and students are not involved in that discussion. To communicate with the administration, students must go through a teacher	Shaking the Movers, 2009, p. 19
Necessary changes are needed within the education system. It must be ensured that all youth are given the space needed to create the best learning environment and conditions to ensure they receive a good quality education.	By default in order to have a proper education system, it has to be a safe space. Racism affects the way we interact with each other in school. Whether it be a lack of opportunity for certain groups, these small microaggressions make it difficult to enjoy a certain class or voice an opinion. What this does is that it starts the road towards their path of life and it decimates the opportunities that they have which end up affecting their future, and demonstrates why certain groups are less than others	Shaking the Movers, 2018f, p. 18

The next theme that was apparent within the analysis was young people discussing how they experience their rights at school. This theme was expected and incredibly important to bring up as young people are expected to spend a very significant portion of their time at school. Hence the experiences they have at school make up a large part of how their rights are experienced overall. Young people discuss their rights in the education system in the following ways: the barriers they face to rights in school, their desire for more rights education, how

educators influence the way rights are experienced, the need for more inclusive and accessible education, and lastly, the need for more support in the education system.

One very common barrier that many young people feel they deal with in schools is bullying. Bullying, in itself, creates multiple barriers for young people in accessing their rights. Firstly, it negatively impacts the right to education among other individual rights, for example, their right to feel safe and protected and the right to not be discriminated against, as bullying usually occurs because of minority social statuses related to race or SES. Young people believe that bullying takes away from them in a significant way, some examples that were brought up were how bullying creates a “barrier to feeling safe at school and in the community” (Shaking the Movers, 2018k, p. 20). This can be problematic as youth are expected to spend a significant amount of time here. Additionally, bullying teaches young people to hide who they are in order to survive rather than teaching them how to authentically be themselves, which negatively impacts their right to self-expression (Shaking the Movers, 2019e). It takes away a child’s ability to make trusting and deep connections with their peers or teachers in their developmental years, and this can negatively impact their ability to create relationships in the future. Bullying can cause schools to be such an unsettling experience for young people that they are motivated to switch schools or even drop out, one participant admits that they have “gone to 4 different schools because of bullies” (Shaking the Movers, 2015, p. 19).

Youth discuss how the lack of action from adults allows bullying to persist. Teachers and principals need to acknowledge the fact that bullying is occurring in schools and must make better efforts to listen to victims. In reference to bullying, one youth mentioned that, “I told my counselor, principal, and teachers about [the bullying] for the past 4 months. Nothing has been done yet” (Shaking the Movers, 2018k, p. 20). Effort is what will allow support systems to be

implemented and provide better spaces for victims of bullying to heal, especially at schools. Some methods of support that were mentioned by youth include teaching them to recognize bullying and inappropriate behaviours, so they can take action against it. Some youth mention that they feel a lack of support from their peers, and they want to “be able to recognize bullying and behaviour that is not appropriate and be able to correct it and stand up to it” (Shaking the Movers, 2007, p. 9) to ensure that they themselves are not participating in bullying, it becomes important to question the underlying reasons why young people resort to bullying, and this can be because of ignorance or intolerance. They state, “bullying happens because there’s not enough knowledge or awareness” (Shaking the Movers, 2019e, p. 14). It is important that young people are exposed to other minority youth, such as peers who belong to racial minorities or peers with disability. This exposure will allow them to build tolerance and be more accepting, which can aid in reducing bullying. For instance, people in “decision making roles could make a difference by standing up to it and providing more opportunities for other youth to learn about” diversity and other difference such as disability among youth (Shaking the Movers, 2018c, p. 19). Young people make the following suggestions of how adults can better support them (Shaking the Movers, 2018k): in schools, youth can have teachers who circle back and check in on youth who experience bullying, there needs to be improved communication between teachers/school administrators and parents, and lastly, young people should be consulted on how they can be supported, and how improvements can be made. Consulting young people will allow them to get the best type of support from teachers. Overall young people feel like they should be able to get support for bullying without having to feel judged; otherwise, it makes them feel like they are being discriminated against.

Teachers and principals and vice principals [should] actually listen to what you're saying and act on what children mean. And actually listen instead of just ignoring them.

(Shaking the Movers, 2018k, p. 20)

Here young people mention the lack of support that they are getting from adults in power at schools. Adults, including their teachers and principals, need to make better efforts to listen to them, and this includes their concerns, opinions and suggestions. This creates opportunities for educators to have conversations with youth to understand what their needs are and how they can work together to achieve the most successful educational experience. As “inaction on the part of adults was identified as a significant issue” (Shaking the Movers, 2018k, p. 20). Authority figures at school need to attribute greater value to the voices of young people. Most often, youth feel like they are not being heard or they are being passively listened to because of the lack of action being taken. When young people are constantly being ignored, it can lead to them being disengaged from their learning or make them believe that there is no value in speaking out, which can demotivate them from engaging in learning opportunities (Shaking the Movers, 2009, p. 10)

Additionally, this passage speaks to the power dynamics that exist in schools. At school, there is a power hierarchy due to the different roles that children and adults play. Adults are given authority and responsibility over children, and in some cases, in order for adults to fulfill this role, they can resort to violating the rights that children have. In this environment, young people must depend on adults to help them meet their needs. For instance, if they are being bullied, they seek support from adults to feel safer, or if they require accommodation, they need the assistance of their teachers. In schools, it can be difficult to obtain the support and resources

they require without receiving support from teachers (Shaking the Movers, 2018k). If youth try to speak out and take measures into their own hands, they may need to deal with negative consequences of disobeying the authority of the teacher. Interestingly in school, educators hold the power to listen to or dismiss youth; however, children are not given the same autonomy or chances to advocate for themselves. “People in the schools often tell students to “advocate for themselves” but after a certain point, teachers and administrations consider it disrespectful coming from a student” (Shaking the Movers, 2020c, p. 31). Instead, they are mostly expected to obey their teacher without questioning them; otherwise, it is seen as an act of disrespect towards their authority. This can take space away from a young person to ask questions or speak up against mistreatment.

Young people acknowledge the grading systems at schools as another barrier that negatively impacts their right to a good quality education, and it undermines their learning and creativity in education. Grades do not accurately reflect the abilities of children; therefore, in order to get their desired grades, children can be motivated to cheat, which can have negative consequences such as poorly impacting their relationship with their teachers or peers. However, a grades-focused approach is “seen by the students as incomplete or unfair as a student’s performance may be affected by a situation at home, or by a medical or mental health diagnoses that make it difficult for them to perform” (Shaking the Movers, 2020c, p. 18), and ultimately prevents them from receiving the appropriate amount of support they need. Keeping a focus on grades “encourages your students to avoid challenging work” (Shaking the Movers, 2020b, p. 13) and take risks, taking away their opportunities to think critically about the content they learn about. It then trains young people how to passively take in and spit out the information they are being given without actually learning.

Lack of access to resources and technology is also mentioned by the participants of the workshops as a barrier to their education and their rights in an educational institution. Many young people feel as though they are not aware of all the resources available to them at the school and they complain that their “school barely talks about the resources available to the youth on creating a change in the future” (Shaking the Movers, 2018f, p .17). These resources must be better organized and advertised to make them more accessible. This is necessary because “not everyone has access to a computer and wifi” (Shaking the Movers, 2020b, p. 13) at their homes, and when they need to depend on this technology for their education, it can put them behind or cause them to be overwhelmed, especially when their education is online (Shaking the Movers, 2020b). Some youth express how they have experienced failing classes because of their inability to access a computer, a factor outside of their control, and they felt “school didn’t even care if all students didn’t have a computer” (Shaking the Movers, 2020b, p. 13) because they were given minimal support from the school to aid in rectifying that occurrence. This lack of resources prevents schools from giving all young people equal opportunity to succeed.

Unnecessary barriers in education can be caused by rules. Young people feel like the present rules can be more restrictive rather than protective, and this can “prevent our generation to evolve to their own way” (Shaking the Movers, 2018a, p. 16). These regulations at schools can restrict rights and contribute to a unsafe environment instead of helping young people feel safe. An example that was given was how young people feel like the use of uniforms restricts their self-expression and prevents others from seeing diversity and differences among peers (Shaking the Movers, 2018a). Being able to interact and see diversity is important for young person’s development, as it allows them to be the most accepting and understanding of others.

The majority of the *STM* participants admitted that they had never learned about their rights or the UNCRC. They believed that this occurred because of the lack of time allotted to rights education, the lack of importance towards children's rights, and not incorporating rights education or the Convention into the curriculum. Young people have repeatedly stated that they want change and more rights-based education in school, starting at the elementary level. "Many youths felt that the conversation about rights should become more normalized and recommended integrating rights-based education into provincial school curriculum" (Shaking the Movers, 2018k, p. 23). However, this education needs to happen beyond surface-level conversations and in more elaborate ways. This education needs to be both about their individual rights and their rights in general. Young people need to be given concrete examples of their rights, how they can be applied in real life and how youth can defend them. This approach can allow them to obtain the most well-rounded education about their rights.

Before the Shaking the Movers weekend, I knew basic rights but I got to learn how rights are being violated everywhere especially among students in school. I heard a lot of stories about not being able to use that right even though everyone has equal "rights." (Shaking the Movers, 2018d, p. 14)

In this passage, young people, as students, place emphasis on their rights being violated at schools. With more knowledge and awareness, they begin to recognize that their rights are not respected and are violated on a daily basis. This is a reference to knowledge being power. The knowledge of their rights allows them to see how their rights are being violated, and it then gives them the power to act upon this new understanding to create their desired change. Young people need to know that they have rights before they can understand in what ways they are being violated. This then allows young people to take on the role of being empowered individuals who

can fight for their rights. Within this positionality, young people are not powerless over the power and authority that adults have over them. Adults cannot gatekeep rights because, with the proper knowledge, youth can find different opportunities and support systems that can make their rights more accessible.

When the youth states, “I heard a lot of stories about not being able to use that right even though everyone has equal “rights” (Shaking the Movers, 2018d, p. 14), this is a direct reference to how not all young people are treated the same. When employing Willig’s six-stage approach, this positionality is an indication of existing power disparities in society. Some children are given more value; therefore, they are able to access their rights better and more often, these are the young people who reflect those adults in power. This can send youth a message that certain groups of people are more worthy of receiving opportunities and being able to exercise their rights than others and even further teaching young people to reinforce these values. These values create a very specific reality and turn such treatment into norms. It can become a norm to treat specific groups of people better than others, and when that happens, mistreatment is no longer questioned, it is accepted. This is a reality for all the youth who are not able to use their rights. It is important that all youth are treated equally and given the same opportunities to exercise their rights. Educators in schools need to work together with children to ensure that they are treating all young people the same and provide them with equal opportunities to exercise their rights. This can allow for measures to be taken that allow for better integration of rights in the education system and therefore better implement rights.

