

Teaching the C3 Framework

Be the Change: Guiding Students to Take Informed Action

Carly Muetterties and Kathy Swan

“Be the change you wish to see in the world.” Though this statement is often attributed to Gandhi, there is no record of him ever uttering those words. The line likely derives from a different statement Gandhi made:

If we could change ourselves, the tendencies in the world would also change. As a man changes his own nature, so does the attitude of the world change towards him.... We need not wait to see what others do.¹

This longer statement better reflects Gandhi’s approach to civic action. That is, change comes when individuals transform themselves first and then move outward into the world. If Gandhi’s words are a starting place for civic action in social studies classrooms, educators must first provide a space for students to be reflective about their own thoughts and stances towards societal problems before moving to action. In other words, their actions must be *informed*.

The C3 Framework lays out a similar vision for civic action within Dimension 4 of the Inquiry Arc in a section titled “Taking Informed Action.” The Framework emphasizes that “It is important to note that taking informed action ... should be grounded in and informed by the inquiries initiated and sustained within and among the disciplines. In that way, action is then a purposeful, informed, and reflective experience.”² The Inquiry Design Model (IDM) breaks down Taking Informed Action into three sequential steps: *understand*, *assess*, and *act*. To understand, students apply the inquiry’s concepts or enduring ideas to a civic context. Students assess the topic by considering different perspectives on the issue, ways to address it, and the potential impact of their actions. When students act, they apply their learning in a civic action.³

We know from working with teachers around the world that the Taking Informed Action component of the Inquiry Arc and the IDM blueprint can be the most intimidating part of an inquiry experience. Often, these three words conjure up visions of student walk-outs or protests at City Hall.

Understandably, educators may feel hesitant to pursue such a course of action. Since the publication of the C3 Framework, we have tried to paint a broader picture of civic action that allows for Taking Informed Action tasks to come in many shapes and sizes, from the complex (e.g., organizing a school-wide donation drive) to the everyday (e.g., having an informed conversation). In this article, we discuss how to support students in the understand-assess-act sequence of the IDM Blueprint and to provide them agency in determining their ultimate action. In doing so, we hope to inspire even the most reticent teacher to dip a toe into inquiry-based civic action.

A Guided Inquiry: How Will I Make Change?

We begin with a blueprint that we recently designed for a middle school in Kentucky whose teachers wanted to end their year with a civic action project. The compelling question—“How will I make change?”—serves as a frame for the inquiry experience. This blueprint is an example of what we call a “guided” inquiry,⁴ in which students are given some guidance and structure to the inquiry experience, but are offered an opportunity to become more independent and to exercise greater agency around the topic they choose, the sources that inform their research, and the ways in which they communicate their conclusions. In the supporting questions, they not only understand a problem and assess *possible* actions they could take, but they plan to take action on the problem under investigation (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Be the Change: Civic Action Inquiry

How Will I Make a Change?													
Kentucky Academic Standards for Social Studies	8.I.CC.4 Apply a range of deliberative and democratic procedures to make decisions about ways to take action on current local, regional and global issues.												
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Summative Performance Tasks	TASK 6: ARGUMENT How will I make a change? Construct an argument about how you will make change, including a step-by-step timeline.												
	TASK 7: ACT Implement the taking informed civic action plan in a way that shares the project with others.												
	TASK 8: EXTENSION Reflect on the experience noting what you learned from the project and what you might do differently next time.												

For purposes of this article, we zoom into the formative and summative performance tasks to break down this process further:

- Task 1 Staging the Compelling Question:
Selecting an Issue
- Task 2 Formative Performance Task:
Understanding the Issue
- Task 3 Formative Performance Task:
Assessing Policies to Address the Issue
- Task 4 Formative Performance Task:
Planning an Action Plan
- Task 5 Formative Performance Task:
Evaluating the Action Plan
- Task 6 Argument: Finalizing the Action Plan
- Task 7 Act: Implementing the Action
- Task 8 Extension: Reflecting on the Action

In the sections that follow, we walk through excerpts of a

graphic organizer that accompanies the inquiry to help students work through the eight formative and summative performance tasks. The entire graphic organizer is available on C3 Teachers.⁵ We begin with the Staging the Compelling Question task for the question, “How will I make change?”

**Task 1 (Staging the Compelling Question):
Selecting an Issue**

The inquiry begins with students thinking about an issue or problem that is important to them. We can see teachers providing prompts (e.g., current events, news articles) that help students reflect upon topics that are important to them. The chosen topic can become the focus for the entire class inquiry or each student can work on an individual topic. Then, we encourage teachers to have students talk with one another about the personal importance of each issue.

