Take Action - Praxis

Take Action is the experiential learning, or praxis component of this course. The Brazilian educational philosopher Paulo Freire defined praxis as reflective action intended to transform the world. Developed in the political context of 1960’s Latin America, Freire’s pedagogical theory was based on collective action toward freedom through literacy, dialogue and critical consciousness. In the context of this Global Issues course, praxis engages students in work with their peers in order to apply their learning and contribute to a more equitable and sustainable planet in which quality of life is improved for all.

Moving from critical consciousness to praxis

Take Action shifts learning from the theoretical to the experiential by providing an opportunity for students to engage in practical, community-based projects. The goal is to move students from awareness through questioning, inquiry and dialogue, to critical consciousness and, ultimately, to praxis – engagement in informed reflective action for positive change.

Successful Take Action projects will make a difference in the lives of students and their communities. In order for this to happen, projects need to be student-initiated, collaborative and goal-oriented. Projects also need to be meaningful to students, and related to issues they believe are important, relevant and personally significant. The focus and scale of projects should be flexible, accommodating student concerns, needs and abilities. Students should be free to plan small or large scale projects, with a local, national or global scope. They may choose to work in a small group to take on personal projects that focus on making sustainable lifestyle choices. Some students may decide to undertake larger scale, long term projects that involve community members. Whatever the nature and scope of Take Action projects, students will have opportunities to become mindful, hopeful citizens who appreciate the power of collaboration and who contribute to a more equitable and sustainable world.

Among Grade 12 students, as in the general population, there will be a wide range of approaches to citizen action and engagement. Students should be encouraged to determine their own level of social action, by challenging themselves to explore areas where they can be most effective in making personal, community and societal change.

Westheimer (2008) identifies three approaches to citizenship, which may be seen as a sort of continuum of citizen engagement

- the **personally responsible** citizen
- the **participatory** citizen
- the **social-justice oriented** citizen
The characteristics of each type of citizen are summarized in the table *Kinds of Citizens*.

As students learn about global issues and have opportunities to engage in meaningful action, they develop a critical consciousness of the world and the status quo. They come to see where there is a need for change and to understand that, as citizens, they can make a real difference in their communities and in the world. As they build an understanding of the many ecological, social and ethical links between local issues and planetary issues, they come to build a more holistic or relational way of thinking which is based on the shared concerns and interdependence of human beings. The more opportunities students have to reflect and act upon issues that concern them, the greater the likelihood they will move along the citizenship continuum towards a social justice orientation, and the more likely they will become agents of systemic change.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Kinds of Citizens</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Personally Responsible Citizen</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Description</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Acts responsibly in the community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Works and pays taxes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Picks up litter, recycles, and gives blood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Helps those in need, lends a hand during times of crisis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Obeys laws</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sample Action</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Contributes food to a food drive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Core Assumptions</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- To solve social problems and improve society, citizens must have good character; they must be honest, responsible, and law-abiding members of the community.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Consumer to citizen

The over-arching goal of this course is to help students grow in their capacities as ecologically literate, social-justice oriented citizens. This growth should naturally include a shift away from a consumerist world view to one of citizenship.

Consumerism is a thriving force in our society, supported by the powerful tools of marketing and advertising. O’Reilly and Tennant (2009) regard advertising as “the most ubiquitous force in modern culture”. Students are exposed to advertising at every turn and, just like many of the adults in their lives, may embrace consumerism both as a way of life, and as a measure of quality of life. Only recently have we as a society begun to address the tensions between consumerism and citizenship, and to recognize the disastrous and far-reaching impact of unchecked consumerism on the environment – and it may already be too late to reverse the damage we have inflicted upon the planet.