Young people further discuss what a rights-respecting school should look like and what it should incorporate. In terms of classrooms, they should incorporate information about rights and be small enough that teachers are able to respect rights by understanding the needs of each

student. “Rights are taught at an early age and are implemented in daily activities” (Shaking the Movers, 2009, p. 27). Young people need to be given opportunities to be part of the decision-making process, so their voices are heard. Adults and students need to have mutual respect for each other, and this places adults in a position where they can “listen to what students have to say” (Shaking the Movers, 2009, p. 27) and give them an open space for rights-based discussion. All young people should be made to feel welcome and feel like they belong regardless of their identity because “every child deserves to go to school and deserves to have the chance to grow up” (Shaking the Movers, 2009, p. 27).

Teachers play a very significant role in the lives of young people as they are the adults that young people are expected to spend the majority of their time with, aside from their family or guardians. Young people state that it is important for school to be a safe space, and that they feel supported by their teachers, however, that is not always the case. Youth mention how they feel a need for more supportive teachers who respect them. The respect between young people and teachers is often one-sided where teachers demand respect and do not return it. This implements values in young people where they are “taught to respect everyone, even if they are not respectful” to them (Shaking the Movers, 2009, p. 20). Instead, there must be efforts to create mutual respect between the two sides. For educators to better support youth, they need more empathy and must value and find importance in the experiences that young people have. Allowing teachers to better understand the needs of their students, so they can work towards meeting them. This can aid young people in building a trusting relationship with their teachers instead of feeling anxious or scared of approaching them.

One participant explained how a teacher refused to give them notes because the teacher felt the student had “decided to stay home” rather than recognizing that this student has a serious mental illness (Shaking the Movers, 2018e, p. 23).

In order to ensure that children succeed, it is vital for teachers to work in partnership with them. The first step to doing this would be teachers building a more respecting relationship with youth where they believe what the young person is saying, rather than trying to exert their power over them. This case is a situation where the teacher is abusing their power over the child by denying them information and support when they request for it. Moreover, the educator stating that the young person “decided to stay home” (Shaking the Movers, 2018e, p. 23), when in fact, they were struggling with something, and that is extremely unfair to the youth. This makes it seem as though the youth made an intentional and unreasonable choice to miss school. When teachers refuse to work in partnership with youth, it can lead to consequences such as having their education negatively affected and directly violating their rights. When educators do not work in partnership with youth, it can lead them to dismiss the concerns or issues that youths are facing and not providing them with the proper and required accommodations that are needed. It creates both a barrier to their well-being and their education. Here, the young person’s mental health was completely invalidated by their educator, making it seem like their mental health issues were not real or valid, and this can be damaging to a young person. It implicitly puts pressure on young people to increase their need to thrive while struggling with their mental health, and it can even create hesitancy for them in the future when they try to ask for mental health support. It sends a message that mental health is not valid, and youth should not be asking for support just because “mental health still isn’t understood and still isn’t given the same weight as other problems by some people” (Shaking the Movers, 2018e, p. 26).

When educators do not make efforts to support young people, they can cause education to become a negative experience and create additional barriers for youth. Teachers should undergo enhanced training where they obtain more education about how to better support their students with all types of disabilities, how to support young people with language barriers and ways to support youth who have mental health challenges. Additionally, teachers must be willing to unlearn the preconceptions they have and be willing to accept diversity and the unique perspectives of young people. This prevents them from perpetuating inequalities due to the biases and stereotypes they hold. If teachers are not mindful of this, they can institute and teach young people discrimination such as racism, if students see a teacher treat students differently, the students can learn to act in the same way. The ways that teachers think need to be deconstructed, so it is appropriate to bring in a class, and ensure it aligns with children's rights (Shaking the Movers, 2009). Overall, educators and the education system need to have a better understanding and education about children's rights, and this assists in creating acceptance and better implementation of these rights. If teachers do not have adequate information about rights, they are not able to successfully educate young people about them.

A rift in communication: A gap exists in the education system, in that it is always parent to teacher or teacher to parent communication and students are not involved in that discussion. To communicate with the administration, students must go through a teacher. (Shaking the Movers, 2009, p. 19)

Young people point out communication gaps in the education system. Communication more often occurs between adults, whether it is between educators and school administrators or educators and parents. "Another issue identified in the interviews is the lack of power given to

student councils and students in school” (Shaking the Movers, 2020c, p. 18). This means young people are not included in these conversations about themselves and have very limited input on the School Board. There is significant value in creating opportunities for young people to have this line of communication as it allows them to engage in their freedom of expression and directly state their thoughts and opinions to administrators. It provides youth spaces to talk about issues that affect them, interest them and create opportunities for open dialogue between them and those adults in positions of power and authority. Schools should have a designated process to hear the voices of young people and take them seriously so they can be more involved in the education system.

The communication gap is an example of a play of power dynamics between children and school administrators. In order for young people to communicate with the administration, they must go through other adults. In such cases, teachers can act as gatekeepers. Due to the role they play, and the power they have over children, they are in a position where they can filter the young person’s voices and concerns or make the decision that the young person’s voice is not important enough to pass on to the administration (Shaking the Movers, 2009, p. 19). Since the young person is not able to directly get in touch with the administration, they will never know if their voice actually got to where they wanted it to go. This can be problematic as it can prevent children from being able to state their true concerns or recommendation to those people who have the power to make changes.

One way that young people do not mention this communication gap is through discussing it in terms of how normalized it is. It should be questioned why a system made for children does not include them in the decision-making process or in any executive decisions. It is normalized for adults to have this power over young people and create a system for them to live through

without fully taking into consideration their needs and wants. In this way, the education system can be considered as a way to socialize children into what adults want them to be. This relates to Mayall's (2000) statement, "How children live their childhoods looks heavily structured by what adults want of childhood" (p. 248). The way children are consistently treated can make it seem like it is inappropriate when adults do not have control. Adults having control over children has turned into such an expected phenomenon that it has turned into a norm. It is more foreign to see young people in such positions rather than questioning why adults hold the ability to dictate and have so much control over the lives of children.

Changes are needed to help make the educational system more accessible and supportive to young people. The suggestion that the participants of the workshops made based on their experience include ensuring that young people are given the space needed to create the best learning environments and conditions for themselves. The first step in accomplishing this includes making sure that school is a safe space, as proper learning can only take place when young people feel protected from harm that can be caused by factors such as racism or microaggressions. Young people should feel safe and comfortable enough to be able to express themselves in the classroom and share their opinions without fear.

By default, in order to have a proper education system, it has to be a safe space. Racism affects the way we interact with each other in school. Whether it be a lack of opportunity for certain groups, these small microaggressions make it difficult to enjoy a certain class or voice an opinion. What this does is that it starts the road towards their path of life and it decimates the opportunities that they have which end up affecting their future, and demonstrates why certain groups are less than others. (Shaking the Movers, 2018f, p. 18).

Discriminations such as racism can be difficult to eliminate from educational institutions because of how deeply entrenched they are in society. It cannot be, nor should it even be denied, that such institutions favor certain groups of people and have a more harsh and negative effect on other groups of people. These power relations can be reinforced by both teachers and students. Teachers can give some youth more opportunities to learn and develop their skills whilst being critical of others, and this can come in the form of questioning how capable certain youth are. On the other hand, students can reinforce this by being more inclusive to those who are like them and socially excluding and bullying other youth. The negative treatment not only makes education more difficult to access and takes away opportunities, but it has lasting effects on youth (Shaking the Movers, 2018f). Children who bully and feed into microaggression are socialized into thinking their behaviour is okay when they see their teachers doing the same. It creates a belief that not all people are equal and that some should be treated better than others. This can lead them to transfer those beliefs into their future lives and continue to treat people differently and negatively. Moreover, when a group of youth keep having negative experiences in schools, it can lead them to perform poorly in their classes, prevent them from being able to develop their skills at the same level as other youth or even drop out (Shaking the Movers, 2019e). This can hinder their ability to achieve their goals and even get further education. These experiences based on discrimination do not just have a present effect on youth, but it has the potential to alter their future (Shaking the Movers, 2018f, p. 18).

It is important that racism in schools is acknowledged and the underlying reasons for prevailing microaggressions are addressed. Taking these measures is what will allow schools to be safe spaces. Once school feels like a safe space and all youth have security, then they can receive a proper education (Shaking the Movers, 2018f). When racism and other forms of

discrimination are acknowledged, it can break down a power hierarchy where the majority youth are placed at the top, and minority youth are placed at the bottom. It instead creates a more balanced scale of how young people are treated by giving all youth access to the same participation opportunities and equal chances to succeed at school. Furthermore, one way this can occur is if diversity and inclusivity is promoted within schools. “Inclusivity is about recognizing that each individual is a person, no less, no more than anyone else” (Shaking the Movers, 2009, p. 16). Additionally, “staff should come from diverse backgrounds so that staff can understand the different struggles of students who come from different backgrounds” (Shaking the Movers, 2018e, p. 27). Having diverse adults to look up to, and get support from, can create representation for youth and help them feel less isolated while teaching other youth how to be more tolerant and accepting of diversity. Once school feels safer, youth can properly exercise their right and get a good quality education.

Another way to create the best learning conditions for young people is through creating more flexibility in the curriculum. Youth suggest that there should be “an open curriculum so that youth can start learning about cultural, sexual, and other relevant issues, especially children’s rights” (Shaking the Movers, 2009, p. 12). This would allow learning to be individualized to each young person’s needs and abilities rather than focusing on one general Eurocentric curriculum. This will give young people who require more support the additional help they need, preventing instances where they get extremely frustrated and are discouraged from reaching their full potential (Shaking the Movers, 2020c, p. 12). It also allows youth who are more advanced to get work that continues to challenge them and develop their skills instead of needing to wait for everyone else to catch up. Flexibility with the curriculum makes space to

have lessons involving current and relevant issues and culturally diverse education that gives youth more opportunities to think critically, leading to more engaged youth.

