Working with Young People

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Working with Youth

As adults (and youth) who work with and support young people, we can use some help and direction in how to do this work well. We are part of a group that, both in fact and in young people's perception, sometimes has discriminated against and abused power over youth. It may also be hard for us to think clearly about young people, because we were once young and perhaps retain our own unresolved conflicts from those earlier years. After all, adults sometimes exercised power abusively over us when we were young, too.

Abuse and violence have intimately touched all young people. If we define abuse as restricting, putting down, controlling, humiliating, or hurting another, it is clear that abuse is a daily experience for most young people. As mentioned previously, we have a word for this system of abuse: adultism.

Obvious examples of adultism are all around us: physical and sexual abuse, extreme forms of "discipline," fights, the corporal "toughening up" process for boys, and the instillation of fear in girls. The still-pervasive teaching of male and female roles—that women are dependent victims and men are abusive monsters—is a disaster for young people. But beyond this, emotional, verbal, financial, sexual, social, and political forms of abuse exist. Perhaps the most pervasive form of this abuse is our educational process itself, carried on in schools, families, religious and cultural institutions, and the public media. This process, despite its best intentions, continually invalidates or trivializes young people's intelligence, denies them access to important information (for example, about birth control), and then faults them for not having it. The process arbitrarily subjects them to either control or dependence and denies them life resources—money, transportation, and the chance to speak for and represent themselves. Perhaps most crucially, it continually passes on adults'

resignation to the fact that what people can do and what the world will allow have limits —in other words, we teach them our own hopelessness.

In young people we find powerful resistance to such teachings and, at the same time, internalization of them. Youth fight the roles and inhabit them, and in that confusion they abuse one another and themselves.

How can we be allies of young people in these circumstances? The first step is to affirm that we are indeed allies. We care, and we are in a great position to support youth. We all have memories of an adult or two who was there for us, and we all have some immediate information about what we can do for youth in our lives. But more basically, our youth have become accustomed to mistreatment by adults, and we completely contradict that principle by becoming an adult who cares and is willing to do something to express that care. We can do a lot more. The following suggestions are meant for those of us who work with youth in educational settings. In general, in our work we are participating in adult-constructed institutions, such as schools, detention centers, residential programs, and recreational and cultural programs, that contribute to the power inequality between adults and youth and that represent that inequality to many young people. Awareness of the power dynamics in these settings as well as the barriers already set in place by the adult abuse of youth outside these institutions is a prerequisite to being an effective ally. This also means being aware of the existence of other power differences (such as racial and class inequities) that may separate adult presenters from youths in the classroom. However, "being aware" does not mean "being paralyzed by" or "being helpless about"! It means considering where our own confusion about these differences lies, recognizing where confusion and misinformation may exist for young people, and being prepared to talk honestly about these issues.

As adults, the best thing we can do with youth, right from the start, is to contradict directly, in our actions, the traditional adult behaviors youth often encounter.

For example, where youth are traditionally denied information, we provide it, answering all questions and not faulting the asker for lacking the facts. No question is trivial. Similarly, young people and children hear in hundreds of ways that they are stupid or not smart enough. In contrast, we start with the assumption that they are smart and are doing everything they can to live creative and nonabusive lives. We assume that the only deterrents to their

success are institutional barriers and the abuses that happen and have happened to them.

Youth often have incorrect information or misinformation about, for example, the ways boys and girls should act, or behave, or about each gender's "natural" or biological qualities. This confusion exists in addition to the misinformation that adults have passed on to them about race, class, and sexual orientation. We do not necessarily blame young people for believing these things, because it makes sense for them to believe stereotypes about African Americans, Jews, or people with disabilities when an entire culture teaches and reinforces these images. We can only explore such seemingly inherent beliefs by allowing them to surface, keeping the discussion open, and letting young people work out the issues with each other.