**Task 2 (Formative Performance Task):
Understanding the Issue**

To prepare students for *informed* action, the second task poses

Figure 2. PLAN STEP 1: Be Connected

Who are the stakeholders? (a) Who is affected, (b) who can bring change, and (c) who can help you?			
<p>Everyday citizens Friends Classmates Schoolmates Teammates Students at other schools Other young people</p> <p>Parents Family Teachers School leaders (principal, counselors) Coaches Neighbors</p> <p>Other people in my community</p>	<p>Local Political Leaders <i>Examples:</i> Council members, Board members, Mayor</p> <p>State Political Leaders <i>Examples:</i> State House/ Senate representatives, Governor, Secretary of State, Attorney General</p>	<p>National Political Leaders <i>Examples:</i> Congresspersons, Senators, President,</p> <p>International Leaders <i>Examples:</i> UN representative, Foreign heads of state (other countries' presidents, leaders), International organization leaders, Businesses/companies</p>	<p>Societal Leaders <i>Examples:</i> Leaders of nonprofit/civic organizations, Educational organizations, Religious institutions (churches), Businesses/ companies</p>

questions to help students investigate and better understand their chosen topic. In the graphic organizer, we prompt students with the following questions:

- What is the issue/problem?
- Who is affected/involved?
- What caused the issue/problem?
- Why is it important?

We provide some resources to help students begin their research. These resources include websites like *Scholastic News*, *Time for Kids*, and *Newsela*, but could also include resources that are provided by the school/district.

**Task 3 (Formative Performance Task):
Assessing Policies to Address the Issue**

Now that students are more informed on their issue, the next task asks them to dive deeply into the ways that people have tried to address the issue and the challenges they faced in doing so. We anchor their investigation with four key questions:

- What is needed to help?
- What are people doing about your issue/problem?
- What struggles/challenges can happen when addressing your issue/problem?

- What are other ways people could address the issue/problem?

**Task 4 (Formative Performance Task):
Planning an Action Plan**

For the fourth task, students are constructing an evidence-based claim about the best way to address their issue and take action. Part of this task includes planning their civic action project. We created a series of action task organizers to scaffold the planning task into three steps: students (1) determine stakeholders; (2) select the action they want to take; and (3) decide how they will share their project with others. We tried to be comprehensive in our organizers to help students see the many opportunities for civic engagement and allow for teacher adaptations.

We label the first planning step, “Be Connected” (see Figure 2). Here, students connect their civic action plan to the stakeholders who are affected by the issue, who can bring change, and who can help them implement their policy goals. The stakeholder list ranges from everyday citizens to international leaders in order to emphasize the many ways people act as civic stakeholders.

Next, students decide what their action project will entail. Connecting with others in civic matters can take many forms. Showing a range of options encourages students to be citizens in ways that feel meaningful and authentic to them, whether big or small. Inspired by Westheimer and Kahne’s categories of civic engagement,⁶ we created four categories to parse out different ways students act as citizens (See Figure 3).

Figure 3. PLAN STEP 2: What action can I take?

Be Informed	Be Engaged	Be a Leader	Be the Change
Start conversations about your issue with others Write an article Create a pamphlet/flyer Make a video Create a public service announcement Write a story/poem/song Create a podcast Draw a picture Make a poster Create a presentation Create a class position statement Take a survey on the issue Write a suggested textbook revision	Give money to a charity related to your issue Donate items Invite a guest speaker Participate in a rally Participate in a boycott Volunteer Sign a petition Attend a candidate's forum Attend a neighborhood meeting Attend/watch a speech related to your issue Comment in an online conversation	Organize a fundraiser Organize a donation drive Organize a community service Create a Facebook page on the issue Organize a flyer campaign to raise awareness Form a club Organize a petition campaign Organize a class forum with stakeholders Organize a rally Organize a boycott Conduct a survey to determine people's views on the issue Organize a voter registration drive	Start a charity to address the cause of your issue Write a resolution to address the cause of the issue for sharing with stakeholders Contact a stakeholder about addressing your issue through policy/laws Speak at a school, town, or other community meeting Present at a local civic organization
EXAMPLES: Write an essay about homelessness in your community Talk to your parents about the cleanliness of a local park	EXAMPLES: Donate food or clothing to a food/clothing drive, homeless shelter, or other related charity Clean up litter	EXAMPLES: Organize a food donation drive for a homeless shelter Organize a cleanup project of a local park	EXAMPLES: Start a charity to provide job and housing supports for your community's homeless Write to your local councilperson about funding for more trash receptacles in your local park

To *be informed*, students learn about an issue and communicate learning. Possible informed tasks include writing an article or creating a pamphlet on their issue.

To *be engaged*, students engage with others on an issue. Engaged tasks include such activities as having an informed conversation with someone or volunteering on behalf of the issue.

To *be a leader*, students organize a collaborative action to address their issue.

To *be the change*, students seek transformation, meaning they take an action that will address the root cause of their issue.

In selecting an action task, teachers and students should consider what they enjoy doing, the logistics of their choice, as well as how they can engage with their fellow students or

other stakeholders. Some students may want to have a march or protest. For others, having an informed conversation may feel much more comfortable. Likewise, the amount of classroom time to devote to the task will impact decision making.

The third step of this task is to determine the audience and level of sharing. (See the chart on the next page) We call this section: Be a Voice (see Figure 4). Establishing the scope and audience of the topic helps narrow down where (or with whom) the action should be shared. Options range from another class of students to the global level. Selections should directly connect to the issue at hand and the chosen action task. If students are addressing litter at their local park, for example, the level for sharing should be local in scope (e.g., school, neighborhood). This list also helps narrow in on the appropriate audience or medium for the task. If the topic has a potentially global impact, and the action task can logistically be broadly shared, the organization or space for sharing should have a global reach.

