True Leaders: Culture, Power and Justice

A youth development approach to social justice

Authors

Dr. Nia Imani Fields, Assistant Extension Director and 4-H Program Leader, University of Maryland Extension

Dr. Alex Chan, Mental and Behavioral Health Specialist, University of Maryland Extension

Dr. Maru Gonzalez, Assistant Professor and Youth Development Specialist, North Carolina State University

Dr. Edwin M. Green, Jr., Professor, Community-Based Education & Leadership, Stevenson University

Dr. Fe Moncloa, 4-H Youth Development Advisor, University of California Cooperative Extension

Kamaria Massey, MFA, Urban Educational Leadership Doctoral Student, Morgan State University

Dr. Keith C. Nathaniel, 4-H Youth Development Advisor, University of California Cooperative Extension

Editor

Dr. Katherine E. Soule, Youth, Families, & Communities Advisor, University of California Cooperative Extension

Graphic Design

Trish Moore, Graphic Designer, University of Maryland Extension

Table of Contents

The *True Leaders: Culture, Power and Justice* curriculum was designed to engage youth in critical dialogue and collective action in order to contribute to a more empathetic and just society. Youth have an incredible opportunity to see the world as bigger than themselves. This curriculum offers dynamic opportunities for youth to explore their identities, different cultures, new perspectives, and the histories that have shaped power and privilege within our communities. Youth will engage with peers, adult support systems, and communities to increase the resources and tools they need to advocate for positive community change. These lessons are rooted in a social justice youth development framework. Additionally, as a facilitator, it is important that you use these lessons as a guide but allow for adaptations to ensure each discussion and activity is culturally relevant for your audience.

Intended Audience: Middle and High School aged youth

Social Justice Youth Development

The following table offers a 'principles, practices and outcomes' framework for social justice youth development (Ginwright & James, 2002, p.34-35, Erbstein & Fabionar, 2014). Social Justice Youth Development is a way to foster critical consciousness among young people while encouraging them to act toward achieving a sociopolitical vision (Ginwright & Cammarota, 2002). Social Justice Youth Development is deeply rooted in culturally relevant teaching.

Principles	Practices	Outcomes
Analyzes power in social relationships	• Political education & strategizing • Identifying power holders • Reflecting about power in one's own life	• Social problematizing, critical thinking, asking and answering questions related to community and social problems • Development of sociopolitical awareness • Youth transforming arrangements in public and private institutions by sharing power with adults
Makes identity central	• Joining support groups and organizations that support identity development • Reading material where one's identity is central and celebrated • Critiquing stereotypes regarding one's identities	• Development of pride regarding one's identity • Awareness of how sociopolitical forces influence identity • Feeling of being a part of something meaningful and productive • The capacity to build solidarity with others who share common struggles and have shared interest
Promotes systemic social change	• Working to end social inequality (such as racism and sexism) • Refraining from activities and behaviors that are oppressive to others	• Sense of life purpose, empathy for the suffering of others, optimism about social change • Liberation by ending various forms of social oppression
Encourages collective action	• Involving oneself in collective action and strategies that challenge and change local and national systems and institutions • Community organizing • Rallies and marches • Boycotts and hunger strikes • Walkouts • Electoral strategies	• Capacity to change personal, community, and social conditions • Empowerment and positive orientation toward life circumstances and events • Healing from personal trauma brought on from oppression
Embraces youth culture	• Celebrating youth culture in organizational culture • Language • Personnel • Recruitment strategies	• Authentic youth engagement • Youth-run and youth-led organizations • Effective recruitment strategies • Effective external communications • Engagement of extremely marginalized youth

Culturally Relevant Teaching (CRT)

Culturally Relevant Teaching is as broad and diverse as the youth who enter our programming. Adopting a culturally responsive approach is not an exact science. In fact, the guiding principle of Culturally Relevant Teaching is an awareness that all youth are unique and must be placed at the center of all youth development programs. We offer these methods, not as an exhaustive list, but as examples of ways to foster true Culturally Relevant Teaching. Ongoing reflection and re-learning is a critical component of fostering culturally relevant experiences with communities. This curriculum is to be delivered with culturally relevant practices. Strategies related to how to utilize a culturally relevant teaching approach include:

Intentional self-reflection to understand one's cultural norms, values, beliefs and behaviors.

