THE CHALLENGE TO CHANGE

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#canedchange

The Discussion Guide
Version 2.0

Canadian Education Association | Association canadienne d'éducation

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The Discussion Guide Version 2.0
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About CEA

Founded in 1891, the Canadian Education Association (CEA) is a network of passionate educators advancing ideas for greater student and teacher engagement in public education. CEA does this by conducting research and spreading useful ideas through its publications, website, workshops, symposia, blog, videos, and social media channels, and supporting education systems to be more adaptive to the rapidly changing needs of all learners in an effort to reverse the trend of students 'tuning out' of their learning opportunities.

About Discussion Guide Author Stephen Hurley

After serving in Ontario's public school system for over 30 years, Stephen Hurley continues to work to open up spaces for vibrant conversations about change in education across Canada. A writer, podcaster and father of two, he believes that our current way of "doing school" is in need of some bold new ideas that will breathe more fire into the learning lives of young people, educators and the communities in which they work.

STAY INVOLVED IN THIS PAN-CANADIAN CONVERSATION

Visit **www.challengetochange.ca** to access this Discussion Guide, to share comments on our discussion threads, and to access valuable resources to enhance inform and enhance your conversations.

This website was developed in collaboration with TakingITGlobal, one of the world's leading networks of young people learning about, engaging with, and working towards tackling global challenges.

A CONVERSATION ABOUT CHANGE IS DEVELOPING...

On October 23, 2013 over 300 teachers, students, parents, policy-makers, education leaders and community groups gathered in Calgary to join the **Canadian Education Association (CEA)** in a conversation around the question, *What's Standing in the Way of Change in Education?* It's a provocative question, to be sure, and one that continues to draw interest and attention from individual citizens and stakeholder groups right across the country. For this reason, CEA has designed several ways for you to contribute to the conversation.

Locally Facilitated Conversations

In order to enable those interested in convening their own conversation about change in education, we have produced this discussion guide.

Mirroring very closely the facilitated process started in Calgary and modified as part of several regional workshops conducted in the spring of 2014, this guide is designed to adapt the conversation to your local context in the following ways:

- **Teachers** may wish to treat the guide as a series of lessons in order to draw students into a critical conversation about the educational change process.

- **School districts** might consider using the process as a way of thinking about their strategic planning.

- **Parent-based organizations** may use the guided process as a way of engaging communities in a deeper, more intentional dialogue about change.

- **Provincial ministries and departments of education** might consider using the guide to facilitate policy-level planning retreats.

Although this discussion guide is explicit in outlining an ambitious dialogue process, conversation entry points are provided for users that may wish to adapt it to meet their specific needs. Share with others how you have made use of the guide, changed it up and added to it in order to enliven your own conversations!

The Challenge to Change Website

In addition to the opportunity for locally-developed conversations focusing on *The Challenge to Change*, CEA has developed a website, in collaboration with TakingITGlobal. Following a similar rhythm as outlined in the discussion guide, the intent of this website is to draw individuals into more intentional dialogue with other Canadians. In particular, teachers and students are invited to take advantage of some of the design possibilities outlined on the site for work in the classrooms and schools.

Join the Conversation

Perhaps you were present in Calgary for the beginning of the conversation, or maybe you've attended one of the regional workshops. It could be that you are able to be a catalyst for dialogue at your local level, or you may choose to access the resources on *The Challenge to Change* website. The important thing is that you are part of an ongoing discussion and an active part of the various calls to action that are already beginning to emerge. This is an important conversation for all Canadians and we hope that you will join us in making it come alive in your community!

Visit challengetochange.ca to contribute your perspective.

DISCUSSION GUIDE OVERVIEW

At the Canadian Education Association, we believe that lasting change occurs when multiple voices and perspectives commit to gathering around the important questions. We realize that there is no shortage of great teaching, learning and leading going on in Canadian classrooms – there is so much expertise at all levels of our education systems. But we feel that change is happening far too slowly, with this expertise too often being shared in silos. For this reason, we are encouraging as many of you as possible to share the many examples of how you have moved beyond the barriers, so that all students can experience the rich learning environments they deserve.

This guide is divided into four separate sections, each focusing on a different aspect of the change conversation. Although users may wish to use only and/or adapt particular sections to meet their needs, it is recommended that this guide be followed in sequence in order to maximize the effectiveness of the process.

