

Social Studies Take Action Project – “Pennies for Poverty”

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Step 1: Identify your concern

Embarking on this project brought initial concerns for the homeless and starving people in Fredericton. Both coming from small towns in Nova Scotia and PEI, we haven't experienced the level of poverty that encompasses the streets of Fredericton. It was almost as if the people of Fredericton grew accustomed to walking by the homeless man on the corner of Queen Street. The sight of this man sitting on a cardboard box with a small tattered piece of fabric for a blanket and a bucket with "please help" on the front, containing only a few coins in small chain made me ache. This was our concern, and we wanted to make a change. There were multiple possibilities of how we could get involved; Fredericton has a great Food bank and multiple clothing drives (Salvation Army etc.) So, we started our research on the most effective way to make a change.

Step 2: Research your concern

During the research process we had been hit with a major game changer. A simple question that changed the course of our project altogether; Why is their poverty in Fredericton? This question stemmed from the Paulo Freire concept of "False Generosity". False Generosity is contributing to a cause without knowing what lies beneath. For instance, contributing to a food drive, without understanding fully, why there even needs to be food drives. *Why is their poverty?* We kept coming back to this question. We changed the direction of our project and this is where it gets a bit sticky. We have a little more than two weeks to get something started and accomplished. The background information and research of your project is the most important and time consuming part. It really deserves to be carefully planned out and studied so that the results you wish to achieve are beneficial. It is important to stress this to your class. Knowing everything, from the repercussions to the why's and the how's of your project will help you and your class to succeed in your take action project.

Step 3: Find out who supports you

At this point, we researched a local organization called "FAPO" (Fredericton Anti-Poverty Organization). We chose this organization because they are a non for profit organization who receives zero government funding. If you wanted to dig deeper into the problem of poverty in your community, you might even want to contact your local MP and find out why organizations

such as this do not receive any funding or what specific things the government in your province is doing for the homeless (ie. job opportunities, homeless shelters, funding, grants etc.) If your results return to be unfavourable you may even want to have your class start a petition towards getting a government budget or grant for non for profit organizations such as FAPO. These are some things we would have done, had the time been available.

We contacted FAPO and confirmed what we already knew; they needed money. We caught the FAPO coordinator Melynda Jarratt as she was on her way to the bank to cash a small cheque to pay some of their bills. She was overjoyed that we were planning a project to support the organization. They use all their donations and funds to help the people in Fredericton, while the costs to run their facility build up. Mrs. Jarratt explained that FAPO does whatever it can to help the cause of poverty in Fredericton; From supplying clean mattresses and sheets to families in need to donating to the local soup kitchen. Their main source of impact is through a flea market they put on. They ask for people to drop off clean and usable items which they set up for sale or as give-aways for those who simple cannot afford it. The problem they have is that the people of Fredericton are using the source as a dumping ground for their old broken things. FAPO is then left responsible to transport the broken items to the dump. Another project may be to have a campaign that makes the community aware of the trials and tribulations that an organization such as FAPO must endure in order to continue. Have a local volunteer day where the school and community can lend a hand to these organizations. As Mrs. Jarratt said, *“every penny counts”*.

Step 4: Create a plan

With that, we came up with a plan to create a project called “Pennies for Poverty”. Our thought was that everyone has a pocket full of coins that they don’t want. Why not give them to a good cause who could use every penny? We decided that we would call some local businesses around Fredericton and request that they allow us to put a can at their cash registers with our slogan and the FAPO information pamphlets. FAPO, needless to say was overjoyed to hear that we were offering to help and sent us their slogan, information packages and pamphlets, giving us full permission to use their name.

Step 5: Take Action

We called a variety of stores and businesses and we quickly found out that not many were willing to help. However, this kind of bump in the road is to be expected and it is important to never let your class become knocked down by someone telling them no. The fact that someone is saying you can’t do it, should only strive to make you work even harder. A few small businesses allowed us to put our can at their registered and we promised to come back in two weeks to retrieve it. Although we were warned at a local home hardware that they have

had people steal these kinds of donation boxes in the past. Despite the negative responses we left our donation cans in the hands of the businesses and hoped for the best.

Step 6: Evaluate the plan

The idea came late and the project was pushed to finish within our time restraint, so we did not enter expecting significant monetary donations to be accrued. However, after the two weeks we counted out all our pennies for poverty and we had a little less than forty dollars in coins, which we rounded up to the nearest dollar. The FAPO was ecstatic to receive our donation, and we again were met with the saying “*every penny counts*”. A class may be weary of doing something like this in fear of not gaining a large sum of money towards their organization. However, for an organization that receives no income, no funding, no grants, any amount of help has an impact.

Step 7: Apply your learning

We had two weeks to raise some funds for an organization that really made an impact on our community and on us as individuals. It’s important that your students feel passionate about the issue they are taking action towards; otherwise they will not be driven to take part and see the project through to the end. The other important thing we have learned is that success is not always measured in numbers but rather in effort and experience. This was our first take action project and we are proud that we were able to accomplish something small towards bettering the community we live in. That is how true success is measured.

Relating the project to Social Studies curriculum outcomes

New Brunswick Social Studies Curriculum Outcomes K-12

Citizenship, Power and Governance

- GCO: Students will be expected to demonstrate an understanding of the rights and responsibilities of citizenship and the origins, functions, and sources of power, authority, and governance.

Individuals, societies, and economic decisions

- GCO: Students will be expected to demonstrate the ability to make responsible economic decisions as individuals and as members of society.

People, place, and the environment

- GCO: Students will be expected to demonstrate an understanding of the interactions among people, places, and the environment.

Interdependence

- GCO: Students will be expected to demonstrate an understanding of the interdependent relationship among individuals, societies, and the environment-locally, nationally, and globally-and the implications for a sustainable future.

Time, continuity, and change

- GCO: Students will be expected to demonstrate an understanding of the past and how it affects the present and the future.

New Brunswick Social Studies Grade 2 Curriculum Outcomes

Unit 2 Technology and Community

- 2.2.1 describe how people contribute to making change in communities;
- 2.2.2 demonstrate an understanding that technology has changed over time to meet their needs, wants, and interests; and
- 2.2.3 predict ways their community might change in the future and how they might contribute to that future.

References:

(1) *Fredericton Anti-Poverty Organization*

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(506)-458-9102

<http://frederictonantipoverty.blogspot.com/>

www.antipoverty.com

(2) Dale, John. Hyslop-Margison J, Emery. (2010). *"Paulo Freire: Teaching for Freedom and Transformation"*. Springer Media: London, NYC.

****"False generosity and paternalism: The point Freire is making with these terms is that when a system is structured so that there are oppressors and oppressed, some of the oppressor class feel genuine compassion toward the suffering of the oppressed. They move to isolate that suffering and to aid it, not to address the structures of society which are the root causes. Thus, to the extent that they relieve any suffering they do so by hiding from themselves the genuine causes, their own privilege as oppressor class members"***

<http://www.webster.edu/~corbetre/philosophy/education/freire/freire-terms.html>