Design Elements that Contribute to Long Term Transformation Through Service

by

M. Anne Ostwald

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF EDUCATION IN EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP

VANCOUVER ISLAND UNIVERSITY

Nanaimo, British Columbia

March, 2020

Scott Priestman, Supervisor
Abstract

This thesis explores the design elements in Social Justice classes that lead to long-term transformation through service to the community. Various questions concerning design elements, transformation, and service were posed to five participants in a focus group setting from various graduating years. The participants shared their thoughts, perceptions, and insights into personal transformation from their Social Justice class and, if their development continued past graduation, the design elements that assisted with personal growth, and any missing aspects they wish would have been included. According to the participants, there were three key design elements that helped with individual transformation: class atmosphere, learning about consultation, and planning and execution of a self-determined service project. Participants’ primary dissatisfaction was around class size and composition, group size, and lack of discussion and education around privilege. All expressed a desire to have more exposure to the outside community and a greater variety of teaching methodologies to enhance student learning. Most of the design elements which assisted with personal, long-term transformation of the participants are transferrable to any British Columbia classroom where the focus is on developing The Educated Citizen and core competencies.

Keywords: Action Competence, Consultation, Cross-pollination, Sanctuary, Transformation, The Educated Citizen
Acknowledgements

My parents, Bill and Michelle Witham, have long been my staunchest supporters and I would not be who I am without their continued loving support and belief in me. I send a heartfelt thanks to my husband, Robb Ostwald, who steadfastly encouraged and supported me throughout this process. My sons, students, supervisor, and colleagues gave me the courage and incentive to persevere. I could not have done this without any of them.
# Table of Contents

Abstract .......................................................................................................................... ii
Acknowledgements ........................................................................................................ iii
List of Figures ................................................................................................................ vi
Chapter One: Introduction ............................................................................................. 1
  Educated Citizen ......................................................................................................... 1
  Purpose of the Research .............................................................................................. 6
  Research Question ....................................................................................................... 7
  Justification of the Research ....................................................................................... 7
  Definition of Key Terms ............................................................................................. 8
  Brief Overview of the Study ....................................................................................... 9
Chapter Two: Literature Review .................................................................................... 11
  Legal Documents Pertaining to Youth Voice .............................................................. 11
  Transformative Education .......................................................................................... 16
  From Sanctuary to Action ......................................................................................... 23
  Transformation of Youth Through Developing Action Competence Skills ............. 30
  In Essence .................................................................................................................. 34
Chapter Three: Methodologies ...................................................................................... 35
  Research Design ......................................................................................................... 35
  Data Analysis Techniques .......................................................................................... 38
  Validity ....................................................................................................................... 39
Chapter Four: Focus Group Voices ............................................................................. 41
  Part I: Definitions ...................................................................................................... 41
Part II: Transformational Aspects Investigated .................................................43
Looking Ahead ........................................................................................................50
Chapter Five: Researcher Reflections ..................................................................51
Part I: Definitions ....................................................................................................52
Part II: Transformational Aspects Investigated .....................................................54
Limitations, Recommendations, and Conclusions ...............................................63
References ................................................................................................................65
Appendices ..............................................................................................................72
List of Figures

Figure 1 Classroom Environment Fosters Transformation Through Service to the Community p. 4

Figure 2 Essential Ingredients for a Successful Community Project p. 25

Figure 3 Action Competence p. 26

Figure 4 Questions Asked of Focus Group Participants p. 41
Chapter 1: Introduction

Educated Citizen

‘The Educated Citizen’ (Appendix A) is a section contained within BC’s new curriculum that iterates the kind of citizens schools and educators are charged with helping develop. Elements of this Educated Citizen include being principled and respectful, being a critical thinker, being able to communicate effectively, and being able to demonstrate creativity and flexibility. This document gives overarching guidelines for how teachers may develop their curricula and lessons in order to assist their charges in becoming responsible, empathetic, and thoughtful world citizens. How each teacher does this is highly personalized based both on the grades and subjects we teach and who we are as individuals. The Educated Citizen is both a foundational document and a beacon of light to guide our way. It has become a cornerstone of my practice, and the design elements contained in my classes reflect these educational policies that lead to long-term, personal and, ultimately, societal transformation.

I am the sole Social Justice teacher at Mountain View Secondary School (MVSS), which is the only high school in an economically depressed city in B.C. As such, I work to develop well-educated citizens within a classroom sanctuary, teach inquiry skills in order for students to delve into the strands, and facilitate the choosing and development of projects to better their community. I also teach the framework within which we operate by examining sections from a variety of important documents which may include the United Nations Declarations of Human Rights and the Rights of the Child, the Canadian Constitution, BC Human Rights Code and the BC curriculum.

Creating a sanctuary is the foundation of my practice, for within the creation of a safe learning environment, one which is a “welcoming and embracing space that enables the active,
inclusive, genuine and interactive participation of learners and educators in the programs” (UNESDOC, p. 32), people can have the freedom to develop their higher selves, learn about attributes they may not have known existed, and develop dreams and the confidence and skills to pursue them. Next comes the building of action competence, as “justice work and sanctuary go hand in hand and may be mutually reinforcing” (Akiva et al., 2017, p. 29). When you also take into account supportive connections with both adults and peers, positive transformation is a likely outcome.

Current student-chosen projects happen within the context of many years of ensuring that all my classes have service-oriented projects as their cornerstone. Students spend a considerable amount of time reflecting on their personal strengths and passions, bringing their understanding of our community into the classroom for group consultation with the purpose of developing self-directed projects they may wish to execute. Once they have generated their own ideas, I bring to their attention various community suggestions that had been proposed to me from a variety of people and associations. The students then choose which projects they are most interested in implementing, be it their own idea or a suggestion from the greater community. As they have complete ownership of their projects, the youth have to learn how to develop their initial thoughts and dreams, turning them into reality: they learn how to discover gaps, consult, make proposals, and solve a myriad of issues during the execution of their Social Justice projects. If a group of students wishes to pursue a suggested idea, the proposing group or organization is consistently consulted with, but now youth are the ones taking the lead with their initiatives and insights.

One of the most successful additions to our project days has been the introduction of ‘cross-pollination’. The only rule we observe during this time is the absolute necessity to treat
people better than we want to be treated. Within this highly structured framework, each group is
given the floor to share what they have accomplished during the class and what difficulties they
have encountered. All students are expected to pay close attention, listen carefully, and give
feedback, providing suggestions and ideas to the presenting group. Everyone gets the same
amount of time to share. Cross-pollination appears to be a cornerstone of project execution due
to the support and input of classmates. The researcher wonders if this activity boosts confidence,
solves problems, and creates a community where students thrive, develop skills, and learn the
intricacies of successful consultation where new ideas take root and blossom. One task of this
educator is to guide students in their process of learning action competence, of transforming
themselves and the society around them. The researcher wonders if on-going guided and
structured active reflection is a key component for personal transformation.

Schusler, Krasny, Peters, & Decker (2009) noted that adult goals for the youth in their
programs involved “developing confidence and self-esteem, a work ethic, or critical thinking and
problem-solving skills” (p. 116). These are transformative goals for personal development. I do
carry a bias towards the work of individual transformation and action competence as my father
lovingly raised us to solve our own problems and issues, carefully observing and only giving
suggestions when we really got stuck. I have incorporated that into my daily teaching practice,
and have consistently observed many students change, develop, mature, and transform into even
more lovely human beings with confidence and enhanced skill sets to meet their world with a
deep-rooted knowledge that they can, indeed, tackle problems with understanding and aplomb.
Note. This illustrates the bounded system of the Social Justice class where the curriculum is mandated by the BC Ministry of Education. Students work individually or in groups on self-directed projects to transform their community. Students and teacher consult within each group and with each other, cross-pollinating ideas in order to assist everyone to achieve their goals.

My classes have a long, positive history in this community of doing service projects, which I began in 2009. We have worked with many organizations such as the Ministry of Education, local School Board, City of Port Alberni’s Parks, Recreation and Heritage Department, the Port Alberni Fire Department, Chamber of Commerce, various service clubs, the newspaper, radio and television, as well as many local businesses. The individuals we have worked closely with include our Member of the Legislative Assembly, Member of Parliament, Chief Inspector of the RCMP, the City’s Chief Administrative Officer, and numerous community leaders and business owners. Through these varied connections we have established a solid
One example of a project occurred in the 2014-15 school year, when I was approached by six different groups and organizations who proposed various project ideas for my high school class to undertake. I introduced these propositions to my students three weeks into the semester. The initial weeks of a new class are used to establish the foundation of our Social Justice class wherein we create a positive learning environment and do research to put potential projects into a local, national, or international perspective. After deliberating over the six community options, my class decided to change the monthly tsunami test sounds as they agreed that the current one was unappealing. Once our Fire Chief was informed that his proposal was accepted, students started working hard: emails were written, phone calls made, potential agency involvement was researched, community stakeholders were invited in for consultation, costing for implementation was done, generating public and media interest and, of course, intense and heated debate about which sound to choose. Once this was narrowed down to six possibilities, the fire department brought their portable tsunami pole and speaker to the local stadium, where we listened to our choices in a real-world setting. A presentation to City Council followed with our top three choices and the smile-producing sound of a digeridoo was chosen (CBC, 2015). We were contacted by various media, both local and national. Every student was incredibly proud of creating a legacy for their town!

**Purpose of the Research**

The purpose of this research was to explore what the elements are in my Social Justice 12 classroom that support long-term individual transformation so the educator can continue to build on, and develop, these elements for future students. I am exploring the idea that with a supportive learning environment and student-chosen and directed action projects, youth can,
indeed, transform themselves and, therefore, the society around them. Students need three things in a classroom: 1) a supportive environment, which in part consists of a “sense of belonging, self-concept, and relationship with their teachers” (Katz & Sokal, 2016, p. 40) which provides a place to thrive; 2) a burgeoning understanding that they can undergo personal transformation, where “success is a young person ‘learning that she’s incredibly powerful in a new way’, contributing to positive environmental and community change in her own individual and unique way” (Schusler et al., 2009, p. 120) and; 3) learn how to implement self-directed action plans to impact the greater community (Akiva et al., 2017, p. 26). However, students traditionally have had very little opportunity to develop these attributes in a high school setting, as classrooms are not usually set up for youth autonomy. Barrett (2006) indicated that taking action is often not part of a normal schooling process and is frequently met with resistance when it is suggested (p. 503). This researcher believes this lack of opportunity needs to be overcome so educators can learn to see youth as agents of change with powerful voices and limitless potential.

BC’s new curriculum has a section called ‘The Educated Citizen’. This research will contribute to other educators’ increased understanding of what these elements are, so they can incorporate them into their classrooms to help develop the 21st century citizens our provincial government, and world, require. If learnings from this research can be used as an example of what can be accomplished, it is hoped that other educators, with the essential support of their administration, will gain the confidence to take the necessary steps to implement this transformative process into their own classrooms.

