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Preparing Youth for Climate Action: Philadelphia Teachers Facilitating Student-Led Social Change in Elementary and Middle School Classrooms

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Overview

- Brief intros
- Sustainability as an intersectional youth-led movement
- Our story & study
- Try it!
- What are we learning so far?
- Concluding thoughts

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Introduce yourself…

In the chat box, type:

Your name, your affiliation(s), and
a social issue in your community
that you care about

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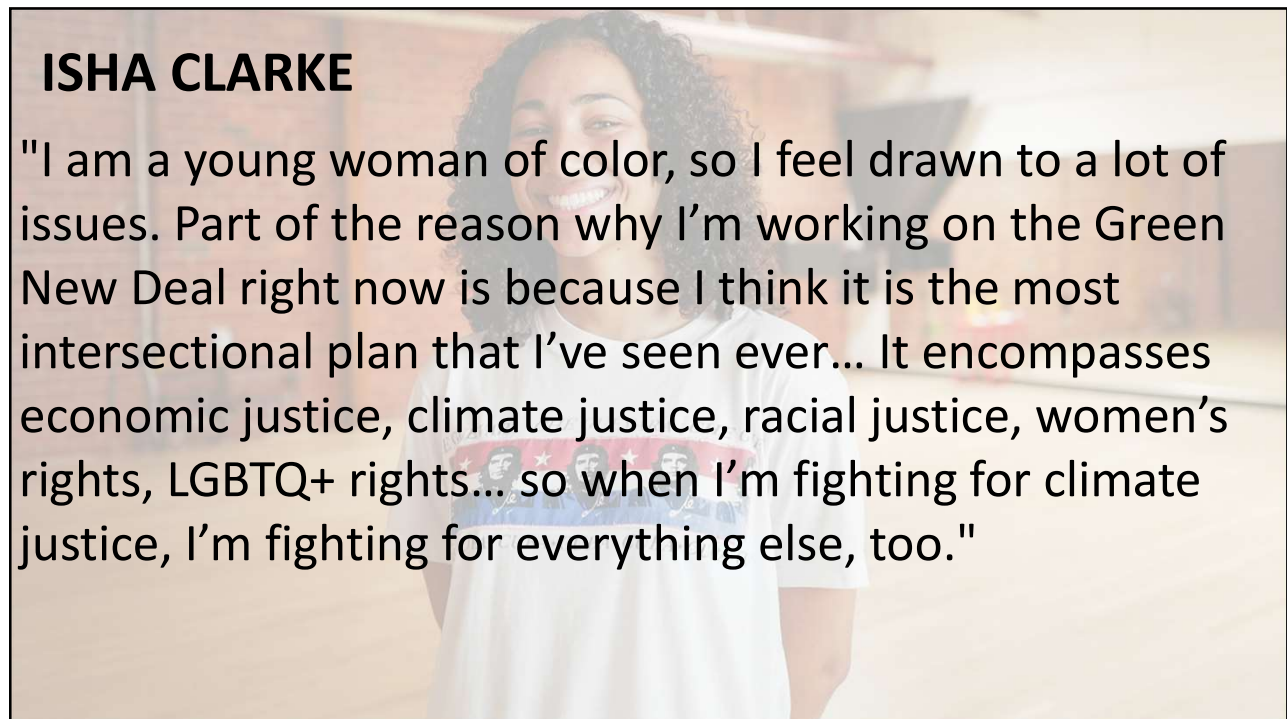"I would like these kids to be able to say

'I want to be Greta Thunberg.'

And who knows? You never know which kid in your room is going to be
one of these people who is going to change the world.

- Juan, 8th grade teacher

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ISHA CLARKE

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ISHA CLARKE

"I am a young woman of color, so I feel drawn to a lot of issues. Part of the reason why I'm working on the Green New Deal right now is because I think it is the most intersectional plan that I've seen ever... It encompasses economic justice, climate justice, racial justice, women's rights, LGBTQ+ rights... so when I'm fighting for climate justice, I'm fighting for everything else, too."
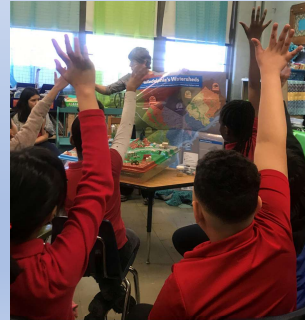
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UN Sustainability Goals

#3: Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages.

