The Impact of World Religions on Leadership for Social Change

A Curriculum for Middle and High School Teachers

Summer Institute 2016 “Teaching and Experiencing World Religions”
Georgetown University
1. How does the FFC Speaking Truth curriculum work?

2. Why use the FFC Speaking Truth curriculum?

3. How can this curriculum help your students develop their own visions of social change?

4. How can you adapt this curriculum to the unique needs of you and your students?
1. How does the FFC Speaking Truth curriculum work?
This curriculum seeks to teach world religions in a dynamic way – by linking it to current global change.
It does this by focusing on leaders who have been influenced by various world faiths

John Lewis
Malala Yousafzai
Thich Nhat Hanh

Mario Gonzalez
Muhammad Yunus
Ruth Messinger

Berta Caceres
Chico Mendes
Wangari Maathai

Daniel Barenboim
Joan Baez
Pete Seeger
Hamada Ben Amor
The FFC curriculum modules follow a standard format – focusing on three factors common to such visionary leaders for change in our world:

• The **role models** that initially inspired each of these visionary leaders to see the need for special social changes;

• The **“watershed moments”** in the lives of these visionary leaders that eventually triggered their efforts to seek social change;

• The **“faith perspective”** of these visionary leaders that gave them the strength to persist seeking transformative social change against all odds.
“And then on a Sunday morning in 1955, I was listening to the radio, tuned to WRMA out of Montgomery, as always, when on the air came a sermon by a voice I’d never heard before, a young minister from Atlanta… I listened as this man spoke about how it wasn’t enough for black people to only be concerned about getting to the promised land in the hereafter… He said we needed to be concerned with the gates of schools that were closed to black people and the doors of stores that refused to hire or serve us. His message was one of love and the Gospel but he was applying those principles to now, to today.”

– Representative John Lewis
Factor #2: How “watershed moments” occurred in their lives – often at an early age – and gave them a new vision to change what looked like an impossible situation.

“Dr. King’s message hit me like a bolt of lightning. I felt like he was preaching directly to me. I went to the library on Monday to find out everything I could about this man. At the time I could only find one newspaper article. But 1955 was a watershed year… Lines had been drawn. Blood was beginning to spill.”

– Representative John Lewis
Factor #3: How their faith tradition gave them a vision of change and the strength to resist great opposition

“Dr. King’s example showed me that it was possible to do more as a minister than what I had witnessed in my one church. I was inspired.”

– Representative John Lewis
Each module is supplemented by materials that make it interesting to high school students.

Of Love and Reconciliation: A Pilgrimage to Alabama

Documentary film produced by FFC award winner Melissa Mergner (https://vimeo.com/79448759)
The curriculum modules provide a window into how world religions inspired these leaders to action.

- **John Lewis**: Music and Activism
- **Malala Yousafzai**: Girls’ Education
- **Thich Nhat Hanh**: Mindfulness and Leadership
- **Mario Gonzalez**: Seven Generations Leadership Model
- **Muhammad Yunus**: Microloans and Economic Justice
- **Ruth Messinger**: Living on $2/Day Challenge
The curriculum modules provide a window into how world religions inspired these leaders to action.

**Music, Peace-Building and Social Justice**

- Daniel Barenboim
- Joan Baez
- Pete Seeger
- Hamada Ben Amor

**Innovative Grassroots Environmental Projects in Developing Countries**

- Berta Caceres
- Chico Mendes
- Wangari Maathai
2. Why use the FFC Speaking Truth curriculum?
The **Speaking Truth** curriculum was selected as a workshop topic from over 1300 proposals submitted to the National Council for Social Studies for its 2014 annual conference in Boston.
The curriculum has benefitted from two decades of work between the Fund for the Future and Georgetown University – working on programs to stimulate visionary youth leadership.
The curriculum has also benefitted from visionary high school teachers who have worked with youth on innovative courses dealing with world religions and social studies.

