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Implementing Social Activism into an Elementary Classroom

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Abstract

Social Activism is a key aspect to educating and being educated. For this Capstone, the researcher discusses on the outcomes to implementing a social activism curriculum into an elementary classroom. The participants for the Capstone Project included fifth-grade students in a public elementary school located in a small agricultural city. Through a literature review and detailed lesson plan, the researcher has further discussed and described implementations through multiple subjects which serve and acknowledge all students in the classroom. As a result, the researcher has found a need for a social activism curriculum in this problem-solving elementary school. With an arrangement of resources related to social activism and multiple implementations, the researcher aimed to help educate, inspire, and to acknowledge the future generation. The Capstone benefits the researcher by challenging the researcher to inspire other future educators to teach through a variety of learning styles.

Keywords: social activism, elementary school, curriculum

Literature Review

"Evidence suggests that children as young as seven have concerns about the environment, poverty and injustice, that they are aware of global issues and have already developed a strong set of social and ethical values" (Claire and Holden, 2007). Implementing a subject such as social activism into an elementary is crucial to the development of youthful minds. If students are naive to many aspects of society they will be more prone to receiving misinformation and develop a completely misrepresented point of view. But if students are taught how to perceive many of these past social issues and learn to implement them in modern times then our society will have a stronger future.

"Studies of the student and youth activism of the 1960s and beyond have not often addressed the specific experiences of high school and middle school students, focusing primarily on college and university-based movements" (Taft, 2010). Clearly, there is a lack of activism in the younger generations due to the missing curriculum.

What is social activism?

Social Activism has unequivocally played a major role in the formation of modern society. "It provides opportunities for students to identify, describe, evaluate, analyze, and think critically about issues related to civic life" (Vander Veldt & Ponder, 2010). Social Activism gives students a chance to speak up and speak out on social issues. Most of all, it plays a role which allows the people to dictate how society will change not a select elite. In order for progress to continue we must educate future generations on the history of social activism, its importance to each individual, and the future of society itself.

What is the value/effectiveness of teaching social activism?

Introducing social activism in the classroom benefits the elementary students in defining their character and growth in empathy towards one another in their community. Stepping forward, with teaching social activism, it is important to also teach the six elements that act as a solid framework. These elements include: self love and knowledge, respect for others, issues of social injustice, social movements and social change, awareness raising, and social action. This framework is designed to better educate students on social activism.

"By addressing these six elements of social justice education in the elementary classroom, teachers lead students to value themselves, respect the diversity of the world around them, understand how diverse people have been treated differently and often unjustly, recognize that ordinary people have worked to address such injustice, and take action themselves" (Picower, 2012).

The six elements help students understand social issues, and take part of these issues. They help tie up the loose ends by informing students and allowing them to explore. Educating students about social activism creates an all around picture for the student as an individual and as someone who plays apart of a community.

It was the Spanish poet Antonio Machado that said existence is the reason for reality but reality does not exist without one's own identity thus identity is reality. The importance of one's own identity dictates the type of functioning person they will be in society. It is an educator's duty to provide all resources necessary to ensure that development. It has been observed that social activism studies show wholesome causes that students create a bond towards helping define that identity that is crucial to their development.

Teaching social activism opens the eyes of students by informing them of what

is happening in their community. As students begin to mature their view on social issues must become more refined. It is important to introduce curriculum regarding social activism at the elementary grade level as this is when students start to notice social issues. Though there is no particular age or year that student should specifically begin this exploration, teaching them the earlier, the better. "To be effective, a course in social movements must make the stories of activism come alive and be meaningful to a generation that has not yet distinguished itself as active participants in the collective political process" (Cornelius, 1998). Essentially; when a student's comprehension allows them to relate to the subject being taught they can begin understanding the true elements of social activism. Ranging from social justice, awareness, and love. These lessons will hopefully accumulate into a desire within each student to take action within their own mark.

In what ways can teachers implement a social activism curriculum into a 5th grade classroom?

"Children need to be given opportunities to voice their own hopes, fears and concerns and, in so doing, to develop the skills of critical reflection through discussion and decisionmaking at school" (Claire & Holden, 2007). When students walk into a classroom, students walk in with hopes and concerns. For educators to give these students this opportunity, students learn about how to express themselves, and get an opportunity to learn and connect with one another through experiences.

According to the researcher, implementing a social activism curriculum into a fifth grade classroom can be done by incorporating the curriculum into Language Arts, Arts, and Social Studies. These options allow students to grasp the idea through their own experiences which ultimately engages and acknowledges the students the most.