#4: Ensure inclusive and quality education for all and promote lifelong learning.

#11: Make cities inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable.

#16: Promote just, peaceful, and inclusive societies.

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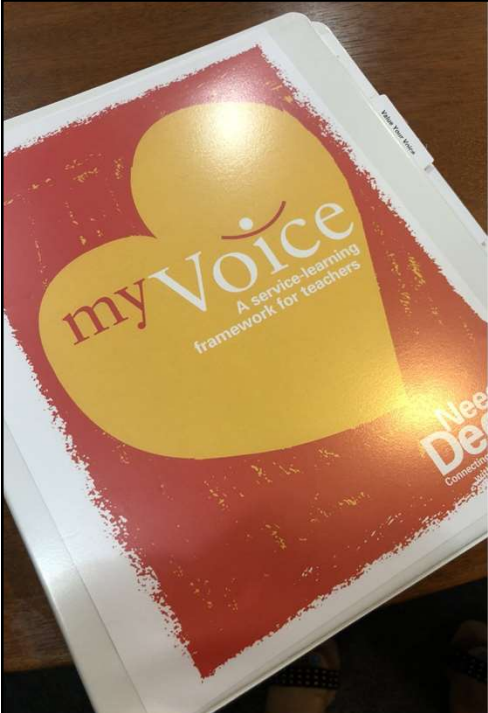
Story of the Questions

How and to what extent do teachers facilitate critical service-learning projects where participants work to redistribute power, take a social change orientation, and develop authentic relationships?

In what ways do teachers and students characterize their experiences and learning as they engage in, and reflect on, their participation in critical service-learning?

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Non-Profit Partner

Professional development and resources for teachers to facilitate a "yearlong process of active problem-solving around a community issue of each classroom's students' choice."

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Need in Deed's *My Voice* Framework

V
Value student voices

O
Open the issue (root cause analysis)

I
Identify project

C
Conduct service

E
Evaluate impact on root cause
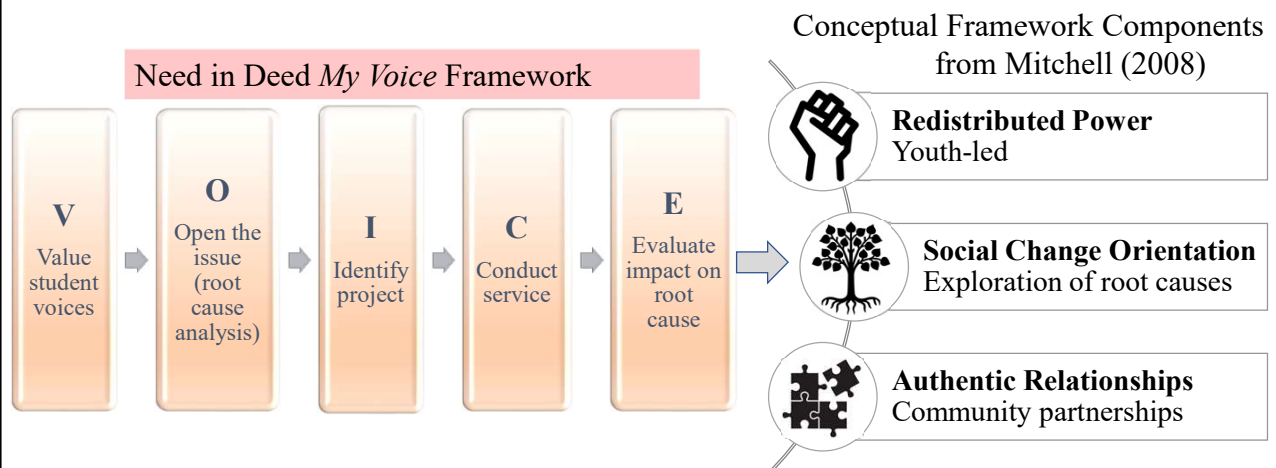
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Theoretical Framework: Kinds of Citizens

Kinds of Citizens

"What Kind of Citizen? The Politics of Educating for Democracy" by Joel Westheimer and Joseph Kahne (American Educational Research Journal; Summer 2004)