June Murray-Crawford  
Hudson High School

Lansing Freeman  
Montgomery Blair High School

David Weeks  
Glenelg Country School
The proof is also in the pudding: high school youth have been particularly motivated by examining the lives of visionary agents of change.
High school students have been intrigued at how the change of perspective of these visionary leaders had direct links to their own faith traditions.

Here are just a few examples:

**“The Female Potential”, Interfaith Works’ Clothing Center**

Rachel Solomon
Rockville High School
Now attending St. Mary’s College

**“Hands On”, Youth Dinners With Shelter Residents**

Veronica Ferris
Washington International School
Now working with the Peace Corp in Namibia

**Produce Stand at the Food Bank Gardens in Howard County, MD**

Lanre Faderin
Glenelg Country School
Molecular Genetics, University of Maryland and a patient care volunteer at Children’s National Hospital
One other side benefit: these students have found that spiritual wisdom from these faith traditions provided practical insights into how constructive change can occur in the world.
This type of curriculum therefore has important educational value – particularly in light of the diminishing understanding of world faith traditions among young people.

“The number of Americans who do not identify with any religion continues to grow at a rapid pace. One-fifth of the U.S. public – and a third of adults under 30 – are religiously unaffiliated today, the highest percentages ever in Pew Research Center polling.

This large and growing group of Americans is less religious than the public at large on many conventional measures, including frequency of attendance at religious services and the degree of importance they attach to religion in their lives.”

– 2012 Pew Research Center Study
www.pewforum.org/2012/10/09/nones-on-the-rise/
3. How can this curriculum help your students develop their own visions of social change?
Teachers and high school students in FFC programs have started innovative justice and transformative change projects around the world after finding inspiration in faith traditions.
One high school student, Nike Awotunde, received an FFC grant to raise money for the improvement of the science lab at the Oyan Grammar School in Western Nigeria.

“I have made a significant amount of progress concerning the Oyan Grammar School Lab Project, and I am very grateful that I was given the opportunity to impact other young lives. I feel blessed that I came into contact with this organization because if it weren’t for FFC, I would have had no way to raise money for the chemistry lab, let alone even start it.”

– FFC Grant Recipient Nike Awotunde
Through their FFC project, a group of six students from Hudson High School has raised $4700 to help build schools in southern Sudan.

After studying about the Sudan in their World Cultures Latin America/Africa (WCLAA) class, students were motivated to take action. They were inspired by the role education played in the lives of Sudanese refugees and in particular the life of Emmanuel Jal. Energized by the lyrics of Jal’s music, students organized a “pay per view” assembly and raised over $1400 for his organization, Gua Africa. The funds will be used to build schools in southern Sudan. …

To date Schools for Sudan has sponsored a fundraising night at a local restaurant, maintained “Jars for Jal”, an initiative to collect spare change developed in partnership with the school cafeteria, been featured on local radio and in the Metrowest Daily. The initial $1400 total has grown to $4700.
Student Rishabhb Khatri’s FFC project raised money to fund medical clinics in earthquake-ravaged Haiti

Rishabh started the Health for Haiti campaign and sold blue and red wristbands to raise $1,100 in response to the January 2010 earthquake and resulting life-threatening health issues. Rishabh was able to sell the bands at 4 area schools with the assistance of other interested students.

The money raised from the sale of the wristbands went to the building of a new health clinic in Camp Coq, Haiti and renovating a school. Rishabh and other students organized an “International Food Night and Glenelg’s Got Talent” event with donated cuisine and raised over $10,000.
Kikanae Punyuua’s FFC project raised money to build a school and health clinic in his native Kenya – and returned home to persuade his community to stop female circumcisions

Kikanae has raised close to $5,000 for his foundation, has achieved tax-exempt status, has increased participation in his efforts, and was given land by his tribe to build a school/library. Grant and matching grant funds have been used for the materials for a health clinic to be built. The balance of funds will be for the general construction of the health clinic, beginning with the foundation.

Kikanae was able to return to Kenya over the 2012 summer to address his community on the impacts of female circumcision, and he was able to persuade them to stop the practice. During his visit, Kikanae also emphasized the importance of education for girls.
These high school students have gone on to college and beyond – continuing their early visionary projects.

