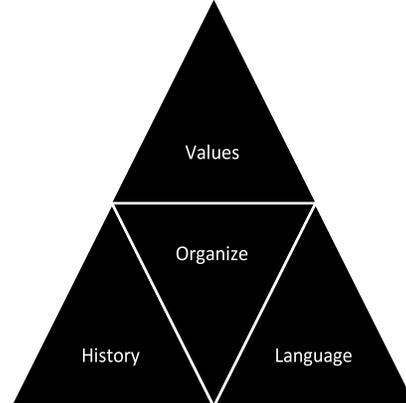


MODULE 5

Strategies for Social Change: Power Relations in Justice Work



SUMMARY

This module offers participants the opportunity to investigate the “social ecology” within which we work for change in education, and a spectrum of types of social change work. We will consider how taking action within that spectrum reinforces or challenges existing social, economic, and political power relations. As we commit to bringing about a more socially just future for ourselves as workers, for our students and their families in the communities we serve, and for the public commitment to accessible, quality education for all, we will apply frameworks for change to issues in education. The activities in this module connect individual and collective action, NEA’s organizational values and mission, and the language that catalyzes strategic action.

Goals:

- To empower members to self-organize and become parts of cross-issue movements
- To discuss the importance of collective action
- To determine locations of current and future participant advocacy

Materials:

- Flip Chart Paper
- Markers
- Social Ecology Worksheet (Appendix A)
- Models of Social Change Work Handouts (Appendix B)
- Follow-up training check-lists

NEA Unionism Curriculum 2018

Curriculum to “promote the attitudes, values, and goals of unionism, solidarity, justice, fairness, and the search for the common good.”

Provided to the National Education Association by

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AGENDA

EXERCISE	FORMAT	TIME
Group Introductions	Go-Around or Individual Conversations	5 minutes
Social Ecology	Large Group Discussion	25 minutes
Modes of Social Change	Large Group Discussion	15 minutes
Making the Connection	Small Group	15 minutes
Debrief	Report-backs	20 minutes
Close	Complete follow-up training check-list(s)	10 minutes
TOTAL TIME: 1 hr 30 minutes		

GROUP INTRODUCTIONS (5 minutes)

NOTE: Do introductions as a go-round if you are working with a group small enough to accomplish this in 5 mins (suggested max of 10 people). If you are working with a group larger than this, have people turn to one or two people around them that they don't know and introduce themselves.

- Ask participants to give their names, their preferred pronouns (see the facilitator's guide for guidance on preferred pronouns), anything else about their identities they wish to share, and why they are at this training.

SOCIAL ECOLOGY EXERCISE (25 minutes)

SAY: "We are going to start by thinking about the "social ecology" of justice work."
(Pass out social ecology worksheet)

Let's start with some definitions. Does anyone know what the terms "social ecology" means or where it comes from?

(Pause for discussion)

Here's a basic definition: "Social ecology's social component comes from its position that nearly all of the world's ecological problems stem from social problems; with these social problems in turn arising from structures and relationships of dominating hierarchy. They argue that apart from those produced by natural catastrophes, the most serious ecological

dislocations of the 20th and 21st centuries have as their cause economic, ethnic, cultural, and gender conflicts, among many others. Present ecological problems, social ecologists maintain, cannot be clearly understood, much less resolved, without resolutely dealing with problems within society.” **(Note:** Feel free to write this out on a flip chart sheet)

So you can see that the term “ecology” is being borrowed here from its environmental, scientific roots to be applied to social justice concerns.

This handout identifies four levels at which social injustice operates. They are depicted as cogs because they are all interlocking. These are also levels at which action can be taken to combat social injustices, starting with the individual, and broadening out from there to the cultural, the institutional, and the systemic.

Take a moment to look at the defining terms in each cog. Note that the defining terms are followed by some examples of where, or among whom, these levels of social ecology operate. Does anyone have questions or reflections?

(Pause for discussion)

“As you can imagine, there are many, many issues within our educational system that could be put into this diagram. Some issues operate more within one or two of the cogs. Some spread across all of them. Let’s brainstorm some of the key issues where you see social injustice operating within our educational system. After we’ve generated a list, we’ll go back and discuss at what level or levels those injustices operate. Feel free to use your handout to take your own notes as we go along.

Pause to brainstorm. Flip chart responses. Work either with a single flip chart sheet split into three columns labeled “injustice, level(s), action”, or have three flip chart sheets side by side with these three heading.

