

Using the Arts for Advocacy

Project Based Art Centered Activist Instruction for 2050 and Beyond

The following pages include ways to help teachers develop *scaffolded approaches* to the world's problems and create projects that are fun, exciting, and impactful.

sections:

1 The Activist Teacher

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**We must act
like we are
facing a crisis,
because we are.**

**“ Few will have the greatness to bend history itself;
but each of us can work to change a small portion of
events, and in the total; of all those acts will be written
the history of this generation. Robert Kennedy**

**The youngest among us will have to bend the course
of history back towards a sustainable future.
Teachers can help make this happen.**

on a heating planet

There is no time to waste. Today's global challenges are terrifying. Climate Scientists tell us changes are coming faster and faster We must equip students to begin changing the world NOW. We must prepare them to deal with a hotter climate and all the natural and political upheaval that will come with it.

Passive Lessons are not enough. Action beyond the classroom is necessary. Students not just learning about activism, but practicing it. An Art Centered Activist Project contains an action plan that calls for something to change, be preserved, or enhanced.



Will you inspire the next Malala?

From civil disobedience to registering voters, from protest to advocacy, from protection and preservation to disruption and change, from local to global engagement, from intellectual to emotional focus; there are ways for everyone, young and old, to make the world a better place.

Teachers must inspire students to strengthen cultural values, pursue local sustainability, protect and preserve our rights and our responsibilities. Students must tackle threats to global wellbeing as they learn to think critically, solve problems creatively, and grow artistically. **They must become compassionate citizens. As teachers we all yearn for this, together we must find ways to make it happen.**

In 2018 Greta Thunberg, stopped attending school one day a week and began a protest outside the Swedish Parliament to draw political attention to climate change. Since then, Thunberg's tactic of going on a climate change strike has been taken up by children in a hundred countries around the world. Her idea didn't come out of thin air, she was inspired by the *Never Again* students of Parkland High School in Florida. It took being shot at and having friends shot and killed to move the Florida students, but all it took Greta was seeing a problem adults weren't facing and deciding something had to be done about it.



Children shouldn't have to skip school to keep our planet livable.

Schools should define the problems we face, teach the skills to respond to them, and bring us together so we can work collectively to make meaningful change.

Most importantly, students must see that their efforts are worthwhile, that they are making a difference. That they are heard and seen.

Section One

What is an Activist Teacher?

Becoming an activist teacher requires self examination as well as examining how schools fit into broader social, cultural, and political contexts. Take stock. Most teachers get into teaching because they want to make a difference. Do you identify with a cause? Are you a feminist? An environmentalist? Pro Choice/Pro Life? LGBT? Antiwar? Do you do something about any cause(s)? What has been your activist timeline.

Schools are predisposed to be conservative, much slower to change than the rest of society. They often run counter to democratic and egalitarian principles. So a big part of being an Activist Teacher involves changing schools and changing the way we teach to better serve the world.

Imbedded in such conservative organizations, teachers often find it challenging and frustrating to advocate for for even small changes. This can lead to disenchantment and burnout. We should not let this happen, because it is often teachers who make the greatest difference in students' lives. Teachers can and do inspire activism. Teachers also teach the skills activists need: organizational, artistic, scientific, social. Teachers can create a safe place in their classrooms for the exchange of beliefs and goals, a place for students to develop their activist roots.

Teachers must find ways to explain their own motivation and activism to students without indoctrinating or enlisting them. As a teacher they are there to inspire students and help them find their own voices and causes. Together students and teachers can take up causes that are mutually compelling.



Finding Your Activist Comfort Zone

Everyone has their own approach to action based learning and activist involvement.

Engagement doesn't have to be confrontational. Advocacy works as well or better than protest. Change is not always about "progress". Preservation often goes "backwards" to regain what has been lost culturally, environmentally, politically, and socially.