**Research Question**
The pivotal questions addressed in this thesis were: Can a Social Justice classroom environment foster transformation of self through service to the community? If so, what are the design elements in that classroom that lead to personal long-term transformation? Unravelling the answers to these questions was carried out in a focus group format.

Justification of the Research

In a Transformative Pedagogy (IGI Global, 1988 - 2019), educators equip learners with the capacity to affect change in their community so they themselves can transform, can understand their own strengths, and become positive leaders. Learning connects the mind, heart, and actions, thereby transforming knowledge, attitudes, and skills. The process of learning, of becoming curious and understanding that you can affect change, is more important than the memorization of knowledge (UNESCO-IICBA, 2017). This is an inquiry-based learning approach where students are at the centre of their learning process, where they direct a lot of their own paths to knowledge. Educators need to reframe their thinking to view youth as having strengths and assets, as opposed to deficits (Checkoway, 2011) as youth will often meet our expectations. Perkins & Zimmerman (1995) wrote “Empowerment-oriented interventions enhance wellness while they also aim to ameliorate problems, provide opportunities for participants to develop knowledge and skills, and engage professionals as collaborators instead of authoritative experts” (p. 570).

As the Baha’i International Community (BIC) states, “The concept of a two-fold moral purpose – to develop one’s inherent potentialities and to contribute to the transformation of society – provides an important axis of the educational process.” (BIC, pg. 1) In order to empower youth, to provide them with a sanctuary to aid in personal transformation, we need to
believe in our students, encourage them, celebrate, and uplift them. We need to spend time helping our charges discover their talents and gifts, assisting in their development, so each person may consciously take positive action to transform self and society. Teachers need to learn how to educate youth and help them understand they are vital to the integration process going on the world today, as it is through conscious action that transformation of self and society occurs.

This research will hopefully demonstrate, in a microcosm, that educators can empower their students to become the best version of themselves, to transform themselves and society around them. If we all put various design elements into our classrooms that facilitate safety, love, respect, and the ability for our students to have personal growth and self-determination, our schools, communities, province, and world will benefit and transform for the better. We all benefit – each and every person we come in contact with. It starts with the classroom teacher as leader.

**Definition of Key Terms**

*Sanctuary,* according to Akiva et al. (2017), is where

A protected space may be considered psychologically safe, and this may be an important component of sanctuary. However, an affirming space does not simply lack physical or psychological danger. Rather, youth were often quick to note that aspects of their identity are celebrated (not just tolerated) in these spaces. (p. 27)

*Action Competence* in school is where students learn *about* action (how to envisage the future and concrete ways to achieve it), learn *through* action (experience the planning and taking of action), and learn *from* action (reflect on their actions and the actions of others to determine
their efficacy). The construct started with Jensen and Schnack (1997) as it relates to environmental education.

*Transformation* embodies the development of character, personal empowerment, engagement, and a sense of purpose (Jones, 2017); it is also about increasing self-confidence, critical thinking, and problem-solving abilities (Schusler et al., 2009). It is ultimately about personal, long-lasting, and positive development.

*Inclusivity*, as defined by Cook (2004) is “…a philosophy of acceptance and about providing a framework within which all children (regardless of the provenance of their difficulty at school) can be valued equally, treated with respect and provided with equal opportunities” (p. 5).

Based on a Baha‘i concept, *consultation*, according to Richards (2018) is where one tries to be kind, open, purposeful, and action oriented. “…consultation is of vital importance, but spiritual conference and not the mere voicing of personal views is intended. … consultation must have for its object the investigation of truth. He who expresses an opinion should not voice it as correct and right but set it forth as a contribution to the consensus of opinion, for the light of reality becomes apparent when two opinions coincide” (‘Abdu’l-Baha, 1982, p. 72).

**Brief Overview of the Research**

Chapter 2 presents a review of the literature surrounding personal transformation through learning action competence skills. Chapter 3 describes how this researcher used a qualitative methodology, collecting information using a Focus Group format. Chapter 4 explores new understandings gleaned from the completion of the study group consultation, while Chapter 5 will discuss key results with possible long-term implications.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter examines how the inclusion of carefully chosen design elements can foster long term personal transformation in students through self-determined service to the greater community. According to Jensen and Schnack (2006), youth need to learn to be active citizens in their society. This chapter examines legal documents pertaining to youth voices, as well as scholarly literature on the themes of transformative education, the movement from sanctuary to action, and the transformation of youth through developing action competence skills. According to Bamber and Hankin (2011), “Transformative learning is concerned with fostering social change as much as personal transformation” (p. 201).

Legal Documents Pertaining to Youth Voice

There are various ways educators can create strong, inclusive foundations for the betterment of our students, and for the advancement of our culture into one that is more inclusive, accepting, and celebratory of our youth. Various documents and professional development can point out gaps in our understanding, guide us in eliminating them, and help us become better educators and leaders in our quest to create higher quality environments for all our learners (Steck & Perry, 2018).

By examining various legal documents, an understanding of the legalities of creating a culture of inclusivity in our schools can be achieved; with this knowledge, educators can create a sanctuary in their classrooms.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)

The UDHR was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in December 1948. When the Canadian government became a signatory, it effectively signed a covenant that would
motivate all freely elected governments to also agree to be held to these high standards. There are specific articles that directly apply to students in our classrooms today, and they can guide our practice accordingly. For example, Article 1 states “All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights” while Article 19 is clear that “Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to see, receive and impart information and ideas through any media”. Furthermore, Article 21’s purpose is to uphold the right to take part in government.

Of particular interest to this research is Article 26, Section 2 which states that Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups, and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace.

Education is not merely reading, writing and arithmetic if we are directed to focus holistically on each student, to help them develop characteristics that will lead to their overall development, transformation (Jones, 2017) and, therefore, potentially to the betterment of the society around them. This clarion call to educators will involve a shift in pedagogy from being curriculum-centred to student-centred.

Lastly, Article 29 states that “Everyone has duties to the community in which alone the free and full development of his personality is possible”. While these duties are not specifically stated, educators do have a responsibility to provide a space for this to happen. Teachers hold a unique position in any given community as they are hired to educate the children and youth. The classroom environment can be a foundational cornerstone of human potential and development,
as that is one place where youth can learn to transform both themselves and their communities through education.

*The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)*

This convention was signed in September 1990 and Canada ratified it in 1991. Among many assertions that address the well-being of all the world’s children, it also states that every child has the right to an education. There are three articles (see Appendix B) of particular interest to this researcher. Article 12 addresses the right children have to form their own views and state their own opinions. Article 13 iterates that children have the right to investigate, learn, and to share what they have discovered in a respectful manner that does not harm others. Article 29 states:

> Your education should help you develop your personality, talents, and mental and physical abilities. It should encourage you to develop respect in your own culture, for other cultures and for the environment. It should help prepare you to live in and contribute to a free society. (UNCRC, Save the Children)

*Constitution Act, 1982*

The signing of the UDHR had a notable effect on Canadian law as it moved from being an ideal, non-enforceable document to becoming the basis of the Constitution Act in 1982, which contains the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, the supreme governing law of Canada. Fundamental Freedoms, Section 2 (b), is the most pertinent section for educators, as it states that everyone has “freedom of thought, belief, opinion and expression” (Constitution Act, para. 3). The Supreme Court of Canada uses this cornerstone document to make its decisions regarding appeals from all lower courts, with rulings as widespread as upholding LGBTQ rights in schools to ensuring minority language educational rights; these ultimately affect individual classrooms.
This researcher notes Section 2 (b) is of particular import to the classroom as it could be a key foundational design element that contributes to individual long-term transformation.

In examining these three documents, a number of striking similarities can be seen, especially that all people, regardless of age, must adhere to the rule of law, that all people are equal, that education is a right, and that thoughtful, non-discriminatory opinions can be stated and discussed within an overarching climate of respecting self and others. The documents are built on a strong foundation of respect and are excellent sources of inspiration towards creating an inclusive classroom that potentially aids in propelling forth transformative education.

**B.C.’s New Curriculum**

The key statements contained in the human rights legislation connects to the Province of British Columbia’s educational system. In the Introduction to British Columbia’s redesigned curriculum there is a section entitled “The Educated Citizen” (Appendix A) which outlines how our “education system assists in the development of human potential and improves the well-being of each individual person in British Columbia society” (Province of British Columbia, 2018b, p. 1). This document outlines what educators need to be focused on when considering the development of our youth. Communication, thinking, and personal and social competencies are also elucidated in the new 2018 curriculum. These are sets of “intellectual, personal, and social and emotional proficiencies that all students need to develop in order to engage in deep learning and life-long learning” (Province of British Columbia, 2018a). Communication encompasses sharing information, experiences, and ideas in a variety of formats. Thinking is both creative and critical, whereas intellect is developed to transform thinking and understanding; new ideas and concepts are generated and brought to reality, where options are analyzed, conclusions drawn and informed judgements made. Personal and social competencies centre around understanding
one’s identity and place in the world, where students learn to care about themselves and others, where they are able to find and achieve a personal purpose.

These competencies have three distinct areas: 1) Positive Personal & Cultural Identity which involves an understanding of who one is, which contributes to a positive and healthy sense of self; 2) Personal Awareness and Responsibility encompasses setting goals, monitoring individual progress, and evincing self-respect and respect of others, and; 3) Social Responsibility recognizes the interdependence of people with each other and the environment, developing peaceful problem-solving skills, growing empathy and appreciation for other perspectives and ideas, and how to develop healthy relationships (BC Curriculum, Core Competencies Section). This researcher proposes that educators need to consider educating the whole child while simultaneously affording students dignity and the right to be heard.

**School District 70 (SD70) Diversity & Inclusion Policy**

With references to the School Act of BC, Human Rights Code of BC, and the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, SD70 has a policy that captures protected grounds covered by the Human Rights Code of BC and is intended to ensure that all employees, regardless of their personal beliefs, reflect on how their actions and interactions create a respectful, accepting, safe and supportive environment for all members of our school communities. (SD70)

Regardless of our personal beliefs, the law upholds the rights of each person in our country. If we can consciously do the same, knowing we have the full weight of the law behind us, we can, perhaps, take steps toward creating a ‘sanctuary’ (Akiva, Carey, Cross, Delale-O’Connor & Brown, 2017, p. 27).
Transformative Education

The question preceding ‘how?’ is ‘why?’ Why bother creating an environment in our classrooms that includes all students? Why is creating a sanctuary potentially the basis of educational success and safety? There are many facets to creating a sanctuary. According to Mafora (2016), the cornerstone of education needs to be upholding human rights and respecting human dignity. As Johnson (2015) asks, how can we, as educators, look for and find the beauty in each one of our students; how can we let that guide our professional practice? Baha’u’llah (1978) says, “Regard man as a mine rich in gems of inestimable value. Education can, alone, cause it to reveal its treasures, and enable mankind to benefit therefrom” (p. 261). If educators can view their job not as filling up empty vessels, but rather as assisting students to find and polish the gems they already have within them, we are well on our way to creating spaces where our students may thrive. Akiva et al. states that “Similar to the positive youth development perspective, empowerment theory focuses on strengths over deficiencies” (p. 1847). If we are busy nurturing the strengths in our students, helping them discover their own positive attributes, we will not be focused as much on their deficiencies. This will assist both ourselves and our students in having a heliotropic orientation.

