

# Active Citizenship Course

**“YOU MUST BE THE CHANGE YOU SEEK IN THE WORLD”**

*GANDHI*

## **Rationale:**

This course is aimed at encouraging learners to critically and ethically examine consumer culture, the influence of media on youth and community decision-making, to reflect on their own personal consumption choices, and to examine consumption patterns across the world, realizing how the personal choices that they make often have a far-reaching ecological, economic, political, and social impact. It is through this lens that students will learn to think of themselves as active citizens, willing, able and equipped to influence and make a difference in their school, community, and world. Students will explore the political landscape of issues such as climate change, racial and gender equality issues, disaster, war, poverty issues such as clean water and hunger. Students will choose an issue of relevance and importance to them, construct a team of like minded individuals, determine a course of politicized action, and execute that course of action.

## **Philosophy:**

Paulo Freire (1921-1997) was a Brazilian educationalist. His view of education was that it is a process of transformation and change and central to being an active citizen. Freire hoped that the transformation and change would take place through a focus on experiential learning. His views were influential as he challenged the role and methods of formal education and the role of the educator. Freire challenged educators to consider not just how they educated but also the power dynamics of teaching and learning. John Dewey (1859-1952), like Freire, was committed to using experience, interaction and reflection as the basis for educational practice. In addition, Dewey was committed to education as a central element in democracy and what he called ‘enabling the sharing in a common life’ (Dewey, 1916).

This course will expose you to world issues and will guide you in how to get involved to make a difference in the world.

It is a 12 week course spread over 4 modules.

**Learning Outcomes:**

Academic Goals: To develop the skills of inquiry, research and critical thinking

Social Goals: To develop collaborative and co-operative learning skills and to cultivate a sense of empathy, compassion and citizenship

**“AS THE UNITY OF THE MODERN WORLD  
BECOMES INCREASINGLY A TECHNOLOGICAL  
RATHER THAN A SOCIAL AFFAIR, THE  
TECHNIQUES OF THE ARTS PROVIDE THE  
MOST VALUABLE MEANS OF INSIGHT INTO  
THE REAL DIRECTION OF OUR OWN  
COLLECTIVE PURPOSES.”**

**--MARSHALL MCLUHAN**

## **Module #1: Week 1/2/3 – Media, Corporatism, and Consumer Culture**

In this module, you will critically examine the role of media and marketing in consumer culture. You will explore which corporations control the majority of major media outlets and examine how the media shapes and reinforces flawed public perceptions. You will also begin to make some connections between these flawed human perceptions and between issues at the school, community, and global level.

### Focus Questions:

- Try to become a critical viewer of the media over the next couple of weeks. How is the media used to shape public opinion?
- Which media outlets virtually control the corporate media in North America?  
<http://www.nowfoundation.org/issues/communications/tv/mediacontrol.html>
- What is stealth or undercover marketing?
- What is meant by the term corporatism?

Use the chart on below to create connections between media messages, school, community, and global issues.

Media Promotes	Examples	Related School Issues	Related Community Issue	Related Global Issue
Violence	Entertainment is often predicated on violence; it permeates many television shows, movies, sports, and video games. Violence events are a socially acceptable form of entertainment.	Fights Bullying	Random acts of violence, swarmings, shootings	War, Conflict
Racial stereotypes	Many movies, television and video games perpetuate racial stereotypes.	Hostility between Segregated Racial Groups	Racist public perceptions	Racism, AIDS
Sexual stereotypes	Models in advertisements, movie actors, and children's dolls often perpetuate an unhealthy body—being below healthy body weight. Movies, advertisements, and music videos objectify young women, promote promiscuous behaviour. Young girls' dolls often	Provocative attire  Inappropriate treatment  Expectations  Unhealthy diets, anorexia, bulimia	Prostitution  Teen pregnancies	Gender equality
Materialism	advertising perpetuates stress and creates false needs for products and brand names.	Brand names equal status  Pressure to consume to fit in  Stealing	Theft  Disparity between "haves" and "have-nots"	Climate change
Unhealthy lifestyle choices	eating choices (obesity), alcohol consumption, drug use	Unhealthy eating habits, drug use	Substance related crimes (property	Health

			theft, assault, murder)	
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**“THE VIETNAMESE ARE OUR BROTHERS,  
THE RUSSIANS ARE OUR BROTHERS,  
THE CHINESE ARE OUR BROTHERS:  
AND ONE DAY WE’VE GOT TO SIT DOWN  
TOGETHER AT THE TABLE OF BROTHERHOOD.”**

*DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.*

### **Project:**

Create a project using a technological medium to illustrate several examples of how the media promotes the following:

- Violence
- Racial stereotypes
- Sexual stereotypes
- Materialism/Consumerism
- Unhealthy lifestyle choices

Find a creative method for illustrating numerous examples to support your point and find some statistics on the habits of the media users. Also, indicate what message this is sending, who is sending it, and for what purpose or end?