Before learning about other cultures, it is imperative to engage in an intentional self-reflective process "focused on understanding patterns of difference and commonality between yourself (and your cultural group) and other culture group's perceptions, values and practices." (Hammer, 2012 pg. 2).

Experience cultures different from your own.

Experiencing other cultures may include activities such as watching a movie, traveling abroad, engaging in conversations with people, or participating in trainings, to name a few. In learning and experiencing cultures different from one's own, it is important to engage in self-reflection on the similarities and differences between one's own culture and other people's cultures.

Develop an appreciation and respect for diverse cultural beliefs and values, beyond objective surface understanding of culture, toward a deeper subjective understanding.

A key practice in culturally relevant teaching is to accept other ways of knowing and doing, and to acknowledge how these behaviors may be similar or different from one's own culture. In this reflection, it is important to withhold judgment. In this process, educators begin to understand various cultures, and cease "othering" cultures different than one's own. This is easier said than done.

Evaluate overgeneralizations and stereotypes. Seek clarification when needed.

A challenge in working with diverse populations from various cultural backgrounds is being able to apply cultural generalizations appropriately. Cultural generalizations are flexible and categorize members of a cultural group as having similar shared behaviors. These generalizations recognize that there are always variations among cultural subgroups, which are often influenced by social contexts. We can utilize cultural generalizations to help us understand the variations among cultural subgroups and take

into account the historical and system level socio-economic and political contexts that influence the lives of youth, families and communities.

Stereotypes on the other hand, are generalizations that are used to describe members of a cultural group as having the same cultural characteristics. In general, stereotypes tend to be rigid and describe cultural groups in negative terms. Resist using stereotypes to describe cultural similarities among cultural groups. Instead, take time to learn about the histories of cultural groups and consider checking for understanding and clarification from the cultural group(s) one is working with.

Use materials that reflect people, language, art, music, stories, and games from various cultural traditions.

In the teaching or engagement of diverse populations, it is imperative to include images, poems, art, stories, etc. of various cultural groups in the handouts, materials or presentations. Music can be included before the presentation, and while participants engage in group work. Including examples of art, stories and games in one's teaching communicates an appreciation for various cultural groups. In addition, the material needs to be relevant to the audience.

Provide experiences that facilitate care, engagement and discussion of their own cultural backgrounds and assets.

Facilitators should seek opportunities to elicit participants' experiences to learn what they know and increase their understanding about their cultural backgrounds. Use the included activities as an opportunity to engage with diverse populations as they share their cultural assets. Educators can demonstrate caring attitudes toward diverse learners by "naming the moment," which entails acknowledging the societal and political pressures youth may be facing in their communities, state or nation, and inviting youth to share their concerns, hopes and dreams. It is important to not ask or expect any individual to represent their entire cultural group. Culture and dimensions of diversity are complex and while there may be shared stories among cultural groups, there are often just as many differences as well.

Communicate high expectations for all participants.

It is important to communicate to learners the high expectation for participating in extension's programs. Everyone can learn when the material is taught in a culturally relevant manner.

Be aware of the influences of dominant cultures and provide spaces where marginalized voices are amplified.

Dominant identities represent the values, practices, languages, and traditions that are assumed to be the most accepted and influential within a given society. In American culture, dominant identities include: White, middle class/wealthy, heterosexual, male, cisgender,

Part II:
Cultural Identity

CULTURE

Background:

This is a mindfulness activity where children and youth can imagine how their daily stresses can fly away. Mindfulness seeks to promote physical and emotional health through emotional regulation and stress management.

Key Terms:

Mindfulness is *noticing what is happening right now* with one's body and mind. It means paying attention to how one's body feels, and how it responds to things one sees, smells, hears, feels, or tastes. It also means noticing how emotions feel in one's body, perhaps through a tightness somewhere, or a good sensation. Mindfulness is also noticing what one's mind is doing.