More Inclusion of Youth Voices and Participation

Table 4

Summary of Findings for Theme Four: More Inclusion of Youth Voices and Participation

Sub-Theme Description	Quotes	STM Report
Adults must be more willing to work in partnership with children by listening to them and giving value to their experiences.	Adults have learning of their own to do, however, in terms of letting go of the control, letting go of the structure and giving young people opportunities to participate on their own terms. Adults also have a responsibility to talk about the benefits of involving young people, and to share positive experiences with other adults by discussing “how and why and what they did because of listening to youth	Shaking the Movers, 2007, p. 8
Adults can silence and shut down children’s voices when children try go against their beliefs. Adults must be more willing to accept the changing realities of youth.	During a "civil" day (possibility of dressing as one wants in a school context), [a friend] wanted to express himself, he wanted to denounce that people were closed-minded on "the sexes and how the sexes should dress", the assistant secretary called [my friend] to her office, because he was wearing a dress, to change into a uniform. When [my friend] petitioned to be respected and not discriminated against for this choice, even at that, the secretary refused and cancelled her petition. It was a normal dress that met the criteria. And they asked her: "Are you gay or in transition to be a girl? When I heard that, I said to myself, "That's irrelevant". (...) He had managed to get 114 signatures on his petition and the principal chided him and said: "You should thank me, because it was a provocation, I prevented you from getting into trouble.	Shaking the Movers, 2018a, p. 16
Children’s voices can be dismissed because of their age. Consistently facing this barrier	Participants spoke of experiencing prejudice because of their age. They pointed out that adults, by dismissing the opinions of young	Shaking the Movers, 2010, p. 10

can demotivate and discourage them from trying to participate.	people, are creating a bigger problem: a generation of disengaged youth	
Youth participation cannot be tokenistic. Adults need to listen and act on the concerns and recommendation of youth to make their participation meaningful.	Youth participation and youth engagement are different. Bringing issues to the table that are important to young people is a way of participating as an individual in a group process, but actually listening and acting on what children say, is what most youth participants felt would give meaning to their participation.	Shaking the Movers, 2007, p. 5
Participation allows young people to feel empowered. Additionally, it gives them space to understand how real-life issues connect to their rights.	What I hope will happen in regards to environment because of the conference is that people will come out of the conference seeing that we have the capacity to combat these issues even on a small scale. Maybe like convincing our parents to get solar panels for the house, or to waste less compost more, and recycle more. So just to be more motivated to participate on this issue on a micro level, as well as advocate them on social media, calling our local MP's office, stuff like that	Shaking the Movers, 2017e, p. 20

Another theme that was extremely prominent within the *STM* reports was how society needs more participation opportunities for young people and efforts to include youth voices. When considering participation opportunities for young people, an important part of this conversation is discussing the barriers that young people face, which make it difficult to access those opportunities and the role that adults play in this. Due to the power that adults have over children in society, adults have a very influential role in dictating how involved youth can be. One-way adults can create barriers is by not holding space for young people. This can be done by young people “not being acknowledged or recognized for our contributions as participants” which takes away the value of their participation (Shaking the Movers, 2007, p. 9). This can lead to adults overpowering youth and “when young people speak up on matters of concern they can be demeaned and belittled” (Shaking the Movers, 2021a, p. 3). They make decisions on behalf of children rather than including them in these conversations. Youth express how this can be

extremely frustrating for them, seeing how adults do not consult young people about decisions that impact their lives. Instead of asking youth, adults base these decisions on generalizations or their idea of what is best for the child. Ultimately this can be more damaging to the child and have negative impacts instead of benefiting them.

Adults have learning of their own to do, however, in terms of letting go of the control, letting go of the structure and giving young people opportunities to participate on their own terms. Adults also have a responsibility to talk about the benefits of involving young people, and to share positive experiences with other adults by discussing “how and why and what they did because of listening to youth.” (Shaking the Movers, 2007, p. 8)

Adults must shift this reality to one where they acknowledge how valuable young people are. They must be open to discussing the benefits and positive experiences that come with including youth (Shaking the Movers, 2007, p. 8). Youth provide access and insight into the unique experiences of young people in the present, how they interact with the world, the challenges they face and the desires they have that are based on their status of being a child. For this to occur, there must be partnership between children and adults where they undergo a process of co-learning, co-researching and co-imagining possibilities of working together (Shaking the Movers, 2019, p. 15). Adults must learn how to include young people in conversations and listen to them. If adults take too much control and refuse to listen to children, it can create difficulties for a young person to find their voice and their place in society. This method better allows youth to feel a sense of safety and comfortability that prevents them from sharing their opinions and being involved. A youth participant states, “we shouldn’t be scared to share our opinion” (Shaking the Movers, 2021c, p. 49) because children’s opinions on matters

concerning them should be considered to be equally as important as adult's opinions. Adults need to actively work on their commitment to involving the opinions of young people. This can even include the element of asking young people for feedback about the participation opportunity they have engaged in; this can help make it more accessible and better meet their needs in the future. When adults vouch for young people and state the benefits of working with them, it can make it easier for youth to access other participation opportunities.

In this passage, due to existing power relations, when the youth participant talks about adults "letting go of the control, letting go of the structure and giving young people opportunities to participate on their own terms" (Shaking the Movers, 2007, p.8), they are referencing how adults have a very strong grip on the way young people are able to interact with the society they live in. Society is structured to benefit adults by giving them the most power over everyone and everything. Young people can be controlled through rules, policies, and legislations that are all created by adults with minimal input from youth. When adults let go of control and let go of structure to give young people more agency it can allow for there to be a more youth-friendly and rights-based system that holds a stronger value of children's voices and encourages them to participate by giving them space in societal structures. Based on the current structure of society, the participation opportunities that young people get are very limited, and they can be restrictive as they are a reflection of the adult agenda of control and power. Instead, to get the most authentic and unfiltered version of youth voices, adults must work in collaboration with young people to allow them to participate on their own terms and at their convenience. Participation can become a very intimidating experience for youth when they have to challenge adults; they must speak up and talk against a system that was not made for them. Allowing them to feel more comfortable allows them to speak their innermost thoughts and state their concerns and

challenges. The participants admit that “the more confident you are, the more you’ll say” (Shaking the Movers, 2007, p. 9), and this increases the likelihood of young people being able to get their concerns across.

This positions young people as being affected by power relations that exist in society, and that means they strongly require adults to support and fulfill their obligations towards them. Based on the ways that adults treat and value youth, this can for the most part, make or break the way they are able to participate and voice themselves (Shaking the Movers, 2007). Young people may need to challenge the power that adults have in an attempt to let go of the control they have over children. Although it is important that young people fight for their agency, this can be very difficult without the support and partnership they have with adults. For instance, a youth may need to be educated on a topic before they can successfully participate in an event. In this case “youth participants need help and guidance in order to understand the issues before they feel they can discuss them. If preparation time and support are not provided, participation can be an overwhelming experience” (Shaking the Movers, 2007, p. 5). For children to be able to access their right to participate in society, both children and adults must work together. However, if children are unable to get the support of certain adults, they must find other adults who can better support them. If children are not able to find opportunities and spaces for them to participate, they should be able to count on adults who can create this representation and advocate for them.

Young people face additional circumstantial barriers that make it difficult to participate in different opportunities. For instance, a young person of lower SES may not receive equal chances to participate in the same opportunities as other youth. “Some young people can’t participate because of financial constraints and it’s not fair that a young person who wants to but can’t participate” (Shaking the Movers. (2018e, p. 22), regardless of the talent, skills, or desire

they possess. In other cases, youth may not be equipped with the right resources to be able to participate, making several opportunities inaccessible to them. For example, “virtual opportunities are also less accessible in the North because of limited internet bandwidth” (Shaking the Movers, 2021a, p. 3) and this can create participation barriers for a specific group of youth when they try to engage with online participation opportunities. When young people do not receive the support, they need to be able to participate, it can have negative implications. Firstly, they are excluded, and that exclusion can have negative impacts on their self-esteem. There are other cases where some youth can unintentionally be silenced. The reality for youth of colour is that there is an expectation for them to remain calm and strong, so they “learn to not discuss their experiences of struggles of pain” (Shaking the Movers, 2020b, p. 17) and this is something that silences them because if they try to speak up and fight for better experiences, they are stereotyped as being “angry Black people” (Shaking the Movers, 2020b, p. 17).

It is necessary for all children to have equal opportunities to participate, regardless of who they are and what the circumstances of their lives are. Including a wide range of youth in participation opportunities can be extremely beneficial as it provides an opportunity to understand what everyone’s needs are and what the youth collective finds important. This is especially true for youth who belong to minority groups who have been systematically targeted or discriminated against. Across the *STM* reports youth participants specifically point out the importance of needing to include Indigenous youth, newcomer youth with language barriers, and young people with disabilities, as they feel like these groups are the most excluded. Youth mention they need “more opportunities for young people to learn about tolerance, specifically around themes of religion, gender, and sexuality” (Shaking the Movers, 2018k, p. 18). This inclusiveness helps combat ignorance However, this can be extremely difficult with adults who

are not on board. If adults are unwilling to open up their minds and listen to the youth, they have the power to completely shut their voices down.

Lors d'une journée « civile » (possibilité de s'habiller comme on veut dans un contexte scolaire), [un ami] voulait s'exprimer, il voulait dénoncer que les gens étaient fermés d'esprit sur « les sexes et comment les sexes doivent s'habiller », la secrétaire adjointe a comme appelé [mon ami] à son bureau, car il portait une robe, pour qu'il se recharge en uniforme. Quand [mon ami] a fait une pétition pour se faire respecter et pas discriminer sur ce choix-là, même à ça, la secrétaire a refusé et a annulé sa pétition. C'était une robe normale qui respectait les critères. Et ils lui ont demandé : « Est-ce que tu es gai ou en transition pour être une fille? ». Moi quand j'ai entendu ça, je me suis dit : « Ça n'a pas rapport! ». (...) Il avait réussi à avoir 114 signatures dans sa pétition et la directrice l'a chicané et lui a dit : « Tu devrais me remercier, car c'était de la provocation, je t'ai empêché d'avoir des problèmes ». (Shaking the Movers, 2018a, p. 16)

Translation using DeepL software:

During a "civil" day (possibility of dressing as one wants in a school context), [a friend] wanted to express himself, he wanted to denounce that people were closed-minded on "the sexes and how the sexes should dress," the assistant secretary called [my friend] to her office, because he was wearing a dress, to change into a uniform. When [my friend] petitioned to be respected and not discriminated against for this choice, even at that, the secretary refused and cancelled her petition. It was a normal dress that met the criteria. And they asked her: "Are you gay or in transition to be a girl? When I heard that, I said to myself, "That's irrelevant". (...) He had managed to get 114 signatures on his petition and the principal chided him and said: "You should thank me, because it was a provocation, I prevented you from getting into trouble.

This passage provides the perfect example of how adults can shut down children when children go against their beliefs and values. Adults hold the ability to silence young people if they are not willing to accept or understand what children are doing. In this case, the young

person worked in collaboration with their peers to stand up against a type of discrimination they felt at school. This action was a child's attempt to fulfill their own rights-based responsibility towards their peer (Shaking the Movers, 2007). This child knew they had a voice and was trying to use their knowledge to speak out against a rights violation. However, the way the principal and secretary reacted and responded to the child reinforces the idea that society is run by adults and that children should silently follow the adult agenda (Shaking the Movers, 2018a). Their power is being used to limit, control and regulate the child through the expectation of needing to follow norms. The young person did nothing wrong; however, because they broke a social and gender norm, they are treated like they did something offensive or inappropriate because norms are considered silent rules that youth are expected to follow. In this way, norms can be used as another method for adults to exert control over children.

This passage additionally brings light to the reality that young people are often shut down for no valid reason other than adults' lack of willingness to accept change. Rather than being praised for their efforts to bring acceptance and help their environment progress, young people state that "when we voice our opinions, we get in trouble for being out of line" (Shaking the Movers, 2009, p. 10), they are treated like they are doing something wrong and breaking the rules when they are exercising their rights. On top of that, adults make young people feel like they are saving them from getting in trouble by shutting them down. This can help adults justify the wrongs they commit against children; their method of oppressing a young person is justified. They are perpetuating an idea that what this child did is wrong and gender norms should not be broken. Young people should not be excluded or be forced to suffer because "older generations are so reluctant to change" (Shaking the Movers, 2018e, p. 18) which results in them having a

difficult time accepting change, because going against gender norms “wasn’t a thing in their time” (Shaking the Movers, 2018e, p. 18).

Participants spoke of experiencing prejudice because of their age. They pointed out that adults, by dismissing the opinions of young people, are creating a bigger problem: a generation of disengaged youth (Shaking the Movers, 2010, p. 10).