### **Technology Considerations for Your Project:**

What technological mediums and software tools will lend themselves well to project research and for communicating and representing ideas within projects?

### **Generate a Rubric**

In a group of four or five generate a rubric that you can all agree on for this assignment and submit it to your teacher for evaluation. (5 Marks)

**THERE ARE NO PASSENGERS ON SPACESHIP  
EARTH. WE ARE ALL CREW.”**

**—MARSHALL MCLUHAN**

**“NEVER DOUBT THAT A SMALL GROUP OF COMMITTED CITIZENS CAN CHANGE THE WORLD. INDEED, IT IS THE ONLY THING THAT EVER DID.**

**--MARGARET MEAD**

## **Module #2: Week 4/5/6 – Building a Team**

In this module you will tell others about your issue and will ask them for their help. You can find a group of like minded individuals within the classroom, or try to convince others to join your team of active citizens.

The following guidelines and tips will help you build your action team.

- Look for teammates who are also committed to solving this problem.
- Talk to your classmates and friends
- Make a presentation to your class to gather team members
- Put up posters announcing the meeting date for this new group
- Come up with a creative name for your group

According to Kielburger and Kielburger (2002), a good team may include the following:

<b>People who are ...</b>	<b>Can...</b>
Creative	Think up clever fundraisers
Organized	Plan events and keep the group focused
Artistic	Create posters and information displays
Good writers	Help group members write speeches or letters
Logical	Problem-solve
Good communication	Network
Good at math	Take care of finances
Enthusiastic	Motivate the group

(p. 20).

**You will also need to complete your reflections for Module 2 describing your learning process as you tackled on this task.**

- **How did you create your group?**
- **Did you have many interested individuals?**
- **Do you have the ingredients for a good team?**

In this module you will prepare a meeting agenda and call a meeting of your team members. During the meeting, you will discuss about possible courses of action you could take to make a difference to the problem you selected.

The following guidelines and tips will help you create the agenda and the plan of action.

The following website may help with some ideas of how to set up a meeting. Ignore the context of the ideas – since it doesn't have anything to do with active citizenship. [http://www.snd.org/about/affiliates\\_student\\_start.html](http://www.snd.org/about/affiliates_student_start.html)

**ANYONE WHO TRIES TO MAKE A DISTINCTION  
BETWEEN EDUCATION AND ENTERTAINMENT  
DOESN'T KNOW THE FIRST THING ABOUT  
EITHER.**

**--MARSHALL MCLUHAN**

**REPORTER: "MR. GANDHI, WHAT DO YOU  
THINK OF WESTERN CIVILIZATION?"**

**GANDHI: "I THINK IT WOULD BE A VERY GOOD  
IDEA."**

**REPORTER: “MR. GANDHI, WHAT DO YOU THINK OF WESTERN CIVILIZATION?”**

**GANDHI: “I THINK IT WOULD BE A VERY GOOD IDEA.”**

### **Module #3: Week 7/8/9 - Choosing an Issue**

In this module, you and your group will explore an issue that you are passionate about and will research about it. You will find out the causes of the problem you are investigating, their developing consequences and possible solutions.

#### **Decisions to make:**

Which injustice do we want to address with our project? (*Suggestion: Try to stick with one topic and delve into that topic in depth and potentially at various levels.*)

The following guidelines will help you in choosing an issue.

- Pick a topic that you are passionate about.
- What social problem motivates and inspires you?
- Bounce the idea out with friends and family.

#### **Some possible issues or concerns to treat more in depth in your project:**

**Media:** violence (as entertainment), racial stereotypes, sexual stereotypes, materialism/consumerism, unhealthy lifestyle choices

**School Issues:** violence and bullying; ostracism; racism; homophobia;  
health: unhealthy body images, anorexia, bulimia, steroid use;  
materialism/brand names: buying social status/peer pressure for materialism;  
drugs and alcohol abuse; sexual stereotypes

**Community Issues:** violent crimes; property crime; racism; homophobia;  
gender equality; health; drug and alcohol abuse;

**Global Issues:** war; racism; gender equality; climate change; child labour;  
health and disease (epidemics, AIDS); water; pollution; poverty;  
malnutrition; disasters



Try to narrow your focus to a specific, identifiable problem. The chart below takes large issues and breaks them down to give some of specific problems.

Issue	Specific Problem
World hunger	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students at my school are hungry.</li> <li>• Children in North Korea are starving.</li> </ul>
Child labour	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A local store is importing clothes made in sweatshops that use child labour.</li> </ul>
Poverty	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Our city lacks shelters for the hundreds of homeless people.</li> <li>• One in six children in the U.S. live in poverty.</li> </ul>
AIDS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Millions of people in sub-Saharan Africa are dying from AIDS.</li> <li>• People in our community have the illness and need our help.</li> </ul>

Once you have narrowed down on your topic, research for information on the causes, consequences and solutions to the problem of your choice. Please visit the following websites to help you with this task.

