

US! – A SOCIAL JUSTICE PASSION PROJECT

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PASSION PROJECT GOAL

The goal of this passion project is to create a framework for an extra-curricular Social Justice club for elementary students using the following questions to guide my research.

1. What is the appropriate age(s) and grade level(s) of students for which a Social Justice Club is best suited?
2. What are some suitable topics and issues to include, possible training opportunities for club members and resources for both the facilitator and students?
3. How can a Social Justice Club be used to proactively address issues existing in individual school communities? Local communities and beyond?

My project focuses on educating students about issues as a way to better influence and implement long term social change. A focus that matches well with the overall goals of all K – 12 Curriculum indicated below:

K-12 Goals for Developing Identity and Interdependence:

- *understanding, valuing, and caring for oneself*
- *understanding, valuing, and caring for others*
- *understanding and valuing social, economic, and environmental interdependence and sustainability*

K-12 Goals for Developing Social Responsibility:

- *using moral reasoning*
- *engaging in communitarian thinking and dialogue*
- *taking action*

I chose this project as I have always been involved in Student Leadership Councils (SLC). However, SLC's are often involved in fundraising efforts that focus on the charity aspect of a situation rather than educating students about the Social Justice issue(s) that create the need for charity.

CHARITY versus SOCIAL JUSTICE

It became obvious early on in my research that the terms Charity and Social Justice are often used interchangeably. Therefore, regardless of the age of students, this difference must be explained early on in the process of creating a Social Justice club.

For example: Students need to understand that raising money or collecting food for Christmas hampers is a worthwhile "charity" project that raises awareness about specific needs in a

community. However, these efforts do not provide education and discussion surrounding the social justice issues that have created this need, nor do charitable actions make long term meaningful change.

This link <http://www.thebarefootmommy.com/2017/03/social-justice-kids-service/> provides many, easy to understand examples of how charity is different from social justice. This resource uses a “Two Feet of Love in Action” activity to illustrate that acts of charity and acts of social justice complement each other, but are different. The examples and activity would be useful when promoting the Social Justice club and/or to include on one of the first meeting’s agenda.

SOCIAL JUSTICE INITIATIVES WITHIN SCHOOLS

While researching, I learned that elementary, middle level and high schools are often involved in social justice initiatives. However, the initiatives are most often part of a school wide effort or as part of another club or organization’s agenda, such as the Student Leadership Council (SLC), Respect Ed, ME to WE, Peer Support or the school’s Gay Straight Alliance (GSA) club, etc.

It was interesting to discover that Regina Public School Division has a division wide anti-racism, cross-cultural youth leadership program for students in Grades 6 – 12 entitled ACT! (<http://www.rbe.sk.ca/act>) Participating team members attend a fall training retreat returning to their individual schools to work on raising the global community of their schools through positive action and support to help make their school community free from discrimination, prejudice, stereotyping and racism. It is an opportunity for many of the above listed school clubs, along with any social justice clubs, to receive training in these areas. This is a great opportunity for those student groups that are able to attend but I feel that including similar types of training as part of my Social Justice Club framework will reach more students on a regular basis.

WHAT’S IN A NAME

One resource suggested that creating a catchy name for your Social Justice Club is one of the first steps as it will be what captures the students’ attention.

<https://mashable.com/2015/09/12/student-clubs-social-justice/>

I am proposing calling the group US! which is an acronym for “Understanding Students”. Simple and easy to remember but a name with a multiple meaning. I feel that to effectively address social justice issues one must look within themselves and understand how essential personal qualities of tolerance, respect, empathy, understanding and acceptance of others are in order to be an effective advocate for social justice issues. Therefore, US! refers to a group of students who are learning to understand themselves and their peers, in addition to being a group of empathetic students who care about others and creating change in the world.

Making true social justice impact begins with US!

WHERE, WHEN AND HOW TO START?

My first guiding question was to find out what is the most appropriate age and grade level for which a social club is best suited. I was surprised to learn how important it is to begin discussing social justice issues early and how even our youngest students can make effective change.

