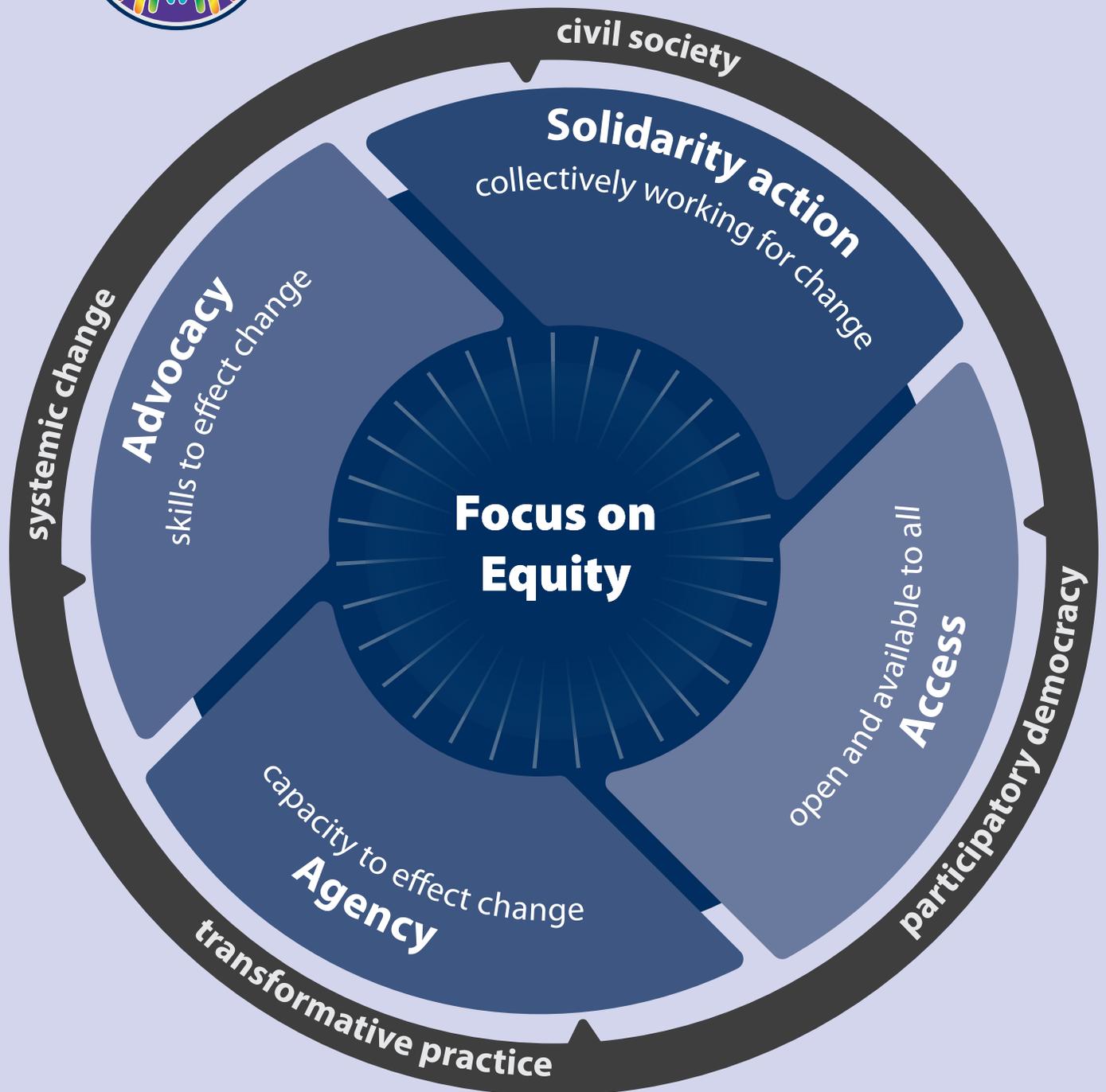




# A Social Justice Lens



## A Teaching Resource Guide

For more information about the Social Justice program at the BCTF, go to [www.bctf.ca/SocialJustice.aspx](http://www.bctf.ca/SocialJustice.aspx)



# Using the BCTF social justice lens to focus our work

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*revised by CASJ, May 2010*

The BCTF's Committee for Action on Social Justice (CASJ) has developed a lens that applies social justice and critical theory to all aspects of our professional lives. This tool provides a framework in our union and in our schools to help guide policy, plan actions, and evaluate resources for social change. Social justice theory focuses on equity for all and critical theory requires action and systemic change. These two concepts form the basis of the BCTF social justice lens.