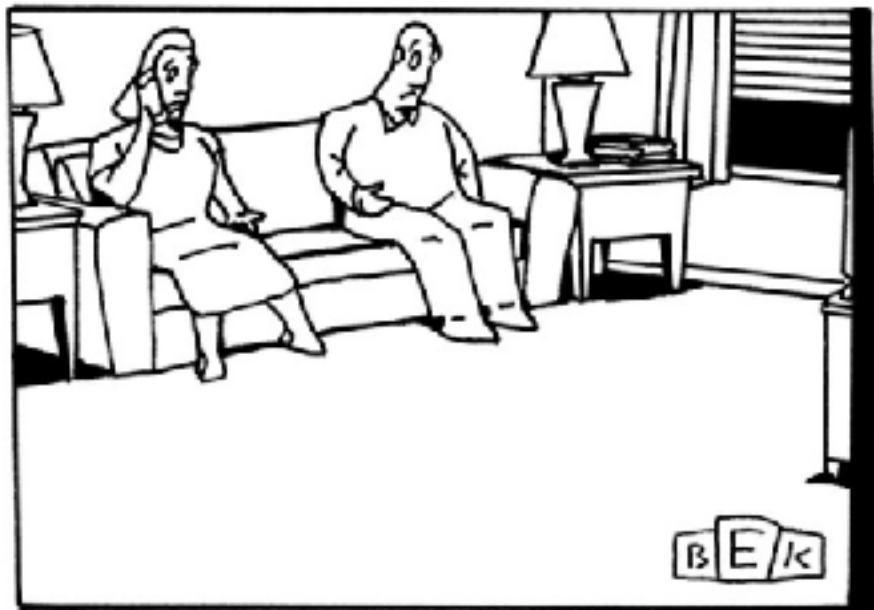
Looking Inward Teaching activism begins with self examination and assessment. Take stock. What has been your activist timeline. Some of us have a long history of acting out and acting up. Some have used quieter ways of helping our schools and communities. Whether or not you have a strong activist history, you do have feelings about the world around you; things you'd like your students to consider. Things you'd like them to preserve, enhance or change.

Working on personal visions as they pertain to teaching means examining and reexamining why we came into teaching. Asking "What difference am I trying to make?" Creating a personal vision forces us to take a stand for a preferred future. **The more we express our purpose, the more kindred spirits we are likely to find. This naturally leads to organizational change which can unite entire schools in a common vision.**

Looking Outward Teachers can help students become thoughtful democratic citizens, when we all understand the relationships between power, privilege, and knowledge. We must begin with an honest investigation of how the school system perpetuates social inequities. We need to know how we are all shaped by dominant ideologies and discourses, and also that we can change these when we learn to see, think, and act differently. We need to explore different visions of what could be, no matter how fanciful or impractical they may seem.

Ultimately, in the broadest sense, teaching is activist when it supports students to become critical, justice-oriented, creative thinkers. We must all develop a critical, even skeptical approach to the world around us. Once this is established and nourished we must look inward and examine our prejudices, fears and hopes.

Easier to Say Than Do



"Just hand-wringing and watching helplessly."

Aren't we all doing this more than we'd like?

When teachers feel overwhelmed, under appreciated, isolated, and at war with students and administration

Burnout Follows

There's nothing new about teacher burnout, the following quote comes from 1991:

Most teachers begin their careers wanting to make a difference in their student's lives. But the devastating effects of a growing "sense of inconsequentiality" often builds.

"The inevitable difficulties of teaching ... interact with personal issues and vulnerabilities, as well as social pressure and values, to engender a sense of frustration and force a reassessment of the possibilities of the job and the investment one wants to make in it" Farber (1991, p. 36)

teachers who find themselves isolated in schools where student morale or motivation is low, or the administration is rigid, outmoded or overwhelmed must not only work to stay afloat, but must commit to building schools that are relevant, nourishing, and inspiring.

The following helpful list was adapted from an article by Fullan and Hargreaves 1991.

1. Listen to, then articulate your inner voice... Integrity heads the list of valuable personal attributes because we have to work together and get along but not by bending to situations we find intolerable.
2. Is your teaching working? Teachers get frustrated when students disengage. Don't take that frustration out on them. Don't give up and blame students if they "don't get it". Take responsibility. Try multiple approaches and methods. Observe teachers whose students do "get it". Ask students what would help them do better. Be patient. Effective teaching takes practice and time.
3. Develop a risk-taking mentality with teaching...don't always choose the safe way. Take some chances. Try new techniques and technologies. Admit to the possibility of uncertain outcomes. Include your students in the process. Experimentation can be a shared adventure.
4. Embrace the new but don't abandon well worn techniques and practices when they still work. Staying within a shared comfort zone helps people solve interpersonal problems.
5. Don't take advantage of your position as teacher. See your students as equals deserving your interest and understanding. Treat them as you want to be treated when you find yourself in their position.
6. Commit to working with colleagues, both likeminded and those with opposing positions. Teachers often compete, even work against each other. The system sets this up but real power lies in escaping classroom fiefdoms and joining together even with adversaries, to solve problems.
7. Seek variety and avoid balkanization within your teaching focus... look across the school community for answers... don't leave anyone out from janitors to district administrators.
8. Redefine your teaching role to extend beyond the classroom. Maybe you are already involved outside of school. Use your connections and networks to expand your effectiveness inside your classroom. If not, take some time to get involved. Your effort will be repaid with the resources you gain. Create gateway experiences for students of all ages. Get them out into their communities as learners and contributors. You can even go further afield, even worldwide.

