

Fighting Antisemitism Together, FAST

In 2004, former President and CEO of BMO Financial Group, Tony Comper and his wife Elizabeth founded Fighting Antisemitism Together (FAST). Led by a coalition of non-Jewish Canadian business and community leaders, FAST is dedicated to funding educational programs that empower and challenge students to speak out against antisemitism and racism in Canada.

In September, 2005, FAST launched an innovative education program called Choose Your Voice. Developed in partnership with Canadian Jewish Congress Charities Committee, Choose Your Voice educates students in grades 6, 7 and 8 about the dangers of intolerance in all its manifestations, with an emphasis on antisemitism. Choose Your Voice empowers teachers and students to fight against bigotry and intolerance. It's a natural complement to bullying prevention programs, character, citizenship or values-based education and other programs that promote safe and caring schools.

Choose Your Voice is specially designed to help teachers meet the curriculum outcomes in the areas of Social Studies, History, Geography, Language (Reading, Oral and Visual Communication and Media Literacy) and the Arts (Music, Visual Arts, Drama and Dance). The bilingual program includes four lesson plans, an assessment strategy, and an award-winning educational DVD that features an introduction by television host Ben Mulroney. Choose Your Voice is free of charge to educators across Canada.

The program has received wide acclaim from educators who say it has helped promote harmony, respect and equality in their schools. Choose Your Voice "enlightens, empowers and teaches the children, not only about themselves, but of the importance of a world that is free of racism and free of judgment," says one Vancouver principal. "It encourages them to love one another and respect other people, no matter where they are from."

This past March, Canadian Jewish Congress Charities Committee (CJCCC) and Fighting Antisemitism Together (FAST) hosted an event to announce that Choose Your Voice had reached this important milestone. The event was celebrated in Toronto, at Lord Lansdowne Public School with student choir and dance performances, a poetry reading and an art display all inspired by Choose Your Voice. It was the first school to incorporate the program into its curriculum three-and-a-half years ago. Almost 200 students attended the event with Canadian

Jewish Congress Charities Committee CEO Bernie Farber, FAST Founders Tony and Elizabeth Comper, Ontario Minister of Education the Honourable Kathleen Wynne, and several other government officials, trustees and community leaders. The Minister said in her speech,

"I applaud the work that has gone into the Choose Your Voice program. All students deserve an education system that is free from bias and discrimination, and celebrates diversity and culture.

	BOARDS*	SCHOOLS	STUDENTS
2005 – October, 2008			
ON	31	2624	350,000
QC	72	78	25,569
BC	2	n/a	590
NS	3	n/a	3,000
Other (AB, NB, NF, MAN, NUN)	1	n/a	19,515
TOTAL	109	2702	398,674
November, 2008			
ON	9	447	14,180
QC	n/a	16	889
BC	0	22	1,029
NS	1	n/a	3,700
TOTAL	10	485	19,798
December, 2008			
ON	3	429	13,501
QC	n/a	5	491
BC	0	398	1,544
TOTAL	3	832	15,536
January, 2009			
ON	6	495	19,024
QC	n/a	7	3,042
BC	15	246	7,488
Other (AB, NB, NS, NF, MAN, NUN)	2	2	270
TOTAL	23	750	29,824
February, 2009			

ON	0	5	117
QC	4	27	8,517
BC	5	114	7464
TOTAL	9	146	16,098
March, 2009			
ON*	0	0	0
QC	1	71	8,213
BC	5	295	4656
TOTAL	6	366	12,869
April, 2009			
ON	2	40	936
QC	1	7	4,750
AB**	TBC	250	TBC
BC	1	26	842
TOTAL	4	323	6,528
May, 2009			
ON	7	435	18,463
QC	4	14	3,767
BC	2	1	46.8
TOTAL	13	450	22,276
June, 2009			
ON	4	655	17,878
QC	NA	NA	NA
BC	1	44	2,527
TOTAL	5	699	20,405
TOTAL	BOARDS*	SCHOOLS	STUDENTS
	182	6,753	542,008
TOTAL Faculties of Education to date	11		

*No distribution in Ontario in March due to FAST coordinator being on vacation.