Central to all is a commitment to equity requiring systemic change. Often bandage-type solutions are inadequately used to solve urgent and emerging problems. Our social justice lens was developed to assist us to both zoom in to sharpen our focus, to broaden our perspective, and to develop and expand the scope of our work within the bigger picture. It provides a common language to communicate about our work and ensures that we are moving beyond short-term, immediate reactions. It is applicable to the classroom and to our work within and beyond our own union.

The lens has four distinct interconnecting filters—access, agency, advocacy, and solidarity action. Each represents an aspect of social justice work, and, while we may focus on one filter at a time, the true potential of these filters lies in engaging with all four simultaneously. Participatory democracy, civil society, transformative practice,

and systemic change found on the rotating outer ring of the lens are necessary to achieve the ultimate goal of equity found at the centre of the lens.

**Access** is the gateway to inclusion and participation. It hinders or enables an individual or group to take part. As teachers, we recognize the inherent socially just nature of the public education system and strongly voice our concerns to ensure that all students have real access to all programs and educational opportunities. Institutions only open to a privileged or select few have a high social injustice quotient. Restricted societies close off opportunities.

**Agency** means that individuals know their rights and are empowered to assert them. They have the capacity and the ability to voice their concerns and act on them to create change for the better. Learning how to think critically about the world is a key strategy to develop their agency. In conjunction, a social justice education is imperative for developing socially responsible, democratic participation in a civil society.

**Advocacy** is a deliberate process of influencing outcomes so that change can occur. It requires a set of skills that allows a person to understand a problem and affect change using varied strategies and tactics. Developing the skills to successfully advocate for oneself or on behalf of others involves awareness (knowing

what's happening), analysis (seeing the different parts, their impact, and the importance to the whole), and action plans (knowing what to do and how to do it). Action plans include a purpose, a message, a way to express the message, and an audience. Advocacy can be done individually or in groups.

**Solidarity action** refers to working with others to act for the collective betterment. It requires us to recognize injustice, know and navigate our social location within power, privilege and oppression to work across differences to find a common ground, and to achieve equity. Solidarity action requires coalition building within a group and networking with other groups. Examples of skills that help to achieve solidarity action can include empathy, co-operation, coalition building, and effective mediation and conflict-resolution skills.

Participatory democracy, transformative practice, systemic change, and civil society, like the ultimate goal of equity, are to be kept in mind when developing plans to advance access, agency, advocacy, and solidarity action. Invoking these concepts, we challenge the control of elites, whether they are ruling classes in society or the power structures in our work places. We also must look inside to examine how our own privilege affects our values and actions. These are some ways we choose to do socially just work and the means by which we will achieve greater equity.

# A social justice lens checklist

by Marianne Neill, CASJ—Peace and Global Education Action Group member

Here is a checklist that you can use to assess whether programs, resources, events, and so forth meet the criteria of the social justice lens. If not, you may want to identify alternatives that do satisfy these criteria. Note that some criteria may not apply to the specific item you are evaluating. A scenario using the social justice lens follows the checklist.

## Access

- values a welcoming and inclusive approach to all people equally
- values openness to the ideas and opinions of others as equal participants
- teaches the value of multiple perspectives
- demonstrates respect for democratic processes and civil society
- values community and co-operation
- responsive to all others equally

## Agency

- develops understanding of one's right to create change
- encourages belief in one's ability to affect one's own reality
- nurtures action and empowerment of everyone equally
- develops ability to think critically about social problems
- develops leadership skills
- values recognition and respect for the agency of others