Role of the Teacher in Creating a Positive, Transformative Space

According to Lewthwaite & McMillan (2010),

At the heart of these changes is teachers accepting that they are the central players in fostering change, first in themselves by shifting power relationships and working collaboratively towards an environment where practices reflect the culture in which students are situated and second, by changing their teaching practices to assist students in their learning (p. 171).
The teacher is the role model for creating a sanctuary, as they need to be the one to demonstrate how to do this, and it is important that their words match their deeds. The creation of a sanctuary starts immediately, when educators structure learning, work on the atmosphere of the classroom, and establish ground rules with the students’ full participation. According to Hirschy & Braxton (2004) incivilities, or “actions that hinder a “harmonious and cooperative learning atmosphere in the classroom” (p. 68) must be addressed immediately so everyone knows where the boundaries are and can feel safe within them. “Failure to confront uncivil acts damages the learning environment (Hirschy & Braxton, 2004, p. 71)” and that is the antithesis of creating a safe classroom environment. Educators can create a positive and transformative space in order to encourage students to take steps to realize their dreams, to “safeguard the right of all to develop their capacities and contributions toward the advancement of civilization” (Toosi, 2013, p. 1).

It is our responsibility as educators to acknowledge, and act upon the fact, that we bear a measure of responsibility (Toosi, 2013) for all in our care; that we have a distinct role in providing an encouraging environment to assist each student along the way to reaching their full potential. As Toosi (2013) stated:

When anyone is deterred from opportunities to develop his/her full intellectual and spiritual potential, this is a tragedy not just for that person but for all humanity. In either case, everyone loses out from the ideas and inventions, insights and understandings that those individuals could have contributed, had they had equal access and opportunities (p. 346).

To avoid this tragedy, educators need to be consciously inclusive of all students in order to create a sanctuary for everyone in their class. Educators influence the school environment for better or
TRANSFORMATION THROUGH SERVICE

worse – we have potential to create a supportive or hostile environment for each of our students. If we promote unity in diversity we will be well on our way to creating a sanctuary for most of our students.

Creating a Culture of Inclusivity to Allow for Transformation

For the World Conference on Special Needs Education: Access and Quality, Salamanca, Spain, 1994, a conference statement was presented. In part, it stated that “A child-centred pedagogy is beneficial to all students and, as a consequence, to society as a whole. Child-centred schools are, moreover, the training ground for a people-oriented society that respects both the differences and the dignity of all human beings” (Framework for Action, 1994, p. 496). Having a child-centred and inclusive classroom is an important component in the creation of a positive school culture. Inclusivity, as defined by Cook (2004), is “…a philosophy of acceptance and about providing a framework within which all children (regardless of the provenance of their difficulty at school) can be valued equally, treated with respect and provided with equal opportunities” (p. 5).

Regardless of which cultural, religious, ethnic, sexual orientation, gender identity, physical or mental health issues, intelligence, socio-economic status, or clique a student identifies with, they each have their own uniqueness which requires special considerations. How we work with each person requires finesse and an understanding and celebration of their diverse strengths. School leaders need to work on educating students not only about ‘multicultural’ issues, but ‘intercultural’ ones as well. This means “the idea of exchange, communication and negotiation between different interacting cultural groups” (Read, Aldridge, Ala’i, Fraser & Fozdar, 2015, para. 6). This is not an ‘us’ versus ‘them’ mentality, rather an acknowledgement that we are all human, all different, and all have varying cultures and approaches to the world
that we can learn from and become better people because of this exchange. As Hussey, Fleck & Warner’s 2010 research indicated, “curriculum infused with diversity content can reduce prejudice” (p. 91). Learning decreases ignorance and prejudice while increasing understanding and compassion; if educators model and teach inclusivity, we can perhaps assist our students to accept and celebrate differences.

The Foundation of Sanctuary is Love

People need to feel loved, to belong, in order to have a sense of self-worth, wrote DeMarco and Tilson (1998); if a student feels welcome they can then thrive and contribute to the society around them. It has been proposed that the foundation of a sanctuary is love, as Hobbes (1651) recognized that “love needs are a necessary condition to fulfilling safety needs, as the formation of interpersonal relationships precedes and enables society’s formation” as cited in Oved, 2017 (p. 538). If we examine Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs it must be put into context of the time he proposed it, which was during WWII. If we look at Oved’s (2017) restructuring of the pyramid, his suggestion echoes Hobbes: love comes before safety. To validate that claim, we just need to look at examples of people who endanger their own lives in order to protect their loved ones.

Personal Safety Helps Students Thrive Emotionally and Academically

Each student, regardless of academic ability or personal characteristics, stands in need of specialized interventions to thrive emotionally and academically in a school setting. As George (2005) stated, “Providing differentiated classroom instruction (i.e., the adaptation of classroom strategies to students' different learning interests and needs so that all students experience challenge, success, and satisfaction) that responds effectively to this diversity is absolutely essential (p. 189). The respectful practices we put in place may help students reach their potential
in a safe and non-threatening environment. Educators could call to mind that our “bottom line mission is to get students to achieve, to graduate and be good, healthy citizens. It’s not going to happen if you have an environment of separation, of hate, of disdain, that’s unsafe and not secure” (Steck & Perry, 2018, p. 233).

Safe learning environments create the conditions necessary to support and encourage learners to be themselves and to share, express their thoughts, feelings, beliefs, and connect with one another. Welcoming the learner in an environment where they can feel safe and nurtured is very important for the development of each individual and the society as a whole” (UNESDOC, p. 32).

Being connected to school can be an issue for many students, especially given the increasing diversity of today’s society. It can be proposed, therefore, that part of a teacher’s responsibility is to create safe spaces wherein students may thrive socially, emotionally and academically; where schools are safe, wherein acceptance and respect for diversity infuses the greater community.

**Caring Educators Transform Themselves and Their Students**

If teachers evince a genuine sense of caring and allow their hearts to guide them (Bazylak, 2002), it can make all the difference in the world to their students. It will also make all the difference to our practice if we willingly adjust and transform *how* we teach so we can reach our students and assist them in on the path to attaining their full potential. Part of this requirement, according to Mombourquette and Head (2014), is recognizing that there are, indeed, no ‘bad’ students; respect goes both ways and if we evince compassion, honesty and caring, we will make a big difference in our class and school culture. They go on to say that this would effectively eliminate practices that includes harsh language and sarcasm as there is no place for
any of these characteristics in our classrooms. “At the heart of these changes is teachers accepting that they are the central players in fostering change” (Lewthwaite & McMillan, 2010, p. 171) within their classroom. Students do place “importance on teachers who care for them not only as people, but also for their performance as learners” (Lewthwaite & McMillan, 2010, p. 140): if our intent is good, even if we make mistakes the caring will be palpable and student will respond accordingly. Educators need to consistently show we care through our actions; we must act fearlessly and with determination, making heart-to-heart connections and establishing trust and love in order for each person to discover their own talents (Johnson, 2015).

**Respect Goes Both Ways in Creating a Classroom Sanctuary**

Lawrence-Lightfoot (2012, p. 449 – 450) identified six dimensions of respect: empowerment, healing, dialogue, curiosity, self-respect, and attention. Educators can model each of them in their classroom in order to create a respectful atmosphere. Self-respect is a foundation – when we manifest a sense of confidence and self-worth, we give permission for our students to do the same. Empowerment is about offering knowledge so individuals can make informed decisions; healing is concerned with nourishing a sense of worthiness and well-being. Dialogue must be authentic where listening and responding are done carefully and supportively without judgement. Curiosity demonstrates we are genuinely interested in the other person, and we offer our full attention to the person / people we are interacting with.

A mutually respectful classroom culture and learning environment can be co-created between the students and teacher, where the atmosphere established is one where all students contribute to the overall classroom culture. Each person needs to be supported and encouraged to develop themselves, to be the best they can be, where they learn to share honestly, and express their thoughts, feelings, and beliefs, where they can make real connections with one another
TRANSFORMATION THROUGH SERVICE

(UNESCO-IICBA, 2017). Students are guided to learn what respectful relationships look like, and teamwork and collaboration become the norm as students are learning about both their own, and classmates’, strengths and virtues (UNESCO-IICBA, 2017; Cornell Teaching Resources).

**Belonging is a Key Component to Performing Well**

As Demarco and Tilson (1998) pointed out, students who are made to feel welcome are more likely to perform well and have a strong sense of belonging. They will also take their learnings into the greater community to help create “a people-oriented society that respects both the differences and the dignity of all human beings” (Framework for Action, 1994). This can be a key, long-term goal of education: the transformation of self and society through conscious action. As Einfeld & Collins (2008) pointed out, “A primary goal of higher education is to create responsible, moral, and productive citizens” (p. 108).

**Equity is Necessary to Provide Acceptance of Differences**

According to Castelli, Ragazzi, & Crescentini (2012), educational equity acknowledges the existence of unequal treatment in order to “make equal” the students in our classrooms (p. 2245) as they all have different strengths. Equity provides equal opportunities, treatment and results for all. It is not about treating everyone the same – it is about providing what is required for each student to succeed, which may be different for everyone. George (2005) states that providing differentiated classroom instruction (i.e., the adaptation of classroom strategies to students' different learning interests and needs so that all students experience challenge, success, and satisfaction) that responds effectively to this diversity is absolutely essential. Differentiated instruction properly implies the development of classrooms in which students sometimes exercise varied learning options, work at different paces, and are assessed with a variety of indicators appropriate to their interests.
and needs (Tomlinson, 2003). Differentiated instruction, then, can involve the alteration of content, instruction, and assessment to meet the needs of unique learners. (p. 189)

Educators need to make adjustments for their students’ individual needs as it is about each student’s progress that is an important part in their personal transformation and growth. This is a demonstrable aspect of celebrating unity in diversity, of creating a “sanctuary” (Akiva et al., 2017) as students will know they are not only accepted, but their differences are celebrated.

