

Strategies for Incorporating Social Justice into our classrooms

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Why Social Justice?

How do we counteract/unlearn hatred and prejudices as a “pre-existing condition” among individual and social groups of students in our classrooms, across disciplines, and incorporate this practice into our curriculum?

HATRED, BIGOTRY, SEXISM AND OTHER DISCRIMINATORY IDEAS AND PRACTICES ARE NOT A “NATURAL” STATE OF BEING. THEY ARE LEARNED PRACTICES FROM:

- FAMILY, COMMUNITY, AND COLLECTIVE/NATIONAL TRADITIONS
- SOCIAL AND CULTURAL BACKGROUND
- PEER PRESSURE
- LOW SELF ESTEEM
- LACK OF KNOWLEDGE, LANGUAGE OR EDUCATION
- CONSTANT AND REPETITIVE INPUT FROM THE INTERNET, SOCIAL MEDIA, TELEVISION, DISSEMINATION OF POLITICAL PLATFORM AGENDAS, NEWSPAPERS OR OTHER PRINTED MATERIALS
- NEGATIVE PERSONAL EXPERIENCES
- THE “MASS” VS THE “INDIVIDUAL”

Our students are the citizens of the future
We are their rolemodels, mentors and
leaders. If not from us then who?
Our role is TRANSFORMATIVE

Common Issues of social injustice

Habitual discriminatory areas of practice:

e.g. class, race, ethnicity, gender, sex, religion, etc.

Practices of social justice which may be the result of cultural/linguistic background:

e.g. Inherited preconceptions without evaluation or knowledge of background;

Inability to work successfully in diverse groups of students across cultural boundaries

Harassment Teacher-student or student-student

(i) large e.g. sexual, spouse abuse, child corporal punishment/abuse etc.

(ii) small e.g. bullying, use of pejorative language, shaming etc.

Common and prevalent practices

eg. Threatening or uncontrolled use of power structures

Using media to inform without critical filtering resulting in belief that everything you hear or read is true: what is “fake news?”

ALL OF THESE INHIBIT LEARNING, RAISE THE AFFECTIVE FILTER IN INDIVIDUAL STUDENTS, AND KEEP THEM ISOLATED WITHIN THEIR OWN SOCIAL GROUPS.

Three ways in which we can counteract discriminatory practices and enact social justice in our classrooms

1. Consciousness raising and adaptive strategies on the part of both teachers and students
2. Introducing and imparting skills of Metaliteracy in scaffolded educational practices
3. Using resources for teachers well, adapted to our own curricula

1. Consciousness raising and adaptive strategies for both teachers and students

PART 1

- (i) Introduce, enact and enforce respectful classroom practices: if we are role models, this applies to us too.
- (ii) Assuring personal security; encouraging openness and trust
- (iii) Engendering empathy for each other
- (iv) Demonstrating good attitudes e.g. openmindedness, forgiveness
- (v) Facilitating verbalization of abstract ideas as a source of critical thinking, identifying a problem, asking relevant questions, problem solving
- (v) Empowering them not to be victims

Consciousness raising and adaptive strategies for both teachers and students

PART 2

- Bridging cross-cultural and intra-linguistic identity differences by facilitating interaction between students: pairs, groups, presentations
- Using skills that students already have to best advantage e.g. research, fluency, computer skills etc.
- Identifying and discussing students' perceptions of curriculum and current issues in the news
- Facilitating discussion of negative or embedded opinions, prejudices, judgements
- Asking open-ended questions
- Teachers remain neutral to encourage open, honest discussion and debate. This requires careful facilitating! Students often isolate themselves within a classroom if they do not feel confident to use their voices; fear of repercussions, fear of being humiliated, laughed at. **DO NOT GIVE UP ON THEM-** even the student in the back row who is angry and belligerent!