Kikanae Punyua
*Women’s Health and Equality* (Masai tribe, Kenya)

Ibrahim Anyars Salih
*Poverty Relief* (Vocational workshop for orphans, Kumasi, Ghana)

Shayna Solomon
*Spirituality & Social Justice* (Oxford University)

Melissa Mergner
*Peace Building* (Korean Unification)

Diana Jeang
*Refugee Resettlement* (Emory University)

Jonathan Kesten
*Corruption* (Working with Wildlife Law Enforcement in Cameroon)

Rishabh Khatri
*Disaster Relief* (Haiti, New Orleans, India)

Veronica Ferris
*Peace Corp*, Namibia
4. How can you adapt this curriculum to the unique needs of you and your students?
The curriculum modules contain far more than just biographies – they invite students to examine and address social justice issues through faith in action.
There is an initial base module with a number of lessons which initiate conversation about faith-based activism.

**Overview**

- **How It Works**: There is an initial base module with a number of lessons which initiate conversation about faith-based activism.
- **Why Use It**: Students will capture their interpretation of the meaning of the words Faith, Doubt, Purpose, Values, Life, and Trust.
- **Student Impact**: In addition to fostering a sense of community and values, this module helps students develop critical thinking skills.
- **Use Flexibility**: Flexibility in the use of this module is encouraged to adapt to different learning environments and student needs.

**Content Objectives**

- Students will explore personal narratives related to each prompt.
- Students will discuss their journaling with peers.

**Synopses of Lessons**

- Begin with a writing prompt written on the board and a 15-minute free write. Students will share their pieces with each other. At the end of the unit, students will select their favorite pieces and create a class journal/video/document.

**Faith**

“Faith is believing in what we cannot see.” — Albert Einstein

What does faith mean to you?

**Doubt**

“Doubt is the opposite of faith; it is an element of faith.” — Paul Tillich

What do you believe you cannot face?

**Purpose**

“Do what you love for what you can do.” — Friedrich Nietzsche

If you could do only one thing in your life, what would it be?

**Values**

“Your values become your thoughts. Your thoughts become your words. Your words become your actions. Your actions become your habits. Your habits become your character. Your character becomes your destiny.”

— Mahatma Gandhi

And the 5-7 values most important to you? How do you identify and evaluate them? If the answer is yes, then there is room for improvement; what could you change so that you were living more in alignment with what you value?
Each individual curriculum module – selected by you and your students – contains a series of lesson plans and questions unique to that visionary leader.

**Overview**

**How It Works**

**Why Use It**

**Student Impact**

**Use Flexibility**

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**Content Objectives**

Students will examine the experiences in their lives that have shaped their faith.

Students will create visuals of their faith journeys and share their “maps” with the class.

**Materials**

Paper (11x14)

Colored pencils, crayons, markers

**Synopsis of Lesson**

Begin by asking students to reflect on their experiences with religion and faith. Perhaps have them sit back, close their eyes and think about their earliest memories to present ones about the role of religion, belief in their lives. Then, have students get up and put themselves in a line, one end representing those who believe in a God concept and consider themselves religious, the other end for those who consider themselves atheists or humanists (making sure they understand the terms). Explain that this is a spectrum and they should put themselves in the location that best represents their beliefs.

Ask students to explain why they have placed themselves where they have in the line.

After the discussion is over students should return to their seats. They will now be creating Spiritual Maps. You will be asking them to capture those moments that have shaped what they believe in the form of a map (journey). I introduce this activity by sharing with students the map that I drew to capture my spiritual journey.

Their journeys will all begin with their births and they end in this moment. Ask students to imagine what the path looks like that they are on. Is it a road, river, mountain, what stops have there been along the way, what people and places have been part of their journey.

Once students have completed their maps have each member of the class share their journey with their peers.
There is also an FFC YouTube channel for downloading additional materials

https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCLnvgfyiq9Q0v76CJZ5MbPg
The individual curriculum modules can be downloaded through the FFC website.

http://www.futureofchildren.net/speaking-truth