Note: If people need some examples to get them going, or don’t mention some of these important issues, add them: school mascots, equity pay for teachers, biased testing standards, school discipline policies that target racially marginalized groups, lack of accessibility for those with varying disabilities, etc.

“Now let’s go back through this list and identify at which level(s) the issues operate.”

Note: The discussion should reveal that each social justice forces interaction between the levels within the social ecology.

“Finally, let’s brainstorm actions that you and your coworkers, community members, and other education stakeholders could take to combat these injustices at each level.”

MODES OF SOCIAL CHANGE (15 minutes)

SAY: “Now that we have some sense of the complexity and challenge of doing social justice work within a social ecology, let’s discuss methods of social change work and power relationships within existing social change approaches.

As we enter this discussion of power relations, each of us needs to be aware of how we are positioned within social hierarchies. Some of us bring more privilege to this work than others, some greater levels of oppression or barriers to overcome, and these things contribute to our strengths and weaknesses as leaders. Both privileges and barriers will shape the relationships we form in social justice work, the resources we bring to the work, the cultural expectations we place on our partners and allies, and the risks we take, etc. It’s important not to assume that we all enter this kind of contested terrain with the same positionality.

ASK: Do people understand what I’m talking about?”

(**Pause** for discussion)

SAY: “When engaging in collective action, injustices that impact us differently need to be addressed in order for us to share a common culture of social change. If we don’t do this kind of work from the start, the different experiences among us can hamper or even completely stymie social change organizing. We cannot be effective at pushing for justice in the world of education unless we’ve engaged in that work within our union and our community.

Just as we, as individuals, represent a spectrum of social identities, social change work also exists on a spectrum. Let’s look at this handout.”

(**Distribute** social change work handout)

Ask: In light of our discussion so far, why do you think that the kinds of social change work on the left-hand side (Direct service, self-help) are marked as ACCEPTING existing power relationship, while those on the right-hand side (advocacy and organizing) are marked as CHALLENGING existing power relations?

(**Pause** for discussion)

MAKING THE CONNECTION (15 minutes)

SAY: “Our final activity is going to connect the social ecology and the modes of social change. In a moment, I’ll ask you to form small groups with the people sitting around you – pick one person to report back from your discussion. Pick one of the issues that was identified in the

social ecology exercise and discuss:

1. How the various modes of social change could be used to address it, and;
2. Under what circumstances your approach might reshape key power relationships.

You have 15 minutes. Begin!

DEBRIEF (20 minutes)

ASK:

- What did you learn about yourself and the process of social change by doing these activities?
- Does this make you more interested in organizing and what would you want to learn next about it?

NOTE: These report-backs can easily run over time. Based on the size of your group, make sure each small group knows how long they have to report back and be a time keeper. You can signal that a small-group reporter needs to wrap it up through visual or auditory signal, or by holding up signs.

CLOSE (10 minutes)

SAY: “This workshop (and any previous modules you’ve participated in) have given you a brief exposure to organizing for social change and social justice. But we know that there’s a lot more to learn before we’re ready to start campaigns. In order to know what next steps you would value most, we’ve created a couple of check-lists(s) for you to complete (**pass them out**). Please take a moment to fill these out and leave them with us as you go. Thank you!

Best Practices and Recommendations for Facilitating Challenging Trainings

Facilitating training sessions on social justice topics, and especially those concerning diversity, equity, and inclusion, can be mentally and emotionally taxing for the facilitator and the participants.

Facilitating requires more than time in the classroom. Thoughtful and thorough preparation is essential, as is de-brief and decompression afterwards. Being unprepared will put you and your learning objectives at risk. Having some strategies at hand for when people are emotionally “triggered” is strongly advised. These and other best practices can ensure that you arrive in the educational space, and orchestrate the development of the educational community, in the best possible way.

Through intentional practice, you will find methods for holistic preparation and decompression that work best for you and feel healthy. Following the recommendations below can help you to grow as a facilitator who can sustain the learning space for the duration of the training, and do these kinds of trainings throughout your career. This list of best practices can serve as a checklist when you initially begin your facilitator journey.