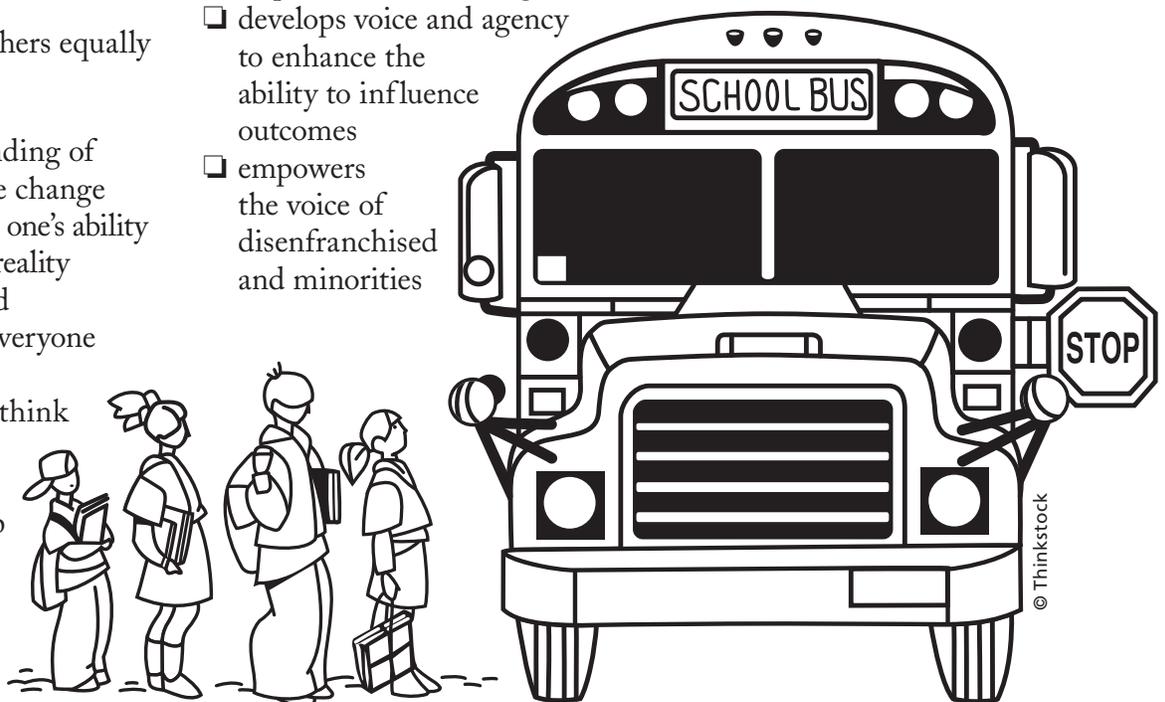
- actively encourages leadership in working towards positive change that benefits everyone
- encourages people to find their own voice
- empowers people
- values participatory democracy
- contributes to the development of ability to participate in the world
- contributes to the development of ability to change the world

## Advocacy

- builds skills needed to affect systemic change using various strategies
- develops an understanding of one's position and privilege in society
- develops awareness of social realities
- develops analytical ability
- develops awareness of how to respond to make change
- develops voice and agency to enhance the ability to influence outcomes
- empowers the voice of disenfranchised and minorities

## Solidarity action

- promotes transformative work for the betterment of others
- nurtures an understanding that an injury to one is an injury to all
- values co-operation and coalition-building
- works across differences to find common ground
- advocates broad interconnections and common goal-setting and actions
- shows recognition of the strength in unity
- shows effectiveness in mediating and resolving conflict to build alliances
- encourages collaboration with disenfranchised or minorities
- nurtures ability to take action with empathy



## Reflecting on the Social Justice Lens

**Instructions:** Imagine that you are a UWEC student planning a Service-Learning opportunity in the community. You are given a list of these examples below as possible Service Learning options as a part of a community engagement class. For each example, consider how each example can be improved. Please note, all examples below are intentionally submitted as imperfect examples of Service-Learning and require some work to make them more appropriate by using the Social Justice Lens considerations.

### Example 1 – Poverty & Hunger

Hold a canned food drive or collect items to make care packages for the homeless. Partner with a local organization that works to combat poverty.

### Example 5 – Diversity & Inclusion

Have a plan and host a “celebrate diversity” day at school to educate each other on different cultures or groups and embrace differences among students. Partner with local organizations or departments that promote diversity and inclusion.

### Example 2 – Literacy

Collect books to donate to low income schools or (for older grades) tutor younger students to read. Partner with a local community organization that supports literacy in youth.

### Example 3 – Animal Welfare

Collect pet food and toys for animals at your local humane society, then take a class trip to deliver the items and visit the animals.

### Example 4 – Environment

Work to improve recycling efforts at UWEC. Educate staff and students about what can and can't be recycled. Make a quick reference poster.

## Our social justice lens as a tool

**THEME/IDEA/QUESTION/CONCERN**

**ACCESS**

**AGENCY**

**SOLIDARITY ACTION**

**ADVOCACY**