The youth participant here implicitly makes references to what James and Prout (1997) believe to be the adult-centered view of childhood that is rooted in the developmental ideology of childhood merely being a “biologically determine stage” (p. 10) on the way to adulthood and the reality of young people being thought about as incompetent beings because of their age. Young people here are not taken seriously because there are assumptions that, due to their age, they do not have enough knowledge or experiences to have valuable inputs on the matters around them. Additionally, youth state “adults tell us that we don’t know anything, we haven’t had enough experience. They don’t take us seriously because we are young” (Shaking the Movers, 2009, p. 10). This can be a setback for young people, and this completely disregards the lived experiences of youth. Regardless of their age, it is possible that young people have richer experiences than some adults because of the circumstances of their life. They may be able to give access to completely unique insights. For example, a white upper-class adult may not be able to grasp the way systematic racism impacts people in the society the same way as an Indigenous young person who lives on a reserve. These two lives should be considered incomparable. In fact, it can provide the adult with a learning opportunity that can help them better understand those experiences. But solely because of the young person’s age, their experiences can be invalidated. Adults must learn to better fulfill their responsibilities to children and learn to take them seriously.

If youth are facing participation barriers on a consistent basis, it can have lasting negative implications on them. It can lead to young people becoming disengaged and demotivated to participate. When they recognize the pattern of adults always shutting them down, it can make participation opportunities seem pointless and which means adults can be adding to the larger issue of young people being disengaged (Shaking the Movers, 2009, p. 10). If all youth become disengaged, there will be no efforts in trying to make changes or speaking up against rights violations. Silencing youth can deprive them of their ability to connect with others with similar ideals and values, which limits their ability to create a sense of belonging and find community. It even prevents young people from bridging the gap between the reality of their needs, desires and experiences and what adults believe the young people need. The dismissal of youth voices can be recognized as a tool that helps adults keep their power over young people. When youth are dismissed and disengaged, they do not need to fight against them. It gives them the space to push the adult agenda with minimal interference.

Due to the numerous barriers that young people face while attempting to participate, “only a small percentage of the youth population actually speak out on issues” and “likewise, the percentage of adults who want to hear the voices of youth is relatively small” (Shaking the Movers, 2007, p. 8). It is vital that adults begin to give more value to the unique perspectives of youth. This can occur through listening to the verbal and non-verbal cues of youth when they give insight about their experiences, and if there is attention paid to their body language, behaviours etc., it can provide deeper meaning (Shaking the Movers, 2021d). For example, if children are not speaking up, their body language can give insight into their state of mind to determine if they may be feeling uncomfortable or demotivated to participate. Based on these cues, adults can work to make participation more accessible.

Once the barriers that young people face are acknowledged, this brings to question how more participation can occur. This goes back to the needed partnerships between children and adults. Partnership can allow children to get the required support and guidance that they need to help them prepare for participation opportunities (Shaking the Movers, 2007). Adults can support young people by giving them the required information and helping them fully understand it by checking in on them and seeing what they know. Without this type of guidance, participation can turn into a negative and overwhelming experience for the young person.

Youth participation and youth engagement are different. Bringing issues to the table that are important to young people is a way of participating as an individual in a group process, but actually listening and acting on what children say, is what most youth participants felt would give meaning to their participation. (Shaking the Movers, 2007, p. 5)

Young people do not explicitly state how they feel and a fair portion of participation opportunities they receive are not meaningful to them. They can feel as though the participation opportunities they get are tokenistic. Their involvement is very superficial and often occurs for the sake of youth involvement. It is important that what young people are saying is actually taken into consideration and acted upon. Adults taking action on the words of youth is what is missing. This feeling can cause young people to become doubtful about how seriously they are taken, and it can make participation opportunities feel deceptive (Shaking the Movers, 2007). Young people question whether involving them is to check off the adult agenda or it is because adults care about their experiences. This then brings up the question of whether their voice and the information they share is actually getting to where it needs to go. Young people fear that “what

they say becomes filtered before it reaches the right people” (Shaking the Movers, 2007, p. 5) such as adults who are in positions of power.

To get to this level, it is important that adults and children have collective conversations between themselves in order to see how participation can be made accessible and meaningful to them. Youth feel like meaningful participation comes from adults allowing children to be involved in the participation opportunity from beginning to the end and then following up on what youth have to say (Shaking the Movers, 2007). Meaningful participation would help prove that there is a level of importance given to the ideas that the youth shared while they are participating, but also afterwards. This type of participation goes beyond just the participation opportunity. In the *STM* reports, the children suggest taking a “nothing about us, without us” approach (Shaking the Movers, 2018c, p. 9). The purpose of this is to implement an approach where adults do not talk about or make a decision about children without including them.

When young people talk about their desire to participate and have their voices heard, they do not talk about it in a way where they want to overpower or overrule adults. However, it is often taken that way, adults see youth participation as a threat. Young people simply want space to be heard and be taken seriously. They believe that partnership is a key component that will allow their needs to be met. Youth want to be able to give valuable and unique input, they never mention participation as a tool to take all the power from adults. For example, when youth state that “bringing issues to the table that are important to young people is a way of participating” and when they state that, “listening and acting on what children say” (Shaking the Movers, 2007, p. 5), both points are references to how adults and children can work together. Children want adults to acknowledge the issues that children face and bring those up. Additionally, children want adults to listen to what children say so they can work together to solve those issues. Young

people believe that the best type of partnership that can occur between children and adults, is the one in which adults fulfill their obligations towards children and give them guidance while also providing them with agency to make their own decisions that impact their life. A significant portion of the understandings that adults have regarding youth participation is skewed and inaccurate, which causes them to be hesitant and create additional barriers that prevent young people from being able to participate.

Allowing youth to be involved in participation opportunities comes with many benefits. Participation can be an extremely empowering opportunity for children. This can be a chance for them to learn about their rights and how to apply them. In the *STM* reports, the young people describe how these workshops have given them the ability to recognize that it is important for them to use their voices and speak up for what they believe is right. One participant stated, “(The conference) makes me feel confident that I can change something and make something happen” (Shaking the Movers, 2016, p. 20). When they feel empowered, they understand that their opinions matter; it gives them the power to state their concerns and learn about real-life issues. This can put them in a position where they are able to make connections between their rights, their lives, and what is happening in society and how it impacts them. Empowerment can also come through young people watching their peers participate and use their voices, as it can be a motivating factor for them to do the same.

What I hope will happen in regards to environment because of the conference is that people will come out of the conference seeing that we have the capacity to combat these issues even on a small scale. Maybe like convincing our parents to get solar panels for the house, or to waste less compost more, and recycle more. So just to be more motivated to

participate on this issue on a micro level, as well as advocate them on social media, calling our local MP's office, stuff like that. (Shaking the Movers, 2017e, p. 20)

This passage is a depiction of how young people can feel more empowered when they are involved in participation opportunities and given space to talk about real-life issues. In this case, young people were able to discuss climate change and make connections between how their lives and rights are negatively impacted by it. Having such discussions allows them to be aware of the fact that they can make changes and take action by brainstorming ideas regarding what they can do, such as recycling more. These discussions can prove to be very insightful experiences that help youth understand what rights they have, the barriers that exist around them and how rights application should look like in real-life situations. Furthermore, when children work together, it helps them recognize that they need to take action towards the types of changes they want to see, and that they have the ability to make those changes (Shaking the Movers, 2017e). Participation gives them the power to spread awareness to those around them and to reach out to people in positions of power, and this can give them a better chance to be heard. Overall, participation has the potential to lead to change.

Participation opportunities can also be a great way for young people to be exposed to different perspectives. Young people can begin by sharing their own individual experiences with others. Sharing one individual experience can create space for others to be able to relate to it, bring up any common struggles between the youth, and help them feel less alone and build the community because their "voices can shape their sense of belonging" (Shaking the Movers, 2021c, p. 21). The opportunity for youth to share their experiences gives insight into diverse perspectives on one issue in relation to how a young person is situated in the society, and

impacted by different factors, such as their race, gender, religion, as they can have different experiences with the same issue. When young people are exposed to these different perspectives, it helps them see how different people have different lives and how others engage in the world, while building tolerance and acceptance for lives that differ from theirs. Having this type of knowledge about an issue can provide them with an opportunity to form their own thoughts and opinions about it.

In application of Willig's (2013) six-stage approach, the main positionality that is taken in this discursive construction of children's rights is the need to better include young people's voices and better support from adults. Adults can act as young people's support systems when they create participation opportunities such as the *STM* workshops, where they provide young people with safe spaces to have rights-based discussions. On the other hand, they can act as the biggest barrier that young people face while trying to engage in participation opportunities and use their voices. Once this becomes explicitly known to children and adults, it can guide their partnership in a way where they can reevaluate their role and consider the types of changes they need to make to act as a support system rather than barriers. It even places them in a position where they can ask why some adults may refuse to provide any support to children and whether or not there is a possibility of partnership. This then leads to the need to accept the fact that not all adults will be willing to step into a partnership role with young people, and in such cases, youth should have enough guidance and knowledge to understand where and to who they can go for the required support. The barriers that young people face may make it difficult for them to access some opportunities; however, they should not let that fully stop them. This knowledge should encourage them to find ways of existing and interacting in the world around those

barriers. With enough guidance from their support systems, they can find ways to work around existing barriers to get their messages across and be able to access their rights.

Discrimination Against Children and Their Rights

Table 5

Summary of Findings for Theme Five: Discrimination Against Children and Their Rights

Sub-Theme Description	Quotes	STM Report
In the past, adults in positions of power have intentionally used their power and exploited Indigenous children by assimilating them for their own benefit.	I feel like the government were very future-minded and I think they understood the easiest way to make the changes and perfect them in the future was to start with the young people because it would be a waste of resources to try and assimilate the older generations because they wouldn't be there in the future where the government would need them to cause actual changes. So, the younger they are and the faster they assimilate them, the quicker the future would look like the way they wanted to	Shaking the Movers, 2019b, p. 11
There is a need for more education and awareness on the systematic discrimination Indigenous youth face and how that continues to impact them.	It is of great importance that children, youth, and our communities are not only aware of how Aboriginal youth are at higher risk of incarceration, but where this stems from	Shaking the Movers, 2012a, p. 16
The education system needs to better incorporate Indigenous history into the curriculum so all children can be educated and aware of the troubling history and lived experiences of Indigenous people in Canada.	More realistic and factual history of our First Nations and their present circumstances needs to be taught in all schools across Canada. It is through education and awareness that children and youth will begin to understand and become sensitive to the lived experience of our Indigenous peoples	Shaking the Movers, 2012a, p. 16
The government continues to exclude and deprive Indigenous communities of resources they can benefit from.	Provincial governments have this mandate to provide all schools with menstrual products, but that excluded specifically the schools on reserves. How does that even make sense?	Shaking the Movers, 2021b, p. 12

The last prevailing theme that was seen throughout the *STM* reports indicated that children face experiences and situations where they are treated poorly and discriminated against.

