



The Bark

Summer 2016

Learning for an Engaged Life by Gary Hansen

Have you ever wondered why some students turn their minds away from lessons being taught, or from school altogether?

Some of my best public schooling memories are when I was learning about events or challenges in our larger society. For example, hearing Mel Hurtig speak to my high school social studies class moved me to go to downtown Edmonton on a Saturday morning to collect signatures on a Committee for an Independent Canada petition. A Biology 30 project to measure noise pollution at several major intersections in Edmonton during rush hour earned me an honourable grade. And a grade nine option class project, researching and writing an essay on the merits of the space race, energized me.

So how is it that some students find their schooling boring? The answer may, in part, be found by asking the questions, "Does the content of courses connect students to their world? Do Indigenous students see their lives, their struggles, their challenges, and the contributions of their community to society reflected in the life of the school and in their learning? How about working class students? Immigrant students? LGBTQ students?" About 20% of Alberta students come from families living in poverty. Do these students see themselves in their studies? Without this content, students are missing the validation of their lives and significance learning.

To explore the reality of "boring learning," another question to be asked is, "Do students have a voice in their learning?" A pedagogy that allows a student to explore their understanding of an issue, allows them through dialogue to make the connections of their lives to the larger world they live in. Student engagement in their learning allows them to develop a deeper understanding of the issue and of their lives.

An attitude prevalent not only in schools, but in the whole of society, is that, "I can't do anything about it, so it is no use trying" Can we connect this attitude to student learning?

The lack of meaningful learning material and minimal student voice sends a clear message to discourage students from their learning. Conversely, if students are allowed to engage with the world around them as they learn, it encourages them to participate in shaping that world. It leads to fulfilling the vision of an educated student as being "...engaged, active, informed and responsible citizens...aware of their capacity to effect change in their communities, society and world." (*Alberta Social Studies Program of Studies, 2005*)

If we are to have a thriving democracy, we must have curricula and a pedagogy that is inclusive of students who are currently not accurately represented in our curricula and whose voices and communities have been silenced. There is a great opportunity here for educators to support these students to be engaged in their schooling and be empowered for life.

News & Events

September 21 – [International Day of Peace](#)

September 30 – [Orange Shirt Day](#)

October – [Healthy Workplace Month](#) (Canada)

October 1 – [International Day of Older Persons](#)

October 3 – [World Habitat Day](#)

October 5 – [United Nations' World Teachers' Day](#)

October 10 – [World Mental Health Day](#)

October 11 – [International Day of the Girl Child](#)

October 16 – [World Food Day](#)

October 16-22 – [Coop Week](#) (Canada)

October 17 – [International Day for the Eradication of Poverty](#)

October 24 – [United Nations Day](#)

November 16 – [International Day for Tolerance](#)

November 20 – [Universal Children's Day](#)

November 18-20 – [Parkland Institute Conference](#)

November 25 – [International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women](#)



Aspen Foundation for Labour Education



Teaching about Residential Schools?

How about a focus on the topic of residential schools and their legacy on Orange Shirt Day, September 30th? Resources can be found at:

[Safe and Caring Schools](#)

[Orange Shirt Day](#)

[Secret Path](#)

Social Justice Learning Grants

The Aspen Foundation works to help educate young Albertans by developing citizens that are engaged with issues that affect their communities, country and world. Teachers and students can apply for a grant of up to \$1500. Please visit our [website](#) for further information and the application form or check the latest ATA school mail out. The deadline is October 3, 2016.

Half of the grant will be paid when the application is approved. The balance is paid on completion of the project, and the recipient provides an accounting and evaluation report.

The GWG: Piece by Piece—A Resource for Alberta Teachers

The Aspen Foundation will present at the ATA Social Studies Council Conference, October 13 – 15, 2016 at the River Cree Resort. Further information on the conference is available [here](#). The presentation will highlight the newly developed resource that includes lessons for grades 4, 5, 7, 9, 10-1 & 10-2 and 12-1 & 12-2. The lessons include music from the 60-minute video ballad performed by Maria Dunn. It includes lessons based on the Alberta Social Studies curriculum that identify Outcomes, Competencies, Concepts and Inquiry Questions for each of the grades.

Aspen Foundation Annual Appeal

Once a year, the Aspen Foundation does an Annual Appeal for assistance to help us with our program. Our appeal is on line [here](#).

Aspen Foundation Feedback and Participation

We value your comments, please send them to us. If you would like to write an article regarding social justice work in the classroom, talk to us. If you would like to participate in some way in our work, please contact us.

We believe that it is important that schools teach about building new, fairer, kinder, and more just workplaces and communities. Friends like you make our work possible.

Your support is key to offering Social Justice and Labour Education in schools

Aspen Foundation is a registered charity and provides **income tax receipts** to individual donors.

[Click here to donate!](#)

Related Links & Info

[The Story of Change](#)
[Tax the Rich: An animated fairy tale](#)

[Fairness Works Campaign](#)
[Social Studies Council](#)

[UN Observances](#)

[Aspen Foundation Teaching Resources](#)

***Always review resources before using them in class.**

Like us on [Facebook](#) for more resources and links!



The Aspen Foundation for Labour Education

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