

DEVELOPING

Sociopolitical

CONSCIOUSNESS



**CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE-
SUSTAINING EDUCATION**

*Across
Learning
Environments*

TALE Academy



MODULE 2 - SESSION 5

Students Lead the Way

Jack's Story



Credit: North Colonie Central Schools

In May 2016, Jack Einstein, a senior at Shaker High School in Latham, New York, was celebrated on his school's [website](#) for creating and leading a human rights campaign. Jack said, "I have a voice and I have a strong voice." Jack's recognition of his own **agency** and his conviction to use his voice for a greater good is supported by NYSED's [Culturally Responsive-Sustaining Education Framework](#). In New York, we have committed to a vision of students who (1) experience academic success, (2) are sociopolitically conscious and socioculturally responsive, and (3) have a critical lens through which they challenge inequitable systems of access, power, and privilege.

Jack's project, "I AM HUMAN," sought to raise greater awareness for transgender rights, specifically the treatment of transgender students in schools, encouraging open dialogues that would allow students to explore the issue more deeply. As part of his strategy, Jack used message stickers to spark conversations about a topic he cared about. What started as an assignment from his English teacher to take part in an advocacy project, "became a lot bigger than [he] intended it to become." Jack was even asked to present at other local schools, as well as to the New York State United Teachers (NYSUT) Civil and Human Rights Committee.

Thea's Story



Credit: Saint Rose Magazine

Jack's teacher, Thea McFawn, is no stranger when it comes to encouraging student activism. She was featured in a [NYSUT article](#) for her [Human Rights Day](#) advocacy lesson that guided students in getting involved with a cause of interest. Class time was used for discussion on how each student is advocating for their cause or improving conditions. Students' projects in their community included volunteering with a refugee agency, helping children new to this country develop literacy skills, creating Public Service Announcements about the Dakota Access Pipeline, and sending holiday well wishes to service men and women abroad.

Michael's Story



Credit: Michael Hernandez

In [this article](#) on co-creating interdisciplinary social justice projects, educator Michael Hernandez describes how he integrates cultural literacy with academic literacy – critical thinking, writing, close reading, and media literacy skills. Hernandez notes that "social justice projects' interdisciplinary nature helps students make important connections between history, culture, economics, and science." One of his projects included equipping students to make a short documentary that would "tell a story about something good in your neighborhood that others don't know about." For educators such as Hernandez, the power of visual storytelling and student documentaries helps him align content with standards.

Youth Participatory Action Research

McFawn and Hernandez are not alone in their quest for increasing students' civic engagement.

Many teachers across the country - and the globe - integrate a method called **youth participatory action research** into their instructional design.

According to the Youth Activism Project Guide produced by the Youth Activism Project, participatory action research “empowers community members to learn and apply research techniques in order to discover solutions to issues in their community.”



Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) is a strategy that allows students and adults to partner on research aimed at improving the conditions of youth lives and communities.

The data that emerges from YPAR can be used to advocate for change in communities. This process and its goals are likely why so many teachers have begun to integrate YPAR into their curriculum. At its core, YPAR reaffirms the value young people bring to wide-scale problem-solving and treats them as equal partners who have the ability to effect real change. Teachers involved in YPAR are tasked with the responsibility of ensuring that their students are adequately prepared to pursue the significant objectives often tied to YPAR projects.



9 Steps of Effective Youth Participatory Action Research

In their [YPAR Guide](#), The Youth Activism Project outlines nine steps to prepare for a successful YPAR endeavor:



Recruit a YPAR Team

STEP 1

This can be as simple as organizing learning around YPAR with our own classes. Use online tools and resources for students to ask questions privately, learn more about what YPAR is, and sign up.

Build Relationships

Teachers must facilitate trust and collaboration, so while this is step two, it is actually an ongoing part of the process. Using a [restorative justice](#) community-building circle is a [research-based](#) process that moves easily between in-person and online environments. A regular circle process supports building, strengthening, and maintaining relationships through safe and structured conversations.

STEP 2



Develop Critical Awareness

Teachers need to ensure students have an understanding of the systemic roots of community issues and the social, historical, economic, and environmental reasons for inequitable outcomes that favor some groups over others. Strategies such as [online teach-ins](#) allow students to come together to research, listen, present, and problem solve around the issues that matter to them.

Identify Issues

Although students are the lead investigators, teachers have to support students in effectively narrowing their focus areas based on various factors that affect feasibility. This [online handbook](#) is a practical guide that can be accessed on any device.