This work is in large part about making information —and thereby power —accessible. And it is also, in part, about acknowledging feelings stemming from the abuse that people have already experienced. To carry on this work we must make what we say simple and direct, structured around a few basic goals. We must be clear and use real-life language. In particular, we can avoid the jargon we have all learned to use that distances us from what we are trying to convey. Such words as "perpetrator," "instigate," "continuum," and even "violence" can be walls to real experience. Even the words adults use to categorize young people—"youth," "teen," and "adolescent," terms found in the text and title of this book—can serve to pigeonhole young people, holding them at a distance. This work is also about how we as adults can learn from young people. In thinking about the traditional roles of young people, we begin to think about the traditional roles of adults.

Roles emerge that we are supposed to have mastered—knowing how much work is appropriate; making our way in a world alive with violence and unequal power distribution; feeling we have to know everything; and assuming responsibility for the support, maintenance, safety, and physical and mental health, twenty-four hours a day, of young people as well as ourselves. We notice how we have all learned what consequences can follow from making mistakes. We think about the lies we have ingested from counselors, educators, and child-care experts that result in the feelings all adults experience: "I've been trying so hard and this isn't easy, so I must not be good enough." By sharing power with young people in the classroom, we can let down the adult "guard" we've learned and experience a refreshing relief from these oppressive roles. By trusting the expertise of young people, by

finding out what they think and what their lives are like, we lighten this load of adult responsibility. Giving up the role of omniscient teacher with all the answers gives us a chance to learn ourselves.

Adults in cultures across the world often have turned to young people for inspiration. The younger generations' hope that the world can be different, their outright insistence on justice and fair treatment (sometimes mislabeled "rebelliousness"), their insight, and their irreverence are essential to our own freedom. Acknowledging this fact to ourselves is a crucial step forward in our work with young people.

Adults do not routinely show respect to youth or treat them as having equal rights. Here again we can turn the situation around by being personal and direct, speaking informally for ourselves and from our own experiences with honesty, respect, and humor. Beyond adultism's stipulated roles, young people carry misinformation about themselves that is always appropriate for us to correct. A boy who has learned that men are, on a basic level, monsters needs interaction with adults who clearly believe that men have learned violence but are not naturally abusive. This boy will also benefit from being exposed to adults who support the many ways men resist abuse — crying when they are hurt, walking away from fights, seeking nontraditional careers, and fighting for the rights of women and children. A girl who has learned that women survive based upon how they look and how they relate to men needs an adult ally who supports her efforts to move beyond these limited conceptions.

Another part of the disaster of adultism is the teaching of other oppressions to young people, especially those of race, class, and sexual orientation. Here, too, our supportive corrections are crucial (and, of course, not easy to make). A racist or homophobic remark or abusive act that goes unchallenged hurts everyone, including the perpetrator. It lowers the youthful community's hopes that these oppressions can be overcome and eliminated from the world. It passes on, directly, the abuse that keeps youth separated from each other in the first place.

Young people do form a community; they have learned together, and they have collectively experienced control by adults. Calling upon them to resist abuse as a community is a genuine act of alliance. It means supporting them by recognizing their strengths and the ways they have resisted abuse. Further, it means expecting them to be powerful and to handle their problems by reaching out to each other, with our help and confidence backing them up.

Finally, we do this work for ourselves and to keep alive our own hopes for a nonabusive world. We do this work not "for" young people but "with" them, knowing that we are engaged in our collective liberation.

We should not hunt for or expect gratitude from young people. We can just enjoy being with them, teaching and learning together. We can get support for our good work by finding other adults to talk with, especially when hopelessness, exhaustion, or our own unresolved teen issues creep back into our lives. We must support each other, make loads of mistakes, fix them, and continue with our work.

Facilitating Social Justice2

One of the tasks of the educational system is to prepare young people to live and prosper in the world. In a school system, this task is undertaken in large part by daily instruction of groups of students roughly the same age. These groups of students may be composed of people of the same gender, race, first language, religious belief, or economic background; they might be slightly diverse or fully diverse. One thing common to all students, regardless of likenesses or differences, is their participation in this learning community. How this community is structured and facilitated, how students are positioned to relate to each other, what and how they are taught — these are all lessons, whether explicit or hidden, about how they are to live with and act toward each other and others in the world. How people live together, after all, reflects how they define and practice justice and is itself a part of what constitutes justice.