This often occurs because of the preconceived notions that other members of the community have about youth based on factors such as race, ethnicity, religion, gender, age, and sexual orientation. This relates back to when the young participant stated that “we want the police to act the same way as they act with White people” (Shaking the Movers, 2018a, p. 27). Here, a young person is being discriminated by an adult in a position because of their race, which is a factor beyond the control of children, and that can make them feel like they do not belong. This can lead to youth feeling discouraged and as though discrimination is everywhere and difficult to escape. Discrimination can result in extra unjustified surveillance on the lives of some people, making them more susceptible to being caught making mistakes and facing negative repercussions. This results in youth who are distinctly different than members of their community to be put at a disadvantage. Any type of discrimination can cause simple situations to escalate, and the youth gets treated much more seriously or intensely than what should have occurred (Shaking the Movers, 2018a). Youth should not be treated poorly or differently for any reason, as that significantly alters the experiences they have in society and the access they have to their rights through the opportunities or resources they receive. It is vital to not be discriminatory towards children and instead, treat them with equality because it “means every child having chances to grow and every child having the same opportunity to succeed” (Shaking the Movers, 2019a, p. 11). Education and better partnership between adults and children can assist in preventing and decreasing discriminatory experiences.

When discrimination is discussed, it is necessary to bring up the treatment of Indigenous youth and acknowledge the barriers they face in exercising their rights. This section will solely focus on the discriminatory experiences of Indigenous youth and the experiences they have with their rights. Although other experiences of discrimination based on minority identities have been

mentioned throughout the reports, as the researcher, I believe it is most beneficial to keep the focus on the experiences of Indigenous youth. This is based on the concerns of young people stating that there is very little acknowledgement of what Indigenous youth have experienced, as they have stated that they feel “within Ontario education system there is a lack of Indigenous teachings (history)” (Shaking the Movers, 2008, p. 8). Acknowledging the experiences of Indigenous people brings light to how discrimination can be deeply entrenched in society and have generational repercussions. Historically, a false promise of education at residential schools and a better life, which was made to be compulsory through the Indian Act (1920). Youth believe that the Canadian government established residential schools as “a way to force cultural assimilation on people who were Indigenous” (Shaking the Movers, 2021e, p. 10), through extreme measures of mental, physical and sexual abuse. The history of colonialism contradicts children’s rights and now Indigenous communities such as Nunavut sit “in tension with the belief that education is integral to the rights of youth and the quality of life education is an integral part of rights and a good quality of life” (Shaking the Movers, 2021a, p. 1), because through residential schools, education was used to accomplish the exact opposite of providing children with a good quality of life. This was a collaborative effort made by churches, the Canadian government, and law enforcers where they intentionally came together to target and abuse their power over Indigenous children and infringe on their rights (Shaking the Movers, 2021a). Unfortunately, young people still feel the impacts of this.

I feel like the government were very future-minded and I think they understood the easiest way to make the changes and perfect them in the future was to start with the young people because it would be a waste of resources to try and assimilate the older generations because they wouldn’t be there in the future where the government would

need them to cause actual changes. So, the younger they are and the faster they assimilate them, the quicker the future would look like the way they wanted to. (Shaking the Movers, 2019b, p. 11)

The young person in this passage states that the government was intentional in targeting Indigenous young people in their efforts towards assimilating and acculturating them. This is an intentional abuse of power; the government knew that children are a more vulnerable and easier to influence group of people, compared to adults. The government was able to put youth through institutions that socialized them in a way that served their own agenda without having any regard for how the youth were being treated, even if this meant they would be subjected to mental, physical and sexual abuse, and without considering how this would impact their future. The government simply saw it as an opportunity to create a future that best aligned with their own values (Shaking the Movers, 2019b). Whereas, if the government targeted Indigenous adults, they knew that these adults have more power and are already set in their values, so they have a higher potential of fighting back and resisting. Which meant that Indigenous adults would be more difficult to control. In this process, the government also lied and isolated Indigenous youth from their parents and adults to ensure that they were being stripped of any power that stood behind them and could have created barriers in them from achieving their goals.

The way the young person talks about the government is representative of the lack of trust they have. They recognize that the government is willing to take advantage of youth for their own benefit. This history of Indigenous youth provides a reflection of how the government in Canada can deliberately work against youth in an attempt to enforce their agenda (Shaking the Movers, 2021). Some adults in power are willing to take any measure to do so without

considering how their actions will impact children, therefore having a complete disregard for the rights children have. This type of discrimination has explicitly occurred in the past and continues to occur presently at all levels of society. Indigenous youth's rights are still being violated through the way adults in authority treat them. This positionality places young people where they can hold adults accountable for the oppressions they have caused and demand change. Young people further discuss that they are coming to an "unsettling realization that settlers on this land have a particular relation to Indigenous communities" (Shaking the Movers, 2021b, p. 18) that must be addressed. The first step to creating change is recognizing where the problem occurs. The problem occurs when adults take on a role that deliberately mistreats youth for their own gain. This means that young people take on the role of the victims, they are being wronged, and that must be acknowledged.

Young people want these experiences to be acknowledged to prevent them from being forgotten. There needs to be a celebration of the Indigenous culture and identities "to recognize those children that died and sacrificed their identity for the government" (Shaking the Movers, 2021e, p. 24). "Increase and deepen education for youth on Canada's Indigenous People, specifically in schools" (Shaking the Movers, 2018k, p. 14), so it can be ensured that history is not repeated and that they can be given proper reparations. When the troublesome experiences of Indigenous individuals are not discussed or mentioned, they go completely unknown, which means many people are not aware of the realities they have faced. This leads to a high level of ignorance around the issues that Indigenous people face because a significant portion of that is in relation to their past. Generational traumas and systematic disadvantage prevent these youth from being able to thrive and instead, make them more susceptible to being involved with drugs and crime. Unfortunately, others recognize "drugs and crime as a part of the culture, instead of as

a result of colonialism” (Shaking the Movers, 2012a, p. 16). Without a proper understanding of Indigenous history, it can be difficult to provide them with the necessary accommodation and resources, which continues to put them on a path where their needs are not being met, and their rights are not being protected.

It is of great importance that children, youth, and our communities are not only aware of how Aboriginal youth are at higher risk of incarceration, but where this stems from.

(Shaking the Movers, 2012a, p. 16)

This passage is a reference to how there needs to be more acknowledgement towards the history of Indigenous people, the systematic discrimination they face and the mistreatment they experience in society. Knowledge of these factors provides an explanation of how there are additional barriers created by discrimination and mistreatment, which makes it much more difficult for Indigenous youth to be successful. In the *STM* reports, some of the youth had little to no awareness of the realities of Indigenous people. It is necessary that all members of society, including children, know the truth about how society puts Indigenous people at a disadvantage, and this can help them better understand the struggle they face. For instance, many non-Indigenous youths were oblivious to the fact that Indigenous youth are at a higher risk of incarceration (Shaking the Movers, 2012a). This needs to be known so youth can question why this occurs and the needed changes that can take place. Youth should be given education on how generational traumas and deep-rooted racism in society make it difficult for Indigenous people to obtain opportunities to better their lives. It brings awareness to how Indigenous youth must deal with micro-aggression, a lack of resources and being targeted by authority figures, which makes it difficult to escape the reality of being involved with drugs, crime or the justice system.

Without proper knowledge about their circumstance and struggles, it can lead to Indigenous people being diminished to stereotypes about them or treated like they are at fault for their own poor conditions.

The young person stated that there needs to be more awareness among children and the community. This refers to the needed partnership between children and the community or children and adults in order to fully acknowledge the realities of Indigenous youth. There needs to be a collaborative effort where a co-learning and co-educating process occurs. Adults need to learn and educate young people, and they need to keep an open mind when they are being educated by youth and vice versa. Only when everyone can understand how the Indigenous experience is entrenched in discrimination, can there be work toward change. Additionally, this passage is the young person's implicit way of pointing out the need for more education. Societal structures need to step up to better ensure that young people and the rest of the community are being given education on this. Canada has a troubled history that, to this day, is still impacting Indigenous people (Shaking the Movers, 2021a). Hence it is vital that this reality is known, and that can help break down and fill in those disparities that continue to discriminate and disadvantage a population.

More realistic and factual history of our First Nations and their present circumstances needs to be taught in all schools across Canada. It is through education and awareness that children and youth will begin to understand and become sensitive to the lived experience of our Indigenous people. (Shaking the Movers, 2012a, p. 16)

The education system plays an influential role in how much awareness young people have about the experiences of Indigenous people. Unfortunately, the Eurocentric focus within the

curriculum means there is a lack of Indigenous teaching, “this gives everyone of false sense of Canadian history” (Shaking the Movers, 2008, p. 8). There can be a misconception that the government and structures of Canada have only ever been supportive of everyone, completely disregarding the fact that historical events have been the root of systemic discrimination. Young people feel as though schools should better educate youth about this. They admit that “the content is very limited and there is little discussion on what First Nations people are facing today in Canada” (Shaking the Movers, 2012a, p. 15). In order to change this, there needs to be funding for proper education on Indigenous history, trauma, culture, tradition and language. This can help educate everyone about a culture that was repressed and lost. These teachings need to occur beyond reasons related to Truth and Reconciliation, but there needs to be a consistent effort for this education to be successfully implemented.

The young person is not explicitly saying this, but the underlying message behind this passage is related to how the government holds the ability to control and shape the way people think. The educational curriculum, has input from governmental figures, determines what the young people learn, and they have chosen a Eurocentric curriculum with minimal education about the history and experiences of Indigenous people. This Eurocentric view creates an unproblematic image of the Canadian government. This is an indication that the government has the power to censor the information youth receive, resulting in them having a false understanding of existing realities. Being aware of how much power the government and authority figures have over the lives of children makes it more crucial that there is youth involvement in these structures. For examples “schools should delegate some of the decision making on issues to students” (Shaking the Movers, 2020c, p. 12), this can help redistribute power. Instead of

censoring children, they can give their input on what they want to learn and what they believe is important to be educated about.

Provincial governments have this mandate to provide all schools with menstrual products, but that excluded specifically the schools on reserves. How does that even make sense?

(Shaking the Movers, 2021b, p. 12)

The young person in this passage acknowledges another way Indigenous youth and communities are excluded. The government treats Indigenous reserves as being separate from the rest of the province and therefore treats them differently. This passage is a reflection of the values of the Canadian government; they do not see Indigenous communities being equally deserving of resources and support in comparison to the rest of the community. They do not receive the same type of support and resources as the rest of Canada, and this is especially true for Indigenous communities on reserves (Shaking the Movers, 2021b). This “speaks to the minimal access that the First Nations community has to clean water. They are getting sick from their water, which is a basic human right” (Shaking the Movers, 2016, p. 12). This impacts them in all areas of their life. They are not getting their basic needs met, and it takes away their ability to better their lives because it can prevent them from going to school and receiving an education. Some Indigenous young people mention that because of the lack of access they have to clean water “instead of going to school to get an education, they have to substitute that time to bring water from lakes/streams/wells, to their homes” (Shaking the Movers, 2016, p. 12). This means they need to take time out of their lives, to be able to get clean water. In the case of a child, this is the time they should be spending in school or engaging in play.