**From Sanctuary to Action**

While it is good to create a sanctuary, an affirming place where youth are not only safe, but supported and celebrated (Akiva et al., 2017, p. 27), unless we do something with it, this researcher deems it is not adequately fulfilling the requirements for personal growth and transformation as she hypothesizes that without action, thoughts and feeling good simply do not transform an individual or society as a whole. We must recognize that the period of youth is an important developmental time for “physical, cognitive, socio-emotional, and educational development” (Hall & Rodgers, 2018, p. 1) as they are at a critical juncture between childhood and adulthood and need to feel both respected and valued. Youth voices must be heard as they are often passionate to help their community, to contribute and make a difference. Akiva et al. (2017) found that social justice work and sanctuary go hand in hand and may be mutually reinforcing. The protected and affirming space of youth organizing programs is likely a key factor in youth engagement and the effectiveness of their social justice campaigns. Further, sanctuary may be a important factor that supports youth to develop critical consciousness. Similarly, a youth program’s social justice work may stimulate the
conditions of sanctuary (p. 29).

Sanctuary and action are inexorably intertwined; if educators can provide these in their classrooms, perhaps we can all aid in contributing to the positive development of our youth and, by extension, society.

**Action Competence**

Bamber & Hankin (2011) have pointed out that “harnessing students’ energies and enthusiasms, their sense of adventure about the world and their wish to make a difference within it, has become a part of many universities’ plans and vision” (p. 192). This researcher is proposing that educators bring that mindset to the high school level as that will set a firmer foundation of service to the greater community that will already be entrenched before they leave home. Our new BC curriculum alludes to aspects of this when they iterate what an Educated Citizen (Appendix A) is: “well educated people who have the ability to think clearly and critically, and to adapt to change” and for people “who accept the tolerant and multifaceted nature of Canadian society and who are motivated to participate actively in our democratic institutions”. Youth are naturally transitioning to greater autonomy as they become young adults and are preparing to move out of the family home. If educators give them a solid set of skills which engenders the capacity of positively impacting the society around them, they will already have experience with action competence and its accompanying empowerment. According to Jensen and Schnack (2006), “there is a need for a form of teaching from which pupils acquire the courage, commitment and desire to get involved in … social interests….” (p. 472) in order to become actively involved citizens in our democracy. Youth do need positive purpose in their lives, and it is important that they choose what project they want to do, what action they wish to carry out to better their community. According to Checkoway (2011), youth need to “identify
their own issues [as this] can awaken their spirit and move them into action” (p. 342).

**Self-determination of Projects**

Jensen and Schnack (2006) came up with a chart similar to this one:

**Figure 2**

*Essential Ingredients for a Successful Community Project*

An initial step in choosing a project is to ensure students research to discover issues and/or opportunities that are currently in the community, in order to discover something that captures their interest. It is imperative that youth organize around issues of their choice (Akiva, Carey, Delale-O’Connor & Brown, 2017; Checkoway, 2011) as this is what will spur them into action and keep their interest through the difficulties that are an inevitable part of seeing a project through to fruition. It is through their commitment to creating change that educators can help students develop action competence skills.
**Developing Action Competence**

Once a project has been decided upon, an educator can then focus the youths’ attention on developing “action competence’ [which] brings the capacity to envision alternatives, clarify the values and interests that underlie different visions, and make choices between visions” (Bamber & Hankin, 2011, p. 191). Part of this capacity includes being able to “act, now and in the future, and to be responsible for one’s actions” (Jensen & Schnack, 2006, p. 483). It involves carefully looking at an issue from different perspectives and, according to Schusler et al. (2009), critically thinking about it, finding gaps in knowledge and involving yourselves in responsible actions and counter-actions in order to help create the world the youth wish to live in.

**Figure 3**

*Action Competence*

Action Competence embodies cyclical learning, as one leads to the other in seamless cycles throughout the execution of student-chosen projects for the community.

This is a cyclical method, as one is constantly learning about, through, and from action.

Once a student gains knowledge and insight into an issue, commits to taking concrete and
intentional action, thereby developing “motivation, commitment, drive [and] assertiveness” (Jensen & Schnack, 2006, p. 482), and also takes sufficient time to actively reflect on what they have been learning and doing, they will continue to develop positive and changing visions about a better society, thereby refining and building on what has been done previously. The students will be connecting “emotions, values, knowledge and action” (Jensen & Schnack, 2006, p. 482) in an ever-increasing spiral of understanding and walking a path of service.

**Learning in Action**

Within the action competence framework is another ‘spiral’ to consider. The Universal House of Justice (2013) wrote:

> Perhaps the most important of these is learning in action; the friends participate in an ongoing process of action, reflection, study, and consultation in order to address obstacles and share successes, re-examine and revise strategies and methods, and systematize and improve efforts over time (p. 2).

This is a conceptual framework that is utilized effectively throughout the world for many things, social action among them. It is readily incorporated into developing action competence in the classroom.

**Student Autonomy and Purpose are Worth the Effort**

Teaching the skills contained within action competence involves a lot of work, time, and energy, and is a decidedly different form of teaching. Barret’s (2006) studies found that “taking action is often not part of typical schooling processes, and frequently meets with resistance” (p. 503). Teaching the skills of action competence is messy and decidedly not linear, and most importantly, takes a modicum of control away from the teacher and gives it to the students. In Frank’s (2006) research, she found that
the literature recommended that adults relinquish some of their control and give youth responsibility and voice in the planning processes. Researchers found that when adult coordinators allowed youth greater autonomy and purpose, they were highly motivated to do good work” (p. 367).

Students must have autonomy as they are the ones who are fully responsible for their project and for their process of learning the skills required to make a difference. The teacher is the facilitator, the one who asks the guiding questions so the youth can figure out their answers and own them. This may be viewed as a radical shift in our traditional educational paradigm and can be met with resistance as it is difficult to put the learning on a rubric and assign a letter grade to the various skills contained within action competence and its accompanying transformation, development, and growth. Linsky et al (2018) noted that “classrooms can be places of hope, where students and teachers gain glimpses of the kind of society we could live in and where students learn the academic and critical skills needed to make it a reality” (p. x). Implementing a social action-oriented program in a meaningful way can be challenging in any school, owing to the many competing needs and limited resources available (Linsky et al., 2018). This researcher believes it is worth it for the transformative effect it has on our students, our classrooms, and, ultimately, the greater community.

Having acknowledged the difficulties inherent in this model, it is also important to acknowledge the importance of taking steps to incorporate action into our classrooms as this “can promote social, psychological, and intellectual development [and] appear to do so more effectively than classroom-based programs” (Kraft, 1996, p.151). According to Jensen and Schnack (2006), students understand “that collective actions are both important and necessary if one really wants to change things” (p. 481). Action in and for the community is a key component
for learning: we do need to encourage youth to critically think, evaluate and actively engage themselves to develop new perspectives in their ongoing education and development. An integral part of developing action competence is collaborating with others in order to explore personal identities, develop new ideas, and challenge and broaden perspectives (UNESCO, p. 31). We must do this together. In fact, we really cannot transform ourselves or society without a strong sense of unity and community as this researcher thinks that knowledge is co-created socially.

**Five Cs to Positive Youth Development**

Lerner et al. (2005) proposed that positive youth development is characterized by Five Cs: competence, confidence, connection, character and caring. According to Luke, Stein, Kessler & Dierking (2017), these characteristics “contribute to individual well-being and thriving as young people transition into adulthood” (p. 419). Competence is concerned with concrete skills such as intrapersonal ones like critical thinking, a strong work ethic and various problem-solving skills, and interpersonal ones which are demonstrated within actions student undertake for their community (Schusler et al., 2009; Karakos, Voight, Geller, Nixon, & Nation 2016). Confidence is an internal factor where increasing self-esteem, self-worth, personal empowerment and self-efficacy are becoming more apparent (Schusler et al., 2009; Kraft, 1996; Karakos et al., 2016; Jones, 2017; Linsky et al., 2018). Connection is concerned with creating positive bonds and belonging within the greater community, feeling important within the classroom and demonstrating a higher tolerance towards diversity and differences that are within all peoples and organizations (Akiva, Cortina & Smith, 2014; Karakos et al., 2016; Linsky et al., 2018). Character evinces the respecting of necessary rules and helping youth overcome disrespect from some community adults (Karakos et al., 2016). Caring simply means stepping out from one’s own self and thinking about others with sympathy and empathy (Luke, Stein, Kessler &
Dierking, 2007). When these Cs are apparent, positive contributions to the greater community can have the greatest efficacy, and youth have the ability to thrive (Luke, Stein, Kessler & Dierking, 2007) and transform.

**Transformation of Youth Through Developing Action Competence Skills**

While there are a number of elements that assist our students in their personal transformation, according to Jensen and Schnack (2006), youth also need to learn to be active citizens in their society. Providing ample opportunity to develop action competence skills through positive, independent project choices and their development from inception through to completion leads to empowerment and transformation. It would be beneficial if educators are tasked with encouraging their students in the development of skills necessary to facilitate societal change. As DeGennaro (2018) stated, “In order for youth to stimulate transformation and move toward liberation, we affirm that the youth own the learning environment, thus they define its evolution” (p. 227). The framework in which all participants work together is one of the action competence methodology which incorporates action, reflection, study, and consultation (Universal House of Justice, p.2).

**Action Competence Through Project Choice and Development**

As opportunities for action competence are provided to youth, coupled with having someone believe in, and encourage them, they become increasingly aware of the world. Youth learn about the local community and how to create change in it; they take conscious action, gain experience and confidence, and develop numerous practical skills (Frank 2006; Checkoway 2011). These are as wide ranging as leadership, planning, group facilitation and communication skills, goal and identity development, and creation of community connections (Akiva, Cortina, &
Smith, 2014). Youth develop socially, psychologically, and intellectually, according to Kraft (1996), especially if their project is important to them and they get to exercise their autonomy and learn to actively reflect on their experiences. When learning goes beyond the mind to connect with hearts and action, it is transformative of skills, knowledge, and attitudes (UNESCO, p. 27).

As stated earlier, an integral component to transformation of self is that the project chosen must be one that the youth themselves wish to accomplish:

He found that during the first year when the program was teacher centered and teacher directed, gains in student moral and psychosocial development were nonsignificant, but in the second year, when it became student centered and reflective in nature, significant gains on personality measures and emotional and task competence were found (Corbett 1977 as found in Kraft, 1996).

The importance of youth-initiated and driven service cannot be overstated if one wishes to see transformation in our students. While it is difficult to let go of control, positive outcomes far outweigh difficulties in changing pedagogy. Kraft (1996) found “experiential learning acquired through service appears to compensate for some pedagogical weaknesses of classroom instruction” (p. 150). As educators develop new skills and make mistakes, we are not doing any harm to our students’ education as we are modelling important life skills such as creative problem-solving and perseverance through difficulties.