The topic of social justice draws attention to students' relationships to each other as well as to the larger world. What are these relationships? How do people "get along" with each other? Does differential treatment exist? Is inequality of resources, opportunity, or access a concern? What differences are represented in, or made invisible in, the classroom? How do students' experiences of the larger world enter the classroom with them and manifest in who speaks most and who is silent? What does the institutional setup do to lessen or heighten these differences? And what are students really learning from the process about how to be with each other, regardless of whether these lessons are consciously instructed?

However "social justice" is to be defined, the term applies to the classroom itself: Young people learn together the factors that

separate and unite them as well as how their learning community operates. To teach social justice is to facilitate — to enable youth to function as a cooperative community, becoming visible to and learning from each other and themselves, examining their differences and commonalities. It is a process by which students come to consciousness about who they are, about the unjust institutions of power that they live within, and about how people can come together to build community and to establish justice. In other words, teaching social justice goes beyond the individual or group; students are taught to become conscious of the institutions in our society and how these institutions affect our lives. The purpose of the process is emancipatory, enhancing young people's ability to think critically and to engage in the profoundly multicultural challenges of the twenty-first century with a commitment to social justice.

Some kinds of multicultural education propose that the goal of this education is simply to develop awareness of each other's "cultures," as if in accomplishing this task we would then all have equal places in the playing field and would in fact be "equal." Awareness here is not enough; stating that we are "all the same" would not only be false but ingenuous. Even if the same resources within a classroom could be provided equally to all students, students come to a classroom already separated in their abilities to use those resources. What may ultimately be hardest to face in any classroom, however, is the recognition of stratification—the fact that some students are part of groups that are elevated and others are part of groups that are diminished. In addition, when young people in the United States are compared to young people across the globe, young people in the United States are elevated in privilege and resources far above the majority of youth worldwide. There should be not simply equal access but equal success under a suppler and wider definition of what counts as success. The goal of social justice education is to facilitate students to face and work together across their separations and to engage in critical thinking about the history of those separations in order to become effective allies for justice.

How does facilitation work? Obviously it involves the students, the facilitator, and the process itself. We address each of these in turn, closing with how to prepare for implementing the curriculum and building a learning environment in the classroom.

Some Assumptions about Unlearning the "Isms" with Young People

Here is your class: a gathering of young people of differing or uniform gender, racial background, economic background, religious culture, age, sexual orientation, body size, abilities, and first language. Left to themselves, they would probably form smaller groups, the ubiquitous “cliques,” filling the room with jokes, loud or continual conversation, and pockets of silence. The room may hold students with personal friendships, intimate relationships, indifferent contact, and momentary or longer-term dislikes, even enmities. They likely form a society with one another and experience themselves as a community by generation, more or less separate from you, the facilitator. They have each had profound experiences of being treated unequally, and each holds strong opinions about fair play and respect. They may not, or not yet, experience the class itself as a group, much less a “learning community.” Before the first session even begins, what do they already know about differences?

“Isms” in the Lives of Young People

We make the following very broad assumptions about the young people you engage:

Young people come into the world with common physical and emotional needs, curious, eager to learn, expecting care, and not hesitant to proclaim needs and display feelings. They are ready to engage with one another and with adults around them.

Existing disparities in wealth, privilege, and power among peoples identified by race, gender, and many other differences, as well as the conflicts these disparities generate, structure the world young people come into. These are the “isms” —racism, sexism, classism, and others. The “isms” appear most obviously as prejudicial attitudes that may be used to justify disparities, but even the disparities themselves result from injustice.

Young people are made part of the world in a conditioning process: Children are taught, but they are also shaped. They learn not only by programmed instruction but also by how they are treated and by witnessing how others are treated.