The Canadian government has a very influential amount of power over Indigenous people. As long as they do not value and treat Indigenous communities with the same importance as the rest of the population, they will continue to be discriminated against. It is vital that the government shifts its approach to working in partnership with Indigenous youth and communities instead of against them. It can be frustrating and confusing for young people to see that they are being treated more harshly than their peers for no good reason. They cannot count on all adults, including the government, to have their basic needs met. The society that Indigenous youth live in works against them every single day, which means they get their rights violated at a much greater extent. Because of how deeply this discrimination is ingrained in society, it can be very difficult to rise above it without the support of everyone. When the government refuses, it creates an incredibly difficult cycle for these youth.

One way to help Indigenous young people better access their rights is through better efforts of advocacy, and the first step of this is being aware and having adequate understanding of the issues they are facing. However, this advocacy can only be done properly if it includes Indigenous people. It is important that people embark on this partnership for advocating “in support of Aboriginal youth not on their behalf because this takes away power” and can work towards silencing them (Shaking the Movers, 2007, p. 16). Working together can occur through brainstorming how rights can be more accessible. When Indigenous youth are given the time, space and importance to be able to share their experiences, it can help find ways where they can be compensated for the traumas they face and what can be done in the future to prevent history from repeating itself, and further ensuring that what needs to be corrected is corrected.

Chapter Five

Discussion of Findings using Sociology of Childhood Theoretical Framework

This chapter discusses findings by conducting a theoretical analysis using James and Prout's (1997) lens of sociology of childhood and shifting the focus on recognizing how childhood is constructed and experienced by young people in Canada. There is more consideration given to how the social variables of a young person's life impact how they are able to experience their rights. This approach steps away from Foucault's (1981) approach of focusing on "the role of discourse in wider social processes of legitimation and power" as "discourses make available ways-of-seeing and ways-of-being, they are strongly implicated in the exercise of power" (Willig, 2013, p. 113). The combination of both methodological and theoretical frameworks will aid in there being the most complete understanding of how children's rights are implemented and understood by the children and adults who are involved in the *Shaking the Movers* workshop. This will then generate full comprehensive answers to the research questions.

Research Question: How do young people in partnership with adult stakeholders involved in the cross-Canada *Shaking the Movers* workshops understand and implement the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child?

Sub-question One: What types of experiences and challenges do youth face while trying to access their rights?

The analysis conducted on the *STM* reports has made it clear that young people face a plethora of challenges while trying to access their rights. Additionally, these challenges they face greatly vary based on factors that are outside their control. These are often based on the responsibilities that adults fail to fulfill and the relationships that exist between children and

adults. This research has made it apparent that it is extremely difficult to remove the influence of adults regarding how children are able to access their rights. At each level, adults play a role. This is seen based on the experience young people share in the *STM* reports. However, it becomes even more evident when a deeper analysis is conducted utilizing a Foucauldian discourse analysis and employing the sociology of childhood theoretical framework.

The theme focusing on the influence of adults around children's rights pointed out the first and largest challenge that youth face while trying to access their rights: adult partnership. With this partnership, there are rights-based responsibilities placed on adults that are consistently not fulfilled because adults and "many governments do not take their responsibilities seriously" (Reading et al., 2009, p. 229). Due to the structure of society, adults are placed in positions of authority, and these positions are often used to overpower children instead of working with them. For instance, police officers act on stereotypes and prejudices, which target racialized youth. This leads to minority youth being more involved in the justice system rather than police officers working in ways to help marginalized youth and prevent them from being involved in the system (Shaking the Movers, 2018a). Parents can also create barriers by excluding children from the decision-making process at home. Parents believe they can make better decisions for their child, better than the child themselves, however, this takes away their child's autonomy and agency to do so, and it can end up doing more harm than good for a child as they state that it can be "damaging to my mental health" (Shaking the Movers, 2021e, p. 12) when they do not agree with the decisions being made. Lastly, there is the government which continues to allow societal structures to violate young people's rights instead of taking into consideration their concerns and recommendations and acting upon those (Shaking the Movers, 2018f).

Another responsibility that adults have failed to fulfill is educating and making young people aware of their rights, and this ties into the second theme. Lack of education and awareness of rights is a significant obstacle that youth face. If they do not know about their rights, they will never be able to access them (Shaking the Movers, 2007, p. 11). It prevents young people from recognizing when their rights are being violated and disables them from being able to speak up against those violations, advocate for themselves, and demand the necessary changes. Young people depend on adults to get this education, but they can be forced to venture out on their own and find spaces to learn about their rights. This can lead to finding spaces like *STM* workshops, where they find adults who want to work in partnership with them. If young people fail to find adults who can work with them, it can result in them using unreliable resources that can cause them to have misunderstandings about their rights.

The education system provides a prime example of how societal structures can create obstacles for young people accessing their rights. Peer relationships are one component that can create barriers, such as if a young person is experiencing bullying. Bullying can occur on the basis of a young person being excluded due to social factors, such as their race, gender, SES. These experiences reinforce power dynamics between majority youth and minority youth, especially when there is no action taken against this. It is also an indication of how not all young people have similar experiences in the same social institution, and there are numerous factors that can impact this. In schools, specifically, young people face the challenge of not being given appropriate resources and accommodations for their success. Right away, this results in education, a right that youth have, not being equally accessible for all youth (Shaking the Movers, 2018k). Lastly, there is a lack of action that adults in education take for young people. In terms of bullying, young people feel like their teachers and other authority figures in school

ignore the problem as long as possible and also fail to address it (Shaking the Movers, 2018k). This degree of involvement can make it difficult for youth to receive the type of support they need in education system, making it difficult for them to access their rights.

Another experience that young people have which limits their ability to access their rights is that they have very limited opportunities to participate or have their voices included. Young people are often not given space to participate in society, therefore, the benefits of working with children are not acknowledged. There is little effort made to open lines of communication between children and adults, and this causes young people's voices to be dismissed (Shaking the Movers, 2009). Constantly being dismissed can take away young people's desire to participate and voice themselves, leading them to be disengaged from society and the issues impacting their lives. This directly violates their right to participate and have their voice be taken seriously (Shaking the Movers, 2010). Additionally, they face the challenge of receiving equal opportunities. The different social variables of a child can put them at a disadvantage, making it even more difficult for them to participate as they resonate with marginalized identities (Shaking the Movers, 2018a). For example, White youth in Canada get more opportunities compared to Indigenous youth. This further means that when young people are able to participate, those voices are not reflective of all youth. This makes it necessary to give these opportunities to a diverse range of youth so all children can voice their opinions, concerns and recommendations.

Lastly, analyzing the experiences of Indigenous youth in the *STM* workshops gives insight into how different the experiences that young people have with their rights can be. The identities children have, determine how they are treated by adults in power, their peers and society. Indigenous youth experience challenges in accessing their rights on many different levels of their lives (Shaking the Movers, 2012a). For example, when they live on reserves, they

can be unable to access clean water, proper education, healthcare and support. The quality of life they get is poor compared to those who do not live on reserves. On top of this, they must deal with systemic disadvantages, which create barriers for them to better the quality of their lives. Systematic disparities make it more difficult for them to receive opportunities, and the ignorance around the issues they face results in them not being given the proper accommodations they need to survive (Shaking the Movers, 2012a). Discrimination looks different for each child; however, what is common is that it creates unfair and unnecessary challenges for everyone.

The Foucauldian discourse analysis was essential to recognize how power dynamics between children and adults truly influence children's ability to access their rights. The existing power dynamics in Canadian society work to put adults at an advantage so great that they hold the ability to control children. This type of control occurs in multiple different ways. One way adults control youth is through rules and regulations that enforce social control. Rules can be implemented with the idea of keeping young people safe, but they may also be used to socialize young people in a manner that aligns with how adults want them to be. Young people do state that they feel like these rules can be too restrictive, and that it takes away autonomy and agency from them (Shaking the Movers, 2018a). Another way adults use power to control youth is by controlling their participation. This ranges from which types of participation opportunities are created for youth, determining if they can be part of the decision-making process, how much involvement they have, and then deciding if what youth say is important enough for those in authority positions to hear and this is where children are usually censored.

Adults, to a certain extent, can even control the information that children receive. Through the educational curriculum, adults decide what children should and should not be learning in school. They have the power to paint certain types of narratives, which have been

done with education regarding the Canadian government and Indigenous history. Many young people are still not fully aware of how the Canadian government abused their power to torture Indigenous families with the goal of fulfilling its own agenda (Shaking the Movers, 2019b). Instead, young people are taught about how the government has been supportive. When adults control the information that young people receive, it can blindside them to the harsh realities that have occurred and create ignorance towards the systematic struggles and disparities that marginalized groups face (Shaking the Movers, 2012a). When it is broken down, and all factors are considered, it becomes much more transparent how much power adults actually hold over children. Adults can have a very strong influence on the experiences that children have with their rights. It is vital that this is acknowledged because it emphasizes how important it is that adults work in partnership with children.

Additionally, using sociology of childhood allows there to be recognition of how adult perceptions can impact how they act toward children and their rights. Most times, when adults take power, agency and autonomy away from a child, it is based on their understanding of childhood rooted in a developmental ideology. Due to a young person's age, there is an assumed biological immaturity towards them which leads to adults questioning their abilities and competence. Having this belief makes adults believe that they can take children's agency away from them because, as adults, they can make the best decision for the child. However, Mayall (2000) states that "in proposing that we know best the best interests of the child, we deny children's rights. We deny children the right to participate in the structuring of their childhoods" (p. 245). This then impacts children's ability to act as active members of the society; it disregards that children have the capability to influence the social world as they interact with it. When adults hold onto an expectation of children simply following orders, they perceive youth as

passive members of the community. Furthermore, when children are not given space to voice their opinions, it does not allow them to state their concerns, which can completely disregard how different social variables impact the way they experience their childhood. Childhoods are unique, and young people need to be given an opportunity to express how they experience their childhood (James & Prout, 1997). Listening to a young person is the only way to get an accurate understanding of their experiences with their rights.

Sub- question Two: What measures can be taken to address the barriers young people face and instead promote children's rights in relation to sociology of childhood?

Overall, after analyzing all the *STM* reports, it can be argued that one of the biggest measures that can be taken to address the barriers young people face in accessing their rights is working towards better partnership between children and adults. This firstly comes from adults changing the mindset they have regarding children. They must break away from their understanding of childhood that correlates age to capability. This allows adults to be much more open-minded when working with children, and it can potentially create more spaces for children to voice themselves. Furthermore, the *STM* reports indicate that children need to be more involved in the decision-making process regarding their lives, and more involvement will attribute more value to their voices. Once children are given the space to participate, in order to make it meaningful participation, there needs to be action taken upon those words. When children state their concerns, adults need to ensure that they are working towards creating solutions to those issues instead of simply listening to children and doing nothing. When children's voices are given value, it can also empower them to speak out against violations and advocate for themselves to demand change.

Simply stated, in order for any change to occur to better implement children's rights across Canada, adult and child partnership is required. This should not be misconstrued as better implementation can only occur if every single adult understands and works towards it. Rather this means that children and adults who recognize the importance of rights need to find one another because if one group of adults is not willing to work with children, another will, and the *Shaking the Movers* workshop is a strong example of adults who are willing to work with children. Such types of partnerships can create representation and advocates for children at all different levels of society. Building upon this can help increase awareness and education about rights throughout Canada. Creating education and awareness is a foundational step in addressing the barriers that young people face and promoting children's rights.