Letting Go: A Mindfulness Activity

Objectives:

Encourage self-reflection and slowing down in response to daily stressors.

Learning outcomes:

Strengthen personal skills to lead a healthy lifestyle.

Time: 15-20 minutes

Material(s):

Reflection journal

Do:

Ask youth to stand up, and if feasible to form a circle. Ask youth to close their eyes. Guide the group through five deep breaths in which they inhale to the slow count of 1-2-3-4-5-6 and exhale to the slow count to 7. After the youth have completed these five breaths, say: Are you taking big breaths or little breaths? Start to make your breaths deeper. Follow your breath as the air goes into your nose, down your throat, and into your lungs and belly.

Now, imagine there is a string attaching you to a floating lantern. As the lantern gently rises, the string allows you to elongate, and grow taller. Take another deep breath in and out. As you breath in, begin to think about anything that is creating stresses and tension in your life. Take another big, deep breath in and out. Imagine you are writing down your thoughts on all the things that are causing you stress and worry. Continue to breath in and out as you write. Deep, slow breaths. [Pause] In and out. [Pause] In and out. [Pause] Once you have finished writing, reach up and place the list in the floating lantern above your head. Once the paper is in lantern, breath in and imagine reaching up with a pair of scissors. As you breath out, cut the string that is attaching you to the lantern and your stressors and watch as the floating lantern begins to fly away. Continue to slowly inhale and exhale as the lantern floats higher and higher into the sky. When you can no longer see the lantern, all of your thoughts and worries have flown away. Take one more deep breath [pause] and slowly open your eyes.

Reflect:

Ask youth: How did you feel during the meditation? How did you feel when your thoughts flew away? How do you feel now? Invite youth to record their thoughts in their reflection journal.

Apply/Action:

Explain to youth how they can include deep breathing into their daily life. It can work for a couple of minutes or longer. Ask: When do you think it will be most useful to you to practice deep breathing and mindfulness?

Part III:
Acknowledging and Appreciating Other Cultures

Background:

The facilitator should be aware of their own biases before starting this lesson. Maybe think of a personal example of what you thought about a group of people before that you no longer believe now.

Key Terms:

Stereotypes: Generalized beliefs and expectations about members of certain groups that often lead to judgment without cause.

Exploring Stereotypes

Objectives:

· Explore the meaning of a stereotype.
· Reflect on how stereotypes are used in our everyday lives.
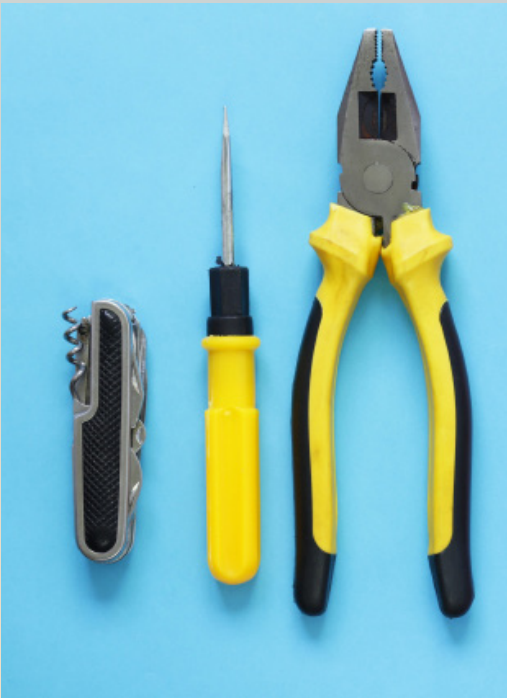
Learning outcomes:

· Understand the meaning of a stereotype.
· Reflect on stereotypes they may have experienced themselves.

Time: 45 minutes

Materials needed:

· Sticky notes
· Markers
· Chart paper
· Reflection journal

Do:

Let's talk about stereotypes. Ask youth to share what words come to mind when they hear the word 'stereotype'. You can capture keywords on a flip chart paper.

Share that stereotypes are generalized beliefs and expectations about members of certain groups that often lead to judgment without cause. They can be based on little or no true information. We are all surrounded by stereotypes in the media, literature, music, our schools, and in other forms of popular culture. Let's talk about times we may have felt someone formed an opinion about us before they got to know us because of a group we may identify with.

