Preparing Youth for Climate Action: Philadelphia Teachers Facilitating Student-Led Social Change in Elementary and Middle School Classrooms

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Overview

• Brief intros
• Sustainability as an intersectional youth-led movement
• Our story & study
• Try it!
• What are we learning so far?
• Concluding thoughts
Introduce yourself...

In the chat box, type:

Your name, your affiliation(s), and a social issue in your community that you care about

“I would like these kids to be able to say

‘I want to be Greta Thunberg.’

And who knows? You never know which kid in your room is going to be one of these people who is going to change the world.

- Juan, 8th grade teacher
"I am a young woman of color, so I feel drawn to a lot of issues. Part of the reason why I’m working on the Green New Deal right now is because I think it is the most intersectional plan that I’ve seen ever... It encompasses economic justice, climate justice, racial justice, women’s rights, LGBTQ+ rights... so when I’m fighting for climate justice, I’m fighting for everything else, too."
UN Sustainability Goals

#3: Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages.

#4: Ensure inclusive and quality education for all and promote lifelong learning.

#11: Make cities inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable.

#16: Promote just, peaceful, and inclusive societies.

Story of the Questions

How and to what extent do teachers facilitate critical service-learning projects where participants work to redistribute power, take a social change orientation, and develop authentic relationships?

In what ways do teachers and students characterize their experiences and learning as they engage in, and reflect on, their participation in critical service-learning?
Non-Profit Partner

Professional development and resources for teachers to facilitate a “yearlong process of active problem-solving around a community issue of each classroom’s students’ choice.”

Need in Deed’s *My Voice* Framework

- **V**: Value student voices
- **O**: Open the issue (root cause analysis)
- **I**: Identify project
- **C**: Conduct service
- **E**: Evaluate impact on root cause
Theoretical Framework: Kinds of Citizens

**Kinds of Citizens**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Personally responsible citizen</th>
<th>Participatory citizen</th>
<th>Justice-oriented citizen</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Description</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Acts responsibly in his/her community</td>
<td>• Active member of community organizations and for improvement efforts</td>
<td>• Critically assesses social, political, and economic structures to see beyond surface causes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Works and pays taxes</td>
<td>• Organizes community efforts to care for those in need, promote economic development, or clean-up environment</td>
<td>• Seeks out and addresses areas of injustice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Obey laws</td>
<td>• Knows how government agencies work</td>
<td>• Knows about democratic social movements and how to effect systemic or policy change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Recycles, gives blood</td>
<td>• Knows strategies for accomplishing collective tasks</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Volunteers to lend a hand in times of need</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Sample action**
- Personally responsible citizen: Contributes food to food drive
- Participatory citizen: Helps to organize a food drive
- Justice-oriented citizen: Explains why people are hungry and acts to solve root causes

**Core assumptions**
- To solve social problems and improve society, citizens must have good character: they must be honest, responsible, and law-abiding members of the community.
- To solve social problems and improve society, citizens must actively participate and take leadership positions within established systems and community structures.
- To solve social problems and improve society, citizens must question, debate, and change established systems, structures, and policies that reproduce patterns of injustice over time.

Theoretical Framework: Critical Service Learning

**Need in Deed My Voice Framework**

- V: Value student voices
- O: Open the issue (root cause analysis)
- I: Identify project
- C: Conduct service
- E: Evaluate impact on root cause

**Conceptual Framework Components from Mitchell (2008)**

- **Redistributed Power**
  - Youth-led
- **Social Change Orientation**
  - Exploration of root causes
- **Authentic Relationships**
  - Community partnerships
### Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher</th>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Teacher Race</th>
<th>Student Race</th>
<th>% Low-Income</th>
<th>Grade</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Olivia</td>
<td>Northeast</td>
<td>Latinx</td>
<td>Latinx, Asian, Black</td>
<td>74.87%</td>
<td>Fourth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anna</td>
<td>North</td>
<td>Latinx</td>
<td>Latinx</td>
<td>88.04%</td>
<td>Third</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Molly</td>
<td>Center City</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Asian, White</td>
<td>44.02%</td>
<td>Fourth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Juan</td>
<td>Northwest</td>
<td>Latinx</td>
<td>Black, White</td>
<td>48.87%</td>
<td>Eighth</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Study Design

- **Yearlong qualitative study**
- **Observations, interviews, focus groups**
- Four classrooms selected based on emphasis on critical service learning principles
Try It!

- Choose one of the following issues:
  - gun violence
  - water pollution
  - gender inequality
  - discrimination
- Use the graphic organizer to identify causes and effects

Initial Learnings

“My advice is to change the water system.”

“It’s what the articles would say.”

“You’re starting an intelligent policy discussion.”
“My advice is to change the water system”

A factory spills plastic and it makes its way to the river.

S: “The oil came in the factory

KR: What can someone like you or me do about the factory?

S: Figure out who spreads the oil.

KR: What happens to them if they get caught spreading the oil?

S: [Stumbles, thinks...] Help collect the oil and throws it in a different place so the oil cannot come near the ocean.
Jim: I don’t think what he said was right. It said racism against black people was the worst. People talk about that a lot and it’s the worst.
Molly: He used the word prevalent. Prevalent means widespread. She has them repeat the word and definition.
Molly says something to the effect of Jim thinking that racism is more prevalent.
Jim: It’s not that I think it, that’s what the articles would say. There were several articles.
“You’re starting an intelligent policy discussion”

Sierra: I feel as though in single parent homes, it’s more common for a mother to raise their child without a father.

State Rep: True.

Sierra: And I feel as though single parents without the help of the spouse or without the help of their other partner should be able to be paid more since they’re not putting in both of the incomes to support the children.

“You’re starting an intelligent policy discussion”

Rep: I think that’s a very intelligent policy discussion that you’re starting. That makes a lot of sense as a policy position. If someone is already starting from an economic detriment, what can we do to help them compete in an equal way?

... Your point is very well taken, it sounds like the kind of a thing a legislature would think of.
Concluding Thoughts

• In an era when young people are stepping into roles as activists for climate justice and other causes, how can teachers act in solidarity with youth?

• In what ways do the principles of justice-oriented citizenship and critical service learning apply to your work?

• What questions do you have?