Figure 4. PLAN STEP 3: Be a Voice

Where can I/we share?			
Levels for Sharing			
Other classes School School district	Neighborhood Town/city State	Region Country World	
Organizations Charity Nonprofit organizations Civic organizations Educational organizations Political organizations Social organizations	Physical Spaces Hang or display work in the school hallway or a place where people gather Present project to: Other classes at your school Morning announcements Students at another school A local or national organization related to your issue A school, town, or city meeting	Publish/Distribute Information Share information to be published in: The school/PTA newsletter The local newspaper National/international news organization Local/national organization publication Digital Spaces Technology Post/share project on: School or class website Community message boards Social media platforms: Facebook, Twitter, Instagram Platforms connecting classrooms around the world (e.g., Google Classroom, Skype in the Classroom)	Contact Stakeholders Talk to others about your issue (parents, friends, etc.) Collaborate with stakeholders in the action Write a letter (email or paper) Write a position statement (email or paper) Call the office of a stakeholder Meet with stakeholders to discuss the issue Submit a message through an online platform Invite them to speak to your school/class Send suggested textbook revision to publisher

Task 5 (Formative Performance Task): Evaluating the Action Plan

Students have an action plan, but their job is not finished! Now students should evaluate possible challenges they may encounter when trying to address their chosen issue. Using the graphic organizer, students brainstorm potential problems or challenges they could face and consider what they will do if the challenge arises.

Task 6 (Argument): Finalizing the Action Plan

With the civic action (and troubleshooting) plan, students finalize their action plan. Students can write a statement that provides an evidence-based argument for why they chose their project and how it addresses the issue/problem. Throughout the graphic organizer, we created “Mad-Lib” scaffolds that help students who need support in being clear about their ideas. An example of a starter for the summative argument follows (See Figure 5).

Task 7 (Act): Implementing the Action

Now it’s time for students to implement their civic action project. Just as being informed is a crucial element of taking civic action, bringing an idea to fruition requires careful scaffolding. We created a timeline handout to help students prepare for action by breaking down implementation into smaller steps. Small-scale forms of civic action may have 1-2 steps, while bigger projects may have several. Regardless, students are gaining guided experience with the work involved in civic engagement. In the graphic organizer on the next page, we created a structure for making the chosen action a reality.

Task 8 (Extension): Reflecting on the Action

The last task of this inquiry has students reflect on their action project. Through reflection, students have space to consider what went well, what did not, and what they might do differently in the future. This task is a crucial step in completing the

Figure 5. ARGUMENT

Even though there may be, _____
Challenges or challengers to addressing your issue,

I can _____
Be informed / be engaged / be a leader / be the change

by _____
action (including where / how you will share).

This civic action will address my issues by _____
How it addresses the issue: helps people and/or addresses the cause or source of the issue

Figure 6. TIMELINE FOR ACTION

BE PREPARED

Step Number	What needs to be done?	How long will it take? (Timeframe)	What additional resources of information do I need?	Notes
STEP 1:				
STEP 2:				
STEP 3:				
STEP 4:				
STEP 5:				
STEP 6:				

action task. Not all civic acts are going to feel successful but, by providing space to reflect upon the experience, student efforts can be validated.

Conclusion

The power of inquiry lies in the opportunities it provides students to wrestle with past and present problems. The IDM's Taking Informed Action component directly connects learning to these larger ideas, by providing a tangible way to apply learning in and out of the classroom. We designed the guided inquiry to offer teachers and students a new way to look at civic engagement. Like all IDM blueprints, we expect teachers to adapt these materials for their own classrooms. We hope that teachers use the blueprint to create civic engagement opportunities that are both authentic to the topic at hand and that show students the importance of their roles as citizens. 🌐

Notes

1. B. Morton, "Falsar Words Were Never Spoken," Opinion, *New York Times* (August 29, 2011), www.nytimes.com/2011/08/30/opinion/falsar-words-were-never-spoken.html.
2. National Council for the Social Studies, *The College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework for Social Studies State Standards: Guidance for Enhancing the Rigor of K-12 Civics, Economics, Geography, and History* (Silver Spring, Md.: NCSS, 2013): 62.
3. S.G. Grant, Kathy Swan, and John Lee, *Inquiry-Based Practice in Social Studies Education: Understanding the Inquiry Design Model* (New York: Routledge, 2017).
4. Kathy Swan, S.G. Grant, and John Lee, *Blueprinting an Inquiry-Based Curriculum: Planning with the Inquiry Design Model* (forthcoming from NCSS and C3 Teachers, 2019).
5. "How Will I Make a Change?" www.c3teachers.org/inquiries/civic-action-project/.
6. Joel Westheimer and Joseph Kahne, "What Kind of Citizen? The Politics of Educating for Democracy," *American Educational Research Journal* 41, no. 2 (2004): 237–69.

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