Before the Training

- **Know your audience.** Anticipate and research the historical and current practices and news about the group you will be working with. You may want to send out a pre-training survey to the group. This will help you assess the level of understanding and salient questions about the training topic.
- **Prepare thoroughly** including learning objectives, a timed-out teaching plan, interactive exercises, accessible materials, etc.
- **Don't train alone** if you can avoid it. This is especially true for less experienced facilitators. We all learn from unexpected road blocks, but make sure you have support from a co-facilitator who can share the weight of the training. Design your division of labor to give each other breaks.
- **Build facilitation teams in light of the topic(s).** Particularly if you are training on racial justice, make sure the facilitation team includes people of color. Similarly, if you are training around gender justice issues, having a male and female facilitator working together is a good way to go. This can also be true for generational differences.
- **Pay attention to language justice.** If you are expecting to train in a multi-lingual environment, make sure that you have the needed interpreters and equipment.
- **Consider triggering.** Make sure that you spend some time preparing yourself mentally and emotionally for managing not only curriculum implementation, but also the thoughts and feelings of your participants.
- **Study models** for methods of communication and conflict resolution. Use the ones that work best for your training and communication style. Get input from others about how they manage conflict in trainings. Disagreement is not a bad thing, but should be managed so that the time spent on it is productive for everyone sharing the experience.
- **Create a routine** that helps you feel good going in to and coming out of the training.

During the Training

- **Establish ground rules** (or group agreements) at the beginning. Ideally, these would be generated by the group itself but have a list of the things that are important to you in mind as well. Make sure people understand that this is a serious endeavor and that part of your role as facilitator is to call out infringements of the behavioral norms and expectations the group has established. Their purpose is to ensure that the space remains as safe as possible. That doesn't mean everyone will feel comfortable all of the time.
- **Be prepared to adjust the timing** in your teaching plan. You will know by "reading the room" when it is appropriate to spend more time on particular aspects of the training, but check in with the group for their consent to stay on the topic or to move on. You have the option of coming back to a topic at the conclusion of your training, either in

wrap-up, one-on-one follow-ups, or collectively if participants want to stay longer and if the space is available.

- **Keep the learning objectives in mind!** Interesting and unexpected divergences can have value, but don't let your plan get totally de-railed.
- **Manage triggering as it occurs.** Triggering may show up as anger or withdrawal, dominating the dialogue or being silenced, tears or defensive body language. If you believe someone is being triggered, don't ignore it. Use classroom conflict techniques to manage interactions. Sometimes taking a break and speaking to someone privately is appropriate. Make sure everyone understands that the impact of particular information or discussion isn't the same for everyone. Members of traditionally marginalized groups may have strong (and legitimate) reactions that should not be ignored. They also should not dominate the learning process for the entire group. This can be a tricky balance to achieve.
- **Provide evaluation opportunity** for participants.

After the Training

- **Do self-reflection** on your own personal evaluation, and de-brief with your co-facilitator as soon as possible after the class. Compare your self-evaluation to the feedback from participants' evaluations. The opinions of your participants are important, but so is your own critical self-evaluation. Experiences of triggering, or the reactions of others to triggering can also show up in evaluations.
- **Become a part of collectives** for trainers, educators, or facilitators on diversity, equity, and inclusions so that you have a place to process with peers who do what you do. This is useful for learning tips, best practices, other forms of curriculum, and group dynamics.

APPENDIX A



Oppression operates at multiple levels, from the individual to the systemic. As NEA leaders, you can think strategically and mobilize others to take action at each level, and intersectionally between levels.

Individual:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Cultural:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Institutional:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Systemic:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

APPENDX B

Models of Social Change Work Definitions

Direct Service: A service organization, government, or church provides direct services to clients. Services might include food, medical care, case management, or housing.

Self-Help: People coming together to discuss and heal from a shared experience of oppression, sometimes doing a collective activity as part of the process. Examples include discussion groups or a neighborhood clean-up day.