Personally responsible citizen	Participatory citizen	Justice-oriented citizen
Description		
• Acts responsibly in his/her community • Works and pays taxes • Obeys laws • Recycles, gives blood • Volunteers to lend a hand in times of need	• Active member of community organizations and/or improvement efforts • Organizes community efforts to care for those in need, promote economic development, or clean up environment • Knows how government agencies work • Knows strategies for accomplishing collective tasks	• Critically assesses social, political, and economic structures to see beyond surface causes • Seeks out and addresses areas of injustice • Knows about democratic social movements and how to effect systemic or policy change
Sample action		
Contributes food to food drive	Helps to organize a food drive	Explores why people are hungry and acts to solve root causes
Core assumptions		
To solve social problems and improve society, citizens must have good character; they must be honest, responsible, and law-abiding members of the community.	To solve social problems and improve society, citizens must actively participate and take leadership positions within established systems and community structures.	To solve social problems and improve society, citizens must question, debate, and change established systems, structures, and policies that reproduce patterns of injustice over time.

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Theoretical Framework: Critical Service Learning

Need in Deed *My Voice* Framework

Conceptual Framework Components from Mitchell (2008)

V Value student voices → **O** Open the issue (root cause analysis) → **I** Identify project → **C** Conduct service → **E** Evaluate impact on root cause →

Redistributed Power Youth-led

Social Change Orientation Exploration of root causes

Authentic Relationships Community partnerships

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Participants

Teacher	Region	Teacher Race	Student Race	% Low-Income	Grade
Olivia	Northeast	Latinx	Latinx, Asian, Black	74.87%	Fourth
Anna	North	Latinx	Latinx	88.04%	Third
Molly	Center City	White	Asian, White	44.02%	Fourth
Juan	Northwest	Latinx	Black, White	48.87%	Eighth

