

Making Connexions: Social Justice Education through Archival Encounters

A project of the Connexions Archive & Library

December 2012

The Connexions Archive & Library (“Connexions”) was founded in 1975 to preserve and share the history of citizen groups engaged in community-building and grassroots social justice activism.

Connexions has assembled, and preserves, an extensive archive of materials related to the activities of citizen groups from the 1960s to the present.

Connexions is now seeking to expand its efforts to make the materials in its collection more widely accessible, by creating digital and other educational resources which will enable the public in general, and students and scholars in particular, to learn about the rich multicultural heritage of citizen and community organizations who have helped to shape our society.

Context

Social justice education is a key component for nurturing critical thinking skills and civic engagement in young people within a knowledge economy. By empowering individuals to participate in change, social justice education has been and continues to be marked by moral concern for those in society who have been disadvantaged and subject to discrimination. An awareness of the history of past movements for change can be a means of informing and inspiring today’s youth to engage with the problems they face.

We believe that young people will benefit from having conversations with past social justice movements through archival research and encounters. Through these historical encounters, youth can discover both continuities and change in deep-rooted social problems and ways of responding to them. By connecting with threads of wisdom from past activists, they will be able to weave new fabrics of social change in their own way, through their own visions, and by using new methodologies for action.

We hope to facilitate these intergenerational connections, to create a space in which young people can encounter stories and narratives of social justice and to give them confidence that they too can make a difference. Ultimately, we strive to see young people learn from our archives in a pedagogically supportive environment.

Project Goals

Making Connexions: Social Justice Education through Archival Encounters is a project whose goal is to educate citizens, and young citizens in particular, about the heritage of citizen and community organizations.

Empowering Young People to Participate in Social Justice

Our project hopes to connect young people with the rich history of social justice in order to help them envision future possibilities for change. By learning about past grassroots movements and innovations, they can be inspired to join various social justice groups in their local communities and become civically engaged.

Developing Career Skills

Connexions' international internship program connects young people with mentors and challenging, meaningful work, to help them develop practical skills related to knowledge production, working with archival materials, doing research, writing abstracts, working with controlled-vocabulary databases, translating, digitizing, etc. Participating students usually receive university credit for their work, and so we have built key partnerships with a number of universities and colleges. We also train volunteers in a similar way; frequently this helps them add useful experience to their resumes and career skills. We also help students with writing and research skills valuable for their development within a knowledge economy.

Making the History of Social Justice Accessible

In order to disseminate the knowledge of social justice movements, we do the following:

- We educate people (users of the website and the physical archive) about the history and heritage of grassroots movements and their role in Canadian (and other countries') history. Currently, we have about 75,000 distinct users a month using the website; they account for around 450,000 page views a month.
- We make historical documents available to scholars and students, both online and physical documents they can look at.
- We provide a resource that helps students doing research and writing essays in fields related to our subject matter. Many students use the website.
- We hope to curate exhibits that showcase archival material in public spaces and educational settings such as high schools and universities.

Project Funding

In order to carry out the work of the project, we need sustainable sources of financial and other resources.

Connexions will be seeking funding from foundations, institutions, and individuals, as well as non-monetary assistance such as a secure space for the archive.

Project expenses include:

- A space for the archive (the collection and those who work on it)
- Internet costs: Internet access and servers, domain names, technical support
- Telephone & related
- Computer equipment and software

Appendix: Corporate information, objects and mission statement

The Connexions Archive & Library is incorporated in Ontario as a not-for-profit corporation.
 Incorporation number: 1845394
 Business number: 82695 5718

Objects for which the corporation is incorporated:

- a) To collect, preserve, organize, index, publish and provide access to information and materials related to grassroots movements for social justice;
- b) To educate and increase the public's understanding and appreciation of grassroots movements for social justice;
- c) To provide information to the public through educational forums, literature, and other means;

and such other complementary purposes not inconsistent with these objects.

Connexions Archive Mission Statement

The purpose of the Connexions Archive is to collect, preserve, organize, index, publish, and provide access to information and materials related to grassroots movements for social justice, and to educate the public about the work and contributions of these movements.

The Connexions Archive works to keep alive the rich history of grassroots movements for social justice, and to enable movements today to learn from that history in shaping the future.

The collection emphasis is on resources related to projects, groups, and movements in English Canada from the 1960s on. Since many of these movements have been involved in international issues, materials from other parts of the world may also be included where appropriate.

The work of the Connexions Archive includes copying and digitizing materials in various formats to make them as widely available as possible. Where resources permit, documents may also be translated into other languages.

To make the materials in the collection as accessible as possible, the Connexions Archive places a high priority on maintaining professional standards in organizing, cataloguing, and indexing the materials.

The Connexions Archives works to include interns, students, and volunteers in the work of the archive in order to encourage their interest and to develop their skills.

The Connexions Archive is an educational resource for scholars, students, and members of the public.

The Connexions Archive works to establish a secure funding base to support its collection and programs. It seeks support from organizations, individuals, institutions, and other funding agencies and foundations.

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