



PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Social Justice Standards | Unpacking Action

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT TOPIC: CLASSROOM CULTURE, INSTRUCTION
SOCIAL JUSTICE DOMAIN: ACTION

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

- What is action?
- What are different ways of understanding, experiencing and taking action?
- How does action impact our way of understanding each other and our world?

Objective

Learners will:

- Define action.
- Understand the relationship between the Action and Identity, Diversity and Justice domains.
- Understand the five Action anchor standards in the Social Justice Standards.
- Begin to think about how action impacts relationships within the school building and the classroom.

This is the fourth in a series of self-paced presentations for individuals, easily modified for a group.

You need:

- ability to access audio and video on your device;
- pen and paper;
- and about one hour.

Learn:

Think about how the following quotes illustrate social action.

“There must exist a paradigm, a practical model for social change that includes an understanding of ways to transform consciousness that are linked to efforts to transform structures.”

–bell hooks, *killing rage: Ending Racism*

“Once social change begins, it cannot be reversed. You cannot uneducate the person who has learned to read. You cannot humiliate the person who feels pride. You cannot oppress the people who are not afraid anymore. We have seen the future, and the future is ours.” –Cesar Chavez

“The world changes according to the way people see it, and if you can alter, even by a millimeter, the way people look at reality, then you can change it.” –James Baldwin

How does each quote support or change your understanding of action?

Go Deeper:

Think about a time you have taken action or seen others take action to turn your beliefs or principles into reality. Consider what was positive and what was challenging about taking action.

Taking Action	
Positive Attributes	Challenging Attributes

Action can take many different shapes and help accomplish many different kinds of goals. If we think of action only in terms of major fights or struggles, it can feel inaccessible. On the other hand, if we think of action only as the little things we do each day, we can lose track of a big picture. The following list includes macro and micro approaches to taking action. Think about the significance of each example and how it might make a difference or help achieve a goal.

- Bringing some cans to a canned food drive
- Cleaning up a park
- Explaining curriculum to parents and colleagues
- Hosting an exchange student
- Making a change in your curriculum
- Marching for a cause
- Organizing a canned food drive
- Participating in a community mural
- Signing an online petition
- Speaking up at a meeting
- Speaking up when you hear someone making a racist joke
- Standing up to a bully
- Talking with a group of children about social justice
- Traveling to a different country or a different part of this country

- Voting on election day
- Writing a letter to a member of Congress

What comes to mind about these different examples? Which examples resonate with you and why? What do you think is challenging, empowering or important about taking action? How might the answers to these questions be different for someone with an identity different than your own?



Working in a cohort? Share your thoughts with the group.

Apply:

The following images are associated with taking action toward a particular goal. For each image, describe what you think the goal is and consider how the action might contribute to achieving the goal. Describe the steps you imagine those involved may have taken to reach their goal.

Let's learn more about the actions represented in each of these pictures.

Community Mural



- What might have been the goal?
- What might have been the steps in this project?
- How does this project achieve the desired goal?

This community mural represents action on a number of different levels. It was painted on the side of a school in downtown Phoenix. The title is “Knowledge Breaks Down Barriers Created by Ignorance.” It was created by an artist and members of the neighborhood. The artist worked with children to conceive the message and design the mural. Consider the ways both the process and the product constitute action.

Adding to the activist nature of the mural is the fact that it represents historical activism carried out by individuals from diverse backgrounds. Because of their visibility, murals are a great medium for communicating messages, mobilizing community members and using art as a call to action.

Standing Up to Bullies



- What might have been the goal?
- What might have been the steps in this project?
- How does this project achieve the desired goal?

Not every action has to take place on a grand scale. This image shows one person standing up to another in the face of bullying. It takes courage to speak your mind, especially when peers are watching. It is important for children, as well as adults, to understand that standing up for yourself and others is a form of action and a way to fight for justice. Consider the different aspects of identity that come into play when someone decides whether or not to speak up against injustice of any sort. What does the image communicate about that? How does action intersect with identity, diversity and justice in such a situation?

AIDS Quilt



- What might have been the goal?
- What might have been the steps in this project?
- How does this project achieve the desired goal?

The Names Project AIDS Memorial Quilt was started in 1987. Each panel—made by friends, lovers and family members—commemorates the life of one person who has died from AIDS. The Quilt now contains more than 48,000 panels and has been displayed all over the country. It generates conversation about the AIDS epidemic, the injustices surrounding the epidemic and different ways to fight it. The Quilt was nominated for a Nobel Peace Prize in 1989. It is the largest community art project in the world.