Language Arts

The first option of implementation is incorporating social activism into a Language Arts curriculum. During Language Arts, Teacher A, an elementary teacher, has created a lesson that encourages each and every one of her students to share their thoughts, opinions, and experiences. Through narratives and persuasive writings, students learn what it means to write about an social issue and express their opinion about it. After, students discuss in small groups about a common interest. The students goal of the writing is to share their personal opinion on the topic.

"I emphasize the power of writing as a way to make one's voice heard and, ultimately, as a means to change the world" (Diamond, 2017). Teacher A believes that any and all educators should be held accountable in teaching the youth about the early steps to social activism. Teacher A teaches her students by seeing the value and power in their words and ideas. She also strives to teach her students the small, but beginning pieces of what it means to have a voice.

Visual Arts

Another option of implementation is social activism through an art curriculum. This option is known as an art-based curriculum; where the educator introduces a new idea through the uses of different art forms. "Arts-based research is furthered in the varied forms of art such as narrative, poetry, visual, music, dance, and performance" (Karen, 2011). Teaching social activism during an art curriculum ultimately allows students to be creative. This option helps those who are visual and hands-on learners because not all students learn the same way. It is imperative that students be engaged visually in their studies. A visualization of social causes will expand their thinking of society. Their cognitive development needs this supplement in order to achieve a full understanding of the world they live in.

Teacher B, an elementary teacher, has put together a two week lesson of social activism through an art-based curriculum. Teacher B lesson begins her identifying what a social issue is and how they can be identified. The students then get into groups to brainstorm an overall social issue that needs to be attended. From there, students use books and computers to research the definition, history, and prevention of the issue. Next, each group is given one day out of the week. These days are designed to prevent, help, and inform the school about the social issue. The whole school is then informed about the activities that will be happening throughout the week and everyday, the students of the class explain the reasoning behind the daily activities. To conclude the project, the students created a presentation and shared it with the whole school.

"As a community, there is a need of citizens that want to be informed on all aspects of every issue if there is ever going to be any progress within a sovereign nation then it must be done by a mandate by the masses, embodies how humans perceive their experiences and other intangible concepts, sensitivities, and ideologies" (Karen, 2011). Through the use of art in a social activism curriculum, the students create through their eyes, and share what they see, feel, and experience.

Social Studies

The third option of implementation is combining social activism into a Social Studies curriculum. Teaching social activism during a Social Studies curriculum connects the past with the present by teaching real-life historical events. It puts two-and-two together and makes social activism come alive. "Their lives can teach how to face challenges, where to gather strength away adversity, how to relate to other people, and how to deal with defeat" (Lee, 2002). Learning through another set of eyes who has been through similar obstacles can teach both the students and community that this is hope.

Teacher C has created a framework that can be used in a social activism lesson. This highly detailed lesson guides the educator through the possible opportunity of teaching social activism through social studies. Teacher C starts by choosing a month that he will use to focus on the lesson. He highly recommends to choose a month that is meaningful such as February because it is known for the celebration of African American history. As he creates a lesson, he gathers information on important people and events. He then gives the students the opportunity to choose which person or event they are interested in learning about. The lesson becomes a research project where the students are reading about their interest. Teacher C has guides the students through a variety of questions about their interest and the students write as if they were that person. The goal of the project is to create a timeline and share with the class about the importance of that person or event.

"The analysis and interpretation of popular culture should engage students in confronting specific and substantive historical, social, and/or economic issues. It too challenges students to become politically engaged in real life issues" (Tavin, 2003). Teacher C would agree, students can really capture the history when it is history that they are wanting to learn. When students are given a choices of more than two options they become more engaged into the curriculum because they have the opportunity to decide on something of interest.

Educators are constantly taught and reminded to focus on two important aspects in the classroom: education and environment. Educators strive to create an environment that is relatable to the student. "Teachers empowerment as leaders capable of contributing to a social change and social justice both inside and outside of school provides a basis for belief in the possibility of social justice" (Garber, 2004). By creating a relatable environment, the student is at comfort and eventually comfortable enough to speak freely. The importance of youth being exposed to these

social issues is crucial to the success of the political process. Essentially, by implementing a social activism curriculum into a fifth grade classroom through Language Arts, Art, or Social Studies, the students and community are able to come together an act upon social issues.

