



CJC

CANADIAN JEWISH CONGRESS

The Jewish community's national voice on  
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CONGRÈS JUIF CANADIEN

## **CHOOSE YOUR VOICE:**

### ***Teaching About Antisemitism and Racism in the Classroom***

#### **Introduction**

Canadian Jewish Congress (CJC), for close to a year, has been developing a program to help Canadian students understand the dangers of antisemitism, racism and other forms of stereotyping. It is a project to empower students to confront these evils and – to use the working title of the program – to challenge each student to *Choose Your Voice*. September 2005 is the date for its release.

#### **Background**

The impetus for the project came from outside CJC – indeed from outside the Jewish community.

In March 2004, the city of Toronto experienced a wave of concentrated and highly visible antisemitic activity, including the smashing of synagogue and school windows, the toppling of Jewish gravestones and the defacement of private homes in a predominantly Jewish neighbourhood, one of which belonged to a Holocaust survivor. More horribly, in April a Jewish school in Montreal was the target of an arson attack.

These outrages captured the attention of the wider Canadian society. Our community was embraced by government leaders, parliamentarians as well as members of ethnic and faith communities. A number of individuals wanted to do more.

Elizabeth Comper, the wife of Tony Comper, President of the Bank of Montreal – one of Canada's largest financial institutions – decided that it was necessary for the non-Jewish community to take a stand. A former school teacher, she wanted a program to be developed that would help children understand the dangers of antisemitism. Through her efforts, a number of influential members of the business community joined the team and added their contributions to the project funding. Canadian Jewish Congress was asked to develop the concept and the program. These would be developed as the first element of an emergent strategy under the acronym of FAST – Fighting Antisemitism Together.

#### **Opportunities and Challenges**

CJC was well-prepared for this opportunity. It has successfully established relationships with both public and private schools and school boards, ministries of education and curriculum development experts. Its staff has the necessary background to prepare training materials and educational videos.

In Canada, the school curriculum is administered by provincial ministries of education. For each year from kindergarten to grade 12, ministries issue a set of curriculum expectations that teachers are meant to meet, although they have a fair degree of latitude in how they do so. Our challenge was how to develop a program that (a) focuses on antisemitism and racism in Canada while at the same time (b) helps teachers to meet the ministry-mandated expectations.

The primary target area for the pilot project was the province of Ontario.

### **Target Audience and Goals**

Our consultation process led us to understand that the best group to focus on was children aged 11 to 14. This represents students in grades 6, 7 and 8.

Our goals were to equip educators with a set of tools to teach about antisemitism in Canada, mainly in a modern context. The lessons were to:

- Provide educators with the means to create a call to action for students, helping them make better choices in their own lives and in how they approach people who are different from themselves.
- Include general discussion about racism and stereotyping, with the focus relating back to antisemitism.
- Connect to curriculum guidelines. The program is sufficiently flexible so that if an educator wanted to apply it to students in grade 5 or 9, s/he would be able to do so.

### **Lessons**

The lessons, as currently conceived, are:

1. *“Bursting” the Voices of Stereotyping*: Allowing students to understand the concept of stereotyping, to see how assumptions can lead to unfair judgments and to recognize ways that biases affect everyone.
2. *Voices from the Past*: Creating awareness of episodes in Canadian history that involved racism and antisemitism and showing students how to recognize that racist events involve perpetrators, victims and bystanders.
3. *Voices from the Present*: Raising awareness of recent antisemitic and racist incidents; recognizing the components and/or roots of a hate crime, and learning the meaning of “systemic discrimination.”
4. *Choose Your Voice*: Teaching students that there are no innocent bystanders, that they have choices to make, and helping them identify strategies for responding to racist or antisemitic incidents that will advance a culture of tolerance.

## Resource Kit

Upon completion, the resource kit will contain the following:

- *Teacher Resource Guide*: Introduction on using the kit; four lesson plans; curriculum guidelines and a glossary of terms.
- *Fact Sheets*. There will be one or two fact sheets to reinforce a particular lesson. These would include newspaper articles, images, first-person accounts, etc. and could be used as handouts for students.
- *Video*. Four segments, matching each lesson plan. It could be used as a single package by an educator who chose to teach only one lesson out of four. There will be at least four different groups represented: Holocaust and Rwandan genocide survivors; students and parents victimized by antisemitism; victims of racism and discrimination (an aboriginal Jewish man, a black hockey player) and perpetrators (a former white supremacist).
- *Evaluation form*. For students and educators.

## Distribution

We already have made contact with the largest school systems in Ontario and these support the program's goals and concepts. It is our expectation that the program will be well-received by Boards in our initial target area. Based on the results, the model will be extended to other provinces as well.

## Conclusion

This program represents an example of the synergy that can be developed when advocacy organizations develop strategic partnerships with individuals and groups outside of the traditional pool. The product, when completed will comprise an important element in the pro-active arsenal for fighting antisemitism and racism.