1. **Exploration 1:** The School of My Dreams
   An invitation to explore your personal vision for the schools that you wish to see.
2. **Exploration 2:** What Stands in the Way of My Vision?
   Thinking about the things that stand in the way of your vision from becoming fully realized.
3. **Exploration 3:** Promising Practices – Stories of Seeing Beyond
   An opportunity to identify the conditions that have allowed you to overcome some of your identified barriers in order to come closer to your vision.
4. **Exploration 4:** Designing for Change
   A chance to bring a sense of design addressing the barriers that stand in the way of achieving our collective visions for the schools we want to see.

Exploration 1:
The School of My Dreams

Whether you are a student, an educator, or a parent; whether you are part of a school administration team, or whether you are responsible for decisions at the policy level – whatever role you occupy in the education space, it is very likely that you have a powerful vision for the schools that you want to see and experience. It is also very likely that, despite the fact that there is often a substantial gap between the dreams you have for our education systems and the day-to-day reality of schools, you remain hopeful, buoyed by those moments of deep, authentic engagement, and the type of meaningful connections that constitute moments of powerful learning.

In this first part of the conversation, you are invited to **reconnect** with a story of when you came closest to experiencing the school of your dreams.

- **As a student,** it may be a story of high performance and high engagement – a time when you felt like you were deeply interested in and committed to the work that you were doing and were able to see its relevance and purpose.

- **As an educator,** it may be a memory of a time when you felt connected to your students or your colleagues and that you had a sense of professional confidence, efficacy and pride.

- **If you are a parent,** perhaps it is the story of a time when your child couldn't wait to get back to school to re-engage in their learning.

- **As an administrator,** it may be a powerful memory of when you were able to bring your staff together in a spirit of authentic collegiality.

Whatever the context and whatever your role, the story that you are invited to explore is one that had you thinking, "I wish school could be like this all the time!"

Step 1 - Remembering Your Story (15 minutes)

Before sharing your story with other members of the group, take some time to recall as many details about the context as possible. Some questions to guide you:

- What was your role in the story? (Teacher, student, parent, community member, etc)
- In what type of activity/work were you involved?
- Who else was involved in the story? What role did they play? How did they help the story come to life?
- What were the most compelling details of the story? Why do you suppose that this story is so memorable for you?
- What are some of the emotions that you recall feeling at the time?
- What strengths, talents and skills did you bring to the activity in which you were involved?
- What strengths, talents and skills did others bring to this activity?

Materials You Will Need:
- *Remembering My Story* handout for each participant (pg 11)
- Blank paper for paired storytelling activity
- Flipchart paper for group discussion
- Coloured markers
- *In the School of My Dreams* template (pg 13)

Facilitation Tip

If you're working with limited time, participants may use these *Remembering Your Story* questions as a quick guide to focusing on the important details of their personal stories.

Step 2 - Sharing Your Story (30 minutes)

1. Find one other person to share your story with. Take turns telling your story, including as many of the details that you have recorded as possible. Allow enough time with this part of the process to get a good sense of why your partner is so excited about this particular memory!

2. As you listen to your partner's story, use the *Remembering Your Story* questions above to take notes about the details that will help you share their story with the larger group.

3. Once your partner has told their story, switch roles, the listener becoming the storyteller.

Step 3 - Connecting Our Stories (45 minutes)

1. Find one or two other pairs to connect with. Have the listener in each pair tell their partner's story. (It is particularly powerful to hear someone else tell your story!)

2. Using flipchart paper and coloured markers, have someone in the group record some of the common elements that begin to emerge as part of the storytelling process.

3. Once all the stories have been told, take time to talk about the positive connections between the stories. What elements did most of the stories share? What do these connections tell us about the schools that we envision?

Step 4 - In the School of My Dreams

The individual stories that we tell of our moments of highest performance and engagement can lead us directly to our hopes and dreams for the work that we do. In the case of the schools that we want, the stories that you just recalled and told in several different ways likely contain some of the fundamental images and elements that would help us articulate a broader vision for the *school of our dreams*.

Take time to reflect on the stories that have just been told and use these to write an inspiring vision for the *school of your dreams*. Be as specific as possible in writing a vision that captures a response to that question, *"What if school was like this all the time?"*

Keep your vision statements handy; you will refer to them as the process continues!