The voices of the youth who participated in the *STM* workshops create an understanding of how they experience and access their rights in Canada. This process involved finding patterns of shared and common occurrences of youth by breaking down and categorizing all the different ways, and types of experiences they have. This provided great insight into the different obstacles that a diverse range of youth in Canada face, which impacts how they understand and experience their rights. These findings were then critically analyzed using Willig's (2013) six-step approach to conducting a FDA. The purpose of Willig's (2013) approach was to allow me as the researcher "to map some of the discursive resources used in a text and the subject positions they contain, and to explore their implications for subjectivity and practice" (p. 115). This further allows me to gain an understanding and recognize how young people do and do not reference their rights, the role of power relations that exist within society, and how they impact the accessibility of rights. Acknowledging these factors provides perspective onto the different positionalities that young people can take, and how that serves them in terms of how to have

their needs better met, the barriers they face and how their rights relate to broader social contexts.

Influence of Adults on Children's Rights

When applying sociology of childhood to analyze adult influence on children's rights, it is necessary to recognize why adults create barriers and what justifies those actions. According to this theory, one of the biggest reasons for these barriers is related to the belief that adults have of children as incomplete beings due to their age. In this way, the understanding of childhood is not separated from biological immaturity, but deeply entrenched in this developmental understanding. Adults believe that because children are young and 'under-developed' they may not be able to make the best decisions for themselves. This understanding often stems from adults "projecting their decision, making criteria onto the child" (James & Prout, 1997, p. 75). This can result in adults acting towards what they believe is best for the child, rather than taking into account what a child says they need. "Some students felt that, because of their age, they may not achieve any sort of impact and that their opinions may not be taken seriously" (Shaking the Movers, 2018h, p. 5). Such beliefs are problematic because it results in adults taking power away from children, violating their rights and making decisions for children, rather than working in partnership with them, all because of their age. This can be a frustrating experience for young adults. They are not old enough to be considered as adults, therefore are not considered to be fully matured and this contradicts how these youth recognize themselves. "You are like entirely capable of mature and adult thought and a lot of people do not see kids as people, or as like people in training, but not human beings who are also entitled to the same amount of respect" (Shaking the Movers, 2019e, p. 18). These actions are making limiting assumptions regarding

the competence and capability of children, and they take away from them. Adults can use age as a reason to justify violating rights. It is also demeaning to their status of being complete citizens in society because their unique experiences and perspectives are being disregarded and considered invaluable.

Adults take on a future-orientated approach when it comes to children. “A common refrain is the ‘youth of today are the leaders of the world tomorrow’” (Shaking the Movers, 2021a, p. 4). This reinforces the idea that children cannot make a difference or an impact in society until they grow into adulthood because they lack the competence to do so during their childhood. Adults often treat children based on how they want children to exist in society. Treating children in ways that make them feel like they do not have access to power or influence until adulthood serves adults the purpose of keeping their power over children in society. This further influence how children understand their place in society. Until adults do not acknowledge that young people are active and complete citizens, youth cannot fully participate or exercise their rights (Mayall, 2000, p. 245). One way to do this is through adults listening to children and being allies instead of dismissing or disregarding them “Youth felt strongly that there ought to be more adult allies and supports for youth to overcome these barriers” (Shaking the Movers, 2013, p. 15). As active agents’ children can use their voices to advocate for themselves and state their needs, concerns and recommendations, however, they depend on adults to fulfill these needs due to the unequal distribution of power that exists between children and adults. Lastly, it can even position adults to better listen to children when they reach out for help, so the challenges they face are validated and taken seriously.

Partnership between children and adults can only successfully occur when adults can accept the fact that children are active beings instead of only seeing them as passive. Children do

not simply just exist while the world is happening around them, but they interact with it and make an impact. Adults must acknowledge the fact that the experiences children have are valuable, and they hold the ability to influence their social world and the people around them, and their rights are what allow them to do so. “Children are not just the passive subjects of social structures and processes” (James & Prout, 1997, p. 8). When adults start seeing children as active beings, it then allows them to work in collaboration with children because it creates a space for adults to better listen to children on how to have their needs better met and observe the influence young people have on their environment. “Adults should understand that children have different perspectives and need to be able to share these perspectives to make their lives better” (Shaking the Movers, 2020c, p. 11). When the unique experiences and perspectives of young people are accepted, it allows them to be seen as complete members of the society, as people who make a difference. Taking on this understanding can allow adults to renegotiate how they behave towards children and reconsider the assumptions they make.

Lastly, the way children experience their childhood in relation to their rights and their experiences with adults is based on the social constructions of the society. Young people do not have a universal experience in accessing their rights; their experiences are based on their social variables such as age, race, gender, SES, and where they are located in society. Some young people are given more support from adults, hence having a much easier time accessing their rights and facing significantly fewer violations. On the other hand, because of a child’s minority status or being a visible minority, it can cause them to face many more obstacles and rights violations. These different social circumstances must be acknowledged to recognize how rights are being violated and what obstacles children are facing (James & Prout, 1997). Additionally, instead of being supported by adults, youth feel as though “Professionals and people in authority

are sometimes the very ones who are violating our rights” (Shaking the Movers, 2007, p. 11). For instance, young people may have different experiences with their parents. Some young people endure situations where they may not be able to work in partnership because their parents overpower them due to their responsibilities. There can be little effort to work together and include the child in the decision-making process of events that are related to their life. In such circumstances, youth may be expected to accept the words and fulfill the expectation of their parents without question. In other cases, children may face more violence and harsh treatment from authority figures due to being targeted because of their skin colour (Shaking the Movers, 2018a, p. 27, see also table 1). Although all these children may be living in the same community or country, the reality of the type of childhood they have varies significantly.

The same adults who are given the responsibility to ensure children are being able to access their rights and are able to take on the role as right’s bearing citizens are the same adults who prevent this from happening. This occurs because of an idea of children based on an outdated and inaccurate understanding of them rooted mostly in a “developmental approach to childhood, provided by psychology, is based on the idea of natural growth” (James & Prout, 1997, p. 10) which attributes age to capability. This is exemplified through the way children discuss and experience the Canadian government. The government censoring how much knowledge children get about Indigenous history is a reflection of them controlling and taking away agency from children (Shaking the Movers, 2012a, p. 16, see also table 5). The government makes the decision of how much and to what extent children are learning about certain topics. This is problematic because it then influences how children interact with their social world. Without proper knowledge about Canada’s history, young people will be more susceptible to

reinforcing social inequalities and social hierarchies that all serve the adult agenda of power and control.

Lack of Awareness and Education Awareness Around Children's Rights

The lack of education and awareness that young people have about their rights can be recognized as a form of control over children. Adults do admit that they recognize child's rights as a threat, they believe that if children get complete access to their rights, adults will lose control over them (Jamieson et al., 2022, p. 10). Adults require this control to be able to maintain the power that they have over youth. Young people "shared experiences where adults whose care they were placed in violated their rights because they knew the youth lacked knowledge of their rights" (Shaking the Movers, 2015, p. 18). In some cases, these violations can be purposeful and deliberately take advantage of youth to mould them into beings that adults want them to be. This additionally supports the fact that adults are willing to violate children's right to serve their own purpose. In the workshops, some youth "made the connection that without knowledge of one's rights, they might end up in harmful situations" (Shaking the Movers., 2015, p. 10). Some adults may believe that children are not deserving of their rights, power and ability to participate in society because of their views of children being incompetent. Adults may be motivated to act upon these beliefs due to their struggle to accept youth as social actors, which can lead to them acting in ways that reflect power dynamics between children and adults, and increase the existing power imbalances. This can result in them violating children's rights, potentially for their own gain. This treatment can be based on the understanding that children are a result of a socialization process rather than actors who impact their social world. This understanding takes

away from young people; it solidifies children being passive and undermines them as active citizens of their community.

Lack of education prevents children from being able to exercise their status of being complete citizens and fully participate in society. Instead, they must continue to depend on adults for access, giving adults power over them. For instance, youth may not be able to interact with societal structures such as the government. “They are not informed on how to engage in the political system, and do not have any knowledge about the procedures that exist that allow for one to have their voice heard” (Shaking the Movers, 2020c, p. 11). In such situations, children may need to depend on adults to give them access to being involved in the political system. However, this means that adults hold the ability to censor children by not giving them the space to state their needs. They are also in the position to decide if what children are trying to say is important enough to be heard by people in positions of power. Not having “information on their rights and how to engage with the political system, the government remains an abstract entity” (Shaking the Movers, 2020c, p. 11). Without the necessary education, young people are not able to find methods to reach systems of power in their community, in addition to not being able to recognize situations where they are facing rights violations or dealing with adults mistreating or abusing their power. This takes away a young person’s agency and their ability to be active agents by not being able to stand up for themselves and advocating for their rights and fair treatment.

Lack of education of awareness around children’s rights also relates to the lack of knowledge young people have about social issues that are happening in the world. This places young people in a position where they are not fully able to appreciate the fact that different children have different childhoods, and this can aid in reinforcing social inequalities because

“things like racism are a result of ignorance” (Shaking the Movers, 2021e, p. 21). When young people do not have education about different social circumstances, it creates ignorance around those issues and decreases the youth’s ability to build tolerance and be more accepting. For youth to fully understand how children’s rights are experienced, they need to understand all the social, cultural and political influences around a child’s life. They need to be able to recognize that a young person who lives a similar life to them can have significantly different experiences with their rights because of factors such as their race. This is what allows everyone to see how differently all youth in Canada experience their rights. Knowledge is strongly tied to power; it empowers young people to engage in the role of being actors in their society. When they recognize that they are able to make changes and have the power to impact their social world, it encourages them to advocate for themselves. They are able to act as competent and capable members of society. It gives them a chance to interact and engage with societal structures to demand and create change.

Children’s Rights in the Education System

Children’s rights in education are a depiction of how societal institutions treat children as passive recipients of the world. Firstly, the education system is thought of as a socialization process that teaches young people how to interact with people and be fully functioning members of society through the use of rules, regulations and lessons within the curriculum. In this process, there is limited consideration of how children themselves impact the socialization process.

“Children must be regarded as active, creative social agents who are both shaped by and shape their circumstances and the surrounding society” (Quennerstedt & Quennerstedt, 2014, p. 122).

This socialization process is impacted by a number of factors, such as a child’s race, gender, and

SES. This means that not all children experience their education the same way. For instance, a child's race can impact how they interact with the education system and how the education system treats them. If a child is of a minority race, their experiences can result in them being disengaged at school, so they can be unresponsive and unmotivated to partake in any participation opportunities. This can cause them to not be able to develop the same types of skills as those students who take advantage of the additional participation opportunities they are offered. On the other hand, if racialized youth consistently see patterns of them being excluded and treated unfairly, this can motivate them to protest and demand change until it is more inclusive and accepting of diversity. In this way, children hold the power to make changes to the socialization process that exists in schools.

