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The Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives

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CLIMATE JUSTICE IN EDUCATION

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Environmental
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*Lessons
for Life*

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October 2014



Climate Justice in BC

LESSONS FOR TRANSFORMATION



The Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives and the BC Teachers' Federation have teamed up to create free classroom-ready materials that help students engage with the two great inconvenient truths of our time: climate change and rising inequality. And we don't stop at small-scale personal choices, climate justice looks to how we can re-imagine the systems around us to make a better life for everyone.

Consisting of eight modules designed for students in grades 8 to 12 (adaptable for intermediate), the package explores climate justice within the context of BC's communities, history, economy and ecology.

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ERIKA SHAKER

A “Greenprint” for Teaching Climate Justice

To what extent is the education system — at all levels — addressing the issue of climate justice, and can we make this important, often overwhelming, task a little less onerous?

That’s the focus of this issue of *Our Schools/Our Selves*: a sort of educator’s guide to climate justice and sustainability. How is the topic being discussed? Is it at all — and if not, why not? Do educators have a responsibility to bring these discussions into the classroom (in effect, is it possible to be “neutral” on something as important as climate change?) and into their broader social justice work? Do we need better tools? Better strategies? Better support? Is the “science” of climate change too intimidating for some people to feel comfortable addressing? Should it be relegated to only the sciences, or do the arts and humanities have an important role to play as well?

These are some of the questions authors try to address in this Trump-era issue of *OS/OS*, where suddenly Keystone XL is back on the table, and where climate denial seems to have found new life.

“You can’t be neutral on a moving train,” said Howard Zinn. Educator Ryan Cho agrees: “the call for teachers to be indiscriminately ‘neutral’ on controversial topics is anything but neutral. When it comes down to it, *schools, and the communities* that surround them, are not neutral places.” That said,

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Information and perspectives need to be put in the context of evidence-based credibility. It is misleading and irresponsible for teachers to present different sides of an issue as equally credible when they are not. The climate change debate in the United States is a living example of this.

CCPA researcher Hadrian Mertins-Kirkwood provides us with a crash course for educators in climate action. He explains:

climate change and our response to it will profoundly reshape Canadian society and our economy in the coming decades. Ensuring the transition is constructive and managed, rather than destructive and unpredictable, will require a broad-based cultural commitment to sustainability. We can start by broadening how we think and talk about climate change, including in the education system.

There's no question that the topic of climate change — particularly in the context of science — can be intimidating, and as a result accessible, engaging resources are key to ensuring take-up. An excerpt from David Stocker's latest book, *Maththatmatters2*, provides us with a lesson plan that combines math with social justice in a unit that explores the impact of mercury contamination of water.

Climate change can be a difficult topic to broach for other reasons. Emily Eaton and Simon Enoch discuss their experiences looking at the close, deeply entwined relationship between schools and the energy sector in rural communities in Saskatchewan. This reliance and day-to-day presence has understandably resulted in many rural communities seeing their futures linked to that of the industry. As a result,

there is a desperate need for a concrete vision of an alternative green economy for rural Saskatchewan. Without such a vision, rural communities will continue to side with industry when faced with the choice between grand plans from eastern politicians and urban environmentalists versus the everyday tangible benefits that the oil industry delivers to these communities.

There are ways in which educators have tried to address climate justice outside of the classroom as well. Educator Adam Davidson-Harden talks about pension plan divestment from the fossil fuel industry. Kim Fry, a Toronto-based teacher, recounts her experiences as a partic-

ipant in a silent protest when PM Justin Trudeau spoke with elementary teachers after his decision to approve the Kinder Morgan Pipeline, in spite of making commitments to the contrary. And Chasity Delorme recounts her experiences over numerous journeys to Standing Rock to support the Water Protectors in their struggle against the Dakota Access Pipeline (#NoDAPL), ‘forced to defend themselves against the very same injustices our ancestors have battled for hundreds of years.’

Peyton Vietch looks at a number of ways in the the campaign for tuition-free post-secondary education is linked to policies of sustainability, including but not limited to divestment campaigns: “We refuse to be saddled with a double-sided debt that is both financial and environmental. Working together with faculty, staff, tradespeople and allies in our communities, we can build a post-tuition, post-carbon system of postsecondary education.” Emma Jackson tackles the issue of university endowment fund divestment in the context of increasingly corporatized campuses.

There are, of course, creative ways of incorporating climate justice into education. Barbara Leckie introduces readers to the Carleton Climate Commons (at Carleton University in Ottawa): “in our increasingly specialized world, the solution to climate change is often perceived to come from science or government or some combination of the two. We think the humanities and social sciences have a critical role to play here too.” And Rick Hesch provides us with a proposed soundtrack for the climate justice movement.

“Training the trainers” is about more than simply providing resources. It is often about building supportive networks and creating the conditions to take advantage of key political and social moments to push forward a more progressive climate justice agenda. Kevin Millsip describes for us a new initiative — the Climate Leadership Program, with a goal “to foster a growing network of people who collaborate across sectors to deepen the climate focus in their own work, and to increase the footprint and foundation of people who are both supportive and pushing for greater action on climate change across Alberta.”

The second half of this issue is a collection of articles based on papers delivered at a conference hosted by the Sustainability Education Research Institute (SERI) out of the University of Saskatchewan in conjunction with its flagship program: the Sustainability and

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Education Policy Network (SEPN). The seven articles expand on some of the experiences of students and educators associated with SERI that were explored during the conference. Readers are encouraged to find out more about the exciting research SEPN has been conducting in the area of sustainability in education, much of which is available at sepn.ca.

Thanks so much to all those who contributed their time, support, energy and expertise to this issue, and to their ongoing work in the vital areas of climate justice and education. It is my ongoing privilege to work with the amazing people at SEPN. Nicola Chopin has always been incredibly supportive of a SEPN-OS/OS collaboration, and Rachel Regier was also instrumental in helping bring this issue together. And, as always, Nancy Reid's artistry shines on every page.

ERIKA SHAKER is the Executive Editor of *Our Schools/Our Selves*.