▶ Canadian International Development Agency - <http://www.acdi-cida.gc.ca/CIDAWEB/acdicida.nsf/En/JUD-12882713-HSK>

▶ Free the Children – <http://www.freethechildren.com/index.php>

### **Conducting Research**

Focus Questions:

- What sources will you use to conduct your research? How will you determine they are valid?
- What is the main point of your investigation?
- How could you connect human action in the developed world to make positive change in the third world?

## **Philosophy**

Does the research interest contain any possible links to larger, more fundamental philosophical questions?

- ethical/virtuous behaviour
- concepts of justice
- equality
- human rights
- dignity
- existence
- happiness
- conscience
- truth
- Moral behaviour: What virtues are being challenged and how?

## **Translating Into Action**

- What are the realistic goals are you trying to achieve with of our project?
- How will you know when you have achieved your goals?
- Who is our target audience? Who do you need to inform?

HAPPINESS IS NOT SOMETHING THAT IS  
READY MADE. IT COMES FROM YOUR OWN  
ACTIONS.

—DALAI LAMA

**Project Assignment:**

1. Create a presentation using a technological medium (PowerPoint, video, website, etc—be creative) of the essential information that you gather in your research.
2. Include—
  - a. A memorable slogan or talking point (in no more than six or seven words) that summarizes the main point of the project that you want our audience to remember.
  - b. A satirical comic that illustrates your main point
  - c. Include powerful graphics or images that illustrates your point clearly. Remember: a picture is worth a thousand words.

Content is the key to your video's success! Watch the following simply made You Tube video--It has about 3 million hits! Its simple design can be used as a model for ideas in your own video:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dGCJ46vyR9o>

Sid de Haan (2008) offers the following advice for digital storytelling; it applies equally well to any project:

- 1. Economy of Words:** However you chose to render your presentation, use words economically: less is more; impacting images and carefully worded, succinct messages are more powerful.
- 2. Pacing:** Pauses can be very powerful; make room for silence in your presentation.
- 3. Background Music:** subtle, background music, preferably no lyrics
- 4. Transitions:** overdone transitions take away from content; a transition's job is to be invisible (avoid cheesy sound effects during transitions).

**“THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN WHAT WE DO  
AND WHAT WE ARE CAPABLE OF DOING  
WOULD SUFFICE TO SOLVE MOST OF THE  
WORLD’S PROBLEMS”**

**—GANDHI**

#### **Module #4: Week 10/11/12 – Organized Activism**

You’ve carefully organized a group committed to the same important cause; you’ve created your project, and now it’s time to become active citizens. What form will your activism take? Will you attempt to raise awareness in your school, your community, with your local, provincial, or federal government? Will you attempt to raise money to donate to the cause?

#### **Create press release for your action:**

In *Take Action! A Guide to Active Citizenship*, Kielburger & Kielburger (2002) provide the criteria for a press release on page 55. The Parts of a Standard Press Release are also laid on the following website:

<http://web.uvic.ca/~sdoyle/E302/Notes/PressReleaseNotes.html>, which indicates the following:

“Press releases usually have these parts in this order (although you will find slight variations):

1. letterhead or logo of the government organization
2. release time (either "For Immediate Release" or for release on a specific date)
3. date
4. headline that highlights the message (e.g., NEW CHILDREN’S MENTAL HEALTH PLAN FIRST IN CANADA) in uppercase letters, boldface, or both
5. location (e.g., Victoria, Whitehorse)
6. body (5–7 short paragraphs)
7. end: marked by "-30-" centred
8. contact name and information

Kielburger & Kielburger indicate that “If the press release is more than one page, write more at the bottom of each page. On the last page, write -30- at

the bottom to indicate that you are finished. This will make you look professional” (p. 55).

**Project Active Citizen:**

- 1) What is the end goal of your work? Who do you want your message to reach?
- 2) Create a presentation speech for your project stating your goal
- 3) Design posters to advertise your project
- 4) Create a meeting agenda and a plan of action
- 5) Find a venue to share your project with your target audience
- 6) Present your speech and project

Interesting Links:

Poverty:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NtubPRxTMB0>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LCff-oeCPSc>

Racial Stereotypes in Movies:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rR9J6a9NOfQ>

Gender Issues in Media:

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YP31r70\\_QNM&NR=1](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YP31r70_QNM&NR=1)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KbkDuUdk-QQ>

Materialism/Marketing to Children:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WMDPql6rweo>

Global Village

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-4cjfMA6G-Y>

Globalism:

[http://www.teachertube.com/view\\_video.php?viewkey=61cfbac4352b1ea6a947](http://www.teachertube.com/view_video.php?viewkey=61cfbac4352b1ea6a947)

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Wesch, M. (2008). Anti-teaching: Confronting the crisis of significance. *Education Canada*. 48(2), 4-7. Retrieved on November 15, 2008 from [http://www.cca-ace.ca/media/en/AntiTeaching\\_Spring08.pdf](http://www.cca-ace.ca/media/en/AntiTeaching_Spring08.pdf)