Many of the ways in which children are conditioned are hurtful. Hurt comes systematically in a society where disparities exist, so all young people experience mistreatment simply because they are young people in a world defined by adults. They may also further experience mistreatment directly, as members of a less powerful group, or they may experience indirect misinformation

when they are taught that others are different or less than themselves —for instance, that they are superior and therefore more entitled to society's benefits.

The measure of children's resilience is their ability to deal powerfully with hurt. One obvious way to cope is to adapt to the conditioning. Another is to resist mistreatment directly and to make alliances with others who are being mistreated.

A major negative end effect of the day-to-day "lessons" of hurt is the conditioning of young people to accede to and to continue structural inequality, generation by generation. Outright prejudice against less powerful groups is one way people sustain inequality. This prejudice can be exposed and "unlearned" in a classroom in a relatively direct manner. Institutions that cover up inequality, making it appear normal, inevitable, and beyond transformation, also sustain inequality in a more serious and intransigent way.

Major positive end effects of the day-to-day experience of curiosity, hunger to learn, engagement with the world, and resilience to hurt reflect young people's ongoing enthusiastic engagements with the world and each other, as well as their ongoing commitment to fair play.

As a result, in any classroom, young people already have powerful stories to tell about their own curiosity and intelligence, mistreatment of and misinformation about themselves and others, and acts of resistance and alliance.

Given a chance to share stories, to unlearn their socialization, and to practice supporting one another, young people will readily act as allies to one another across the lines that separate them, building equity and justice.

Working on social justice requires students to pay attention to their own and to each other's stories and the institutional frameworks within which these stories are generated. Some stories involve pain or ignorance and may be hard to express and difficult to listen to.

A general criticism that has been applied to "diversity work" of various kinds, especially that of the women's and civil rights movements, is that it focuses participants on their experiences of victimization, rendering them helpless or setting them up to blame their own shortcomings on others. But it is crucial to note that inequality is painful to those victimized by it, and awareness of it

brings discomfort to people who may be unaware of how they benefit from it. Because developing skills to overcome inequality is a central concern of this work, expressing difficult feelings when inequality is unearthed is also part of the work. Facing it and working through it together is not a renewed experience of victimization but of overcoming it. In the end, you will call upon and celebrate the most powerful strengths of your students . . . and yourself.

In the Classroom

How do these assumptions apply to your group? The first thing to notice is that students come to the discussion of "social justice" with misinformation or outright falsehoods, experiences of mistreatment or outright hurt, and some expertise in each of the areas you address. The process of taking on the "isms" invariably, at one point or another, touches upon difficult occurrences from students' lives outside the classroom as well as current separations, visible and not, among youth right in the room. And it also calls upon students' equally powerful experiences of taking stands against unequal treatment and having others take stands with them. Moreover, the classroom —and the educational system it represents —is one of the basic institutions of society. Expect to see the disparities of our larger society mirrored in the differential treatment students witness and receive. The disparities and differential treatment are alive in the ways students treat each other, see each other, and see and treat you, and they are further mirrored by the relationship of your institution to other institutions serving other youth populations.

At the very least, every student in the educational system at one time or another has had their intelligence questioned or invalidated by an adult, even in the seemingly objective process of grading. Doubts about one's own thinking count as some of the most profound barriers young people (and we as former young people) have to deal with and are a basic pillar of adultism, the mistreatment of young people. Often the doubts are instilled or enhanced right in the classroom.

At the same time, the educational system can be and historically has been an arena of emancipation in which students can learn, together and across differences, to recognize inequality and to organize against it —actual democracy in action. To this emancipation, you can add the great strengths and ingenuities students have adopted to survive mistreatment, their curiosity about and interest in each other, and the ideals of fair play and

equity in young people's cultures.

Your Place as Facilitator

To prepare for facilitation first requires taking some time to think through your own experiences of injustice and how they will affect the discussions about to come up in your classroom. Then, turning to your role as an adult, ask yourself: What does an adult, acting as an ally, do to support young people? In the following sections, you are invited to take some time to prepare. Discussions about hurt, separation, conflict, and privilege—and resilience, resistance, and alliance—among young people can become very personal; it is essential for you to examine ahead of time how particular issues might affect you or even get in your way.