Every issue explored in this course provides an opportunity for student collaboration and growth – either within the general program of study or within the Take Action component. However, this growth will not be automatic; it is critical that students be given time and encouragement to

- reflect deeply upon issues they study
- consider diverse perspectives
- make connections between global issues and personal decisions and actions
- engage in proactive decision-making
- take a stand on important issues
- engage in personal and collective action to effect change and contribute to improved quality of life

The mindful selection of issues for study is an important part of this growth process. Students need to investigate real issues – those that reveal the need for personal and social change – and then apply their learning by making changes in their personal life decisions. This process will help them in two important ways. They will

- develop critical consciousness of the economic, social, cultural, ecological and political factors that influence decision-making
- understand how personal decisions and actions can have far-reaching consequences.

Over time, students increasingly will be able to initiate and carry out desired changes in their own lives. Perhaps most importantly, they will also understand that hopefulness and optimism grow out of the knowledge that working collaboratively with others is the best way to challenge accepted practices and actually effect change. This process of becoming critically aware agents for change may mean a profound shift in values and attitudes for some students – moving from a world view based on consumerism to one that is focused on citizenship.
General characteristics of Take Action projects

Projects *may* be
- ongoing over the term or year, or a culminating activity
- new projects, or build upon existing initiatives in the school or community.

Projects *must*
- reflect student interests, abilities and talents
- be collaborative (working with other students in the course or school, or with community members)
- make links between local and global issues
- involve student inquiry and be supported by research
- allow for diversity – each student determines his or her level of activism and the type of contribution he or she is best able to make
- be anchored in at least two of the components of sustainable development (i.e., a sustainable environment, a just economy, and a healthy society)
- include a dimension of personal lifestyle and decision-making, so as to include more sustainable practices in their daily lives
- include a learning log for reflection and self-evaluation

Projects will vary according to students’ interests and particular strengths or abilities. *Where possible,* students should be encouraged to:
- network with local experts and community resource persons for advice and direction
- help raise community awareness through promotional campaigns and/or community meetings
- approach local politicians and community leaders for assistance in their cause and petition them for change
- organize actions and activities that involve other students in the school and community members
- provide regular progress updates to the class
- find alternative and creative means of sharing information with their peers and community members

**Time allotment**

The suggested time allotment for Take Action projects is a maximum of 25% of the course time. Teachers need to decide how much in-class time will be used to support students as they plan, carry out, and share reflections and progress on their projects. These decisions will be based on the needs, interests, and abilities of students, but it is generally expected that students will spend a significant percentage of the allotted time outside of class.

**Existing Projects**

Many students who will be interested in taking this course may already be engaged in - and busy with - existing school or community action projects. These existing projects may fulfil the action portion of the Take Action component. However, students would still be expected to fulfill the assessment requirements of this course component as described below.
Communicating results

Throughout the planning, research and implementation phases of the Take Action project, students should have frequent opportunities to learn from each other through dialogue, and by having opportunities to make formal or informal presentations to the class. They should also be encouraged to use various mediums to communicate their learning with others, (e.g., blogs, wikis and online journals; video documentaries; information booths; presentations and updates at school assemblies; student-written plays and other artistic productions; workshops, forums and webcasts; team or community consultations, etc.).

Assessment of Take Action Projects

As noted earlier, the time allotted to Take Action projects is recommended to be a maximum of 25% of the course time. It is also recommended that this action component comprise **25% of the overall grade** for this course.

Students and teachers should collaborate to determine assessment criteria **prior** to beginning project work. Methods of assessment should fit the needs of the students and nature of the project. The main areas of assessment should include:

- project goals and outline
- action plan
- research and inquiry questions
- learning log
- evidence of community involvement or partnerships
- ongoing progress reports
- execution/results of the project
- communication of learning to peers, school, community, as appropriate
- final presentation and/or summative report

Assessment should be ongoing and include opportunities for student reflection, self-assessment and peer assessment, as well as community member input, where appropriate. A classroom-based assessment approach, including assessment for learning, as learning and of learning will help encourage students to reach their potential. Early and frequent performance reviews, including the provision of descriptive feedback, will help students learn and grow, and will greatly improve the outcomes of their projects. Peer and self-assessment will help students cultivate learning strategies and guide them as they take action to achieve their project outcomes. The Learning Logs will provide opportunities for students to engage in reflection and self-assessment of their learning experiences.
Legacy Projects

Some projects may live on long after students have graduated. The student initiators of legacy projects may choose to continue their involvement with the school and project after they graduate.