**Positive Community Service Leads to Transformation and Empowerment**

A fundamental need for youth is to have purpose (Jones, 2017). Jones goes on to note that “engaging in meaningful community service has been recognized as a way to inspire a new generation of youth to identify as powerful social actors and civic leaders” (Jones, 2017, p. 50).
By providing opportunities for our students to learn vital action competence skills, we are inspiring them to know how powerful their voice and actions can be, and how much they can directly affect the community around them.

This can all be summed up in the words of one youth:

*Our actions dictate how we feel about ourselves. When we’re doing something for good, to help others despite whether it directly affects us, I think that it gives us a sense of pride, a sense of purpose. It motivates us in every aspect of our life. When you finish a project you get a whole different feel about yourself and you totally know that what you did helped people and it’s a very good feeling, knowing that you’ve helped out the community.* (Jones, 2017, p. 58)

Building out from a solid sanctuary, positive community service learned through all the components of action competence transform not only the youth, but the greater community. As Checkoway (2011) stated “Individuals participate, organizations develop, and communities change. Empowerment is when people participate at all three levels” (p. 343). Transformation embodies empowerment. While it is difficult to document the actual effects of youth participation on society, it needs to be recognized that “changes in personal, social, and organizational development are themselves societal outcomes, and individual and institutional participation are always instrumental to changes” (Morrissey, 2000, as quoted in Checkoway, p. 341).

Success is the synergy arising in the interactions between youth and community development: the environmental/community change and personal growth occurring when youth contribute to community development, which in turn contributes to youth
development, which in turn contributes further to community development in an ongoing cycle of individual and community transformation (Schusler et al., 2009, p. 120).

**Educators Encourage Dreams and Change**

As our society moves forward in serried lines, there is a need to embrace change. Educators have an opportunity to help create the world we want to live in, and what better way to do this than to encourage students to realize their dreams, to “safeguard the right of all to develop their capacities and contributions toward the advancement of civilization” (Toosi, 2013, p. 341).

As Toosi (2013) stated:

Importantly, the principle of collective trusteeship (‘the idea that each one of us enters the world as a trust of the whole and, in turn, bears a measure of responsibility for the welfare of all’) also has implications for education and the acquisition of knowledge, which enable the fulfillment of the potential for justice at an individual level. When anyone is deterred from opportunities to develop her/his full intellectual and spiritual potential, this is a tragedy not just for that person but for all humanity. (p. 346)

Educators are entrusted with these beautiful children and youth, and we have to accept that we are, as Lewthwaite and McMillan (2010) state, central players in fostering change. According to Marina Diez (2010) the educational community needs to:

move towards schools in which all students are valued, where the goal is to recognize the right of all men and women to an education and to fully fledged participation in that education, schools where the processes and practices holding up the walls of exclusion are brought to a halt. (p. 174)
If we do this within the confines of a school, we will inevitably create welcoming communities, an inclusive society and begin a positive shift in social perspective (“Framework for Action,” 1994). Transformation is not only possible, but inevitable.

**In Essence**

Legal documents were expounded upon before the researcher examined various classroom design elements that contribute to long term transformation through service. The design elements this researcher deemed to be of the utmost importance included the role of the teacher in creating a culture of inclusivity, love, and safety; personal and student transformation through caring, respect, belonging, and equity, and; students conscientiously practicing the various components of action competence through self-determined community projects. Transformation of self and society are inexorably intertwined throughout this process.
Chapter 3: Methodology

The purpose of this research has been to explore what design elements of the researcher’s Social Justice 12 classes have been that contributed to the long-term transformation of five participants. A focus group was chosen to investigate how a classroom environment can foster transformation of individuals through service to the greater community.

Research Design

Observations and comments given by many previous students between 2009 – 2019 led the researcher to question what the design elements were in the various classes that led to individual, long-term transformation. The aim of this research was to explore how creating a positive and supportive classroom learning environment fosters personal transformation through service to the community. The researcher hypothesized that these intertwined processes, including the building of action competency skills, would best be understood through a focus group format where the participants explored what the design elements of previous Social Justice 12 classes were that contributed to their long-term transformation.

Research Site

The focus group was held in a private, rented facility in a small city on Vancouver Island, BC. This was done intentionally in order to have a neutral setting where memories of overall schooling would less likely be triggered. This facility also assisted in privacy for the participants as their vehicles would not be seen in front of their previous high school, as might have happened if the participants had met with the researcher in their former classroom.
Research Participants

The study population for the focus group was comprised of five students who participated in a Social Justice 12 class and had graduated from Mountain View Secondary School. Their graduation years ranged from 2016 – 2019; they were in the workforce, attending a post-secondary institution, or had just graduated from MVSS before heading off to university. An invitation was posted on the researcher’s public Instagram page describing the planned research and inviting all former Social Justice students to direct message the researcher if they were interested in receiving more information on the research. The researcher also requested that everyone who saw this page to invite their friends who also participated in a Social Justice class. This researcher was clear in the invitation that she would like to understand the design elements that worked for each of them, and also if they believed the class and learnings therein made a difference in their lives. The researcher trusted each of them to be forthcoming and honest, as they understood her requirement for truthfulness.

Data Collection

Utilizing a focus group format, a semi-structured interview (Cohen et al., 1993) was conducted with five participants. A list of talking points was drawn up and presented to each potential participant of the focus group after they had direct messaged the researcher indicating they were interested in participating. The talking points were:

1. What are the design elements of Social Justice 12 that have contributed to the transformation of individual students through service to the community?

   - What are “design elements”?  
   - What does “transformation” mean?
- What does “service” mean?

2. Do you believe you transformed during our time together? Explain.

3. What design elements helped with that transformation?

4. What were the aspects of the class that did not help with your transformation?

5. Was there anything that would have helped but wasn’t included?

6. Do you think you continued to change because of the time spent in our class? Explain.

It was requested that each participant think about the answers ahead of time and jot down notes for their personal use; however, the researcher would not look at, nor collect, these notes.

The focus group was audio recorded and, upon completion of intelligent verbatim transcription, each participant received an emailed copy of the transcript. Each participant was able to go over their parts and make any necessary adjustments in case they meant something other than what was said or in case the researcher did not represent their words accurately. The researcher made it clear to participants that she would make her best effort to withdraw a statement if a member would like to, but given the collective nature of the study, the researcher might not be able fully retract any given statement. The names of the participants were not coded in the initial email; this was done after receipt of changes. The participants had three weeks from the time the transcripts were sent to respond with changes or retract any personal comments.

The focus group of five MVSS Social Justice graduates met in mid-August 2019 as that was the time everyone was home between university semesters, either working or visiting family. The timing was to ensure ease of attendance for the most people possible.
**Data Analysis Techniques**

Data was obtained from the Focus Group consultation and when all participants returned their edited transcripts, one master copy was created to work from. According to Cohen et al. (1993),

Once data from the interview have been collected, the next stage involves analyzing them, often by some form of coding or scoring. In qualitative data the data analysis here is almost inevitably interpretive, hence the data analysis is less a completely accurate representation (as in the numerical, positivist tradition) but more of a reflexive, reactive interaction between the researcher and the decontextualized data that are already interpretations of a social encounter. (p. 427)

This researcher acknowledges that she was an integral part of this equation and understood she had an impact on this research as she was the participant’s teacher in the Social Justice 12 class. As such, it was of the utmost importance for the analysis to be as systematic, detailed, and impartial as possible. While this researcher feels there is no overwhelming right nor wrong in an analysis of this particular focus group where personal perspectives are presented in a trustworthy, confirmable manner, and all participants have free voice and stand in their own power, she acknowledges that her choice of data to be included is a personal one and must be done with integrity and fairness in order to present all findings as objectively as possible.

The master transcript was read multiple times and coded in order to keep the voice of the participants as authentic as possible. Overall themes were sought and analyzed, and then as sub-themes emerged they were also recorded. Trends became apparent during multiple readings. Key statements were summarized, and design elements were listed and briefly expanded upon.
Validity

Triangulation was utilized in this research to assist with validity of the findings. The participants were from different school years which could help validate the consistency of the transformative phenomenon over time. As the participants were given the talking points ahead of our focus group, it gave them time to think about their experiences both in class and since then, and provided them with the opportunity to talk with others, perhaps generating more ideas and memories before attending the session. Talking points provided were intentionally open-ended to ensure a solid consultation process where participants constructively built on each other’s contributions. Transcriptions were provided to each participant to ensure their accuracy and for them to provide further insights. Literature review from numerous peer-reviewed experts corroborate the findings and results of this research. These methods and results provide insight into the possible transferability and generalization of the data received in order for educators to decide whether or not to implement any of the design elements into their own classroom.

There are three notable threats to the validity of this research. One is concerning the researcher’s personal belief about the benefits and importance of service to the community through self-directed, individually chosen service projects as she strongly feels these lead to individual and, ultimately, societal transformation. The second threat derives from that, as the researcher searched for peer-reviewed authors and research who supported and validated her thoughts. The third threat to external validity is the people who responded and chose to participate are likely different from the ones who did not choose to participate due, perhaps, to different transformative experiences both in class and afterwards.

In Chapters Four and Five the data is presented, analyzed, and discussed utilizing a variety of methods such as coding, identifying themes and patterns amongst the participants, and
unearting relationships between diverse thoughts and comments. Correlations are discovered, and insights into the design elements that garnered transformation are gained. These two chapters discuss which design elements of Social Justice 12 contributed to the transformation of individual students through service to the community, through the perspectives and voices of the five participants.
Chapter 4: Focus Group Voices

In order to ascertain the findings and results of this researcher’s question, “What are the design elements of Social Justice that have contributed to the transformation of individual students through service to the community?” it was determined the answers would best be obtained through a focus group format. Five Mountain View Secondary School (MVSS) graduates (Sylvia Faye, Annesley Gander, Sandy Drew, Marie Reynolds and Ellie Lufta – all names are pseudonyms) participated in a two-hour discussion in mid-August 2019; they received the questions six weeks ahead of our scheduled meeting date. The beginning of our focus group was dedicated to elucidating understandings of the researcher’s key concepts of design elements, transformation, and service.

Figure 4

Questions Asked of Focus Group Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Part I: Definitions</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What are “Design Elements”?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What does “Transformation” mean?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What does “Service” mean?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Part II: Transformational Aspects Investigated</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do you believe you transformed during our time together? Explain.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What design elements helped with that transformation?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What were the aspects of the class that did not help with your transformation?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Was there anything that would have helped but wasn’t included?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you think you continued to change because of the time spent in our class? Explain.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Part I: Definitions

What Are “Design Elements”?