Like a mural, a quilt is an important way to show possible links between art and action. Consider the ways a memorial can represent action. What feelings arise when people look at the AIDS Memorial Quilt? What questions does it raise? What aspects of activism went into its creation?

Grape Boycott



- What might have been the goal?
- What might have been the steps in this project?
- How does this project achieve the desired goal?

The United Farm Workers of America (UFWA) led a strike and boycott against grape growers in the late 1960s; it lasted more than five years. The purpose of the boycott was to garner better treatment and wages for farm workers in grape fields. This image represents one of the many protest marches that took place during the strike.

The UFWA strike was organized primarily by Filipino and Mexican Americans but quickly grew to involve people from many different backgrounds. By 1970, the union—which was nonviolent—had reached an agreement that positively impacted more than 10,000 farm workers. Boycotts, protest marches and community organizations are important examples of action; a movement such as this one brings together diverse groups of people working for a common cause.

Park Cleanup



- What might have been the goal?
- What might have been the steps in this project?
- How does this project achieve the desired goal?

This image shows a group of high school students participating in a cleanup at a local park. Cleanup efforts represent action on multiple levels. They bring people together and generate conversations about community values and priorities. They combat environmental injustice, a major disparity issue that impacts people around the world. Cleanup efforts also equalize groups of people; everyone is engaged in a common—sometimes dirty—cause. Finally, a cleanup helps people value their community more deeply.

Consider any cleanups or other community-improvement actions you have heard of or participated in. How did they impact your relationship to your community?

Go Deeper:

Let's consider the challenges and benefits of taking action.

You will need a pen and some paper for the following activity. Next you will read a series of statements designed to help you think about your own relationship to action. For each statement, provide an answer that reflects your own experience. As you work, consider what aspects of your own identity and history might contribute to your responses. Don't worry about giving right or wrong answers.

1. I took action when...

2. I was impressed by the action someone else took when...
3. Taking action feels good because...
4. Taking action is hard because...
5. An activist is someone who...

Reflect:

Read back over the statements you wrote about action and activists. What do these statements reveal about your own relationship to action? Do you value some types of action over others? Are you more or less likely than other people you know to take action? What types of action do you find most meaningful? How does your relationship to action impact your role in your classroom and school community?

Learn:

Learning for Justice's Social Justice Standards includes 20 anchor standards, five within the Action domain.

Students will:

- AC.16. Express empathy when people are excluded or mistreated because of their identities and concern when they themselves experience bias.
- AC.17. Recognize their own responsibility to stand up to exclusion, prejudice and injustice.
- AC.18. Speak up with courage and respect when they or someone else has been hurt or wronged by bias.
- AC.19. Make principled decisions about when and how to take a stand against bias and injustice in their everyday lives and will do so despite negative peer or group pressure.
- AC.20. Plan and carry out collective action against bias and injustice in the world and will evaluate what strategies are the most effective.

Go Deeper:

What strategies have you seen or used to encourage student growth toward meeting these standards? What teaching practices help students move in these directions? What challenges or obstacles do teachers face when helping students meet these standards?

Apply:

To envision what the Action anchor standards might look like in a school context, read each scenario and answer the question that follows.

SCENARIO 1

Jessica notices that one of her classmates, Jeremy, always sits alone at lunch. She asks her friend Samantha if she knows why. "He's gross!" Samantha replies. "His family is super poor, and he's always coughing."

"You shouldn't be so mean to him, Sam," Jessica responds, "You don't know what his life is like. It's not fair to exclude someone because his family doesn't have as much money."

“Maybe you’re right. I’m sure it makes him feel terrible,” says Samantha, “I have math class with him. I can try to get to know him better.”

Reflect:

Consider what Jessica and Samantha go through in this scenario. What aspects of their own identities might they be dealing with? What inner resources do you imagine it takes for Jessica to speak up? Which Action anchor standard(s) does this scenario address? What might happen next in this scenario?

How do students in your school tend to deal with exclusion?

SCENARIO 2

During gym class, Jenny’s friends are making fun of a girl for being overweight. Jenny speaks up to tell her friends how harmful such speech can be. She calmly explains to them that a person’s weight is determined by a lot of different factors, and that weight is not necessarily a sign of good or bad health. She also explains that shaming people for their weight doesn’t help them; it just makes them feel bad.

Reflect:

What inspires Jenny to take action? What personal attributes does her action display? What aspects of identity and justice come into play in this scenario? Which Action anchor standard(s) does the scenario address? How might Jenny’s action positively impact her community?

How would you envision students at your school handling a scenario like this one? How might other students respond to Jenny’s action?