Ask youth to each take a sticky note. Youth should write the following statement on their sticky note: 'Just because I'm _____, doesn't mean I'm _____. Ask them to take a few minutes to think about the statement and fill in the blanks. It may be helpful to share some examples of stereotypes you have experienced yourself. Or, consider sharing a more common example such as: "Just because I'm tall, doesn't mean I play basketball". You can inform the youth that you will invite them to share their statements in small groups or in the full group. As with any sharing opportunities throughout this curriculum, youth will only be asked to share what they feel comfortable in sharing. It's OK for youth to keep their statements private.

Reflect:

Let's reflect on what youth have shared. Ask youth how it feels to be stereotyped? How did it feel to hear the stereotypes that others have experienced? Have you yourself stereotyped others? Were there any stereotypes that multiple people have experienced in the room? Invite youth to record their thoughts in their reflection journal.

Apply/Action:

While we take the time to think more critically about the world we live in, it is important that we also challenge our assumptions and stereotypes along the way. Some ways to do this is by learning about cultures different from your own. We'll explore cultures together throughout the next few lessons.

Part IV:
Building Networks & Agency

Background:

So far, we have spent time exploring our own cultural identity and the cultures of others. We have learned that increasing our cultural awareness and connections with others, often builds a sense of empathy. Now, we will explore the importance of networking and leadership. Social justice and advocacy efforts are most impactful when there is engagement and support of others. Youth benefit from diverse support systems and networks who expose them to new opportunities and encourage them to dream big! These networks can also serve as a bridge to resources that youth may need as they prepare for leadership and advocacy efforts within communities.

Many businesses and organizations have a board of directors to help advise and guide an organization in being successful. Some board of directors are

Building your Own Personal Board of Directors

Objective(s):
- Identify personal goals and leadership opportunities that lead to community change.
- Build a personal board of directors that will serve as a network of support on your journey.

Learning outcomes:
- Reflect on your support networks.
- Identify strategies needed to achieve desired goals and dreams.

Time: 90 minutes

Materials needed:
- Pens/Pencils
- Note paper
- Poster paper
- The journey to my dreams handout
- My personal board of directors handout
- Reflection journal

Do:

Let's Dream Big

Ask youth to think about their next 5-10 years. Engage in dialogue using the following probing questions:

- What dreams do you have for yourself?
- What career path do you want to take?
- What change do you want to see in the world?

Then, ask youth to complete these two sentences: "My BIG dream for myself is _____". "My BIG dream for the world is _____". Depending on the size of the group, youth should be invited to share their responses in small groups or to the full group.

Next, youth can begin to map out the steps needed to achieve these dreams by completing the "Journey to My Dreams"

Part V:
Socio Political Education

Background:

This activity requires an understanding and reflection on the power frameworks presented herein. It is important that the Facilitator reflects how these frameworks can influence the different ways in which social change can be achieved before teaching this session. Specifically review Expressions of Power and Faces of Power Spaces in advance.

Exploring Power

Expressions of Power: Power over, to, with, within

This framework encourages thinking about power as something that can inspire you and others to create positive strategies and create multiple opportunities for change.

Expression	What does it mean in practice?
'Power over': A form of domination, authority.	People with authority over others are considered powerful, and those who are dominated are perceived as powerless.
'Power to': Individual ability to act	This is rooted in the belief that every individual has the 'power to' make a difference (see sources of power framework).
'Power with': Collective action, the ability to act together	'Power with' helps build bridges across different interests, experiences and knowledge and is about bringing together resources and strategies.
'Power within': Individual or collective sense of self-worth, value, dignity	Enhancing the 'power within' individuals builds their capacities to imagine and raise aspirations about change.

Note: Reprinted with permission from "Power: A practical guide for facilitating social change" by R. Hunjan and J. Pettit. (2011). Carnegie UK Trust. Retrieved from https://www.carnegieuktrust.org.uk/publications/power-a-practical-guide-for-facilitating-social-change/

Be Bold
Be Brave
Be a Leader for Justice