**Distribution timeline TBC. Note that 250 kits have the potential to reach 5363 students.

FEEDBACK ABOUT *CHOOSE YOUR VOICE*

A) STUDENTS

B) TEACHERS

C) EQUITY OFFICERS AT SCHOOL BOARDS & OTHER EDUCATORS

A) STUDENTS IN GRADES 6, 7 AND 8 – Answers from student surveys

BRITISH COLUMBIA

From the *Choose Your Voice* lessons, I have learned:

- I know I can stand up against racist or prejudiced comments and help prevent them from spreading. No one likes to feel like they don't matter, so it's important to show victims that they should speak up if they know something's wrong.
- When I see someone being racist, I can stand up for the victims and tell the person to stop it. By spreading the news people can be aware racism is still happening very often.
- Now I know that racism is more serious than anyone can imagine. It may happen deliberately or even unintentionally but it is still something wrong. We must help prevent it [from] happen[ing] so often.
- That just one voice will go a long way. If just one person speaks up against prejudice, racism or bullying, it is likely that others will do the same. To help eliminate these types of hatred, everyone needs to participate, which means doing your part.
- That if you look different, you are still the same on the inside. That you should treat others the same way you want to be treated. That you should stand up for yourself or others.
- To respect people no matter how they are on the outside. It showed me how hatred and anger can hurt people on the inside and the outside.

- What to do is someone is treating you or someone else unfairly because of what they look like or if they are just “different”. I’ve learned what it feels like to be targeted by racism.
- That stereotyping is a bad thing to do. What racism means. That you should stand up for yourself if you or someone else is being bullied.
- To not judge someone by their appearance. To treat each other fairly. To treat each other how you would like to be treated. That there are many countries that still discriminate people because of their ethnicity or religion.
- That stereotyping and racism is very wrong and can lead to serious consequences. I also learned that bullying is shown in different ways like gossiping.
- I feel that everyone should take part in Choose Your Voice and do everything to prevent antisemitism and bullying.
- I have learned that just one voice will go a long way. If just one person speaks up against prejudice, racism or bullying, it is likely that others will do the same. To help eliminate these types of hatred, everyone needs to participate, which means doing your part.
- *Choose Your Voice* showed me how hatred and anger can hurt people on the inside and the outside. I learned to respect people no matter how they are on the outside.
- The stories of racist acts are very disturbing to hear. Many people have been injured both physically and emotionally by these acts. It is important to know about them though.

ONTARIO

A grade 8 student at Lord Lansdowne School explained to insidertoronto.com that in studying *Choose Your Voice*, he has learned:

- Everything that I think every good human being needs to learn. It is so distinctively Canadian. Our country is built of all different cultures of the world and we all learn to get along together because racism, it's a terrible thing.

There are differences and thus disagreements but there are better ways to overcome these disagreements than violence and misunderstanding. So I think it is important that we all think things through, and get along before the guns come out.

NOVA SCOTIA

- Before we started learning about the Holocaust, I wasn't really sure what it meant. I was in for a real shock. I find it difficult to comprehend that some people could be so cruel. The killings were so systematic. They had a plan that they thought must be followed. I learned that hatred breeds hatred, and if we don't learn about the past, history will repeat itself. If it did, I would hope I had the courage to stand up and speak out against it.

NUNAVUT

- I want to make sure I can help and that we can stop racism in our school and community.
- I'm not going to stand by. I'm going to help and speak up. Someone has to and we can't assume it will be someone else.
- From *Choose Your Voice* I've learned that racism shouldn't exist and I found it troubling that it's still happening. We're supposed to be a multi-cultural country.
- I feel sad for some people and want to help.

B) TEACHERS

BRITISH COLUMBIA TEACHER

- I teach in a very multicultural community. Many of my students experience racism - not just from the majority population but also from various minority populations. Adults

don't generally want to talk about it. I don't think they know how to go about it. That's another reason why your resource is so important.