A booklet entitled, *Kid Activists 101* provide 19 ways that parents and educators can introduce children to social justice.

http://www.thebarefootmommy.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/kid_activists_101.pdf

1. Read and discuss books together that address social justice issues with numerous links to appropriate aged pictures books written by authors from a variety of diverse backgrounds. The variety of topics open up the child's world up to new perspectives and experiences.
2. Hang a world map to locate the countries discussed in a book or news event. It is hard to feel a connection to people if you don't even know where they live.
3. Identify 1 – 2 issues that the child(ren) really care about. Once you figure out what issues are important to them, the group can brainstorm how to learn about the root causes of these concerns and what possible actions can be taken.
4. Help children become more empathetic. Empathy is not the same thing as justice but one cannot effectively work towards social change if one is not able to understand the feelings of others. However, one needs to understand their own feelings first.
5. Teach children the difference between charity and justice. It is easier to see what one can do to help others meet their immediate needs than it is to find or work towards a long-term solution.
6. Change the way you eat (at least a little bit). Look at ways to increase more plant-based eating and reduce food waste ensuring that the students understand how what they eat can help the environment and people.
7. Talk about race openly. Talking about race and skin tone does not encourage racism. It provides children the tools to disagree with the subtle and not so subtle racism they may encounter.
8. Role play speaking up so children are prepared. When reading books or talking about bullying or instances of someone saying something biased, ask children what they could say to say when they hear these conversations.
9. Write letters to elected officials together. Create a letter template suitable for children to use to write in support or opposition to a cause they feel strongly about.

10. Proactively talk about disabilities and differences in our bodies. *The Barefoot Book of Children* is suggested as a good resource.
11. Give a toy or a story character a non-binary pronoun. Not everyone identifies with the male or female gender. One of the ways you can help kids understand this is by consistently using the pronouns like they/them for a particular toy or a character in a book.
12. Teach kids about movements for social justice, not just individual heroes and sheroes. Talk to students about important social justice movements both in the past and in the present.
13. Take part in the Amnesty International annual *Write for Rights* campaign in honor of Human Rights Day and send cards to prisoners of conscience. They highlight several cases of people who are being held in prison around the world for speaking up for human rights. Even children who are too young to write a letter, can decorate cards to those who are prisoners of conscience and sign their names.
14. Attend a march or vigil together. Ensure the event is kid-friendly. Talk to your children about the issue and ask if they'd would like to make a sign to carry.
15. Inspire children with stories of other young activists. Share stories of children activists. Resources are listed on link.
16. Donate diverse books to your child's school library. Does your school's library have lots of books featuring children of color, LGBTQ characters, stories of immigrants, characters with disabilities or that are neurodiverse, and books that feature girls and boys in non-stereotypical roles? Team up with others to host a diverse books drive.
17. Take kids on a trip to the grocery store. Encourage children to look around at prices. To illustrate how cost can influence people's choices about what they eat.
18. Model civility, while also speaking the truth. When children see adults speaking up in the face of injustice, while also demonstrating respect for the people who they disagree with, they can learn these habits themselves.
19. Start buying at least one item you regularly purchase from a source that reflects your values. Choose something your family buys on a regular basis that could be bought from a business that is owned by a person of a different race or from a fair trade cooperative. Even if it costs a bit more or is somewhat less convenient, make a commitment to buying it from a source that reflects your values. Discuss how price is not the only thing that matters when we're deciding who to shop with.

RECRUITMENT

Regardless of what ages/grades one decides to incorporate into the extra-curricular club, deciding how to best recruit is again one the first items on the to-do list. An Alberta guide to implementing school-based peer leadership programs provides a number of helpful suggestions:

<https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/assets/healthinfo/AddictionsSubstanceAbuse/if-tch-peer-leadership-manual.pdf>

Step One: Host an information session to explain to students what the goal and purpose of a Social Justice club is and what they can expect as a member of the club.

Step Two: Recruit students.

This resource suggests that there are four different recruitment processes:

1. Volunteer. Ask interested students to volunteer for the group. Students who volunteer to be part of the club are obviously interested and will be committed. However, this method may mean that you will not get students participating who don't typically volunteer.
2. Recommendation. Students who are recommended by peers or teachers usually mean that they possess leadership abilities and are reliable, but it is possible that they may not have a personal interest in social justice issues.
3. Application. Interested students complete an application form which is reviewed by group leader(s). An interview is often part of this process.
4. Use and/or combine with an existing leadership class/group. Again, this may mean that these students are not specifically interested in social justice issues.

As each of the above recruitment processes have both pros and cons, it is likely best to use a combination of the four in addition to having interested students complete a questionnaire. The questionnaire information will allow you to learn more about the students, why they wish to be involved and what types of activities they are most interested in.

This resource includes some example nomination and application forms that could be easily adapted.

