

Historical efforts for peace and social justice have involved protests, campaigns, sit-ins, civil disobedience, and government resistance – techniques that often go ‘against the system.’ Modern efforts towards peace and social justice go beyond these tried and true tactics to create paradigm shifts in how we view existing societal norms and systems. Here are a few examples of modern concepts and initiatives that provide fresh spins on age-old ideas to create change.

I. Gift Economy:

Gift economy means giving stuff away for free without expecting anything back – no money or goods change hands – based on the idea that people should pay forward favors and kindnesses. When we look out for each other and gift talent and time as best we can, we can be rest assured that ‘what goes around comes around’ – we will be taken care of when we need it. The popular Burning Man festival and its Black Rock City that appears every year in the Nevada desert is a large scale experiment in gift economy – no money or goods change hands; people volunteer their time and talents to help make the festival a success and clean up completely after it’s over.

Nipun Mehta, a leader in the gift economy movement, runs several projects that illustrate this concept in action. He founded Charity Focus, a completely volunteer run nonprofit organization that started out as a way for techies to give nonprofits free technical assistance but became a hub and umbrella organization for other gift economy projects and activities. Another one of Mehta’s projects is Karma Kitchen, a pay it forward restaurant in Berkeley, CA, where the check reads \$0.00 because someone before you paid forward for your meal. You are encouraged to pay as much as you want to for future patrons.

You can learn more about gift economy and Charity Focus here:

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/lee-schneider/gift-economy_b_469202.html

<http://www.burningman.com/whatisburningman/lectures/viva.html>

<http://blogs.salon.com/0002007/2006/12/06.html#a1718>

<http://www.charityfocus.org/new/>

Activity Suggestion:

Ask students to spend one week thinking of and implementing a gift economy idea. They must give something of themselves – their talent, time, listening skills, etc. – to help someone else, without demanding anything back. At the end of the week, ask them to anonymously write their action on large strips of colored paper that you distribute. Collect these strips and pin/paste them to the wall to make a ‘gift economy collage’. Just for fun, have students guess which of their classmates performed each action. The results might surprise you and them!

II. Time Banking:

Time banking is an alternate currency movement centered on the most important of commodities – time! Spending time doing something for someone in your community earns you Time Dollars that you can then spend on having someone do something for you. Dr. Edgar S. Cahn is the founder of the Time Banking movement that he developed while at the London School of Economics. Originally a lawyer by training and profession, he also served a stint as a speechwriter for Attorney General Robert Kennedy and has been involved in several social justice initiatives in a distinguished career spanning many fields.

Time Banking touts itself as a social change movement that alters the way the public sector addresses deep-rooted societal problems, especially related to children, the elderly and minorities in poverty. Monetary valuation of work is limited; often, tasks like child-rearing, care-giving, improving neighborhood safety, etc. are not considered ‘real’ work with compensable skills. Time banking has a more inclusive valuation of all sorts of work. It unleashes human potential that is otherwise wasted or discounted. It works on similar pay it forward models as the gift economy.

You can learn more about time banking here:

<http://www.timebanks.org/going-deeper.htm> (on time banking and social change)

<http://community.timebanks.org/findtimebanks.php> (find a time bank in your area!)

<http://www.getrichslowly.org/blog/2008/03/13/an-introduction-to-time-banking/> (using time banking to build social capital)

http://www.boston.com/yourtown/natick/articles/2010/04/25/wayland_architect_works_to_spread_time_banking_network_west_of_boston/ (another living community example)

Activity Suggestion:

Have students join a local community time bank, if the opportunity exists. Give them 2-3 weeks to complete a time bank exchange (where they do something for someone else and earn time dollars that they subsequently ‘spend’ on something else). Have them write an essay on their experience covering one or more of the following issues: their interaction with another member of the community during the time they offered, their comfort or discomfort using virtual currency, their ideas on how to involve more community members in the local time bank. In communities with no time bank, have students ‘pitch’ the concept to community members and create a report on the feasibility of the time bank in their community.

III. Peace Dot Initiative

The Peace Dot initiative, a partner of the Dalai Lama Foundation and run by the Peace Innovation project at Stanford University, attempts to track and measure antecedents to peace in concrete ways, allowing peace innovators to track progress over time. Their website <http://peace.stanford.edu/> explains in detail the Peace Dot process which roughly breaks down to the following components: organizations set up a subdomain at [http://peace.\[DomainName\].com](http://peace.[DomainName].com) and share their peace related work on that page, which Stanford's lab aggregates into a directory. The peace survey they conducted through their Peace Innovation Facebook group yielded the preliminary results displayed here: http://docs.google.com/View?id=dcqn4jpi_205g84zf2f2.

The Peace Innovation project is an initiative of Dr. B J Fogg's Persuasive Technology lab, which creates insights into how computing products – websites to mobile phones – can influence people in good ways. Check out their list of projects: <http://captology.stanford.edu/currentprojects.html>.

Activity Suggestion:

- a. Have students check out <http://peace.facebook.com/>. Ask them to share their thoughts on peace in the comments section and visit the related Facebook for Good link and share their favorite story of goodwill with the class.
- b. Have students use the internet to find other examples of 'peace data/statistics'. Have them consider the question: how can peace be quantified? Challenge them to broaden their thinking; could development indicators be considered a proxy for whether or not peace is likely to exist in a country? Check <http://hdr.undp.org/en/statistics/> for development data. Another peace data example is Global Peace Index: <http://www.visionofhumanity.org/gpi-data/#/2010/scor>

IV. Social Entrepreneurship

Social entrepreneurship is the work of social entrepreneurs who employ innovative, entrepreneurial approaches to solve social problems. Social ventures are often businesses (for profits or financially self-sustaining/revenue generating nonprofits) that create social impact and solve a pressing social issue. Some famous examples of social ventures are Kiva, the world's first peer to peer micro-lending site that lets people lend to entrepreneurs in the developing world, or Benetech, that creates technology solutions to benefit humanity. Socially entrepreneurial ventures are distinguishable from traditional nonprofits by their focus on scalability, replicability, and financial self-sustainability (that is not donation-dependent).

You can learn more about social entrepreneurship here:

<http://www.skollfoundation.org/aboutsocialentrepreneurship/index.asp>

<http://www.pbs.org/opb/thenewheroes/whatis/>

http://ashoka.org/fellows/social_entrepreneur.cfm

Activity Suggestion:

“Can you earn money solving a social problem? Is it okay to ‘do well (financially) and do good’?” Pose these questions to your students and have a class discussion, with examples of social entrepreneurship from the above links. Have students gather in groups. Assign one social justice issue (such as ‘healthcare access’, ‘vagrancy’, ‘lack of access to education for girls in Africa’ etc.) to each group, or let students choose their own issue to focus on. Make the issues as local or global as you like, depending on the inclinations of your class. Challenge students to brainstorm and come up with 1-2 social business ideas that would address these issues. Can they think of a way to solve this social problem that does not depend on individuals donating money to the cause?