Exploration 2: What Stands in the Way of My Vision?

Despite our best intentions, and our most compelling visions, we have a long way to go to achieve the large-scale lasting change that we're looking for. An important part of the change process, however, lies in our ability to articulate with a good deal of clarity the specific things that stand in the way of the change that we want to see. Whether we call them barriers, challenges or problems, we know that there are many "if only's" that seem to impede our progress.

In this part of the conversation, you will be asked to be very clear about what stands in the way of **your** vision becoming a reality more often. Once you have considered your own vision and your own context, you will have the opportunity to talk with others in your group and, like you did in your storytelling, begin to draw some connections between your identified barriers.

Materials You Will Need:

- A personal vision statement for the schools that you wish to see. See *Exploration 1* (pg 3)
- Several sheets of flipchart paper per group
- Coloured markers
- Post-it notes (preferably a variety of colours)

Step 1 - Looking Back on Your Vision (30 minutes)

1. Take time to revisit the vision that you wrote in the first part of the conversation. Thinking of the role that you play in the education system and the perspective that you bring, consider the things that, you believe, are standing in the way of your vision being realized on a consistent basis.

2. Use a separate Post-it note to record each barrier that you identify.

3. Working in groups of 4-6, collect all of your Post-it notes on a piece of flipchart paper.

4. Allow enough time for each member of the group to talk about the barriers that they recognize. At this point, avoid the temptation to jump to solutions or ways around your barriers.

Facilitation Tip

It is important that participants are working from their own personal vision. If the group did not work through *Exploration 1* (pg 3), or if someone is entering the process at this point, take time to have them write a vision for the schools that they wish to see.

Step 2 - Making the Connections (30 minutes)

Once all of your group members have had the opportunity to articulate their ideas about what is standing in the way of their vision from being realized, begin trying to make connections between what has emerged:

- Allow group members to suggest ways that the Post-it notes might be organized into clusters
- Begin with some initial clusters, but be sure to be open to suggestions for alternative ways of organizing the barriers. The goal is not necessarily to reach full agreement, but to ensure that all voices have had the opportunity to be heard.
- Once the group is satisfied with the way that their barriers are organized, decide on a name for each cluster and record it on the flipchart paper, ensuring that each Post-it note is attached to a cluster.

Step 3 - Reporting Back

1. Take time to hear how each group organized their barriers. Create a master list of all of the group headings created.

2. Pause to make some connections between the grouping names suggested. Where are there similarities? Where are there differences? Are there ways in which your master list of headings could be combined?

3. Are there new headings that emerge from stepping back to look at the group's thinking on the things that are standing in the way of change?

4. Take a photo of your work in this area, making a copy available for participants before the next phase of the conversation.

Share the things that stand in the way of your vision for change from becoming fully realized.

Post your comments about what's helping and hindering change at:

challengetochange.ca

Exploration 3: Promising Practices – Stories of Seeing Beyond

It is quite likely that the *challenges to change* that began to emerge in the last section of the conversation were very familiar to you. It is also likely that you left the conversation feeling a little overwhelmed by the sheer number of barriers identified as well as the complexity of the work required to come closer to the vision for education that you designed at the beginning of the process.

Yet in spite of all this, you have probably been inspired by moments when you have been able to overcome some of these barriers – times when you have been able to see around, if not past, the things that are standing in the way of the changes that you would like to see.

In this section, you're going to be asked to take your mind back to the context in which you are working in order to draw on a story of when you have been able to affect or experience a change in spite of the perceived barriers. It may be a story of working alone, or it may be a time when you were working collegially. It need not be a story of great heroism, but it is a story that reconnects you with what is possible.

Materials You Will Need:
- *Remembering My Story of Change* handout (pg 14) for each participant
- Blank paper for paired storytelling activity
- Flipchart paper for group discussion
- Coloured markers

Step 1 - Remembering Your Story of Change (15 minutes)

As with the storytelling activity in the *Exploration 1* (pg 3), use the following questions to try to recall as many details about the story as possible:

- How were you involved in the story? What role did you play?
- How did the story get started? What inspired you to take action?
- What mindset did you need to adopt in order for the story to begin?
- What personal skills, talents or attributes did you draw on in this story? What new skills did you require?
- What relationships needed to be established/re-established in order to achieve success? To what degree did you need to find new ways of working with others?
- When you compare the context that this story took place in with other contexts, how was this one different?
- What was the role of others in creating success? What personal skills, talents or attributes to you recall others bringing to the situation?