As a successful adult survivor of childhood conditioning, you are modeling how adults successfully take on and address the "isms." The assumptions we make about young people (for example, in "The Heart Exercise") apply to you as well. Like them, you came into the world curious, intelligent, and vulnerable. Like them, you have negotiated your way through mistreatment, misinformation or no information, resistance, and alliance. And now you are an adult, with a specific relationship to young people as an adult ally.

A Model of Power

Notice that many or most "scars" mentioned in this exercise come to us systematically, based upon our membership within various groups—the categories of race, gender, sexual orientation, economic status, and the rest under which we live. That is to say, we inhabit a social structure in which people become categorized and separated into groups that are allowed either more or fewer social resources, such as wealth, housing, sustenance, education, civil rights, leisure, or political representation. The allotment of social resources is based upon existing inequalities—differences in power. Some groups are targeted for institutionalized degradation, exploitation, and violence: They are targets of oppression. What happens to people who are targeted?

They experience oppression —exploitation and violence in routine, day-today, institutionalized, and systematic ways. One form of oppression is the continual dissemination of misinformation or outright lies about the targeted people's character, making them and their concerns invisible or discredited in larger society.

One harsh effect of oppression is internalized oppression —

the targeted people come to believe in the lies or misinformation about themselves or other members of their group.

The contradiction to oppression and internalized oppression lies in the fact that people in target groups have always put up resistance —fighting back against both.
The corresponding groups on the other side of each issue are not targeted; they are nontarget groups. What happens to people who are nontargets?

Nontarget people receive the same misinformation or lies about target groups that members of target groups receive about themselves. Often this misinformation comes from people the nontarget child or young person trusts — parents, siblings, friends at school, and teachers —in a situation called conditioning. Sometimes conditioning also includes misinformation or hurtful expectations about the experience of being a nontarget (for example, training a boy to "act like a man" even though that training includes shutting down feelings and enduring physical mistreatment). Experiencing conditioning is not the same as experiencing oppression, but it is also hurtful and scarring.

The understanding that nontarget people receive unearned benefits in society simply by being members of that group is difficult for them to face. For people with wealth and power particularly, these benefits amount to privilege. What can make this condition especially hard to recognize is that benefits may be invisible to or taken for granted by the people who have them, even if they are not invisible to the targeted people who lack them. What can make this recognition even more difficult is that the concept of privileges, perhaps from race or gender, doesn't resonate with a lot of people who lack privilege elsewhere in their lives, such as those who are poor or working-class.

Finally, it is also true that some people in nontarget groups have found ways, however local and limited, to act as allies to people in target groups, assisting them in intervening against oppression and internalized oppression —for example, by using their privilege or benefits on behalf of target groups or to make room for leadership from members of target groups.

Your Heart and Power

Take a few moments to think about groups to which you belong or with whom you are identified, in a loose and general way. (See the "Power Chart" exercise in Section 2 for a list of some target and

nontarget groups.) You will probably notice that you have experiences in both targeted and nontargeted groups. Use the following questions to explore thoughts and feelings that may arise for you in the process of facilitating social justice.

Your Experience as a Person on the Downside — The Target Groups

Pick one or several target groups to which you belong (some examples: women, children, people of color, elders, poor or low-income people), including those that you were part of as a child, are part of now, and will be part of in the future.

What experiences do you have as part of each group of being discriminated against, mistreated, exploited or violated directly, or learning that your group was "less than" the corresponding nontarget group?

Think of any ways this mistreatment was "internalized" — ways you were made to feel less intelligent or less valuable as an individual and ways you were made to separate yourself from other people in your group.

What experiences of overcoming oppression have you had?

What experiences of overcoming internalized oppression have you had?

Think of allies you have had in this area, such as people from nontarget groups who stood in the way of the mistreatment, even if only once. Who are they, and what did they do?

Which of these categories that you belong to is most likely to bring up personal feelings for you while facilitating the curriculum? What kind of support or preparation will you need to handle these feelings?