9. Balance work and life... don't let one get in the way of the other. Make sure you can teach without worrying about your life at home and be sure teaching doesn't overwhelm your outside commitments and pleasures.

10. Support Principals and other Administrators to develop interactive professional development. Make sure you continue to learn with the help of your school and make that learning personally meaningful.

11. Commit to continuous improvement and perpetual learning. Even if you have been teaching for thirty years and are at the top of the pay scale, there is always something new and meaningful to be learned. Seek out those opportunities.

12. Monitor and strengthen the connection between your development and your students' development ... is what you are doing to grow and change transferring to your classroom?

Today teachers must be equally at home in the classroom and the outside world. They must lead their students into the world outside school.

Perseverance furthers...

Success is counted in small gains, one or two students who are inspired can make a huge difference **when many follow**

Section Two

Student Activists



Noga Levy-Rapoport, age 17 led the London climate strike.

**“We are full of rage
and terror”**

We cannot expect children to solve the problems adults have caused, but we can support them when they try.

Students who have been terrorized, shot at in middle class schools or in gang dominated projects are full of fear and anger. If they have experienced abuse, threats of deportation, hunger, bullying, they have the grounds to take action. But just as it is difficult for an adult to take action even on causes that personally affect them, it is even more difficult for a vulnerable child to do so.. Students exposed to vile acts might be suffering quietly, living in fear. They may seem apathetic, depressed, hopeless. But they will be easier to move to action than a student (or anyone for that matter) living a sheltered and comfortable life.

“Entitled” children can be difficult to reach, but they but they are ultimately reachable when shown that some threats like climate change, guns, other peoples’ poverty, zealotry, pollution effect even the most advantaged among us.

We can all claim membership in one or more groups who are treated unfairly because of race, gender, sexual orientation, religion, disability, and ageism which leads older people to not take youngsters seriously.

The better off among us, young and old, must gain empathy, and must come to acknowledge that only when the lowest of the low are raised up will all of us have a chance to solve the problems besetting us and our cohabitants on the earth. **It is the ones who have time, energy and means who often lead the way.**

A child is never too young to become an activist

Once they know the facts even very young children wonder why “grownups” are not fixing threats to their wellbeing.

Students of all ages can take their messages public. It is often our youngest citizens who get the most positive attention. They have energy and enthusiasm and often have the most at stake. It's our children who are going to inherit this earth and live the longest in it. Kids exude honesty and candor. Their seriousness charms us. Their pleas can turn hard hearts. They hear enough even when we try to protect them, they want to know the truth. It doesn't have to be brutal and graphic, but the truth is better than fantasies and needless worry.

Dispel negative stereotypes

America does not love activists. Because some activists are outspoken, and advocate unconventional practices, activism has been associated with hostile militancy and eccentricity. Some students may use negative stereotypes when describing activists, even though these same students agree with the causes being advocated. When these students describe a feminist as man hating, angry women, or an environmental campaigner as a tree hugger they are repeating what they've heard somewhere. These stereotypes are not the sort of people young students want to associate with, let alone become.

When students meet activists face to face, they will find people who only differ from themselves by their commitment to causes. Bringing inspiring activists into the classroom begins connections that will lead

students into community involvement. Students are ready to do more once they feel comfortable and know what sorts of action they're signing up for. They can match their style to that of the organizations they join or help create. They can find their comfort level whether it involves militancy or mildness.

Use student's personal experience as motivation

Even very young students have a sense that the "real world" is full of inequities and challenges they aren't being prepared to cope with, let alone solve. "Not fair" is heard from a very young age. Older students complain that what they are asked to learn is irrelevant. Many of them live in a world of threats and harsh realities: physical, emotional, economic, political. Some are illegal immigrants, or are homeless, one fifth are hungry, many are threatened by gun violence and drug culture. Almost everyone is discriminated against in some manner or another, because of their race, gender, sexual preference, age, religion, economic status. More and more children are reacting to the threats of climate change, wealth inequality, and lack of opportunity.

Students have plenty they wish were different both personally and with the wider world. Many feel boxed into a state of waiting, of boredom, which ultimately becomes apathy. Their parents are working hard just to keep families' heads above water. They don't have time for activism.