Facilitation Tip

If you're working with limited time, participants may use these *Remembering Your Story* questions as a quick guide to focusing on the important details of their personal stories.

Step 2 - Sharing Your Story (30 minutes)

1. Connect with one other person in the group and take time to tell your positive stories of change, including as much of the detail that you have just recalled to allow your partner to relive that story along with you.

2. As you listen to each other's retelling, try to be especially attentive to the barriers that needed to be challenged in order for these successful stories to take place.

3. Have the listener record enough details of the story to be able to communicate it back to a larger group.

4. Switch roles, with the listener becoming the storyteller.

Step 3 - Recognizing the Barriers to Change (30 minutes)

1. Reconnect with one or two other pairs and, as in part one, have each listener introduce their partner's story.

2. As the stories are being told, have a group member begin to record the specific barriers that needed to be challenged (explicitly or implicitly) in order for these to become stories of success.

3. After all of the stories have been heard, make a group list of the barriers identified and a brief summary of what types of action led to overcoming or seeing beyond these barriers.

4. Bring this summary back to the larger group.

Step 4 - Reporting Back (20 minutes)

Take time to hear the barriers that were challenged and the types of actions necessary to make change. Begin to compile a master list of the types actions that begin to emerge.

Exploration 4: Designing for Change

In the world of design, architects, artists and composers are given various elements which, when brought together in unique and interesting ways, create works that have both functional and aesthetic quality.

In the same way, identifiable elements combine to create the schools and education systems that we currently have. As your stories of success will indicate, examining the value placed on each of these elements as well as the way connect with each other can help us to see change, not as something that happens by chance, but as a process of creative design.

In this final conversation, you will look back on your stories of successful change to recognize how elements such as **leadership, personal attributes, relationships, infrastructure, resources, procedures and policies** were combined in new or different ways to design change. In some cases, several of these elements will have come into play, while in other stories, a focus on just one or two elements would have been enough to get the wheels turning!

Materials You Will Need:
- *An Element of Change* handout (pg 16) for each participant
- Flipchart paper for group discussion
- Coloured markers
- Grid paper, modeling clay, pencils and pens (optional)

Step 1 - An Element of Change (20 minutes)

Return to the personal story of change that you told in *Exploration 3* (pg 7). In thinking about the actions that you and your colleagues took to challenge a barrier that may have been standing in your way, identify which organizational element(s) were intentionally addressed to foster the change. The following prompts may assist you in thinking about your story. In thinking about each of these elements, consider how things may have been done differently in order to foster change and growth:

- **Leadership:** the official and unofficial ways that authority and control was exercised; the ways in which a sense of leadership was fostered among administrators, teachers, other staff, students

- **Personal Attributes:** the qualities and strengths that you and others brought to the context in order to affect change

- **Relationships:** the ways in which people within your context connected with each and worked together to create change. Consider relationship with administrators, other colleagues, parents and the wider community

- **Infrastructure:** the ways in which the often unseen/unnoticed supporting attributes of your school context, (including the design and allocation of physical space, time, scheduling, etc.) may have been challenged in your story of change

- **Resources:** the material, financial and human dimensions that support your school context. How the different ways of acquiring, allocating or designing resources help with your identified change

- **Policies/Procedures:** the official protocols for operating within your school environment. Like infrastructure, these can sometimes go unnoticed but might an important element to thinking about your story of change.

Facilitation Tip

If you are using *Exploration 4* as a stand-alone activity, participants will need to consider a personal story of change. See *Exploration 3* (pg 7) for notes.

Step 2 - Bringing your Stories Together (30 minutes)

1. Working in groups of 4-6, have each participant use a summary of their change story to highlight the elements that played the strongest role in enabling a different way of doing things. Pay close attention to the way that familiar elements may have been combined in different ways to create a particular change.

2. While recording the results of this conversation, make note of any connections between the types of barriers experienced and the elements that were addressed to move beyond those barriers. Also be attentive to any elements that needed to be addressed more frequently than others.