Project

In K-5th education, many elementary schools are in need of subjects that educate and empower students to take notice of themselves and their community. Social activism is one of those subjects that aim towards these goals. Social activism teaches students about the society they live in alongside how they play apart in that society. It is a stepping stone to building relationships with one another, self confidence, and overall to create change in the smallest or largest locations. Elementary age students are already interested or have experienced a social issue in their life. The value of teaching social activism brings awareness to these issues and creates an open discussion for students to share experiences, thoughts, or opinions. Implementing a social activism lesson have been previously taught by former educators in three different forms: Language Arts, Visual Arts and Social Studies. Within these three forms, educators are able to reach out to all students through these interactive lesson plans. This capstones focus is going to be teaching a social activism curriculum through a Visual Arts.

Design

The community partner chosen is an elementary school that caters to students of grade levels Kindergarten through fifth. Outside of the elementary classes, the school welcomes the community in their home and school club. This school is one of the twenty-three elementary schools in it's location. In the community of fifty-four thousand people, this school is home to a high populated bilingual and agricultural community. The teaching mission of the school is to provide students an opportunity to reach their greatest potential as a student, citizen, and individual. Teachers of the elementary aim for the student's best interest while challenging them through academics. They strive for success in each and every student throughout different forms of practices. Alongside classroom work, teachers find experiences outside the classroom just as important and informative as in class lessons. These experiences include field trips, gardening, and science camp. They find these an important part in the social aspect of learning, and constantly push for those experiences to give to all students.

The school's vision is to make sure the students know where they are, where they're going and what their next step is going to be. This three piece vision is broken down into micro visions such as safety, encouragement, and higher education. The first piece is about safety and making sure the students are safe and feel safe on campus. The second piece is about encouragement. The school staff encourage students to stay focused and work hard because they want to prepare them for the next step. And the last piece is about the students higher education. The staff are willing to do what they can to help their student get through the struggles so that they the student will be successful.

This elementary school was chosen because they believe in problem solving, respect, and determination, just as social activism. Implementing a social activism lesson into a Visual Arts curriculum will have the students intrigued, challenged, and active. The lesson will challenge students to share their voice, and have them thinking about social issues they notice. This lesson is created around them; therefore it's goal is to help the students recognize who they are as an individual in the community and what they have to say.

Overall, this community partner is in need of a subject such as social activism because it ties into the school's guidelines. Implementing a social activism lesson into this school will put the problem solving, respect, and determination into action. It will also create a new understanding of what it means to be a students and person apart of the community, alongside how to act upon social change in the school and community. This capstone will give the students an opportunity to become apart of the community through expression and individuality.

The idea of implementing a lesson on social activism into the elementary grade levels is a small stepping stone to issues inside and outside of the school. Social activism isn't just about picking out the issues that we see in the world and acting on it. It brings the community together by sharing a common interest. It teaches us about social skills and about positive and negative communication. And most of all, it is informing us about things that are happening in and out of the community. This capstone project can possibly help the community partner and beyond by simply giving students a voice, confidence, and knowledge of what is happening in their community.

The researcher has chosen a fifth grade classroom to challenge and remind them that they are the role models of the school. A big part of the capstone is going to be giving the students that opportunity to express their opinion and make sense of it. One challenge is going to be communication. Though students at this age love to speak their mind, they have a hard time expressing where the emotion comes from. The whole idea of the capstone is to show students that they too have a voice, just like any other person in their community. Another challenge is making sense of why it is an issue and what their next step is going to be. Just like the school's vision, the capstone will help guide the students from where they are to what they will have to do next.

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Ultimately, the goal of implementing this capstone is to put the key aspects of the school's mission and vision into action. Because the school believes in encouraging and challenging their students to become the best that they can be, the capstone will too push them to grow self confidence. It is going to get them out of their comfort zone, and change the way they think and see things from a different perspective. It will also show that the school is looking at the current social issues and working toward preventing future social issues.

Implementation

The researcher intends to provide a 2-3 day social activism curriculum detailed in Appendix A. Appendix A is split into two parts: what the teacher is intended to do and what the students are intended to do. Each of those parts are split into five sets: "Anticipatory Set: Introduction, Formative Assessment, Introduction and Guided Practices, Independent Practice, and Summative Assessment.