Additionally, the function of the educational system also shows how societal institutions do not always regard or prioritize the agency a young person has. There is very limited input taken from children regarding their education, they are not asked what they want to learn, nor are they asked how the best learning environment can be created for them. There is a "lack of power given to student councils and students in schools" and "there is also currently no input from students on School Boards" (Shaking the Movers, 2020c, p. 18). Teachers make these decisions for children as they believe they can best accommodate them based on their knowledge and convenience instead of basing it on the youth who needs the support. This can be related to both how teachers may not believe that children are competent enough to state their needs or educators do not attribute enough value to the experiences of young people to take their recommendations into account. The education system does not create a space for children to participate as active members but are expected to allow education to happen to them (Quennerstedt & Quennerstedt, 2014). The purpose of education should be for the betterment of

a child, which means their education should be centred around a child. Instead, all these decisions are made by adults higher up in the education system who expect children to work around a generalized system.

When discussing children's rights in school, it is important to consider how young people are influenced by bullying and how this impacts their ability to access their rights. Bullying can be understood as a way that controls young people and increases the power imbalances between different types of children. Children who belong to the most represented social groups are often the ones who perpetuate bullying through social exclusion, participating in microaggressions and even reinforcing stereotypes about minority youth. Such behaviour towards minority youth can be extremely discouraging and demotivate them from stepping up by participating or using their voice to take on their role as active members of society. The lack of effort that is made by teachers and adults presented in the school systems indicates how the experiences of children are not always valued or taken seriously. This prevents appropriate and necessary action from being taken that is needed to help youth. School staff (including administrators, counsellors, teachers and support staff) must take action to validate and support students who are experiencing bullying (Shaking the Movers, 2018k, p. 21). Acknowledging and validating the experiences of youth is the first step in giving them the support they require. For this to occur, youth need to be considered agents of society. Lastly, this makes connection between how the social aspects of society impacts how children experience their childhood and access their rights. This also provides insight into how to truly understand childhood, as "it can never be entirely divorced from other variables, such as class, gender, or ethnicity" (James & Prout, 1997, p. 8). The social institutions they part-take in and the people around them can dictate the amount of agency they have, and their ability to participate as active members of the community.

More Inclusion of Youth Voices and Participation

The lack of inclusion of young people's voices can make it evident how many adults often hold onto the belief that children are not competent or mature enough to be involved. This justifies adults not considering or giving value to what children have to say. "The youth felt that adults rarely invite them to join conversations, listen to them when they try to speak up or value their opinions when making decisions that affect their lives" (Shaking the Movers, 2018c, p. 24). Instead of being asked, young people are more often told what to do. There can be instances where adults expect youth to listen to them even though there are minimal efforts being made to ensure that young person actually understands. One youth states how adults "always make decisions on my behalf and I don't always understand what they want me to agree to" (Shaking the Movers, 2018c, p. 15). The lack of need that adults feel to fully explain their decisions to children can be rooted in their understanding that children may not be able to make the best decisions for themselves; therefore, children should be listening to adults without question. Adults trying to protect children "is the main reason given for restricting children's freedom, and it is in turn demanded because of children's alleged lack of responsibility, capability and competence" (James and Prout, 1997, p. 86). Such beliefs assume a young person's capability and competence, which creates a barrier between children and adults working together. It is important that adults learn to take children seriously without the constant questioning of their abilities and competence due to their developmental level.

Adults excluding children is a way for them to push their own agenda. When adults do not include children, they are not considering how any given issue impacts them. Instead, they are then working in ways to best push their agenda and achieve their desired outcomes (Mayall,

2000). However, it prevents adults from being in a position where they are able to acknowledge the different factors that impact the experiences that children have. Only when children are given an opportunity to speak are they able to state their opinions, concerns and recommendations. “Youth participants expressed that if different types of youth are more involved, there will be a greater understanding of them and of the issues and challenges they are facing” (Shaking the Movers, 2007, p. 6). Regardless of a young person’s developmental levels or where they are situated in society, it needs to be understood that children experience the world uniquely compared to each other and to adults, and that should be enough of a reason to value the experiences of youth. Each time a young person is not included in the decision-making process, their voice is not considered, or they are not being given participation opportunities, it is an example of their agency being taken away. Without agency, children are left unable to participate as active members of their society, as they cannot fully interact with it. Young people face this challenge at many different levels of their lives. This can be at home with parents, teachers or adults in power, such as governmental figures. Young people participating and using their voice is truly the only way to understand how they are experiencing their childhood; they provide insight that is otherwise inaccessible.

Discrimination Against Children and Their Rights

The discrimination that Indigenous young people face exemplifies how different childhoods are uniquely impacted by social and cultural aspects of society; hence all childhoods are not universal. Indigenous youth are subjected to a much greater deal of discrimination compared to other youth in Canada. Not only are they impacted by systematic disadvantages on a daily basis, but they are also impacted by generational trauma and cultural loss. Such factors

influence the opportunities they receive and the circumstances they end up in. For instance, “Aboriginal youth are at a higher risk of being incarcerated due to years of discrimination, racism and mistreatment” (Shaking the Movers, 2012a, p. 15). The social aspects of Indigenous young people being put under more surveillance from authority and receiving harsher treatment from the justice system leads to them being more involved with the justice system compared to other youth. Additionally, the decreased opportunities they get can make it more difficult for them to improve their quality of life and access their rights. This can result in them turning to unconventional methods to have their needs met, such as through theft or using drugs as a way to escape their struggles (Shaking the Movers, 2012a). In no way are these experiences of childhood comparable or similar to all other childhoods, solidifying the idea that childhood is not universal.

Presently, there is still not enough education or awareness of the experiences that Indigenous people face. This makes it difficult to acknowledge how much social aspects of society can impact the lives of those children. Although childhood should be analyzed separately, it is necessary to include an analysis of the social variables around them to get a complete understanding of how childhood is experienced. Children are impacted differently based on factors such as their race, gender, and ethnicity. The lived Indigenous experiences are a depiction of how greatly social variables can indeed impact lives. Societal structures can influence this understanding based on how they present information on the lived experiences of Indigenous youth. The education system plays a role in this as “in high school, students learn about First Nations people, however the content is very limited and there is little discussion on what First Nations people are facing today in Canada” (Shaking the Movers, 2012a, p. 15). Due to the lack of prioritization of acknowledging the experiences of Indigenous people, “there is

such ignorance about the issues that aboriginal youth face” (Shaking the Movers, 2007, p. 16). Often, this results in there being an acknowledgment of the circumstances that these youth end up in, without considering the factors that lead them there, and this reinforces stereotypes and prejudices about them. This then causes the issues and struggles they face to go ignored, unaddressed and their impact on how childhood is not fully understood.

Referencing the discrimination of Indigenous youth brings light to how societal structures such as the government work in ways that reflect the idea that children are incompetent beings. Youth have not been allowed to have agency and be part of the decision-making process regarding situations that impact their lives. This has been occurring historically with residential schools when “the government came in and other school officials came in and just took them without asking or giving them a heads up” (Shaking the Movers, 2021c, p. 10). Indigenous children were removed from their homes and put into residential schools without being informed of what was happening. The government made the executive decision to separate children from their families, homes and culture by spreading the misconception that this would be the best decision for their future. The government here treats young people as being passive to these decisions, and they do not consider that all these children who have been mistreated have their own perspectives, desires and needs that must be acknowledged. There is an attempt to transform children into the perfect future citizen, and this results in their present and childhood experiences being sacrificed because this stage of their life is not deemed to be valuable enough to be protected.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

Overall, in Canada, children and young people involved in the 40 *STM* workshops admit to having very little knowledge about their rights. However, when youth begin to learn about

their rights, findings suggest that they are then able to recognize how their rights are being violated. The fact is that children's rights are not prioritized in Canada, which means there are little efforts to ensure children are actually aware of the rights they hold, and there are minimal efforts to implement them into society. It is clear that successful implementation cannot occur until adults decide to work in partnership with children, this means that there is a need for more intentional efforts to ensure that the structures of society readjust the way they function to better align with the Convention. Due to the lack of consideration towards children's rights, and the reinforcement of the long-prevailing power relations between children and adults, rights violations are deeply entrenched within societal structures. In order to rectify them, strong commitment from children and adults on all the different levels of society is required. Hence, until there is communal recognition of the importance towards children's rights in Canada, rights violations will not cease to exist, but with the continuous growth of support and awareness of children's rights, these violations can immensely decrease, ultimately allowing all youth in Canada to have better access of their rights. This study helps bring awareness to the issues that young people in Canada face while attempting to access their rights. Now that the experiences and barriers youth face have been presented and are better known, it creates direction for what steps need to be taken to help resolve those challenges.

Limitations and Future Direction

The biggest limitation of this research pertains to the use of existing data. As this research is based on published and pre-existing reports by children, this took away the opportunity to ask direct questions or seek clarifications. Although young people provided very useful insights, not all of it was applicable to this research. This created the reality of me as the researcher to feel as

though specific answers, information, or details were not attainable. Since I had no control over the data set contained within 40 reports, it left me with a very wide range of content. This meant that during the process of creating themes, I had to pick what I thought was the most important, and this was done according to how consistently each topic was discussed across the reports. Since I was not directly able to work with the children, I was not able to get confirmation regarding if what I thought was the most important to discuss reflected their ideas of the most important themes. This means there is a possibility that the narrative that this research created only reflected a portion of the reality that youth face rather than being reflective of the entire experience they had.

Another limitation that must be acknowledged is that in the early childhood reports, there were instances where the reports focused on the voices of adults and what they thought about the importance of children's rights. Although these insights were extremely valuable as they indicated the benefits and importance of having adult allies and partnerships between children and adults. However, the focus on adult voices left me in a position where I was not able to use a majority of those reports, as the goal of my research was to focus on the first-hand experience of children that were described using their voices or through their words. I believe that incorporating the voices and insights of adults would contradict the purpose of this research.

The last limitation that needs to be mentioned is the influence that adults have on the youth who participated in the workshop. As this is a youth-driven and youth facilitated workshop, the adults who are working in partnership with youth have made a strong effort to allow youth to take up the space and speak freely about the topics of discussion. However, it must be considered that the presence of adults around children during these discussions may have some type of influence that may be difficult to measure. For example, due to the power

dynamics that exist between children and adults, the youth may find themselves in a position where they do not feel as though they can freely express their opinions in fear of offending any adult or any potential repercussion. Furthermore, this influence may be more prevalent within the early childhood workshops where the younger children depend on adults more for the successful execution of the workshop. The increased involvement of adults in these workshops may mean a stronger influence over children. The unintentional biases of adults may be reflected through the activities they conduct in the workshops and how they interact with the child. Or the adults who are assisting with the workshops may have more difficulty accepting the opinions and statements of the youth because of their adult experiences or prior education, and this may result in the messages or ideas of children not being translated correctly. Overall, in this research, it is important to recognize that there can be an unmeasurable influence of adults on the youth participants.

A future direction of this research would be to have more direct involvement with children when doing research about their experiences. Arguably, the *STM* workshops provided the best dataset reflecting how young people across Canada understand and experience their rights as the reports were constructed by youth, and it mainly contained the voices of youth. This did allow the research to get the most authentic insight into the experiences that young people face. More communication with youth could have resulted in more intentional findings. The current study lacks a line of communication with children that could have provided more clarification and more certainty that young people's voices were being used as they intended.

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Appendix I

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