According to the participants, the overall structure and set-up of the class itself was an
transformation through service

integral foundation for personal growth and safety, which included how the lessons were taught, the administration of individual or group tests, and the choice of service projects to impact the community. A key design element for three participants was the actual process involved with their self-determined projects, including how they were created and implemented. As Sylvia commented,

“I think the safety aspect that also allowed people to feel so comfortable that they’re able to really branch out and do things that they wouldn’t normally do. They are able to feel so comfortable in their skin and feel so safe that they’re able to be creative and able to have innovative thoughts and ideas and actually run with them … we would have the support we needed to actually run with those ideas.”

**What Does “Transformation” Mean?**

As Marie succinctly stated, transformation is “change or growth of the self that lasts” and all agreed while adding that it is a dynamic and naturally occurring part of life. Participants built on that statement by primarily discussing internal changes which ultimately show up as external manifestations such as how one interacts with others and the world around them. All felt that transformation was a positive occurrence that included changes in thought, opinion, and the way one viewed themselves more positively. Annesley wrapped up her comments by stating that one may not recognize their transformation in the moment, but it is always “recognizable when looking in hindsight”.

**What Does “Service” Mean?**

Sandy and Annesley mentioned that service is not necessarily a physical thing but can also be concerned with emotional support, education, and intention to bring awareness to issues and causes. All other members of the focus group stated that service is when individuals come
together to create something that helps a community both without causing harm and for everyone’s betterment. They talked about the importance of putting aside one’s needs temporarily in selfless acts, where each act of service is a gift, an offering of oneself that is put out to the world. Service embodies positive intention.

Part II: Transformational Aspects Investigated

The beginning of our focus group was dedicated to elucidating understandings of the definitions of design elements, transformation, and service. The remainder of our time together was focused on various aspects of personal transformation. The participants shared their thoughts, perceptions, and insights into personal transformation from their Social Justice class and if it continued past graduation, the design elements that assisted with that, and any missing aspects they wish would have been included.

Do You Believe You Transformed During Our Time Together? Explain.

To a person, the answer to the question, “Do you believe you transformed during our time together?” was a resounding “Yes!” Each participant brought up the importance of being consistently encouraged and supported by the teacher as they progressed along their individual paths of growth. All recognized they have unique strengths to offer the world, and that the classroom was, according to Sylvia, a “setting where differences were encouraged rather than suppressed.” Confidence in one’s ability to meet challenges and “push boundaries of what I thought I was not capable of” was put forth by Marie, and agreed with by the other four in our focus group.

The concept of ‘voice’, in its many incarnations, was discussed by all participants. Sylvia delved deeper into what that is when she stated that she had learned to become “that voice of
encouragement for myself.” Ellie, Sandy and Annesley brought up the value of researching topics and gaining a fuller understanding of them. Ellie in particular underlined the importance of investigating issues more fully so she could “navigate discussions in a more peaceful manner that leads to resolutions” instead of sallying forth into heated arguments. This skill also assisted her through difficult situations she has encountered since graduation. Learning how to communicate with others, both individually and in group settings, was closely intertwined with a burgeoning confidence to use their voices to educate and encourage others. All five of the focus group members brought up the importance of working positively within a community and how to find and utilize the myriad resources available therein; they learned that no one is alone as they had also developed skills to reach out.

Sandy recalled that she was “shy and reserved until I walked into her [Mrs. Ostwald’s] classroom. I was able to find my passion for helping others in a way I never could have imagined.” Ellie and Annesley also shared discovering their current educational and career paths as a result of the transformation, passions and skills they unearthed while in the Social Justice class. Annesley expressed her belief that the Social Justice class “… gave me the confidence and opportunity I needed to stand up for my beliefs and articulate their importance. The class also provided me with opportunities that extended far beyond the classroom. Opportunities that allowed me to continue my transformation afterwards so even if I wasn’t transformed on that very last day of class, it still kick-started a bunch of things….”

As Sylvia noted, “We have a voice and it can no longer be silenced because we’ve learned the skills needed to cultivate it. And once learned, no one can take that away from us.”
What Design Elements Helped With That Transformation?

A welcoming classroom atmosphere was a large part of the focus group discussion, and all appreciated that nametags, pronouns, and playing numerous icebreakers at the beginning of each new class created a sense of family. The focus group participants felt supported and heard by the teacher and each other. Each person felt safe and secure enough to try new things, to feel and share their emotions, and to deal with their stresses within the classroom community.

From that foundation of safety and acceptance, the skills associated with consultation had the opportunity to be practiced in a respectful, honest, and supportive manner. Ellie recounted how important peer advice, group discussions and differing opinions were to her as she learned how to work towards resolutions without anger, and how she felt validated and supported throughout this process. Annesley revealed a contrasting, more introverted take on consultation wherein she said that “… the atmosphere still gave me the opportunity to think clearly and think of new ideas. It gave me permission to think in ways I hadn’t before or to challenge my own beliefs even if I wasn’t speaking them out loud.” Sylvia noted that difficult topics were always dealt with respectfully, and that she learned how to express herself “without suppressing others.”

All members of the focus group addressed a mandatory component of Social Justice, which is the creation and execution of a service project. Sylvia was emphatic that “the design element that allowed me to thrive in my learning was the power to choose my topic,” and everyone else commented on how appreciative they were that there was a large amount of class time dedicated to developing and working on their project of choice. Annesley was clear that this setting and devoted time “gave just the right amount of push for me to actually complete something and overcome any self-doubt that I often had doing projects on my own time.” Sandy’s comments on the project referred to a combination of confidence on the part of the
teacher and fear of failure on the part of the students:

“The design element that helped me transform was the complete confidence that Ms. Ostwald had in every student. There’s always a fear of failure in the back of everyone’s mind but it wasn’t ever something we discussed in class. There was no talk about failure, there was always going to be a Plan B or there was always going to be something else we could do instead. It wasn’t ‘you’ve failed and you’re done’ it was ‘there’s always something else.’”

What Were The Aspects Of The Class That Did Not Help With Your Transformation?

Ellie and Lufta both discussed class composition, where larger classes and project groupings led to more distractions with peers who got easily diverted from the task on hand. Sandy pointed out the positive aspect of these classes was that they inevitably “got really interesting discussions and arguments.” Annesley, while acknowledging that “the class was very positive,” also noted that her class could have been “more widely read.” She was very passionate about the necessity for future classes to learn about personal privilege as her teacher did not do that and it stymied her confidence and transformation:

“I’m a bit more timid and afraid of judgment, because I didn’t have that smaller class experience in a very safe space to talk about issues of privilege, and what that means within my own life. I didn’t even know that I needed a space to discuss this issue back then, so while I certainly transformed during the class, not having the small, connected, safe space back then is making it difficult to continue to positively transform now, because my university doesn’t offer me that same space or opportunity that Social Justice 12 did.”
**Was There Anything That Would Have Helped But Was Not Included?**

Ellie talked at length about the importance of Social Justice classes getting more exposure to the outside community in order to increase understanding of the issues that are investigated in class. As an alternative she proposed that individual groups go out and investigate the potential consequences of their projects on the groups / organizations to better understand the impacts they could potentially be making. By doing this, the students would also be able to interact and consult more effectively with a broader range of people. Ellie pointed out a crucial understanding of the ramifications of privilege when she stated that

“we need to have an understanding of how we are walking in this movement and how we are somehow on a level playing field. We need to realize that equality doesn’t mean we get to continue to stand as tall as we do.”

It was felt that taking time to make connections in the community would therefore increase awareness of each student’s personal advantages and have their eyes opened to the realities around them.

Incorporating more academic and creative aspects into the Social Justice class were strong proposals from some of the focus group participants. They suggested that the inclusion of independent research projects within the individual strands would have greatly benefited them in their university classes. These participants had also enjoyed the debates on controversial subjects that were periodically held and wished there had been more of them. It was a strong recommendation from Annesley that more “readings on major social justice figures or learnings of all the history that goes behind movements” would add more context to debates as

“the social context is constantly changing and we need to recognize how we change.

Instead of judging the past and present, we learn and continue to move forward. We need
to recognize past accomplishments, not solely focus on the never-ending list of problems to be solved. If we do that, we can remain optimistic, visionary and happy.”

As a complementary component to the academic suggestions, a myriad of artistic exercises and elements were suggested. These activities included free writes to delve into personal understandings of topics being explored in class, the reading of poetry, creating art and doing art journaling. Annesley recognized that “art has been a major contributor to movements and can add a lot of context and provide new opportunities” to enhance understanding of social justice issues.

_Do You Think You Continued To Change Because Of The Time Spent In Our Class? Explain._

Sandy said,

“I haven’t been out of the class very long so I can’t really say I’ve continued to change, but throughout the times I’ve been in the class [three] I feel I’ve become a different person. I started out shy and then grew with a bigger voice every time, with more opinions. I felt like I grew a sense of respect, care and inclusion. I felt the relationship I had with the students grew better. I feel like this class definitely helped me choose where I want to take my life.”

Marie noted that the class

“opened my eyes to the many inequalities that are present in our world. … It really did wonders on my confidence as to what I was capable of and the impact I was able to have on people. It taught me a lot about pushing my limits and just believing in myself.”

Sylvia recounted:

“I absolutely continued to change because I was given skills to evolve. This class was
geared towards testing my character and who I am as a person through teamwork, problem-solving and innovation. The greatest power we have is the effect we have on other people, and this class was able to show me that I matter, and my effect on others is not something to take lightly. It’s my belief there is always hope no matter how overwhelming our problems may be, if we work together and remember our interconnectedness there is no problem we cannot overcome. Kindness changes everything and Ozzie is a prime example of that.”

Ellie believed that

“not only did Social Justice give me the confidence to speak up and really have faith in what I was saying and be able to adapt with outside information, it was really a big catalyst in the way that I am going forth in this world. I feel that if I hadn’t had this class and the experience of it, that the way in which I walk through my life would have been drastically different than it is now.”

Annesley expressed:

“I definitely continued to change, both right after the class and to this moment. Now every time I face new challenges it gives me something I can think back on; remembering about how much I grew, how much confidence I had. I can think back to conversations I had with Mrs. Ostwald and the support that she gave me which helps me continue to overcome obstacles that get thrown in my way; it gives me courage and a way to face them. The class set me on my academic path as well and really just opened up the path that I’m traveling on now.”
Looking Ahead

Chapter 5 will analyze key results with possible long-term implications. Its layout adheres to the format of Chapter 4 where the researcher reflects on insights gained and learnings received. The researcher unearths and analyzes relationships between diverse thoughts and comments, where correlations are discovered, and insights into the design elements that garnered transformation are gained.
Chapter 5: Researcher Reflections

Throughout the readings for the literature review, the researcher was focused primarily on abstract design elements. While the focus group participants discussed many of those, they also brought up a number of important, tangible elements such as the physical space itself, clear classroom structure, predictability, and expectations that were consistently upheld; this was an unexpected insight for the researcher. The focus group discussion around the service aspect of the Social Justice class provided a feeling of awe for the researcher as the participants delved into the underlying purpose of service and the necessity to put others’ needs before theirs. Acknowledging that the completed project needed to be recognized and celebrated primarily because of the individual’s growth, development, and transformation was a confirmation for the researcher. This also is a testament to the ongoing transformation of society as, while each individual changed, they also interacted differently with the world around them, becoming more than they had thought possible. It was reassuring to note when the focus group members iterated that the individual choice of project, and its execution, were a primary source of ongoing personal transformation, as that was one of the foundational aspects of this research. Recognizing one’s transformation involved time, space, and personal reflection, all of which the focus group participants had had. This educator also needs to continue to reflect and make adjustments while keeping her students’ growth and opportunities for transformation at the forefront of her planning. This focus group experience was both humbling and uplifting to the researcher.