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Study Design

- Yearlong qualitative study
- Observations, interviews, focus groups
- Four classrooms selected based on emphasis on critical service learning principles
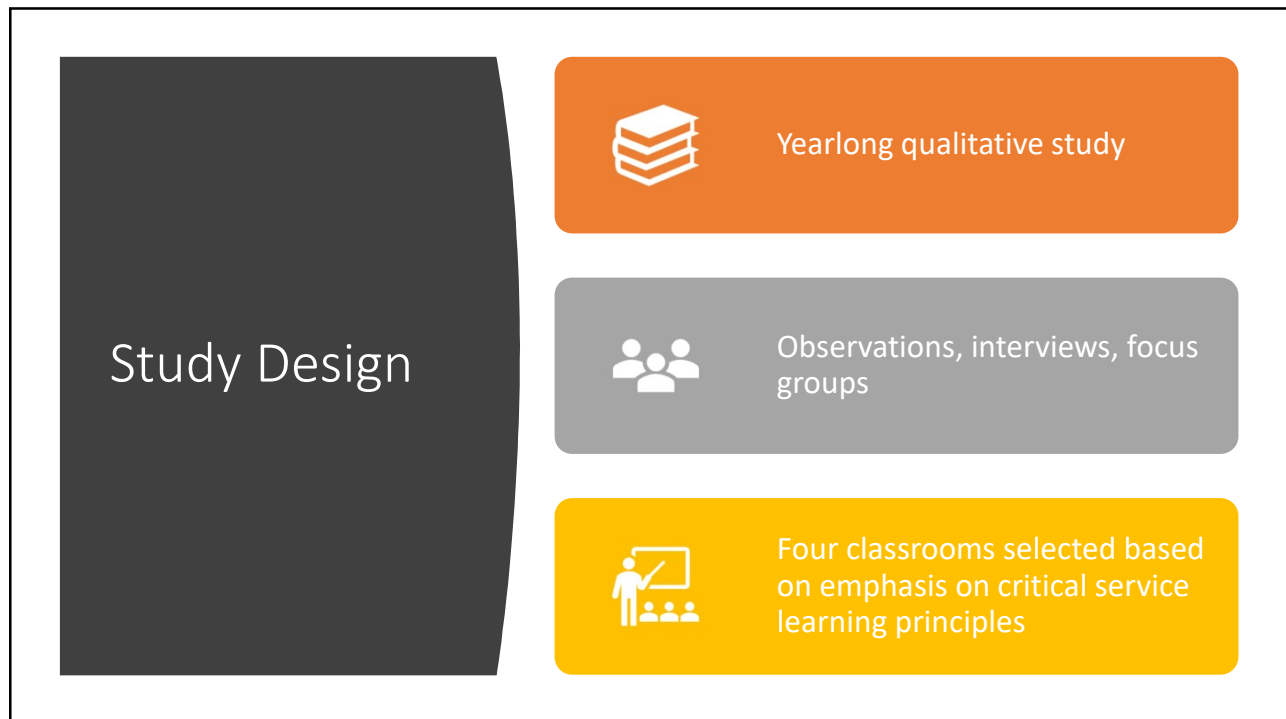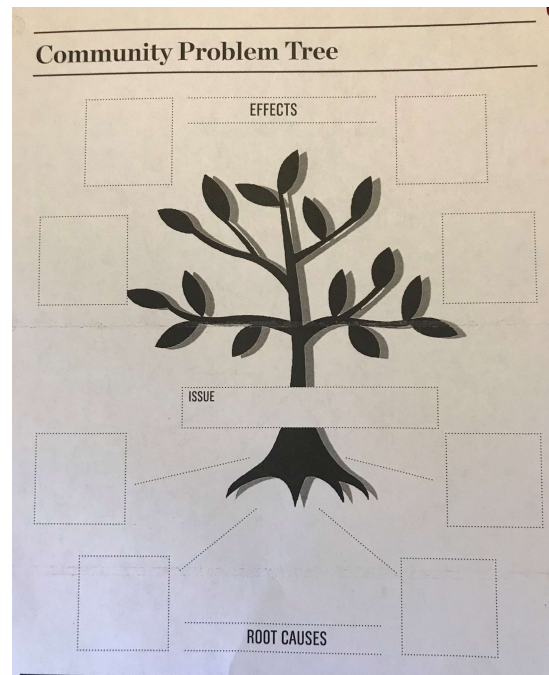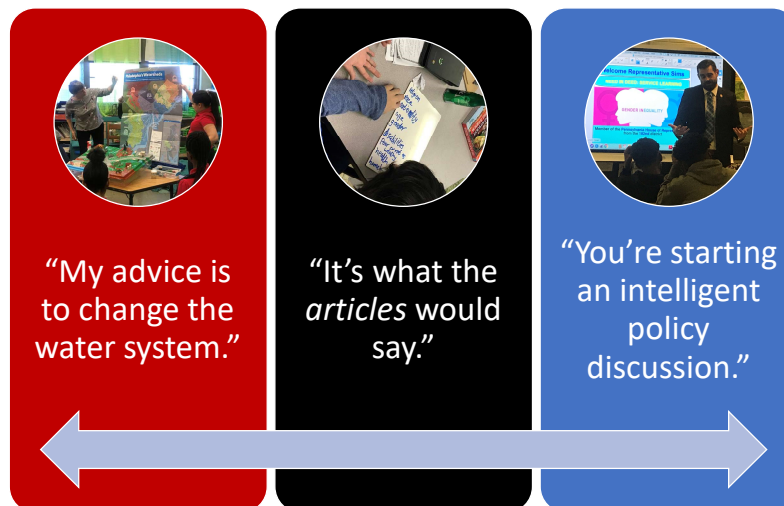
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Try It!

- Choose one of the following issues:
  - gun violence
  - water pollution
  - gender inequality
  - discrimination

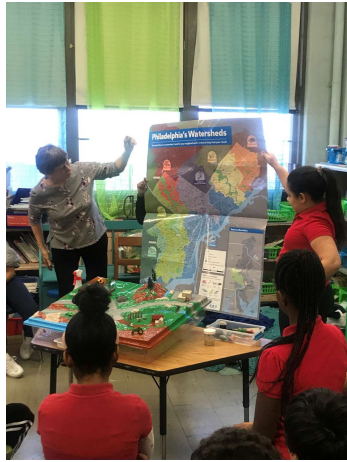- Use the graphic organizer to identify causes and effects

Community Problem Tree

EFFECTS

ISSUE

ROOT CAUSES

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Initial Learnings

"My advice is to change the water system."

"It's what the *articles* would say."