Step 3 - Designing for Change (40 minutes)

1. Decide on one or two of the barriers from *Exploration 2* (pg 5) that resonate with your group of 4-6 participants.

2. Using your earlier work in *Exploration 4*, use your experience and your collective imaginations to consider the elements that, if used differently, could lead to a more substantial and more scalable change. Feel free to use graphics organizers, images, drama, models and metaphors to bring a real sense of design to this conversation.

Step 4 - Bringing Your Designs Together

Take time to view the design work from each of the table groups.

Wrapping it Up

We hope that both this discussion guide and the accompanying **challengetochange.ca** website will resonate with many Canadians and allow both conversation and action to start to percolate across the country!

This is a Call to Action, but it is also a Call to Adventure – an invitation to leave the comfort of what we know and begin to explore some new and unfamiliar territory. Here are some of the ways that you can become part of the adventure:

- Convene your own *Challenge to Change* conversation.
- Take advantage of the **challengetochange.ca** information resources and participate in its discussion threads.
- Share this initiative with a colleague or friend.
- Let us know how you are participating in the conversation.
- Provide feedback that will help us improve the resources that we are developing.

HANDOUT

Exploration 1: Remembering My Story

Use the following questions to help remember a story of when you felt that you came closest to experiencing the school of your dreams. This could be a story that features you in the role of student, educator or someone working in another capacity within the education system. In thinking about the story, try to remember as many details as possible – details about your role, the role of others and how you felt about what was happening in the story.

1. What was your role in the story? (Teacher, student, parent, community member, etc.)

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2. In what type of activity/work were you involved?

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3. Who else was involved in the story? What role did they play? How did they help the story come to life?

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4. What were the most compelling details of the story? Why do you suppose that this story is so memorable for you?

5. What are some of the emotions that you recall feeling at the time?

6. What strengths, talents and skills did you bring to the activity in which you were involved?

7. What strengths, talents and skills did others bring to this activity?

In The School of My Dreams

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In The School of My Dreams

HANDOUT

Exploration 3: Remembering My Story of Change

Use the questions below to help you remember a story of when you were able to affect change in a school-based context.

Perhaps you were:
- A student advocating for a different way of thinking
- An educator working towards a new way of collaborating or an administrator thinking about a new school-based practice.
- A parent with an idea about the relationship between school and community.

Whatever your context and whatever the size or scope of the initiative, this is a story of a time when you were able to see beyond barriers to make change.

1. **How were you involved in the story? What role did you play?**

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2. **How did the story get started? What inspired you to take action?**

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3. **What mindset did you need to adopt in order for the story to begin? What personal and group conversations about might be possible kickstarted the initiative?**

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4. What personal skills, talents or attributes did you draw on in this story? What new skills did you require?

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5. What relationships needed to be established/re-established in order to achieve success? To what degree did you need to find new ways of working with others?

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6. When you compare the context in which this story took place with other contexts, how was this one different?

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7. What was the role of others in creating success? What personal skills, talents or attributes to you recall others bringing to the situation?

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HANDOUT

Exploration 4: An Element of Change

In Exploration 3, you were asked to remember a story of when you were able to see beyond barriers to create change in your own particular context. Use the following prompts to reflect more deeply on your story of change, thinking about the elements of school that needed to be challenged, addressed or altered in order for your change initiative to occur. It is very possible that your story of change involved more than one of these elements. Feel free to add elements that you recognize that may not be represented here.

- **Leadership:** the official and unofficial ways that authority and control was exercised; the ways in which a sense of leadership was fostered among administrators, teachers, other staff, students.

- **Personal Attributes:** the qualities and strengths that you and others brought to the context in order to affect change.

- **Relationships:** the ways in which people within your context connected with each and worked together to create change. Consider relationship with administrators, other colleagues, parents and the wider community.

- **Infrastructure:** the ways in which the often unseen/unnoticed supporting attributes of your school context, (including the design and allocation of physical space, time, scheduling, etc) may have been challenged in your story of change.

- **Resources:** the material, financial and human dimensions that support your school context. How the different ways of acquiring, allocating or designing resources help with your identified change.

- **Policies/Procedures:** the official protocols for operating within your school environment. Like infrastructure, these can sometimes go unnoticed but might an important element to thinking about your story of change.

- **Other Elements:** dimensions of your school context not addressed by the elements outlined here.