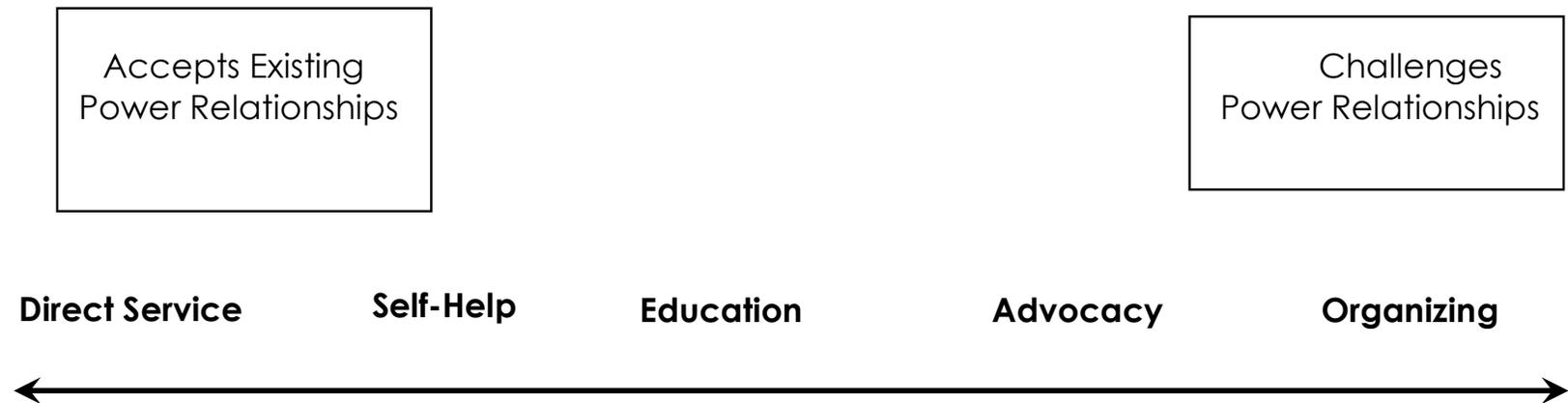
Education: A person, organization, or government provides education or research to people about an issue. An organization that publishes research on the environmental risks of certain cosmetics would be an example.

Advocacy: Advocacy includes proposing and/or fighting for legislative or legal solutions to an issue – most often done by people who aren't directly affected by the issue. One example is an organization that works on drug policy hiring a lobbyist to fight to pass a bill in the state legislature.

Organizing: People directly affected by the issue agree on a solution that meets their needs, organize themselves and allies, and take action that results in real change in their lives and alters the relationship of power.



Spectrum of Social Change Work



Social change approaches exist on a spectrum: direct service, self-help, education, and advocacy. All are valuable to individuals, families, and communities. However, organizing is the approach that has the greatest potential to challenge and change power relationships that reinforce injustices. When we accept unjust power dynamics that marginalize others within our own communities, our organizing is weakened.

We each approach social change work with a personal set of experiences, expectations, and resources. If we want to be effective as a collective, there may be a need for culture shift within our organization(s). We have to be intentional about working on that culture shift in order to bring our social change goals to fruition.

What methods of social change do you feel prepared to employ to eradicate injustice? What politics or structures are you trying to shift? Is your goal equitable? Are there methods that you would like to employ that you need help to understand or develop the skills to use? Who do you need to talk to?

APPENDIX C

Next-Steps Training Options

We hope that your experience of the workshop on *Strategies for Social Change* has gotten you motivated to take action! If so, we'd like to offer you follow-up training and technical assistance to make your action successful and powerful. Please use the checklist below to tell us what kind of follow-up would be most useful to you. If you are interested in more than one, please rank them in order of priority.

- ___ Strategic campaign planning
- ___ Leadership identification, recruitment and development
- ___ Courageous conversations – talking about difficult topics with productive outcomes
- ___ Organizing 101 – how to engage others and move them to action
- ___ Running for office in your union or the public arena
- ___ Using an equity lens in organizational development
- ___ Contract campaigns to drive success in bargaining
- ___ The art and design of direct action – how to bring fun into our movement
- ___ Committee development
- ___ Community outreach and the formation of strategic alliances

Anything else? _____

Next-Steps Training Options

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- School Mascots
- Changes in Wages and Benefits (including Insurance and Retirement)
- Immigration Policies, Practices, and Protocols
- Curriculum Development
- Increased Resource Allocation for School Materials
- Sexual Health and Consent Education
- Dress Codes
- Truancy and Conduct Regulations
- School Board Elections
- Restorative Justice Practices
- School Programs, Holidays, and Events
- Paid Family Leave
- Newborn Child and Adoption Leave
- Disability Accommodations
- Mental Health Counseling
- Testing Practices
- Food Security
- Services for Low Income Families
- Working with Health and Human Services Agencies
- Fiscal Literacy
- Learning Pathways for Trades Careers
- Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Policy Accountability
- Strategies for Bargaining for the Common Good

Anything else? _____