POSSIBLE TOPICS, ISSUES AND TRAINING RESOURCES

I began a collection of numerous resources (for both facilitator and students) on a wide variety of possible training topics. These resources are listed in Appendix A along with a brief description.

The Resource material is diverse and contains such topics as : Racism, Building Empathy, Poverty, Teaching Tolerance, Personal Development and Leadership Training, Conflict Resolution, Truth and Reconciliation, Addressing Stereotypes, Active Listening, LGBT, Diversity, Bullying, Mental Health, Environmental Issues, etc.

The list is endless and will change depending upon students' age, interests and how the material will be used. Topics will also vary based upon school, student and community need.

This list of resources will undoubtedly expand and grow over time as I come other across other useful material and ideas.

EMPOWERING STUDENTS THROUGH SOCIAL JUSTICE

In conclusion, a Social Justice club can be effective at any age or grade level. The topics and areas of interest may vary, but all participating students will gain a stronger understanding of themselves and of what they are capable. In addition, they will develop greater empathy, understanding and compassion towards others as they work to effect change.

My completed framework includes ideas on how to manage the logistics of setting up a new club, personal development training ideas and materials, along with numerous resources of possible Social Justice projects to be implemented.

Creating a simple framework to which I can continue to add resources and ideas will be very useful to me as a beginning teacher as I do not know where I will end up teaching, or the ages of the students I will be working with. However, having a growing bank of information, allows for flexibility as I will be able to pick and choose what will be most appropriate.

- The bank of resources will be useful if I have the opportunity to facilitate a Social Justice Club, and;
- Many of the resources include topics contained in a variety of curriculums. Therefore, the resources may also be used when I am lesson planning in the future.

Educating young people about social justice issues helps to create a sense of social responsibility that empowers them to make positive contributions to their school community and to the larger community beyond. A Social Justice club's proactive measures promote equality, diversity and fosters respect and dignity for all.

APPENDIX A

POSSIBLE TOPICS, ISSUES AND TRAINING RESOURCES

CREATING A SOCIAL JUSTICE GROUP

<https://www.tolerance.org/magazine/five-steps-for-starting-a-human-rights-club>

Resource suggests 5 Steps to following when creating a Human Rights Club along with explanation and activities.

<http://partners.iamstronger.ca/st-josaphat-social-justice-club>

Suggestions for developing a Manual for a Middle School Social Action Club. Many ideas and 10 weeks of activities provided.

<http://www.sjcinitiative.org/>

Resources designed to encourage and assist youth, family member or educator, to start an elementary, middle or high school Social Justice Club complete with lesson plans.

https://www.klicksafe.de/.../Setting_up_Peer_Support_Programmes_in_Schools.pdf

Provides information on what is peer support and what is the role of the Educator and participant. It provides a step-by-step guide on how to initiate a Peer Support Program and what skills you may want to include in your program. For example, interpersonal skills and empathy to name a few.

<https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/assets/healthinfo/AddictionsSubstanceAbuse/if-tch-peer-leadership-manual.pdf>

Provides a potential framework for what your peer leadership program could potentially look like. Provides good examples of how to recruit and form letter template to use for students and parents.

<http://www.etfo.ca/SupportingMembers/Resources/ForTeachersDocuments/Awareness,%20Engagement,%20Activism%20-%20A%20Social%20Justice%20Approach.pdf>

Resource created by the Ontario's Ministry of Education Equity and Inclusive Education Policy. Provides a series of suggested activities for early years to grade eight based on a variety of texts and related resources. The purpose is to promote awareness, engagement and activism around social justice issues in order to create students who act on the principle of "think globally, act locally".

CHARITY AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

<http://www.thebarefootmommy.com/2017/03/social-justice-kids-service/>

The site provides:

- *Tips for creating and choosing social justice projects for young children.*
- *List of Social Justice picture books.*
- *Stories about children activists.*
- *Ways to address racism*
- *How to build empathy amongst children*

<https://www.nnstoy.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/NNSTOY-Social-Justice-Book-List.pdf>

A list of Social Justice books suitable for ages PK through to adulthood addressing a variety of social justice situations. As one testimonial states, “Literature’s best work as social justice is to provide the ‘shock of recognition’ [you feel] when you see your experience is reflected back to you in another’s words. Literature lets us know that others survive, especially those who are like us. These books are narratives of hope to help us process our lives.”

<https://www.cultofpedagogy.com/social-justice-resources/>

A collection of resources for teaching social justice.