As the researcher starts the curriculum, the researcher will go through Appendix A with the help of Appendix B and Appendix C. Appendix B, "Google slides: Social Activism," provides slides of visuals that represent social activism. Appendix C provides a template of the "Where I'm From" poem. Appendix D, "Self Collage," provides photos of the students' progress in the project, and Appendix E, "Social Activism Poster: Student Sample," provides the students final outcome of the project. By the end of the lesson, students will have created a social activism poster that includes:

- 1. "Where I'm From" poem
- 2. Self-Collage

Day 1

On the first day, the focus of the lesson is to get the students involved in a critical class discussion. The researcher will start the lesson by giving a short introduction on what will be discussed and what will be created. The researcher will make sure not give out the answer about the topic by allowing the students to discuss and come up with their own answer to social activism.

Appendix B provides Google slides that include a variety of visuals that represent social activism. During the presentation, the researcher will encourage the students to think-pair-share as the researcher asks questions from the "Anticipatory Set" section in Appendix A. This set of questions will be used throughout the presentation to help direct and make sure the students are understanding the concept. The researcher has chosen to find a visual that most students have seen or are familiar with. While showing the first visual, the researcher will ask the following questions in the "Anticipatory Set" section. As the students have shared their personal thoughts and opinions on the visual, the researcher will make sure to steer the students ideas into the overall concept of the visual. The second slide on the powerpoint will share the background information on the visual to reflect and inform the students of what the visual represents. The following slides in the presentation will be presented similar to the first slide. The researcher will show a visual and follow the steps under "Anticipatory Set". At the end of the presentation, the researcher will ask questions more focused around the topic of the lesson and as a class the researcher will have the students create a definition of social activism. Finally, the researcher will introduce the project, starting with the first step of the project, the "Where I'm From" poem. Students will start to fill-in the blanks to this worksheet for the remaining time of the class.

Day 2

Today will consist of review of social activism and moving onto the next couple of steps explained in Appendix A under "Instruction and Guided Practice". To get the students back into the topic, the researcher will start with a mini discussion using the "Instruction and Guided Practice" section of Appendix A.

Next, the researcher will move down to the next section of Appendix A. In the "Independent Practice" section, the researcher will start the students on their project. This section allows students to take what they have been discussing and create their own visual and discussions on them. The researcher will refer back to Appendix B by posting the final slide from the Google slides which provide the outline of the project. Though the Google slides provide an outline, the research has decided to create an example to share with the students. The researcher will go through the outline through steps while presenting the example to the class.

The researcher will now use step by step instructions to introduce the "Where I'm From" poem found in Appendix C. This poem is to get the students to self-reflect through their senses. The poem askes to fill in the blanks according to what is written in the parenthesis. Meanwhile, the research will roam around the classroom to help students fill in their poem and keep them on track. Students who have finished the "Where I'm From" poem worksheet will start to rewrite their poem on the lined paper. The students who have completed their work will now move onto their self-collage. Shown in Appendix D, the self collage can be created by hand drawn art, with the use of magazine, or with the combination of the two. Once the self collage is completed, the students will glue their project together. This idea of creating a visual and adding a poem supports students by allowing them to express their emotions through art.

Depending on the time frame at this point, the students may or may not need another day to finish their drawings, and glue both poem and drawing one construction paper.

Evaluation

While presenting Appendix B, the students took an interest in the questions and discussion topics. The questions that the researcher has created were simple and open ending to ensure that the students understood what the researcher was asking for. Same with the photos on the slides, the researcher tried to bring images into the classroom that students have seen before or were familiar with. The two images the students acknowledged the most were the photos of Obama and Frida Kahlo.

In Appendix C, the "Where I'm From" poem, students seem to have a rough time from ignoring the literal meaning of the layout of the poem. Students wanted to fill-out the exact place of where they are from instead of what was being asked in the parenthesis.

In Appendix D, the self-collage, students also had a tough time starting. They weren't sure of what to draw or how to incorporate photos from the magazines. The researcher noticed students took my example into consideration and created something similar, but with their own ideas. The researcher also noticed that the more they included in their drawings, the more ideas they had.

Overall, the researcher noticed the lesson went well. Some things that helped the lesson run smoothly was the amount of student participation and the outcomes. After assessing the project outcomes from Appendix E, the student's project, the researcher noticed that the majority of the class followed the directions and finished their projects. Other than timing and a few hiccups on the worksheet, the curriculum ran smoothly and was informative to the students.