"You're starting an intelligent policy discussion."
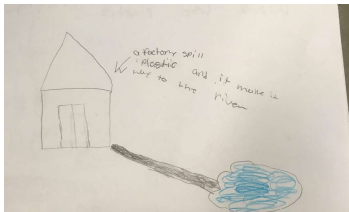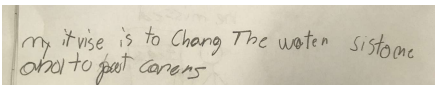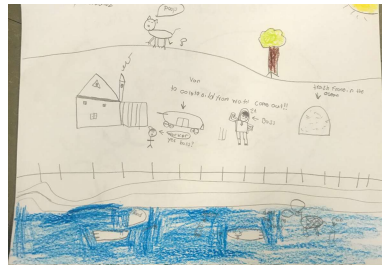
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"My advice is to change the water system"

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"My advice is to change the water system"

A factory spills plastic and it makes its way to the river.

My advice is to change the water system and to ----

S: "The oil came in the factory

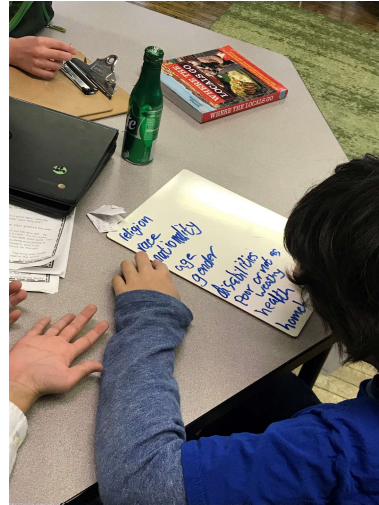KR: What can someone like you or me do about the factory?
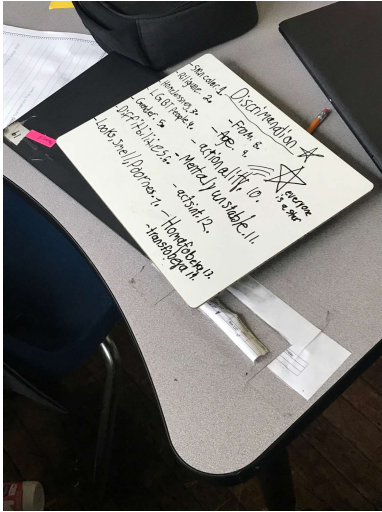
S: Figure out who spreads the oil.

KR: What happens to them if they get caught spreading the oil?

S: [Stumbles, thinks…]Help collect the oil and throws it in a different place so the oil cannot come near the ocean.

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"It's what the *articles* would say."

"It's what the *articles* would say."

Jim: I don't think what he said was right. It said racism against black people was the worst. People talk about that a lot and it's the worst.

Molly: He used the word prevalent. Prevalent means widespread. She has them repeat the word and definition.

Molly says something to the effect of Jim thinking that racism is more prevalent.

Jim: It's not that I think it, that's what the *articles* would say. There were several articles.
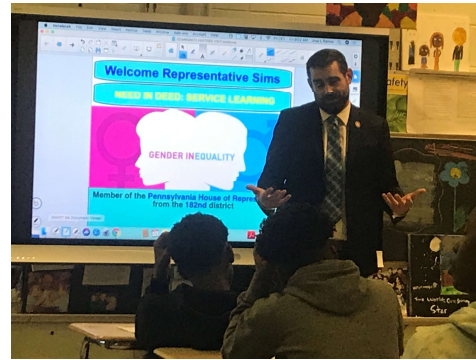
"You're starting an intelligent policy discussion"

Sierra: I feel as though in single parent homes, it's more common for a mother to raise their child without a father.

State Rep: True.

Sierra: And I feel as though single parents without the help of the spouse or without the help of their other partner should be able to be paid more since they're not putting in both of the incomes to support the children.

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"You're starting an intelligent policy discussion"

Rep: I think that's a very intelligent policy discussion that you're starting. That makes a lot of sense as a policy position. If someone is already starting from an economic detriment, what can we do to help them compete in an equal way?

… Your point is very well taken, it sounds like the kind of a thing a legislature would think of.

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Concluding Thoughts

- In an era when young people are stepping into roles as activists for climate justice and other causes, how can teachers act in solidarity with youth?

- In what ways do the principles of justice-oriented citizenship and critical service learning apply to your work?

- What questions do you have?

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