

### **Portfolio Piece 3: Theory of Social Change**

Social change is a collaborative and collective action taken to alter something with the hopes of improving it, whether it be the whole framework of an organization or the language teachers use to teach their curriculum. While it is important to acknowledge that social change isn't always positive and for the better of the community, social change has the potential to make a positive impact in spaces or people. That being said, social change is not just the impact that the actions taken towards change have on a space or group, but rather the action and modification of making change itself. Action doesn't always change everyone around you or a space, but even a change in yourself; self-growth, the way you think about something or even just reevaluating your assumptions, is a sign of valid social change occurring. Change is something that happens for every person, institution and organization. It's the underlying reasons that drive the change that are deciding factors of whether the impact on the people, communities, organizations and institutions they work with is positive or negative.

When we think of social change, we think of making big changes, but even small changes like adding aspects and conversations on culture and identity into a lesson or reflecting on your own positionality within a space can slowly lead to bigger changes. In retrospect it is usually the person at the top of the social hierarchy of an institution who has the power to decide what changes and has the power to approve or deny changes proposed by those inside the organization. This can be harmful as it can lead to miscommunications and work that does not

benefit or invoke change within the community an organization works with, rather just the organization or even just individual people.

Communication leads to less misunderstandings and social change that is positive. By this I mean that communication between the administration, employees, clients and especially with the community is necessary to set expectations for the change the community wants to see the organization work towards. In order to tell that change has occurred it is necessary to remove yourself from the work and critically look and reflect on it. As previously stated, action in and of itself doesn't always lead to change, but that is not a precursor for whether change has occurred or not. It isn't always through data and data collection that you can tell, rather sometimes it is more informal. Even looking at how yourself and those around you are reacting and responding to others in more caring or humanizing ways is a big sign of social change. Another way is through informal comments from program participants. They aren't always obvious comments, but even off hand comments like, "I've never done a project where I draw about my family", or, "I like teaching you guys some words in Spanish in class", are signs that change is happening and having a positive effect on students. Traditional data collection methods like interviews and students work are always definitive ways to see if change is occurring, *but* with interviews it is important to be critical of your own position of power within the organization and not use interviews alone to prove change.

Something that gets in the way of change is that, thinking practically, change often costs money. Financials often get in the way of change because organizations, especially nonprofits, need to have sustainable funding. Many times, institutions that provide this funding have an aversion that grants won't cover if things change within a program. An example is United Way's Women's Initiative no longer funding the All Kinds of Girls teen program because of issues with

the age range. This means the organization has to risk loss of funding in order to expand their “junior mentor teen program” and make a change, even a small one.

At Core Stage, change is controlled by the Board of Directors and Executive Director, who make most changes in regard to financials and notoriety for the program. I would like to engage in internal change within the organization and its programming. Core Stage certainly does a good job with outreach but change needs to happen to make the programs themselves more accessible and a space different than traditional schooling spaces where students have the space to share and gain cultural and linguistic competence and explore identity. Adding more space and curricula like that will more intentionally create social change and better achieve the organization's mission of “empowering youth”. Many young people in Core Stage programming come in with creative and art experiences but never given the agency to choose what it is they want to learn and never given the space to explore their own identity and share their experiences. Instead of only teaching a set, monocultural and monolingualistic arts-based curriculum taken from the internet, I’d like to take some guidance from Myles Horton and facilitate self-exploration, sharing and learning through arts-based activities. More specifically I want to create an arts-based curriculum designed to foster self-confidence, share and explore their own and the general multiculturalism and multilingualism of the space, and explore and navigate the intersections of identities through the arts.

Before change occurs, the organization needs to be organized and make sure the staff and administration have the same understandings of programs. Communication is a necessity when it comes to creating and maintaining positive social change. After that, change within the organization needs to focus on students’ needs and giving them a space and programs different

than that within their mainstream schooling; one with culturally sustaining curriculum that connects them to the arts while helping sustain and foster cultural and linguistic competence.

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*Reviewing what I wrote, I see a lot of shifts and growth within my theory of social change, yet still many things ring true. Early on, my project took on a very different shape: I planned to implement a culturally sustaining arts-based program by myself, something that would not have created change as it would not have included or supported volunteers. Since last year a lot has changed within the organization of Core Stage. Decisions are no longer purely made by the executive director nor are they based on funds, rather they are made in agreement with the Board of Directors, the executive director and the leadership of the Clark club. A year ago, as I was beginning my study, I conceptualized social change broadly and as many different things. It was collaborative in process yet individualistic in its effect. It was self-reflective yet action driven. But, above all, it challenged the norm and was based in concepts of communication (with community, staff, “clients” and administration). For Core Stage, I conceptualized social change as mutual understandings, actions that challenged mainstream schooling and a space that sustained “and foster[ed] cultural and linguistic competence”. Social change for me at the beginning of my praxis journey was the effects of actions, and like my original theory of social inequality, was closely tied with socioeconomics and financial abilities of changemakers/organizations.*

*Now, having completed a different project that was intended to be more inclusive and agency/communication-based, the way I approach social change is both the same and different. According to my current theory of change, one that was developed and grew from my experiences with Core Stage, volunteers and students this year, my focus on communication*

*shifted to a focus on care and relationships. For me now, my theory of social change and social inequality are interconnected, and in order to create change that combats inequality, monolingualistic and monocultural norms and systems of oppression, there needs to be a sense of connection and trust. Taking straight from my thesis, “care and relationships of trust are important when combating the silence around Whiteness and privilege and affirming racial identities, ultimately in order to create a space that challenges the status quo and fosters open conversations on race, racism and Whiteness”. I think my original focus on communication and agency grew and expanded and the experiences of working collaboratively with students and volunteers led me to the focus on relationships and the importance of trust in creating a space to challenge norms. As I read through, I questioned whether I actually made change for Core Stage, the young people I worked with, volunteers or leadership. Honestly, I don’t feel like I can definitively say that I really did. Social change takes time and, as I said in my thesis, it’s impossible to change someone’s whole framework and ideology in a short year.*

*While I am not comfortable speaking for others on the impact my project may or may not have had on them, I know for a fact that my project created change for myself within the way I think about creativity, race, culture and language and my own teaching practices. Throughout this process I was self-reflective and learning about myself and my practices as well as those around me. I believe that every knew “realization” or learning I had was an example of social change for myself. When I say a lot of my theory of social change is similar and different, I mean that I took the framework I created a year ago and added complexity to it. My theory grew and changed just as I did. As I learned more about culturally sustaining pedagogy, and changed my focus within my project, I took basic tenants of my original theory (communication,*

*collaboration, agency and self-reflection) and built on them to focus within race, culture, language, trust and agency.*

*Thus, I think of my evolving theory of social change as a building. The buildings framework is the basic tenants I set the theory upon, yet as I go through life, the building will evolve and change, still building onto the original framework but adding complexity to it as I learn more and reflect more. The thing that will guide me is a principle of self-reflection and collaboration, as I still believe that you can't go on and create change for others, rather you must work in tandem with communities, administration, staff, and young people to create social change that is as beneficial and equitable for all as possible. That is all to say that my theory of social change, and all other theories are ever growing as I continue to learn from the young people I work with, coworkers, academics, administration and others.*