Alternatively, the project may be picked up and continued by students in successive years. Legacy projects may even become part of wider community initiatives and take a life of their own in making the world a better place.

Life Assignment –This Course is just the Beginning

This course alone cannot solve the ills of the world. Ideally, students who complete the course will regard it as an important beginning point in their lives. If teachers approach this course with the spirit in which it has been designed, they will inspire students to embrace the notion of citizenship for social justice as a way of life, to consciously live their lives as agents of change in order to make a positive contribution to the community, and to help ensure a sustainable future for all.

Take Action - Project Examples

Sustainable Environment

- **Reduce Your Carbon Footprint:** Research the impact of lifestyle and consumer choices in Manitoba and elsewhere in the world, (e.g., drinking bottled water; eating meat; driving gas-powered vehicles; buying non fair-trade coffee/chocolate...). Choose an issue and change personal lifestyle habits. Organize campaigns and actions for more widespread, community change. Convince a local grocery story (or national chain!) to stock local produce in season and more fair trade products; persuade peers and community members to get rid of the car, help make “Walk or Take Your Bike to Work or School” an everyday instead of annual event.

- **Water Conservation: Wetlands or River Bank Study and Cleanup:** monitor and record observations about quality of water and presence of wildlife. Contact and work with experts from universities, colleges, Manitoba Conservation. Research information about water in the local community and in other areas of the world. Learn about other student-led projects such as Ryan’s well and finds ways to contribute to existing projects or create a new project, participate in or initiate and ongoing Adopt-a-river project.
- **Community Garden:** Investigate the implications of bio-engineering, mono-cultures, food-transportation and other issues related to food production and consumption. Visit an organic farm and learn about sustainable practices. Create and maintain a school or community garden, share the produce with peers and food banks, or sell it to raise funds to help maintain the garden. Learn about what’s going on in other Canadian and American cities where small and large movements are turning abandoned factories, public property and donated land into gardens. Find ways to extend the garden into and around the community. Enlist local businesses, school boards, private individuals to donate land for more gardens, and convince more people (like senior citizens) to join the project. (This would be an excellent legacy project.)

**Just Economy**

- **Poverty:** Examine the reality of poverty in the local community and find sustainable ways to help people in the local community. Organize a breakfast program or regular food bank drives in the school, make a commitment to long term assistance at a local food bank, and convince other students to do the same. Offer cooking lessons using nutritious foods in local community centre, organize an excess food delivery service between local restaurants and soup kitchens. Write to or meet with local politicians and others of influence to discuss the issues and to make a case for changes in policies and practices.

- **Workers’ Rights:** Start local by conducting a survey to determine how many students in the school division have part time jobs, and the conditions, rights and benefits of those jobs (or lack thereof). Expand that survey to include members of the community; find out what rights workers have in the local area. Going farther afield, research conditions for various jobs in Canada and other places in the world. Learn some history by exploring the history of unions and gains made for workers’ rights in Canada and other places in the world. Find out what happened during the Winnipeg 1919 General Strike. Share information with peers and make them aware of their rights.

- **Rights of the Child:** Initiate a project related to the rights of the child. Research children’s rights, including laws (e.g., Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, United Nations Rights of the Child), and practices that contravene rights (e.g., child labour, sexual exploitation). Learn about existing projects related to Children’s rights such as Ryan Hreljac’s *Ryan’s Well* and Craig Kielburger’s *Free the Children*. Develop a campaign around a theme such as child labour, to teach students throughout the school, and community members about how we all contribute to the problem through our consumerism. Create strategies to convince local businesses to change their practices to become more respectful of children’s rights. (e.g. awareness of product origin, refusal to sell products that exploit child labour).
Community and Society

- **Anti-Consumerism:** Use the resources of organizations and social movements such as Ad Busters, The Story of Stuff, the Freegans, Voluntary Simplicity, Buy Nothing Day, No Logo, Slow Food, 100 mile diet, Greenpeace, and other anti-consumer organizations to learn about mass media manipulation and issues related to consumerism. Plan a project to share ideas, take actions and organize activities to raise critical awareness amongst peers and community members (e.g., Turn off Television Week; anti-fashion shows; community café events; recycled art projects; Henry David Thoreau readings or events; local music or art festivals...)