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO – OISE (ONTARIO INSTITUTE FOR STUDIES IN EDUCATION) STUDENT TEACHERS

- Thank you so much for this incredible resource. I just had a chance to watch the clips on the DVD and I already know that I will definitely use these when I teach history. I already felt like history was an area that I could definitely bring forth issues of diversity and equity, especially through discussion on the Holocaust and immigration. I think this resource will help me bring forth these ideas and help the students relate to the issues that are presented. I also think that the documents that were in the package are amazing. The incredible story written by children would be such a great piece to introduce to a drama class. I feel really strong about using the classroom as a place to promote equity and I think these resources are perfect for that. Thank you so much again!
- Thank you very much for distributing this video package to us. I can see how this material could be useful as a springboard for a discussion on equity and social justice - examining the history of inequality, as well as looking at the choices students can make now to properly address these issues. The lesson plan included in the booklet is also outstanding - the lesson plans are well organized, and looking at historical figures allows students to understand the tragedies of the past and the present, and let this inform their understanding of how they choose to address equity issues. Thanks again.

QUEBEC TEACHERS

- Merci pour votre document. Il m'a grandement aidé pour faire passer des messages de façon professionnelle. Je l'ai utilisé avec satisfaction. Les réponses étaient très positives. Je suis très encouragée à utiliser les différentes ressources de votre centre. ... les sujets sont variés et touchent la société sur différents aspects. Le guide permet de rencontrer divers personnages, il est le reflet du Canada. Les contenus sont faciles d'approche et propices aux débats (important au cycle 3). On touche dans le manuel à presque toutes les

communautés, ce qui rejoint différents groupes en classe.

- *Choisissez votre Voix*, guide très pertinent et très apprécié des élèves. Grande facilité d'accès.
- La présente est pour vous faire part de mon appréciation concernant le document de travail FAST que j'utilise cette année auprès d'un groupe d'élèves autistes à haut niveau.
- Dans le cadre d'une pédagogie différenciée où l'intégration des matières et la pédagogie par projets est mise de l'avant, l'utilisation du programme FAST a été la pierre de lance des cours de français, d'histoire, de géographie, d'éthique et de culture religieuse et d'arts plastiques qui sont sous ma responsabilité. Le programme FAST étant conçu pour aider les élèves à se libérer des stéréotypes et des préjugés et les rendre conscients de l'importance de transformer l'information en connaissance, il me semble être un pré-requis à l'enseignement des cours d'éthique et de cultures religieuses.

Plus encore, ce programme a fourni aux élèves une approche intéressante en regard de la découverte de soi, la découverte de l'autre et l'acquisition de connaissances significatives pour développer une conscience personnelle et sociale en vue d'un engagement communautaire.

QUEBEC FACULTY OF EDUCATION – UQAM

- L'intérêt des étudiantes et étudiants, qui sont des enseignants en exercice, s'est manifesté par les nombreuses questions qui ont été soulevées, par le débat animé qui s'est poursuivi au-delà du temps alloué pour le cours et par la réflexion autour d'expériences vécues au quotidien par ces enseignants dans le milieu scolaire.

Ces étudiants, multiplicateurs dans leurs propres milieux sont conscients de l'importance des enjeux relativement aux problématiques du racisme et de la discrimination dont ils sont souvent témoins, et le programme que vous offrez permet d'identifier des actions

pour les contrer. Ce programme est un modèle qui est transférable dans bien des domaines compte tenu de la discussion-réflexion qu'il suscite et de sa facilité d'adaptation.

Nos étudiants et étudiantes ont de plus beaucoup apprécié recevoir gracieusement le guide pédagogique avec lequel ils/elles pourront travailler compte tenu de la difficulté de se procurer du matériel pédagogique approprié.

Je souhaite que notre collaboration puisse se poursuivre et que d'autres étudiants auront la chance de vous rencontrer dans les sessions à venir.