Discussion

As an ending result to the capstone, the students in this fifth grade classroom seemed to really enjoy this new subject and art project the capstone has offered. This capstone gave students a voice, understanding, and informative lesson on social activism. Students were most successful in participation and staying on track during the curriculum. It seemed students grasped the idea quickly using the visual provided. They also enjoyed interpreting what they thought the visual represented. It was as if they turned that part of the curriculum into a game, which got more and more students involved in the class discussion. Though the outcomes of the capstone were accomplished, the researcher did encounter a few challenges and limitations along the way. One issue faced was during the "Independent Practice" section in Appendix A of the lesson. During this time, the students were instructed to fill in the blanks on the "Where I'm From" poem. The students had a tough and confusing time understanding that the poem was not asking for a literal answer, but what was written in the parenthesis'. Another problem was the timing of the project. The curriculum was rushed and didn't allow students to take their time on their artwork. The instructions on the project required more time than was given allowing only about three-fourths of the students to successfully fulfill those requirements.

Recommendations

Based on the evidence and full involvement on the capstone, to fully succeed in this capstone, the following recommendations must be attended to. The first recommendation is to incorporate a stronger "Guided Practice" section in Appendix A into the curriculum. During "Guided Practice," the researcher could fill in the blanks with the students. By doing so, the researcher could read out what is written in the parenthesis' that way the students could grab a better grasp on their answer. Also, at this time, the students are able to ask questions that could possibly help other in the class. If this section of the curriculum is stronger, then the students will be more successful in the "Independent Practice" section. The second recommendation is to add more time to the project. The researcher was able to teach two of the three days that were

required. If the researcher properly timed out each section of the curriculum, the students would have fully completed their posters and would not have felt rushed.

Action Plan

To continue to build this capstone, the researcher will further explore options and outcomes on the variety of implementations of social activism. The researcher is most interesting in working with teachers on creating curriculums that capture the range of all learning styles. The researcher hopes to implement more of these curriculums to show the importance that all educators are flexible in their teaching.

Conclusion

Implementing a social activism curriculum into a fifth grade class is one of many steps leading towards the community partner's vision. With an interest in education and teaching, the researcher has found that this capstone works in more than one area of the classroom. The subject of the curriculum plays an important role in and out of the classroom. After thorough readings and involvement, the outcome of the capstone have taken a part of empowering students and educators to share their voice and experiences.

Overall, this study was designed to touch across the different learning styles, and teaching techniques in an elementary level classroom. This implementation does more than focus on the studies aspect of the class, it helps assist and brings the classroom to a full lesson itself.

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Appendix A

SOCIAL ACTIVISM CURRICULUM

Overview	Subject: Visual Arts Topic/ Unit of Study: Social Activism Grade Level: 5 Duration: 2-3 Days
Standards	5.VA:Cr1.1 Combine ideas to generate an innovative idea for art-making.
	5.VA:Cr2.3 Identify, describe, and visually document places and/or objects of personal significance.
	5.VA:Re7.1 Compare one's own interpretation of a work of art with the interpretation of others.
	5VA:Cn11 Identify how art is used to inform or change beliefs, values, or behaviors of an individual or society.
Central Focus	The central focus for this lesson is for students to use visual arts as a form of social activism.
Lesson Learning Objective	Students will create a poster that includes a "Where I'm From" poem and self-collage as an example of Social Activism.
Materials/ Resources	Google Slides "Where I'm from" poem worksheet Construction paper Lined paper Magazines Scissors Glue sticks