STEP 4



Create the Research Design

Students require support to determine the best ways to collect their data, so teachers can provide examples of different data collection tools (such as surveys, focus groups, interviews and [PhotoVoice](#)). We can help them identify the pros and cons of each to select the one that is best aligned with their project goals.

Conduct Research

Teachers provide the guidelines for students to transform their research design into action and accurately capture their desired data points (one important practice is a reflection journal that prompts students to reflect on various questions throughout the process; this can be a shared Google Doc, a [VoiceThread](#), or an app such as [DabbleMe](#)).

STEP 6



Analyze Data

Teachers assist students with reviewing the data and drawing conclusions, which can include sharing statistics and trends that demonstrate impact. Use online resources such as [Tinkerplots](#) to build in explicit instruction in data science.

Advocate for Change

Students ultimately want to bring solutions to the challenges they have been studying, so teachers should assign YPAR that culminates in a concrete course of action intended to yield results. Use online presentation software such as [Prezi](#) or [Doodly](#) to help students develop high-quality presentations for community stakeholders.

STEP 8



Reflect and Repeat

Teachers may encourage students to engage in continued reflection, not only for the purposes of continuous improvement on the process but also on what other issues that they can use YPAR to address.

STEP 9

10

Questions to Ask if You Want to BE A CHANGEMAKER



To maximize the benefits of YPAR, consider incorporating the 10 questions that Harvard University's Democratic Knowledge Project recommends young people ask when they want to be changemakers in the world:

What matters to me and why?

How much should I share?

How do I make it about more than myself?

Where do we start?

**How can we make it easy and
engaging for others to join in?**

How do we get wisdom from crowds?

How do we handle the downside of crowds?

Are we pursuing voice, influence, or both?

How do we get from voice to change?

How can we find allies?

Sociocultural Responsiveness

YPAR is an excellent way not only to elicit student engagement but also to reaffirm students' cultural identities while strengthening their communities. YPAR can also be used to develop both students' sociopolitical consciousness – the ability to critically analyze the political, economic, and social forces shaping self and society – as well as their **sociocultural responsiveness**, a goal of the CRSE Framework.

Student Activism at Shaker High School

Student activism can be nurtured even in the upper elementary grades. At Shaker High School, sociocultural responsiveness is encouraged through extracurriculars and in academic programs. High school students from A-B-C (Anti-Bullying Club), SADD (Students Against Drunk Driving) Club, and Best Buddies – in partnership with Siena College students – facilitate an anti-bullying club for 4th graders that mentors elementary students in bystander awareness and advocacy.



Now, more than ever, we can empower our students to use their voice and influence beyond the confines of the physical classroom or geographic borders of their towns/cities to make a difference that can range from local to global. Students can start or join virtual student groups that can fundraise for selected causes, run different social media campaigns to raise awareness on important topics, or connect through different social media platforms for the mobilization of student volunteers, organizing their collaborative efforts in a time-efficient and creative way.

As we conclude Session 5, let's remember that when we plan with CRSE in mind, promoting student activism is a stellar way to have student learning culminate in something that not only emotionally resonates with them but also intellectually challenges them and provides an opportunity to think critically about topics that directly affect their lives and may very well influence their future professional aspirations.

Now It's Your Turn!

You will have two options for your next activity. You can identify an opportunity in your curriculum for student activism or consider how a current event can be leveraged in the classroom to promote critical student dialogue. Your choice!

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About Us

The TALE Academy

The TALE Academy is a series of virtual learning experiences available to all New York State educators and offers a rich array of resources on topics related to teaching across learning environments (TALE). The TALE Academy is built upon the work New York State educators carried out during emergency remote teaching (ERT) throughout the COVID-19 pandemic and extends it toward the future. TALE invites educators to think beyond online learning to consider a broader perspective on teaching and learning that encompasses teaching across multiple environments (in-person, remote, and hybrid).

The Teaching in Remote/Hybrid Learning Environments (TRLE) Project

The TALE Academy is part of a broader New York State Education Department (NYSED) initiative known as Teaching in Remote/Hybrid Learning Environments (TRLE). In July 2020, NYSED was awarded funding through the United States Department of Education's Education Stabilization Fund-Rethink K-12 Education Models Grant to implement TRLE – a three-year project to build the capacity of teachers and educational leaders to effectively implement remote/hybrid learning for all students. Launched in the depths of the pandemic, the first phase of the TRLE project focused on getting resources to the field through partnerships with Boards of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES) and school districts across the state. The second phase, which began in February 2022, focused on aggregating lessons learned and emerging teaching and learning strategies to address a broader field of practice: teaching across learning environments.

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