Your Experience as a Person on the Upside — The Nontarget Groups

Turning to the nontarget groups to which you may belong (adults, white people, men, able-bodied people, heterosexuals), pick one that stands out for you and think about your experience using the following questions:

As a member of this group, what are the earliest experiences you have of being told that people in the opposite, "downside" category were different or less than you?

How might these early experiences still affect you?

What are your earliest experiences of learning about how people in your category are supposed to act?

How might these experiences still affect you? What might they cost you?

As thoroughly as possible, list the benefits that come to you relative to the other group — what benefits you have as a member of each of your particular nontarget groups, even if sometimes these don't feel like privileges.

Think of a time when you felt anger or resentment toward a person or people in a target group. As best as you can, think about what parts of those feelings might have been motivated not by the target of your anger but by misinformation or prejudice.

Think of a time when you felt anger or resentment toward a person (or people) in a target group when that person was also a nontarget group member in relation to you. For example, you are an adult female teacher and find yourself angry at a young male student for his sexist remarks. Do you use your privilege as a member of the nontarget group to suppress, limit, or punish the person from the target group rather than confront him directly about his oppressive actions?

Think of a time when you felt guilt toward a person or people in a target group. How did the guilt affect you? What about this guilt might have been useful, and how might it have hindered you or kept you from acting?

What are your earliest experiences of challenging or refusing the mistreatment of members in a target group?

Which of your nontarget categories is likely to bring up the most personal feelings for you while facilitating? What kind of support or preparation will you need to handle these feelings?

Your Experience of Upside and Downside Positions

Now consider any target/nontarget pairs in which you may find it difficult to decide whether you are on the target or nontarget side

— for example, social class, if you feel you are neither rich nor poor; age, where you may be an adult but are still young (for example, between ages eighteen and twenty-five) or are approaching "elder" status (for example, over age fifty); or disabled, but the disability is hidden or "not that bad."

What pressures have you experienced in your life to connect with the target group or to associate with the nontarget group?

In what ways do you experience mistreatment or "less-than" status from people clearly in the nontarget group?

In what ways do you have privileges or benefits denied to people more clearly in the target group?

Which of these categories are likely to bring up the most personal feelings — or confusion — for you in working with young people? What kind of information, support, or preparation will you need to handle these feelings?

Your Role as an Ally: Your Freedom Is My Freedom

We employ the word ally, for the most part, to represent the person from a nontarget, "upside" group who takes a stand against the mistreatment of the target group. More loosely, it can mean people in target groups who stand up for each other within the group or stand up for members of other target groups. This kind of alliance is called solidarity, and it has a powerful, longstanding, and inspiring history from political movements across the world. An ally challenges the operation of a system of oppression by interrupting mistreatment or internalized mistreatment — not by rescuing, taking care of, or taking over from, but by standing shoulder to shoulder with. As you worked through the questions in the previous exercise, you may have pictured people who have acted as your allies when you were young, and you may have thought of your own experiences of acting as an ally to targeted people. Finally, as an adult, you are already in the position of being an ally to young people.

In the work of building justice, you are inviting young people to acknowledge and to make a commitment to each other across lines that separate them. In particular, you are asking for their commitment to be allies—to see violence or discrimination against target groups that are not their own as injuries to themselves. In seeing someone else's freedom as their own, they can pledge to join together as allies against the mistreatment. What does this

commitment mean for you?

You will encounter barriers to being an ally. Some of the most prominent are already in place from the conditioning you have received:

The oppression itself. Systems of oppression produce segregation, misinformation, and lies about history and current reality so that much of what you have been told about other groups is false and limits your awareness.

Privilege. Your benefits or comforts, many of which are invisible to you, limit your sensitivity to those who are subordinated and lack them.

Your own target experiences. Mistreatment you have received on the downside of other "isms" makes your hurt prominent and hinders your capacity to recognize others' pain.

Internalized oppression from your target experiences. Internalizing the negative messages about your target group and believing that what the nontarget group says about you and those in your group is true compromise your empathy and compassion.

