

Taking Action with *No Small Plans*¹

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WHY TAKING ACTION MATTERS

So often in school we focus on teaching civic education at arm's length. We tell students about democracy. We provide historical content about community. Rarely do we provide opportunities to practice democracy or engage in civic and community action within the school setting. Taking action with students while they are in school matters because we cannot expect young people to be active citizens if we do not afford them opportunities to learn such through experience. We need citizens who are engaged in issues important to their communities so they may become agents of change for their communities. This is not something that is learned once students graduate from school. It must be learned, practiced, and experienced—and schools are ideal sites for developing these skills.

With the ideas, topics, and issues presented in Chicago Architecture Foundation's *No Small Plans*, teachers have a unique "prompt" to move from abstract discussions about community and democracy to doing and taking action with students for purposeful civic engagement. *No Small Plans* provides an excellent excuse for teachers to listen to and learn from students. By allowing students to identify pressing issues, and by allowing those issues to become cornerstones in the curriculum, teachers

can create spaces and opportunities for students to identify problems in their communities and come up with solutions for solving them. Taking action, in this sense, is "doing democracy."

But, how can teachers engage students in action-focused projects when classroom instruction is often constrained by lesson plan mandates, standards alignment, and content that is conceived from the outside? Many state boards of education, including here in Illinois, promote—or even require—service learning, civic education, and civic engagement practices. This essay suggests techniques and tools to help teachers explore action-oriented opportunities with their students—while creating experiences and artifacts that can align with classroom mandates, particularly for civic education.

REFLECTING ON MY OWN TEACHING

When I was teaching in a 5th-grade classroom in Chicago, I had an out-of-the-ordinary experience. A classroom supporter who had backed my students' efforts to push the city and school district to make good on the promise for a new school building to serve their housing project community informed one of my students via email that Ralph Nader was going to be in Chicago. Urging the 5th-graders and me to try to get Nader involved in our cause, she was encouraging us to find allies who could raise the

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profile of their organizing campaign. Believing Ralph Nader could do just that, she suggested that he would be impressed with the young people's efforts related to a community problem to help their neighborhood.

Not only was Nader impressed but he also began writing and publishing about the students, paid the class a visit at school while on the campaign trail during his run for president, and brought additional national media attention to their immediate cause. Because of this, my 5th-grade students' organizing efforts became part of a broader conversation related to the ways in which many urban youth historically have been marginalized through inadequate schools and school resources.²

During our initial interaction, Nader suggested that I check out Katherine Isaac's 1992 book *Civics for Democracy: A Journey for Teachers and Students*, a book that chronicles ways youth have taken action to support causes, outlines civil rights movements in the 20th century, and presents civic activities youth can undertake. Most specifically Nader recommended I look into Isaac's chapter outlining "techniques for participation," that have emerged from a long tradition of youth engagement in civic participation.

TECHNIQUES FOR PARTICIPATION

Most young people in schools are readily able to document a problem. They have no trouble articulating an issue that needs to be remedied, solved, or obliterated. Naming the issues is often the easy part. Figuring out what to do next is where many people, both young and old, get stuck.

Isaac's techniques help teachers and students go beyond simply naming an issue to selecting purposeful activities that can lead to engaging with an identified problem. Some of these techniques include:

- Background research
- Boycotts
- Call-in shows
- Clearinghouses
- Committee hearings
- Demonstrations and protests
- Feature stories
- Forming a citizen group
- Identifying key players
- Initiatives and referendums
- Leaflets, flyers, posters, and bulletin boards
- Letters to the editor
- News releases
- Newsletters
- Nonviolent civil disobedience
- Op-eds
- Pamphleteering
- Picketing
- Public hearings, candidate nights, film/video screenings
- Public service announcements
- Recruiting supporters
- Reports and surveys
- Right to know
- Speakers' bureaus
- Using the courts
- Whistleblowing
- Writing a bill and finding a sponsor³

²A more complete version of this story, and my thoughts about it, has been told elsewhere—see Schultz (2008).

³To see the full discussion of these techniques, refer to Isaac (1992), pp. 157–182.

The landscape of techniques has transformed since Isaac’s book was published in 1992. I often talk with future and practicing teachers and their students about new tools for civic participation. We consider which of the techniques in Isaac’s list are appropriate for taking action today. What is missing? What might be more effective?