NOVA SCOTIA TEACHERS

- Students who have reputations as being 'bullies' have written responses about how they didn't realize what they were doing was so harmful. Students in some situations began to befriend others from different ethnic/cultural backgrounds who had previously been excluded. Students began to have conversations at home with their parents and this would spill over into classroom discussions.
- It wasn't until I used the FAST program this year that discussions about racism openly occurred in my room. I still recall one boy's emotional reaction while watching the video and another tell his story about being racially discriminated on the school grounds of his former school.

C) SCHOOL BOARD EQUITY OFFICERS AND OTHER EDUCATORS

BRITISH COLUMBIA

VANCOUVER PRINCIPALS

- *Choose Your Voice* enlightens, empowers and teaches the children, not only about themselves, but of the importance of a world that is free of racism and free of judgment. It encourages them to love one another and respect other people, no matter where they are from.

- (When I was) presented ... with this educational resource, it really brought home, within a blink of an eye, how important this is. It is important because it enlightens, empowers and it teaches the children, not only about themselves, but of the importance of a world that is free of racism and free of judgment. It encourages them to love one another and respect other people, no matter where they are from. I hope that the "pebble" we threw into the educational waters of BC has big ripples all over the province. Thank you so much for giving me the opportunity to be a part of it.

ONTARIO

OTTAWA CATHOLIC SCHOOL BOARD

Coordinator of Religious Education and Family Life Education

- This is wonderful work that should be promoted.

TORONTO DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD –

Trustee Office Ward 6

- Thank you and your colleagues for creating such a wonderful moving presentation to be shared by our schools.

QUEBEC

QUEBEC SCHOOL BOARD

Commission scolaire de la Rivière-du-Nord

- En tant que conseillère pédagogique en anglais langue seconde de la Commission scolaire de la Rivière-du-Nord, je vous écris pour vous communiquer mon intérêt et mon enthousiasme suite à l'utilisation du guide « Choisissez votre Voix » auprès de mes enseignants d'anglais au secondaire. Des préjugés au racisme, de l'exclusion au génocide, ce document aborde adroitement et avec clairvoyance des questions d'intérêt commun.

Ce matériel s'intègre aussi bien dans le cadre des cours de français, d'anglais, d'histoire et d'éthique et culture religieuse permettant une grande latitude aux enseignants qui désirent explorer et s'approprier son contenu, le tout en interdisciplinarité. La richesse de

son contenu en lien avec le Programme de Formation de l'École Québécoise et des différentes activités proposées favorisent hautement la prévention et la lutte contre le racisme et la discrimination dans nos écoles et notre société.

Les enseignants profitent de ce document exceptionnel grâce à un contenu à la fois documenté et simple d'application. Merci de le mettre au service des communautés étudiantes.

QUEBEC

PRINCIPAL

- Thank-you for the excellent educational tool kit *Choose your Voice*. It is an excellent resource, educational, creative and practical and ties in with Barbara Colosoro's book: *Extraordinary Evil: A History of Genocide*, that is required reading for The Alternate School's senior classes.

DIRECTEUR IMAGES INTERCULTURELLES

- À notre avis, ce guide comporte toutes les caractéristiques nécessaires pour contribuer de manière efficace à l'éducation au racisme et à la discrimination sous toutes ses formes. En plus de susciter la discussion, il répond réellement au manque de ressources qualitatives et peut aider à prévenir les attitudes et les comportements d'intolérance.

À notre avis, le programme *Choisissez votre voix* est un outil de changement pour tous les milieux communautaires et plus particulièrement, les milieux scolaires. C'est la raison pour laquelle, nous appuyons cette belle initiative et souhaitons qu'elle soit récompensée

CANADIAN TEACHERS' FEDERATION PRESIDENT

- We can get the information out to our member organizations to inform the teachers in the classroom. The kit is an excellent resource. Thank you again for sending us the resource material for our fifty Board members. (They) represent 200,000 teachers in the field.

ONTARIO MINISTER OF EDUCATION, THE HONOURABLE KATHLEEN WYNNE

(Speech made on March 3rd at Lord Lansdowne School)

- I applaud the work that has gone into the Choose Your Voice program. All students deserve an education system that is free from bias and discrimination, and celebrates diversity and culture.