Adhering to the focus group format and the participants’ answers, the researcher reflects on insights gained and learnings received.
Part I: Definitions

What Are “Design Elements”?  
The researcher was focused primarily on the abstract design elements and not the concrete ones the participants discussed. This was an omission of error based on an incomplete understanding that while the various aspects of transformation are more abstract in nature, the tangible, material structure of the classroom was the foundation of the design elements which allowed for growth. The researcher did not directly relate the concrete necessity of laying a solid foundation of structure and predictability in the classroom in order to establish a sense of safety, as is iterated in Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs (Oved, 2017). All aspects of classroom interactions, from behavioural and social expectations to format of test days, needed to be clearly and consistently upheld. This researcher has found there is much freedom to be had within structure, and the focus group participants alluded to that. Sandy commented on “… how the classroom is set up; the safety of being in the classroom and it’s not necessarily the physical things, it’s like the emotional that everyone feels like a family,” and Sylvia emphatically stated that “… the ability to choose how we would like to impact our community, and by extension, our world. It’s an alternative to the historical classroom atmosphere in which students are taught to sit down and shut up.”

Students in the educator’s Social Justice classes are consistently given an option of writing tests either individually or in groups of up to four as the researcher has observed that very little in the world of work is accomplished completely on one’s own; cross-pollination is, therefore, also an integral part of tests.

What Does “Transformation” Mean?  
As was earlier written,
Transformation embodies the development of character, personal empowerment, engagement and a sense of purpose (Jones, 2017); it is also about increasing self-confidence, critical thinking and problem-solving abilities (Schusler et al., 2009). It is ultimately about personal, long-lasting and positive development (p. 10).

The researcher appreciated the participants’ diverse insights, in particular Annesley’s final comment about it taking time to notice that one has, indeed, transformed. This is an important insight as it invariably takes time, space, and detachment before being able to look back and notice growth in ourselves and, by extension, the way we approach life’s varied circumstances. All focus group participants consciously chose to make the effort to reflect on their internal and external transformation and this is an integral component of both personal growth and action competence. Personal transformation leads inevitably to societal transformation; it is necessary to have both for the betterment of the world around us, for true change emanates from within. It is important to note that making change for the better is an individual choice, and that choice can be nurtured in a supportive environment.

What Does “Service” Mean?

The members of the focus group discussed ‘service’ in deeply meaningful language; they understood the underlying intent of doing projects. They did not dwell solely on the physical aspects of doing something for the community of their choice; rather, they delved into the underlying purpose of true service, the requirement to suspend one’s needs for the greater good and to offer themselves forth. Lasting positive transformation and learning takes place primarily when students are engaged in worthwhile projects outside the classroom environment where they can see the impact of their decisions and actions on individuals, groups, organizations or, perhaps, even an entire city or area.
There are myriad skills that can be garnered through the process of developing a project, and when learned, practiced and internalized, cannot be taken away. The Action Competence Model (Bamber & Hankin, 2011, p. 191) iterates an ongoing cycle: students learning about action (how to envisage the future and concrete ways to achieve it); students learning through action (experiencing the planning and taking of action), and; students learning from action (reflecting on their actions and the actions of others to determine their efficacy). This model is a microcosm of life where goals are envisioned and decisions are made in order to turn dreams into reality. Constant adjustments are a necessity as understandings develop and obstacles loom but learning how to make the best decision in any given moment through consultation, planning, action, and reflection is an integral skill required to successfully navigate life. It is always an interesting exercise to reflect on how our decisions lead to our current situations – most projects organically evolve from the original idea, and the end product always needs to be celebrated because of the process and growth that the students undergo in the execution of their ideas.

A fundamental need for youth is to have purpose (Jones, 2017). Jones goes on to note that “engaging in meaningful community service has been recognized as a way to inspire a new generation of youth to identify as powerful social actors and civic leaders” (Jones, 2017, p. 50). By providing opportunities for our students to learn vital action competence skills, we are inspiring them to know how powerful and vitally important they truly are, and how much they can directly affect the community around them.

**Part II: Transformational Aspects Investigated**

The beginning of our focus group was dedicated to elucidating understandings of the definitions of design elements, transformation, and service. The remainder of our time together
was focused on various aspects of personal transformation. The participants shared their thoughts, perceptions, and insights into personal transformation from their Social Justice class and if it continued past graduation, the design elements that assisted with that, and any missing aspects they wish would have been included.

**Do You Believe You Transformed During Our Time Together? Explain.**

While there were a number of key indicators of personal transformation, the most significant ones centred around various aspects of voice and an increase in self-confidence. The researcher has discovered through the focus group members that transformation is, indeed, possible when an educator creates a foundation of safety, love and respect and, equally importantly, if the individual student chooses to avail themselves of the opportunities provided. It must be consciously done, on the parts of all participants in the bounded system which is the Social Justice classroom, where it is encouraged and expected that all will progress along their individual paths. We need to help each other. Judgment and negativity simply cannot be allowed. We must not tear students down in order to build them up as that potentially has the opposite effect of good education and upliftment. Educators need to create a space where making mistakes is acknowledged as an integral part of the process of growth and development, both for themselves and the students. We do not know the capacity of anyone, let alone ourselves, so we do not have the right to judge anyone on their path; we may choose to embrace the moral duty, however, to educate, to support, to love, and to guide.

Through transformation, we all become ‘more’: more than who we thought we were, more than we thought we were capable of, more capacity than we had dreamed of. When an educator provides a safe space for growth and transformation, where students are uplifted, encouraged and lovingly pushed and guided, where support and encouragement permeate the
atmosphere, then that is the beginning of a secure foundation for trust and transformation. In this kind of classroom, the educator must be genuinely respectful, caring, and doing their best, as “caring is manifest in actions: it delights, challenges, responds, and affirms” (Lewthwaite & McMillan, 2010, p. 191). If educators can view their students as a trust to be nurtured, where we see the good in each person, we can help them develop themselves. Educators need to trust that their students have what it takes to make their lives, and the lives of those they touch, that much better, and assist them in finding and developing their strengths. If teachers walk in serried lines with their students, we demonstrate that we all need each other, that we are all connected. Together we can transform, grow and learn the tools and skills to fulfill our own dreams and help others find and develop theirs. Together we are in the process of becoming the best version of ourselves. “Every child is potentially the light of the world” (‘Abdu’l-Baha, 1978, p. 103) and by allowing them to discover their strengths, virtues and gifts, we allow them to shine in the best way they can. We are all capable of so much more than we think we are. We deeply need someone to walk with us, to believe in us. When we find that person, that space, we have the ability to transform and believe in ourselves; this is when we may develop a clear and goodly voice whose aim is the upliftment of our world.

What Design Elements Helped With That Transformation?

According to participant responses, there were three key design elements that helped with individual transformation: class atmosphere, the consultative process, and execution of a service project. The research undertaken was primarily focused on design elements as being abstract in nature, and included such components as safety, caring, respect, belonging, inclusivity, sanctuary, love, and equity. While the researcher continues to acknowledge these as a necessary foundation in creating a classroom wherein the students can thrive and transform, there were key design
elements brought up in the focus group which the researcher had not contemplated. These design elements dealt with the tangible, material structure of the classroom, which the researcher gave scant attention to. The classroom itself is composed of tables and chairs which the students move to facilitate their learning and what the requirements of the day are, be it group work, research, study circles, meditation, presentations or games. The walls and windows are covered in student art, flags, and inspirational quotes while a banner and various decorations adorn the ceiling. There is a corner of the class with a small fridge, microwave and sink; fruit and everything required to make tea and coffee are freely available to all students.

Much to the merriment of numerous students, a colleague of the researcher was very impressed with how regimented and controlled she kept her classes as they often heard a timer going off and students directed to the next activity. Everything is, however, timed: there might be three minutes to quietly contemplate and journal on the question / topic of the class before talking with a partner for a couple of minutes. This then leads to small group discussions before the whole class consults together. In any given strand of Social Justice, research project topics and outcomes are created by the class before they start working and, ultimately, sharing their learnings with the class as a whole in a multitude of ways from songs to guided discussions. Project days are structured in that the work of the groups is self-determined on what needs to be done and how, before coming together at least two to three times a week for guided cross-pollination time. Regardless of the day’s lesson plan, the classroom teacher starts promptly at the bell and students invariably work right until the end of class. The researcher believes that having structure provides freedom and creativity.

Students are taught many consultation skills. They learn how to respectfully state their opinions, ideas, thoughts and beliefs and, equally if not more importantly, they are taught how to
listen and respond. The teacher helps the students envision the ideas as a concrete object being put onto a table for everyone to look at; people may comment on it, change it, move it around, build on it, propose alternate suggestions, but may never ridicule or belittle anything that has been put forth as every proposal has merit and can lead to the creation of something not previously considered. The teacher frequently reminds the students to ‘treat people better than you want to be treated;’ expectations of students’ comportment and language are high as diversity of thought and opinion are greatly valued. Negativity is not tolerated, as that effectively stops both safety and creativity. The idea may be disagreed with, but the proposer of the idea may not be hurt in any way. The point of consultation is to create unity.

Service projects, or projects that better a chosen community in some way, are a cornerstone of all classes this educator teaches. As a wide variety of projects have consistently and successfully been executed in the city for over nine years, a myriad of individuals, businesses, organizations and service groups propose projects for future students to undertake. These are objectively presented to students who decide whether or not to implement any of the suggestions; if they come up with their own project, they can pursue that. The criteria for deciding on a project is that it must be something a student is passionate about, that they are interested in, and wish to pursue; there needs to be intrinsic motivation in order to achieve the goals and overcome the obstacles that will inevitably surface.

There is very little understanding of this entire process as people outside the classroom think the teacher tells the students what they must do. This researcher, however, understands that in order for personal transformation to best occur, the choice of project must come from a place of personal interest; this gives ownership of the process and outcome and is the beginning of understanding how very powerful one’s voice can become, and that one can influence and
change our society and the world around us. The teacher’s job is to guide, support, and have the utmost belief that their students will be successful; to have genuine love and respect for the youth is important as we do not know who is in our class, who they will become. The researcher believes we must help students reach their highest potential and give them the ability to pursue their dreams.