New techniques that complement Isaac’s original list:

- Apps
- Blogs
- Culture jamming
- Facebook
- Flashmobs
- Freedom of Information Act request (FOIA)
- Instagram
- LinkedIn
- Listservs
- Mapping
- Online surveys
- Periscope
- Photo captioning
- PhotoVoice
- Podcasts
- Pop-up stands
- Public and performance art
- RSS feeds
- Snapchat
- Twitter
- Video documentation
- Websites
- YouTube

Creating action-oriented curriculum—particularly by leveraging some of these techniques—with young people readily can cover standards, meet expectations, and require them to articulate and demonstrate specific, tangible learning occurring inside and outside of the classroom. The artifacts that result from working through these activities illustrate deep and engaged learning—certainly better than any worksheet or rote learning.⁴

The techniques named above and tools that follow below are intended as a starting point to enable teachers to turn the proverbial corner and undertake a student-centered action project in their classrooms. These tools can help teachers capitalize on *No Small Plans* as an impetus for creating relevant and responsive teaching, honoring what students name as worthwhile, developing student agency, and satisfy outside mandates.

TOOLS RELATED TO TAKING ACTION

Whether developing curriculum alongside students from scratch, or leaning on already-available curricula from an educational advocacy organization or a not-for-profit, teachers can look to some of the following web-based tools and resources to facilitate their efforts. These (primarily free) resources have been curated as a starting point for teachers looking to engage in action-oriented ways with their students.

⁴Many researchers have shown how project-based work can incorporate action, inquiry, civic literacy, and justice-oriented classroom activities, while also aligning with standards. Teachers may be interested in looking to Agarwal-Rangnath (2013); Agarwal-Rangnath, Dover, and Henning (2016); Dover (2015); Epstein (2014); Gutstein and Peterson (2013); Wolk (2013); and Zemelman (2016) for guidance and ideas.

TABLE 1. CLASSROOM TOOLS AND RESOURCES FOR TAKING ACTION

Technique	Topics	Web Address	Explanation
Apps	Build an App	https://ibuildapp.com/ https://www.appypie.com/	design and develop a mobile app using available templates
Blog	Blogging Platforms	https://wordpress.com/ https://www.blogger.com	create a free blog
Culture Jamming	How to Culture Jam	http://www.wikihow.com/Culture-Jam	step-by-step ways to culture jam
Demographics and Mapping	Mapping Tools	https://www.google.com/maps https://www.google.com/earth/ http://www.scribblemaps.com/ https://www.socialexplorer.com/explore/maps	create and share free maps in various formats, or explore demographic data through maps
Flyers, Leaflets, Posters and Documents	Document Creator	https://www.canva.com/	create and share free flyers, posters, social media materials, ads, postcards and other documents
FOIA	How to File a FOIA Request	http://bit.ly/2eL9PmF	how-to guide for completing a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request
GIFs	Create and Share GIFS	https://giphy.com/	search, discover, share, and create animated GIFs
Letters, Emails, Contacting Legislators	Finding Your Legislators	https://openstates.org/find_your_legislator/	enter your address to determine your local legislators
Letters to the Editor	Writing Effective Letters to the Editor	http://reclaimdemocracy.org/effective_letters_editor/	guide for writing letters to the editor
Media Literacy	Media Literacy Educator Resources	http://medialit.org/educator-resources	resources for teaching media literacy
Op-Ed	The Op-Ed Project	https://www.theopedproject.org/	resources section that suggests basic structure, tips, and how to pitch op-eds
Performance Art	How to Organize a Flashmob	http://www.wikihow.com/Organize-a-Flash-Mob http://bit.ly/2tH2r2p	step-by-step instructions for creating a flashmob
Petitions	Online Petition Websites	https://www.change.org/ http://www.thepetitionsite.com/ https://ipetitions.com/	platforms for creating free online petitions
PhotoVoice	PhotoVoice Manual for Participatory Photography	https://photovoice.org/photovoice-manual/	guide for designing participatory photography and digital storytelling projects
Podcast	How to Make a Podcast	http://bit.ly/2h0SF4Y http://www.audacityteam.org/	step-by-step guide to making a podcast, and free audio editor and recorder
Protests and Demonstrations	Know Your Rights	https://www.aclu.org/protest http://www.wikihow.com/Protest	guides to participating in free speech, protests, and demonstrations
Spoken Word	Become a Slam Poet	http://bit.ly/2v5j7k8 http://youngchicagoauthors.org/louder-than-a-bomb	how-to video from TED-Ed and Young Chicago Authors Louder Than a Bomb Youth Poetry Slam
Surveys and Forms	Online Survey Tools	https://www.surveymonkey.com/ https://docs.google.com/forms	develop, distribute, and analyze free online surveys
Video Documentation	Making Documentaries: A Step-by-Step Guide	http://bit.ly/2v5GNFk	steps, resources, and tips for making video documentaries
Websites	Website Development Platforms	https://www.weebly.com/ https://www.wix.com/ https://sites.google.com	create free websites