Appendix A

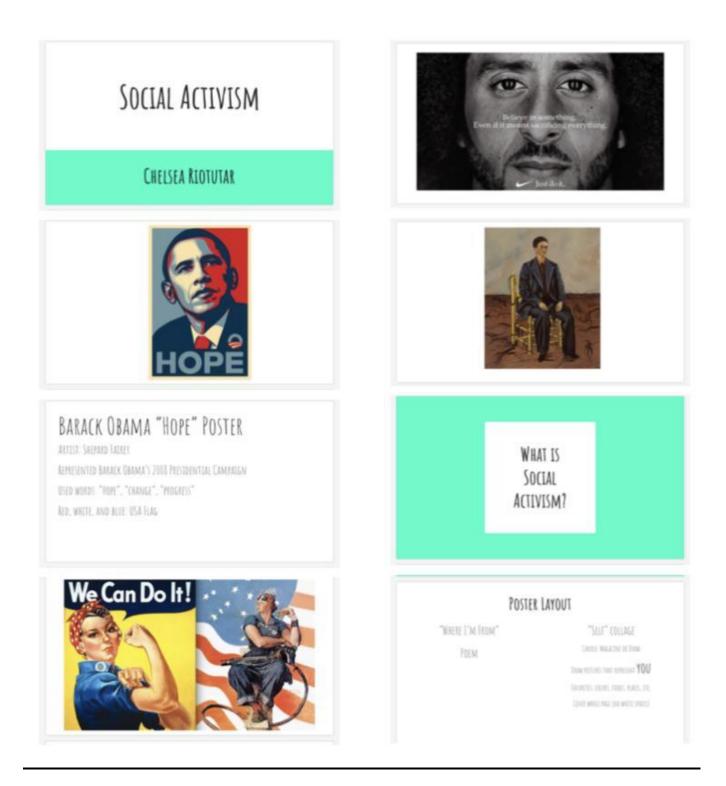
SOCIAL ACTIVISM CURRICULUM

	Teacher does:	Students do:
Anticipatory set: Introduction <i>Time Allotted:</i>	 Google slides include: "Self portrait" of historical people Ask students: What do you notice? What do you think is happening? Why do you think this Visual Art was created? 	 Think-Pair-Share: 1. Observe 2. Create an interpretation of visual art 3. Talk with group about their thoughts and ideas 4. Raise hand to answer
Formative Assessment: -Teacher monitors and guides students through the learning process	 Listen Answer any questions Make sure students are on task 	 Participation answering questions asking questions paying attention
Instruction/ Guided Practice: Class Activity <i>Time Allotted:</i>	 Explanation: What do you think Social Activism? Create Social Activism definition with the class Relationship between Visual Arts and Social Activism What do all of these photos have in common? Share Example 	 Participation: answering questions asking questions

Independent Practice: Individual Activity <i>Time Allotted:</i>	 Post "Poster Outline" Directions: a. "Where I'm From" poem b. When students complete poem: 	Directions: a. Fill-in "Where I'm From" poem b. Rewrite poem onto lined paper c. Collect supplies d. Create
Summative Assessment: -Teacher tests students at the end of the project to see what the student learned	 "Where I'm From" Poem Self-Collage 	 Participation Project includes: Collage "Where I'm From" poem

Appendix B

GOOGLE SLIDES: SOCIAL ACTIVISM



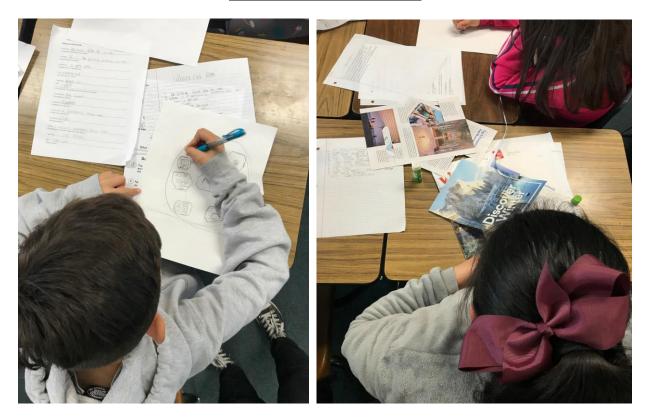
Appendix C

<u>"WHERE I'M FROM" POEM TEMPLATE</u>

Where I'm From Poem	Name:
I am from	
(A specific item from your home)	
I wonder	
(Something of curiosity)	
I am from	
(A plant, tree or natural item)	
I see	
(Favorite place to visit)	
I am from	
(Two favorite/ traditional foods from your family)	
I understand	
(Subject at school)	
I am from	
(A phrase or song lyric)	
I want to become	
(What you want to be)	
I am from	
(Favorite animal)	
I hope	
(Something you actually hope for in the future)	
I am from,	and
(Three favorite colors)	

Appendix D

SELF COLLAGE POSTER



Appendix E

SELF COLLAGE POSTER: HAND DRAWINGS

Where I'm From Fam from my Toblet. T wonder if you can kill or burn a ant with a magnify glass, and the sun. I am from glass. I am from Pizza and hauburgers. I am from Pizza and hauburgers. I am from the Rap Eminen. I am from the Rap Eminen. I am from the Rap Eminen. I work to become a Constructor. I work to finish school I own from Green, Orang. Red. -----Fron an stature of a Vose AT to Ingua bre The presen I want 12 in oul. Prophe will respect 11-0 pink, Gellowy Blac. 0

Appendix E

IMPLEMENTING SOCIAL ACTIVISM

SELF COLLAGE POSTER: MAGAZINE