SCENARIO 3

Lee has grown weary of the bullying he sees at his school each day. He discusses his concerns with classmates, teachers and administrators. Together, they plan Mix It Up at Lunch Day to promote understanding among the diverse student body. The day is used to celebrate the launch of a new diversity club aimed at bringing students of different backgrounds together, combating animosity and promoting healthy intergroup relationships.

Reflect:

Think about Lee’s actions. Which Action anchor standard(s) does this scenario address? What inspires Lee to take action? What resources are necessary to make his action a success?

Apply:

What have students, teachers and administrators at your school done to combat bullying and promote intergroup communication and collaboration?

Think about each scenario. Reflect on your students, your classroom and your school.

How do students at your school meet the Action anchor standards? What can you and colleagues do to help students develop their capacity to take action?



Working in a cohort? Share your answers with a partner.

Learn:

Now let's have a look at what the Action anchor standards look like in texts. Read each text, and review how the Action anchor standard is addressed.

AC.16 Express empathy when people are excluded or mistreated because of their identities and concern when they themselves experience bias.

“Some people think only about having peace for themselves.

They don't care about what others need or want.

They try to stay inside their own peaceful place

and keep everyone else's problems outside it.”

Katherine Scholes, *Peace Begins With You*

AC.17 Recognize their own responsibility to stand up to exclusion, prejudice and injustice. “The message was clear: if it could happen in the fields, it could happen anywhere—in the cities, in the courts, in the city councils, in the state legislatures. I didn't really appreciate it at the time, but the coming of our union signaled the start of great changes among Hispanics that are only now beginning to be seen.” Cesar Chavez, “Commonwealth Club Address”

AC.18 Speak up with courage and respect when they or someone else has been hurt or wronged by bias.

“Interviewer: What do you do when gay is used as an insult?”

Girl: All my friends, they used to say it, and then every time they did that I would just, like, freak out. Was like, ‘Don't do that! Argh! Stop saying that word—it doesn't mean anything bad!’ And, eventually, none of my friends say it any more.”

Welcoming Schools, *What do you Know? Six- to Twelve-Year-Olds Talk about Gays and Lesbians*

AC.19 Make principled decisions about when and how to take a stand against bias and injustice in their everyday lives and will do so despite negative peer group pressure. “At a time like this, scorching irony, not convincing argument, is needed. O! had I the ability, and could I reach the nation's ear, I would, to-day, pour out a fiery stream of biting ridicule, blasting reproach, withering sarcasm, and stern rebuke. For it is not light that is needed, but fire; it is not the gentle shower, but thunder. We need the storm, the whirlwind, and the earthquake. The feeling of the nation must be quickened; the conscience of the nation must be roused; the propriety of the nation must be startled; the hypocrisy of the nation must be exposed; and its crimes against God and man must be proclaimed and denounced.” Frederick Douglass, “What to the Slave Is the Fourth of July?”

AC.20 Plan and carry out collective action against bias and injustice in the world and will evaluate what strategies are most effective. “If the first woman God ever made was strong enough to turn the world upside down all alone, these women together ought to be able to turn it back, and get it right side up again!” Sojourner Truth, “Ain't I a Woman?”

Go Deeper:

Consider each of these texts you just read. Answer each of the following questions for one of the texts:

- How would you introduce this text to your students?
- How do you think your students would respond to this text?
- How could you incorporate this text in a way that inspires students to take action on issues that are important to them?



Working in a cohort? Share your answers with the group.

Apply:

At the beginning of this module, you thought about aspects of taking action that you might find challenging or inhibiting. Review those thoughts now. Imagine how these challenges might feel to your students. Now, place these challenges in the context of the scenarios and the texts you reviewed. What resources and attributes helped these characters and authors overcome the challenges they faced? How can you help your students and others in your school community access and develop these resources and attributes?

Consider a text you have used with your class in the past. What does this text show students about taking action? In what ways might it inspire students to take action? How can you help students make the connection between text and their life?

Record your thoughts.

Reflect:

Let's take a minute to revisit our goals and objectives:

- Define action.
- Understand the relationship between the Action and Identity, Diversity and Justice domains.
- Understand the five Action anchor standards in the Social Justice Standards.
- Begin to think about how action impacts relationships within the school building and the classroom.

Complete the following:

- Name three new ideas you gained from this professional development module.
- Name two new ideas you will bring back to your practice.
- Name one colleague with whom you will share the learning in this professional development module.

In summary:

- Action can exist on micro and macro, local and global, individual and communal levels.
- Taking action can be challenging, but it is an important way to effect change in the world around us.
- Role models, resources, support and encouragement are necessary to foster activists and an activist community.

Thank you for participating in Unpacking Action.

Reference: <http://justconnect.umich.edu/forum/favorite-social-justice-quotes>