REFLECT, COLLABORATE, AND FIND PARTNERS

Challenging students to connect directly with local community-based organizations that are working on different issues bolsters action projects. Several storylines in *No Small Plans* show the power of community-based organizations working for stewardship and change. Chicago's rich community organizing can be seen in the work of, for instance, the Logan Square Neighborhood Organization (<http://www.lsna.net/>) or the Southwest Organizing Project (<http://swopchicago.org/>). These and many other organizations focus on the themes raised in *No Small Plans* including housing, public space, urban planning, access to transportation, segregation, and gentrification. Connecting with community-based organizations and aligning projects with groups that organize around issues students identify as meaningful—such as combatting violence, police brutality, healthy food access, LGBTQ rights, or education equity—helps students see firsthand the multiple ways people steward their communities and enables students to develop relationships with people who are engaged in issues that matter to them personally.

“GO ON. HAVE AT IT.”

Action projects are fluid—they center on and emerge from the concerns and ideas of those who have the most at stake in the classroom, the students. The unpredictability of this kind of engagement is sometimes frightening to teachers—and can make teachers and students feel

vulnerable. Educators who are new to doing action projects in the classroom need not worry that they are “doing it right” or following “the script”. There is no canon to follow. The curriculum emerges from the students and teacher working together and being responsive to authentic experiences. Sharing authority with students has the profound potential to not only motivate students, but also teaches them the skills inherent in “doing democracy.”

Teachers should find solace in the fact that there are no wrong answers in doing this work with your students. Doing emergent action projects is like any other pedagogical approach—the experience is what matters most. Practice with your students. When students are given the opportunity to ask questions and identify issues that matter to them, and then engage in partnership with communities, they will not only build civic engagement skills, but also will likely have an impact on the issue they care about.

Try taking action with students and see how it goes. Reflect with them. Emergent action projects resist teaching and learning that focuses on simply having an answer; classrooms transform into places that embrace conversation, deliberation, and practicing democracy. Again, action projects are messy. If we can model this messiness in our classrooms and show that this discomfort is valuable and transferable to other issues and situations, we are well on our way to equipping young people to “do democracy.”

As Daniel Burnham challenges readers on the last page of *No Small Plans*, “Go on. Have at it.” •

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Liam decides to take the GMAT in October. To achieve this objective, Liam has decided to use management by objectives (MBO). A. After studying for a month, Liam takes a practice test and scores 40 points higher than he did on his first practice test. B. Liam will spend one hour each weeknight and three hours every Saturday and Sunday studying GMAT practice questions. C. Liam takes the test in October and scores a 720. He goes out to his favorite restaurant to celebrate. D. Based on the average test scores of students at his target schools, Liam decides he wants to earn a 710 on the GMAT.

A. Re No Small Plans Productions is a Chicago-based event production company, creating work that both prov See more. CommunitySee all. 713 people like this. 768 people follow this. AboutSee all. +1 312-771-8546.Â Facebook is showing information to help you better understand the purpose of a Page. See actions taken by the people who manage and post content. Page created â€“ 29 March 2013. People. 713 likes. Related Pages. Reunion Chicago. Government organisation. While action plans may differ in terms of tasks and timelines, they generally conform to the same structure and include the same types of information. Create an action plan to help you achieve your goal by following these five steps: Set SMART goals.Â This process entails dividing your main goal into smaller objectives. By doing so, you can make the final goal seem less overwhelming and move closer to it in an organized, step-by-step manner. Make sure the actions are attainable and related to your goal.Â Learning a new skill is one task that will likely need to be broken up into smaller, well-defined steps. Clearly describe each task to create a plan that will lead you to your ultimate goal. Related: Understanding the Project Management Processes and Phases.

Neighborhood action plans (often abbreviated as N.A.P.) is a game feature introduced with The Sims 4: Eco Lifestyle. They are a series of new rules or regulations enforced upon a particular neighborhood in the game, enacted through community voting. These votes committed for the particular neighborhood come from and can only be declared by citizens of the world it's in. Some N.A.P.s are there to help improve or worsen the eco footprint of the neighborhood, whilst others may restrict Sim's leisure