Guilt/resentment. Guilt about your own past actions or those of members of your nontarget group puts you in the position of feeling hopeless or, alternatively, trying to prove your innocence to target group members. Resentment is the feeling that you have already done too much, spent too much time "bending over backward," and should not have to do any more.

Other barriers arise when you take a stand:

Sanctions. Taking a stand against injustice exposes you to backlash and may expose you to even greater enmity from members of your own group —friends, colleagues, and relatives included —who see you as someone who interrupts or embarrasses or perceive you to be a traitor. For example, white people who supported the struggle of African Americans during the civil rights movement were labeled "race traitors," and some suffered other kinds of backlash and violence.

Anger of a target group. Making yourself available as an ally sometimes means committing yourself to hearing the anger about oppression that target groups feel. In fact, it may be a mark of genuine alliance when target-group members trust you to be

able to listen to their anger.

Against these barriers, you have rewards:

Learning your own strength. Taking action as an ally calls upon your strength to contradict limits or negative messages that conditioning may have imposed on you.

Stepping out of internalized oppression. Being an ally compels you to refuse the negative messages you may have received about people (and yourself) in the target groups that you are part of (for example, as an adult white woman acting as an ally to young people or people of color, you are silencing every voice that ever told you, as a woman, "You can't do that" or "Girls can't do that").

Your community. To engage in alliance is to build and sustain community that, in turn, sustains you.

Gaining understanding of reality. To the extent that existing institutions hide or mystify inequality, acting as an ally enables you to recognize and to bring reality into the room: the real conditions of inequality as well as the rich and untold history of alliances, individual and organized, that are part of our daily lives.

Witnessing transformation. Social justice education and action transforms people. Witnessing that transformation in people and their formation of alliances is one of the greatest experiences of inspiration for those who organize.

Hope. With inspiration comes hope that social justice and peace can be sustained. Especially for adults, the renewal of hope against ongoing conditioning is crucial, and hope is certainly important for us to pass on to young people.

So consider your role as an ally to young people or as an ally to people in other targeted groups: What does an ally do?

1. Take action. Before everything else, the mark of an ally is taking action, however small or large, against inequality or mistreatment.

2. Listen/learn. A gift of alliance is finding out, from the target-group experience, how someone whose life is different from yours perceives and experiences the world, providing information that has been withheld from you by the conditioning you received. A first act of alliance is to make space for target groups, with

unconditioned support from you, to define the issues with which they grapple and the structure of the “ism” from their own experience. A companion act of alliance is to research and to discover in detail how the relevant “ism” works by uncovering statistics, facts, and history you can pass on to others.

3. Use your privilege. As an ally, identify the resources you have and use your resources on behalf of the target group, gaining them access and opportunity.

4. Support the target person’s leadership. True alliance means getting out of the way of target-group members, supporting them in taking charge of their lives and making their own decisions about what must be done. To rescue or to take over removes their power once again. Conversely, to step out of the way without offering support, resources, or tactful guidance if requested is to abandon the group.

5. Challenge and mobilize other nontarget members. Target-group members, engaged in their own work, need you to intervene with and to educate other members of your group. Moreover, your intervention must come from the standpoint of support, not differentiating yourself as better than the others of your group. To the extent you reject or push the members of your nontarget group away, you are pushing away part of yourself.

6. Take a chance, and make mistakes. Expect to make mistakes and agree to fix them when you do. Alliance work is built upon trying things, making mistakes, and moving forward.

7. Take care of yourself. Alliance is a lifelong activity. It can’t be sustained unless you are rested, replenished, and hopeful. So in light of that:

8. Get support. Rally friends, family, colleagues, people you can trust, and likeminded members of the groups to which you belong. Talk with them about the challenges you experience, the areas where you get stuck, and your success stories. Discuss strategies for social justice education and how to establish ongoing networks of support. Alliance works best when you are not alone but rather are a member of a community of people dedicated to being allies and dedicated to you.

Please send comments, feedback, resources, and suggestions for distribution to paul@paulkivel.com. Further resources are available at www.paulkivel.com.