<http://www.earthbeat.sk.ca/wp-content/resource-portal/charity-justice-and-solidarity.pdf>

Saskatchewan Council for International Cooperation created Global Citizenship Education Module One: Transforming Charity into Solidarity and Justice This document provides a variety of lesson plans, resources and assessment tools that directly meet Saskatchewan Social Studies Goals and Curriculum Outcomes that transform charity to social justice and can be easily put into action by the students.

<http://bcpovertyreduction.ca/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/JusticeNotCharityLessonPlan.pdf>

B.C. Poverty Reduction Coalition created Working Together for a Poverty Free B.C. Although, this document is specifically for British Columbia, the lesson plans, resources and possible actions can be adapted for Saskatchewan and easily put into place to create, “Justice not Charity”.

https://www.educationworld.com/a_lesson/social-justice-activities-students.shtml

10 great activities that will get kids at different grade levels thinking about human rights and our responsibility to take care of each other.

<https://www.tolerance.org/professional-development/webinars/fun-social-justice-activities-for-elementary-students>

Are you looking for fun and creative ways to engage elementary students in anti-bias learning? This on-demand webinar features fun and creative ways to engage elementary students in anti-bias learning. Help young students learn the meaning and value of Identity, Diversity, Justice and Action—the four domains of the Teaching Tolerance Anti-bias Framework.

TOLERANCE

http://www.tolerance.org/sites/default/files/general/tt_charity_and_justice_scenario.pdf

Tolerance Teaching is a resource from the United States however, could be adapted to use with Saskatchewan students. This resource provides different scenarios of charity and justice issues allowing student to identify the differences between the two perspectives.

PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT AND LEADERSHIP TRAINING

<https://cpb-us-e1.wpmucdn.com/blogs.uoregon.edu/dist/8/11350/files/2015/05/Compiled-Activities-1-r5x71c.pdf>

What is CRAMMS? Conflict Resolution Activities for Middle School Skill-Building. These training activities address a variety of competencies including: emotional vocabulary building, empathy building, active listening, I-messaging, stereotype checks, interest identification, reframing and paraphrasing.

TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION

<https://www.beaconnectr.org/>

This interactive website allows you to choose a path of spirit, head, body or heart. Once you have clicked on a chosen path it leads to a wealth of Indigenous resources that strengthen the road to truth and reconciliation. Is useful to directly use with students or for background knowledge. Has resources for teaching of traditional plants and medicines, Louis Riel and protocols connecting each topic back to the medicine wheel.

<http://www.trcm.ca/public-education/speakers-bureau/speakers-bureau-member-profiles/kevin-lamoureux/>

Guest Speaker Resource: Kevin Lamoureux is the Associate Vice President, Indigenous Affairs at the University of Winnipeg. He is an inspirational speaker on the topic of Truth and Reconciliation.

HUMAN DIVERSITY

Human diversity includes all the ways in which human beings are both similar and different. Respect for diversity means accepting and respecting differences in people and their unique circumstances. Diversity may include, but is not limited to, gender identity, sexual orientation, age, ethnic origin, ancestry, culture, socio-economic status, religion, family status, and mental and physical disability.

<https://www.glsen.org/article/thinkb4youspeak-guide-educators-grades-6-12>

ThinkB4YouSpeak - This guide assists educators who work with teens to introduce the campaign and extend learning about the negative consequences of homophobic language and anti-LGBT bias. The core of the guide consists of discussion questions for exploring and analyzing the video, audio, and print ads followed by six educational activities that increase awareness and knowledge of the issues, develop skills for addressing them and promote social action.

<https://ccdi.ca/media/1588/toolkit-2-exploring-my-power-and-privilege.pdf>

Exploring My Power and Privilege Toolkit - This is a toolkit that allows teachers to explore with their students and provides the understanding of how much power your actions, words, etc. have an impact on others. The toolkit explores topics such as gender, sexual orientation, race, religion, and much more. Numerous suggestions of activities are also included.

BULLYING

<https://www.riderville.com/imagine-no-bullying/>

Imagine No Bullying Presentation (the anti bullying presentation put on by the Riders)

<https://www.alainpelletier.ca/en/>

Alain Pelletier hosts The Cost of Silence - The 5 faces of bullying. The conference demonstrates the point of view of five different characters and each character's relation to bullying. The conference is for primary students, high school students as well as, parents and education professionals.

MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES

<http://canwetalk.ca/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/COOR-791-2016-03-CWT-lesson-plans.pdf>

This website provides insight on the stigma of Mental Illness in the context of educators and students. It provides many lesson plans, teaching tips and resources to use with various topics such as: what is Mental Illness, the stigma, reducing the stigma, stress management, effects of stress, how to cope with stress, self-talk (negative and positive), and many more.

https://walkinourshoes.org/content/Classroom_Lesson_Plans.pdf

Walk In Our Shoes provides many lesson plans on Mental Illness including what is mental illness, characteristics of mental illness (being sick does not always mean visibly sick), identify the stigma, different types of mental illness, myths and facts of mental illness, various perspectives and appropriate responses, have the opportunity to role-play a variety of scenarios and much more.

<https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/sites/default/files/peer-support-combined.pdf>

A resource that outlines how a peer counselling can help raise awareness and address mental health issues. Provides many useful ideas to incorporate and training ideas in the areas of: active listening, verbal/non-verbal communication, paraphrasing, reflecting, open/closed questions, empathy, summarizing, problem solving and decision making.

VIOLENCE AND TRAUMA

<http://www.stopstoviolence.com/>

Kids Matter presentation is delivered to many communities across Saskatchewan in partnership with Prince Albert Mobile Crisis. The presentation includes a combination of puppetry, body movement, interactive discussion and skill building activities to have students understand that it is never okay for someone to hurt them, they do not deserve to be hurt and that there are ways to get help. This is done in an interactive child-centered way.

In the binder are PDF's of Saskatchewan Child Abuse Protocol, presentation package, intro and follow up.

<https://ca.ctrinstitute.com/>

Crisis & Trauma Resource Institute provides a variety of workshops, training, webinars, etc. on many mental health such as, suicide prevention, trauma, challenging behaviours and more.

<http://childtrauma.org/>

A teacher resource that provides insight and strategies on how to understand students who may have had trauma in their life. There are more resources included in the binder on the topic of trauma.

ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES

<https://www.globalguardianproject.com/>

This site believes that “Our Children Deserve a Better Tomorrow” and expands children’s awareness of the world through their e-courses which teach how we’re all interconnected and interdependent, and how it’s imperative that we care for the earth and all who inhabit it- for a better future.

<https://dreambigfilm.com/>

Dream big is an Imax film that you could take your students to go see. Also, there are a variety of teacher resources and student resources that address many environmental issues and explore what we can do to make a change in our lives.

www.studentleadership.ca

Above and Beyond Newsletter (PDF in Binder): This is a newsletter that provides many sustainable actions that are simple and easy to do in which makes a difference. For example, “PickWaste” Movement. This was done in Ontario. Every day while walking home from school two teenagers picked filled a bag with litter that they walked past. Which eventually started a community initiative however, that slightest change does a world of good for the environment.

<https://3percentproject.com/> With an Introduction Video for Teachers:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZkD8K9NQmNo&feature=youtu.be>

Description: 3% Project is a free program that is accessible to all schools across Canada. There is a school wide presentation followed by an interactive question and answer period. Optional is a mentorship workshop for students interested in working on a sustainability challenge in the school or community or enhance one that is already formed in the school. Mentors are available to help the students with their project.

KINDNESS

<https://www.randomactsofkindness.org/>

Random Acts of Kindness provides many free lesson plans, training and resources for all grades. The website also offers some Kindness inspiration where you can get ideas and watch videos and read stories about random acts of kindness that could be implemented with students.

In the binder in association with the Random Acts of Kindness website there are ideas and a few other ideas that could be adapted for any grade.

<https://www.pinkshirtday.ca/about>

Pink Shirt Day is a day that raises awareness about bullying and encourages the importance of being kind.

Some kindness activities that can be done are:

- *Read book on Kindness and discuss*
- *Watch this video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hz_d-cikWmI&feature=youtu.be*
- *Be Kind Bingo*
- *Have students come up and write quotes about kindness on paper plates (pink shirt day could be pink plates). Make a caterpillar and then at the end of the day/week caterpillar turns into a kindness butterfly that is sharing kindness to everyone.*

LEADERSHIP

<https://ca.achievecentre.com/>

ACHIEVE Centre for Leadership and Workplace Performance offers many workshops, training, webinars on the essential skills needed to become an effective leader such as, communication, conflict resolution skills and leadership development.

www.spra.sk.ca/programs-services/take-the-lead/

Take the Lead – Program promotes youth to plan, deliver and participate in regular active play programs. Adults within the community have an opportunity to support and assist the young leaders as they strive to provide healthy, developmentally appropriate and safe active play opportunities to lead other children.