

OH, HEY THERE – I am interrupting myself, before going on to the article, to ask you a (rhetorical) question and to give you a nugget of information: would you like some version of these articles in podcast form? Because that's coming soon, to earlobes near you! Well. To your earlobes, which I hope are near, um, your ears. It's in the works, is what I'm saying. This is a gentle announcement, that you'll only know about if you read this. If you forget, you can think of it as a surprise! Once it's launched, I'll begin linking to the relevant podcast episode in the article itself. Anyway, head's up, in case you want to take things in, find reading extra super duper hard to get in right now, but have 15 minutes every week or two for this. I got you. It's coming. Yay! And now, let's get into this week's article.

This week's question to consider:

What is my job in the world of social justice? I mean, I don't know enough. I've started to see things, but I don't have real power to change those things I see that are wrong. I feel like there's no point in even trying things, because my contributions don't matter that much. What do you suggest for me?

Pro tip: Everything you do matters. Everything you *can* do, matters. You are the only one who can figure out what you can do toward helping the cause of equity and antiracism. But it is all important, and it is all a piece of the whole. Sustained change requires sustained effort.

I have now been to speak to a number of school staffs in our district to give a primer on how we can embed antiracism and equity into the classroom. Maybe I have made to your school! It is a starting point presentation that requires follow-up introspection, wherein I give the beautiful people homework. This homework consists of three things:

1. A suggestion to do one of [Harvard's Implicit Association Test*](#), which I propose as an exercise in facing and determining how we feel about certain sensitive subjects;
2. A suggestion to *Do One Thing*, whether it is read an article, change the names in an assessment, have a difficult conversation, or collaborate to incorporate more equitable wording; and,
3. A request to tell me about it (anonymously) when I come back.

Number 3 there, oof. That has been crucial in this effort.

First, accountability leads to action. If you know I'm coming back with questions, and you want to put effort toward changing how things happen in your world, you're going to take some steps to get there. Of course, things get in the way, and I do not expect 100% participation anywhere. There are so many factors beyond our control (missed the first presentation, changed schools, was out sick in key days, complete overwhelm with no capacity, etcetera). Nevertheless, accountability is important.

Next, this data provides a snapshot of where people are in a school on an aggregate level, and thereby helps target and pinpoint the best next steps in moving along the cause of antiracism and equity in those communities.

For instance, if most of the staff is saying “I had a conversation with a student” or “I read an article” then we are at the beginning of our journey in that school, which is likely a reflection of the community. So, there is a lot of support required to get going, in that building. By contrast, if most of the staff has written the following level of detail “You have to check out the March 4 podcast episode of *I Weigh with Jameela Jamil* where she has screenwriter Mike Schur on. He talked about philosophy in such an accessible way, so much to think about in terms of what it means to be a good person who is their best in terms of social justice”, then there is a lot going on in that building to mine.

There is no way to know what to do next if we have no understanding of where we are. Data informs that, and that is what I am collecting when I ask for those slips of paper.

Lastly, I have no interest in inventing everything that is doable; I prefer to crowdsource the beautiful ideas that the beautiful people in this district have, have encountered, and have implemented. There are so many people quietly working toward equity and antiracism in our district. Thing is, we are often operating in separate places, doing our best in individual ways. When we come together to talk about those things, we build a shared understanding and a shared sense of movement that lightens the emotional load of social justice work. If we feel like we are out there on our own, we’re going to get discouraged in a hurry.

On this same theme, in the helping profession that is teaching, we often feel like there is more to do, or we are never doing enough. This can be paralyzing and stall progress, which is why it is important to recognize the work that people are doing in their own capacity and in their own lives. The thing with social justice work is that when we begin, we can find it very intimidating. I know I did! I’m an introvert and a teacher. I strongly believe in equality and in equity. Among other things, I also believe that if a man can go on a beach topless without issue, the same should be true for everyone regardless of gender. Still, I will never be comfortable with the idea of fighting for equity by marching in a parade with signs while topless. In other words, I, myself, will never march topless in a parade. Well. Maybe in my 60s, if new reasons arise to do that, I’m no longer teaching students, or my sensibilities change. Still, it’s exceedingly unlikely. What I’m saying is that there are limitations to how I can show up for the causes I believe in.

If you have come to help me, you are wasting your time. But if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together.

Aboriginal Activist Group, Queensland, Australia, 1970s
(often attributed to Lilla Watson)

I'm also saying that there is no barrier to entry. That barrier is imagined. To continue with the same example, you aren't required to go topless in public to further that cause. You can show up for that same cause in other ways. Maybe you provide the posters or write a strongly worded letter.

What you are capable of doing, with your specific talents and strengths and interests, it matters. There is no one way to make the world a safer place for LGBTQIA+ students. There isn't one technique for how to eliminate racism in a community. There are many approaches that contribute to those things, and your ideas are valid and important.

In fact, we need your ideas, because you are the one who lives in your community.

This whole idea also ties into how we view disability, by the way. By virtue of the fact that you live in it, yours is an important voice in your community. What you are capable of doing, and how you are able to show up? It matters.

Recommended Resource:

Ted x Essex Talk by C. Russell (May 2016) [18:07] | [From What's Wrong to What's Strong](#)

Every little thing,

Your friendly neighbourhood Anti-Racism & Equity Coach
Therese Trofimencoff (*she/they*)

** Hi! Hello, hi, hello there. A bit about Harvard's Implicit Association tests. If you do choose to take one or more of these implicit association tests, take it as a measure in the moment, like blood pressure. You can take it again if you like, and it may show you different results. Still, you don't have to be tied to those results, nor do you have to reveal your results to anyone. To take that test is to seek self-awareness. Don't be afraid to sit with it.*

Remember: when we know better, we do better.