- **Connecting with Seniors:** Improve the lives of isolated seniors. Make regular and sustained visits to senior centres that include purposeful activities and include them in school events (e.g., organize a Seniors’ Prom; plan a jazz band tour of senior centres).

- **Be a Mentor or Role Model:** Organize a tutoring or participation program with students in an early or middle years school. Make use of personal talents in sports, writing, music, theatre, visual arts, etc by sharing those talents with young people.
Take Action: Outline

Phase 1: Planning phase

- Define topics of interest and determine a focus for inquiry and action
- Develop a plan for inquiry and action, including goals and intended outcomes, required resources, partnerships, team members/tasks (if a collective project), time allotment, feasibility, communication and sharing plan
- Identify inquiry questions to guide research: *what will we need to know and be able to do in order to carry out this project?*

Phase 2: Research phase

- Determine inquiry questions and gather data from a variety of sources
- Maintain Learning Log
- Create materials for sharing with peers and community members as required

Ongoing: Review and adjust planning

- Throughout the inquiry process, engage in ongoing dialogue with teacher and other students in the class for feedback and to share learning and motivate others
- Enlist the support of community mentors or guides as required, meet regularly

Phase 3: Implementation phase

- Execute Action Plan: review and modify as required
- Establish timeline, time allocation, budget and materials requirements and review as needed

Phase 4: Reflection and assessment

- Create summative report or presentation to share with class/school
- Create legacy project: produce a synopsis of the project for next year’s class and/or to enlist students in earlier grades to take over project the following year
- Solicit feedback of community members
- Solicit press support or coverage where appropriate
- Communicate results with larger community

Phase 5: Life Assignment

- Be an agent of change; contribute to the community; live sustainably
# Student Suggestions

These ideas were gathered from Manitoba students at the *Social Justice: Educating for Action* Conference, November 18-19, 2010, in Winnipeg Manitoba.

## Getting started on a project

- Take baby steps...start with what’s easy, but think big
- Take on things that get you excited
- Involve as many other students as possible; start a school committee
- Find an interested teacher for help
- Learn about what others are doing about the issue, near and far. Connect with them to share ideas.

## Communicating with others about your project

- Share what you know with others – paper or electronic newsletter to school, community members, others
- Set up “soap-box speakers” in the hallways, make sure the speakers are passionate
- Use whomever you can for their talents – even if they aren’t part of the project. Ask artists to create posters; ask charismatic students, teachers, community members or local celebrities to be spokespersons.
- Make videos and post them on YouTube
- Create bulletin board displays in the school
- Show videos to the school - set up booth at lunch
- Play songs with messages to interest and engage people(during lunch or school activities)
- Share ideas at other schools. Have students from other schools share their ideas.
- Hold creative events in public places (school or community)
- Put up a big sheet of paper in the school or community and have people sign a pledge for the cause
- Use multiple and creative ways to share information...electronically, paper, events,

## Project Ideas

- Need to be local and international
- Connect with real people at a distance
- Micro loans
- War-affected children
- AIDS awareness
- World Vision – give a chicken/goat to a village
- Halloween for Hunger – go door to door on Halloween for food donations
- Bring back alumni who’ve achieved things or are involved in social action
- Use music /entertainment and food
- Interactive information sessions where possible instead of delivering information
- Don’t give up – it’s ok to try something that doesn’t work –then try something different and learn lessons

## Fund-Raising

- Bring a dollar for _________ day. (wearing a hat/blue jeans/pyjamas)
- Walk for water / coats for kids / kick balls for kids
- Don’t just raise money and send it to needy people far away (that’s *slacktivism*, not activism)
- People like ‘give and get’, so give them something when you ask for $$:  e.g., root beer floats for Haiti