Consciousness raising and adaptive strategies for both teachers and students

PART 3

Introduce, enact and enforce respectful classroom practices

Suggestions:

- *Be persistent, consistent and insistent: be fair, firm and follow through on classroom rules, (eg late arrivals, use of cellphones, plagiarism, inappropriate behavior etc.)
- *Turn taking, pair and group work, respectful listening to others in class and during presentations,
- *Encouraging differing points of view from students in debate, reinforcing students' ability to use their voice within appropriate parameters by means of a supportive comfort zone

Consciousness raising and adaptive strategies for both teachers and students

PART 4

Getting to know you: sharing students' past traumas and difficult
experiences of discrimination through personal narrative

2. Introducing and Imparting Skills of Metaliteracy in Scaffolded Educational Practices

Metaliteracy reaches across academic disciplines by means of using teaching and learning situations that promote self-directed learning, collaboration, participation and metacognitive thinking.

The theoretical basis for metaliteracy lies in INCORPORATING the four domains of learning:

- Behavioral (doing, enacting)
- Affective (feeling, response)
- Cognitive (knowledge)
- Metacognitive (comprehending, processing, reflecting)

The last, metacognitive thinking, is the most important because that ensures that the knowledge gained, the information learned, is applied in a wider continuous framework, and that accompanies the student for application outside of the classroom into the wider world of living and experiencing.

Metaliteracy is more than critical thinking: it encompasses well researched strategies for educational practice

- In addition to acquiring information, individuals need to ethically and responsibly produce and share information. This is not always or usually!) the case.
- Metaliteracy is collaborative and requires reflective and participatory learning activities that promote metacognitive thinking and ethical production and sharing of user-generated content.
- Metaliteracy requires supportive scaffolding from teachers to help learners understand that even as students they have much to contribute and share with others in collaborative spaces.

References for Metaliteracy: theory and Practice

- Metaliteracy Blog <https://metaliteracy.org/>
- Metaliteracy Youtube Channel: <https://metaliteracy.org/youtube-channel/>
- Metaliteracy MOOC: <https://metaliteracy.org/category/mooc/>
- Books: Neal-Schuman, 2016: “Metaliteracy in Practice”
- Neal-Schuman, 2019: “Metaliterate Learning in the Post Truth World”

3. Using resources for teachers well, adapted to our own curricula

- FILM: “Freedom Writers” (2007) Available on Amazon prime video
- BOOK: “The Freedom Writers’ Diary: How a teacher and 150 teens used writing to change themselves and the world around them” (2009). Available on Amazon.

USING PERSONAL NARRATIVE AND TESTIMONY FOR TRANSFORMATIVE LEARNING ON ISSUES OF SOCIAL JUSTICE: RESOURCES FOR TEACHERS

1) IWitness:

- <https://iwitness.usc.edu>

2) USC Institute for Visual History and Education

- <https://dornsife.usc.edu/usc-shoah-foundation-institute/>

3) Echoes and Reflections

- <https://echoesandreflections.org/>

4) Smithsonian Museum interactive learning website for educators and students

- <https://learninglab.si.edu/>

What can we use?

- **IWITNESS:** IWitness is a free educational website developed by USC Shoah Foundation. The award-winning educational platform brings the first-person stories of survivors and witnesses of past histories of genocide to students via multimedia-learning activities. The platform integrates testimony-based education with the development of digital literacy and other 21st-century competencies; IWitness activities boost students' knowledge of subject matter while developing their critical-thinking skills and empathy for others. The aim – and often the result – is to spark a motivation to act, and, ultimately, to help mold a responsible participant in civil society.
- Student assignments vary by learning activity, but include writing short essays, building word clouds, analyzing photos, creating art projects, writing poetry, making sound collages and constructing video essays. These projects go beyond expanding their base of knowledge, building competencies necessary for success in the 21st century. IWitness exposes students to the basics in research, effective searching, archival curation, ethical editing and digital literacy.
- **USC Institute for Visual Education:** these are accessible materials and lesson plans drawn from the Archive of personal testimony of survivors of genocide. They require students to personalize rather than generalize ideas and historical events that assist them to move beyond “Mass” perception to individual people.
- **Echoes and Reflections:** This is a course and a trove of resources for teachers in which the collaborative thread enables interaction with other teachers throughout the world to discuss issues of social justice. (6-10 prof dev credits!)