What Were The Aspects Of The Class That Did Not Help With Your Transformation?

Class and group size and composition, coupled with a lack of discussion around privilege, were the primary focus of dissatisfaction with the focus group participants. While the educator was aware that larger group sizes of up to nine students could be a detriment to both focus and personal responsibility for completion of tasks in the overall project, she allowed them to continue because some groups were notably successful.

Based on Annesley’s poignant insights into her difficulties continuing to positively transform due to a lack of education around personal privilege in a small and safe environment, the educator began including articles and multi-media presentations on this issue. Students have consulted, researched the topic, and created visual representations for the class and school body. Privilege is being discussed in all strands of Social Justice as it plays a contributing role in a myriad of social injustices. The educator has noted that, while students are vaguely familiar with the concept of privilege, they do require multi-faceted, personalized education to gain a better grasp of the many manifestations of privilege in a world that is rife with it.

Looking Forward

After the focus group’s consultation, this researcher will limit group sizes to approximately four individuals as each person will then be required to fully contribute to their chosen service project. Strengths and virtues of each participant will develop more fully as they
learn to work together as a team and consult creatively to problem solve and celebrate their successes.

*Was There Anything That Would Have Helped But Was Not Included?*

There were two themes that emerged in our focus group: more exposure to the outside community and a greater variety of teaching methodologies to enhance student learning. While this researcher acknowledges the potential inherent value of students going into the community to get first-hand knowledge of the issues being discussed in class, there are fundamental difficulties with this. First and foremost is the very real concern that by doing this it could potentially set up an us-and-them dichotomy where students are the observers of someone else’s life; a zoo comes to mind. Many years ago a guest speaker invited the whole Social Justice class to take a tour of a low-barrier housing complex that he was the director of. He told stories about the residents, their drug addictions, their lives, their run-ins with the police, neighbours and each other, and how they got to this point. He admitted it could potentially be dangerous but felt the residents would be okay with the students meeting them and getting a tour of their home. His heart and intent were in the right place as he sincerely desired to remove stigma around people with drug addictions. The educator, however, sent her regrets.

Going into the community has great potential to negatively impact all involved in the visit – the students may walk away more firmly entrenched in their privilege or become depressed at their newfound insights and feel powerless to effect lasting change in the world around them. The community members might feel judged and analyzed while questioning why youth, who have no knowledge or understanding of their lives, feel they have the right to interfere.
As far as the suggestions to incorporate various academic and artistic pursuits into the classroom, most had already been integrated over the past couple of years. The educator made a conscious decision to teach to as many different learning styles as possible in order to reflect the diversity of learners in the classroom. By doing this, everyone can experience success and are more willing to try new things outside their comfort zone.

**Looking Forward**

Exposure to the community can most definitely be set up in an educative manner. The teacher can bring students to a plethora of organizations in town to talk with a variety of professionals on the front line. In this way the students can develop an understanding of local issues and what people are doing at the grassroots level to make a positive impact on people’s lives. This would empower everyone involved, as the students would gain an appreciation of work that goes on behind the scenes and how invaluable each contribution is. Professionals and volunteers would be able to showcase their organization and how they are making our community a better place for a wide diversity of people. Ample time would need to be devoted to debriefing the information in order for the students to best learn and continue on their path of transformation.

The logistics involved in doing this are the main contributing factor as to why this has not yet been incorporated into the local Social Justice curriculum. The educator has been imposing her own hesitations and limitations on the obstacles involved in planning a field trip: these mainly involve organization, time issues, and cost factors. This researcher is recommending that the teacher mindset needs to be adjusted to embrace creativity, thinking outside the box, and to reframe problems as opportunities for growth. The educator also needs to keep her students’ growth and potential transformation at the forefront of her planning as this will help overcome
TRANSFORMATION THROUGH SERVICE

personal and logistical hurdles.

Building on this out-of-the-box framework, the educator can re-structure the strands in order that students have even more ownership of their learning process and gain choice as to how they will demonstrate their knowledge. Some options would be through art, music, journal reports, historical timelines or structured debates. Each of these may be chosen once before using a different modality to experiment with and present learnings to classmates.

**Do You Think You Continued To Change Because Of The Time Spent In Our Class? Explain.**

Each participant in the focus group underwent powerful transformations because of the time spent in their Social Justice class. While the researcher acknowledges that not all students undergo such profound transformations, she is cognizant that most students do develop and transform both because of the design elements contained within the Social Justice class and, equally importantly, if the students themselves make an effort to change. If an educator can make a positive difference in the life of even one student, then all efforts are worth it. Loren Eisley (2015) articulates this quite nicely:

One day a man was walking along the beach when he noticed a boy picking something up and gently throwing it into the ocean. Approaching the boy, he asked, “What are you doing?” The youth replied, “Throwing starfish back into the ocean. The surf is up and the tide is going out. If I don’t throw them back, they’ll die.” “Son,” the man said, “don’t you realize there are miles and miles of beach and hundreds of starfish? You can’t make a difference!” After listening politely, the boy bent down, picked up another starfish, and threw it back into the surf. Then, smiling at the man, he said…” I made a difference for that one.”
Limitations, Recommendations, and Conclusions

A focus group format, by its very structure and format, has limitations for replicable research as it is the voice of those with an interest in participating. This research is, of necessity, a small sample of those who fully and actively participated in a Social Justice class at MVSS, including the completion of a project. Not all graduates had a voice, nor were they necessarily aware of the research as the snowball sampling from social media most likely did not reach all prior students. It must be acknowledged that the educator also plays an integral role in this bounded system and, in reality, cannot be separated from the results. While the exact outcomes and conclusions from this research cannot be replicated elsewhere, the design elements brought forth in both the researcher’s findings and the voices of the focus group participants can be incorporated into an educator’s classroom. This research enhances and supports BC’s new curriculum, especially the section titled The Educated Citizen, and will contribute to the advancement of knowledge in understanding how to create an inclusive classroom environment where students can develop tools and life-long skills so they can continue contributing positively to their community after graduation. My hope is that my research will contribute to helping educators understand ways in which they can provide opportunities for personal growth and/or transformation for their students, as well as improving their own practice.

Incorporating the action competence model (Jensen & Schnack, 2006) into a teaching toolkit will lead to individual change, transformation, and growth. If an educator is interested in doing further research and changing the climate in their classroom, my recommendation is to start by examining The Educated Citizen and taking incremental, sustainable steps to transform those ideas into a reality that fits within your framework. Examining Bovill’s (2016) work on co-creating learning and teaching is a valid and exciting concept to bring to a high school classroom
even though her work is focused on post-secondary institutions. There is a plethora of research done in the fields of service learning, youth participation in community projects, the importance of developing a sense of purpose for youth, class climate, and social and emotional well-being: this researcher could not begin to delve into all of the thoughtful and exciting research that supports youth transformation through service to the community.

A visual to leave you with: Picture a class of students with an empty bucket sitting in front of them on each of their desks. There are some educators who think it is their job to run around and spoon water into each bucket, handing out information and filling up the vessels for their charges. An alternate way to view education is in the words of Baha’u’llah (1978): “Regard man as a mine rich in gems of inestimable value. Education can, alone, cause it to reveal its treasures, and enable mankind to benefit therefrom” (p. 261). Now picture the same class of students with their own spoons and buckets full of dirt and jewels on the desk in front of them. This teacher’s job is still to educate but does so while acknowledging the individual strengths and virtues of each student. The educator, however, spends time focusing on the skills required for each person to learn how to unearth and polish their own gems in order to transform themselves and the society around them. Everyone, therefore, is afforded the opportunity to transform.
References


TRANSFORMATION THROUGH SERVICE


SD70, Policy 101, as taken from https://www.sd70.bc.ca/


UNESCO, Chapter 5, as taken from https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000261349

UNESCO, as found in https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000261349

United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Save the Children, retrieved from

Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Retrieved from

Universal House of Justice, Letter to the Baha’is of Canada, 24 July 2013, found in

Validity. (n.d.) Retrieved from https://www.slideshare.net/muir31/case-study-research-11189031)

Appendix A

The Educated Citizen, A quality education system, assists in the development of human potential and improves the well-being of each individual person in British Columbia society.

Continued progress toward our social and economic goals as a province depends upon well educated people who have the ability to think clearly and critically, and to adapt to change. Progress toward these goals also depends on educated citizens who accept the tolerant and multifaceted nature of Canadian society and who are motivated to participate actively in our democratic institutions.

Government is responsible for ensuring that all of our youth have the opportunity to obtain high quality schooling that will assist in the development of an educated society.

To this end, schools in the province assist in the development of citizens who are:

- thoughtful, able to learn and to think critically, and who can communicate information from a broad knowledge base;

- creative, flexible, self-motivated and who have a positive self-image;

- capable of making independent decisions;

- skilled and who can contribute to society generally, including the world of work;

- productive, who gain satisfaction through achievement and who strive for physical well being;

- cooperative, principled and respectful of others regardless of differences;

- aware of the rights and prepared to exercise the responsibilities of an individual within the family, the community, Canada, and the world.
Appendix B


ARTICLE 12

1. States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.

2. For this purpose, the child shall in particular be provided the opportunity to be heard in any judicial and administrative proceedings affecting the child, either directly, or through a representative or an appropriate body, in a manner consistent with the procedural rules of national law.

ARTICLE 13

1. The child shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of the child's choice.

2. The exercise of this right may be subject to certain restrictions, but these shall only be such as are provided by law and are necessary:

(a) For respect of the rights or reputations of others; or

(b) For the protection of national security or of public order (ordre public), or of public health or morals.

Article 29

1. States Parties agree that the education of the child shall be directed to:
(a) The development of the child's personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential;

(b) The development of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, and for the principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations;

(c) The development of respect for the child's parents, his or her own cultural identity, language and values, for the national values of the country in which the child is living, the country from which he or she may originate, and for civilizations different from his or her own;

(d) The preparation of the child for responsible life in a free society, in the spirit of understanding, peace, tolerance, equality of sexes, and friendship among all peoples, ethnic, national and religious groups and persons of indigenous origin;

(e) The development of respect for the natural environment.
Appendix C

Figure 4: Questions Asked of Focus Group Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Part I: Definitions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What are “Design Elements”?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What does “Transformation” mean?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What does “Service” mean?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Part II: Transformational Aspects Investigated</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do you believe you transformed during our time together? Explain.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What design elements helped with that transformation?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What were the aspects of the class that did not help with your transformation?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Was there anything that would have helped but wasn’t included?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you think you continued to change because of the time spent in our class?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explain.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>