There are always one or more students in every classroom who have been exposed to activism at home, in church or by the circumstances of their lives. Students whose parents are activists are the most likely

to become activists themselves. They have a model to follow and feel comfortable making their opinions public. Often they are even willing to work on controversial causes. These students are invaluable to teachers as models and activators for their peers.

Anger is not as sustaining as empathy and justice.

When teachers help students transform feelings of anger, sadness and hopelessness into concrete actions, students begin to feel better about themselves. Positive messages work better than angry ones. Anger is often the motivation for protest. It can be righteous, but it can lead to negative outcomes both for individuals and causes. For individuals anger is not sustainable or healthy. For organizations and movements a militant message or attitude can turn people off, reinforcing negative attitudes about activists.

When students turn their anger into activism they experience the “helper’s high”. Through affirmative, inclusive, collective action, students get out of themselves and experience empathic engagement.

Section Three

Creating Activist Arts Centered Classrooms

We can help students gain artistic proficiency, think creatively, knowledgeably, and logically as they join ongoing debates, communicate forcefully, build coalitions, present their demands to a wider public, and ultimately organize movements. Doing so we create classrooms where students are excited and willing participants. **A teacher does not need to be an artist to teach these things. She must simply nurture artistic talent in her students.**

the classroom is not the place for teachers to impose their views on students.

It is a place where difficult subjects can be examined. It is the place to insist on inquiry and to avoid indoctrination.

Many teachers fail to create “student centered” curriculum simply because they have not asked for student input. Often they are so busy trying to follow the proscribed Standards they don’t get to know their students’ lives, desires, and beliefs. Teachers need to listen closely to every students’ viewpoint so that student centered teaching naturally follows.

Teachers can create safe places for sharing diverse strongly held beliefs by practicing consciousness raising or Ho’oponopono, insuring classrooms that are inclusive, egalitarian, and committed to Hawaiian values.

Ho’oponopono

Ho’oponopono brings together people with different experiences, life styles and beliefs in order to work on goals that will be mutually beneficial. Involving both reconciliation and consciousness raising, ***ho’oponopono*** perpetuates Hawaiian culture and values while giving every participant a safe space to share feelings, beliefs, and goals, to ask for forgiveness and to grant it. Using this uniquely Hawaiian practice will set the tone and fulfill the goals of the Department of Education **HA Na Hopena A’o Statements. Hawaiian studies and language teachers can direct other teachers to practitioners.**

Support inquiry over indoctrination

Ho’oponopono gives everyone an equal chance to express themselves, but we must take into account that teachers inherently hold a position of power and authority in their classrooms. Our students must know we have strong beliefs we will fight for, but we must always support inquiry over indoctrination.

The following is a quotation from “ Teaching as and for Activism: Challenges and Possibilities” by Kathy Hytten It includes *some additions in italics*:

In a democratic society, we should appeal to broadly shared democratic values as criteria for our pedagogical choices. These include freedom of conscience and choice, respect for diversity, defense of individual freedom and rights, and commitment to common goals. These values tend to be broadly shared in the abstract, yet concretizing them in classrooms is always a challenge.

Activist teachers claim we ought to be explicit about our value commitments and why we hold them. Pretending to be neutral on the most important social, political, and ethical issues risks modeling moral apathy and passivity. But when does such explicitly partisan teaching become indoctrination? Is it possible for activist teachers to take moral stances in the classroom, and to frame curricula and design pedagogical activities around social justice values and commitments, without at the same time stifling genuine inquiry and implicitly forcing students to share their beliefs?

As locations where knowledge is contested, habits are developed, and communities created, classrooms are activist spaces,. Knowledge and power are inherently linked, and teachers must value some perspectives, positions, arguments, and materials above others. At the same time, the classroom ought not to be a site for advocacy in lieu of inquiry. We should always engage multiple viewpoints and perspectives, and encourage our students to do the same. Students must be allowed to express their opinions without pressure from peers or teachers to conform to anyone else's beliefs. A free and safe exchange of ideas, no matter how disparate is the beginning place. We must all listen to each other. We must agree to disagree but also to be open to changing our thinking as we learn from each other and from the world at large.

So, we need to create classrooms where every member including the teacher can express their most deeply held beliefs without encountering disparaging comments and attacks. Classrooms where teachers analyze their beliefs and ask students to do the same, to think critically about the world: to unpack their assumptions, to consider alternative viewpoints, to dismantle problematic beliefs, to make careful arguments, and to defend their perspectives.



Inspire students with stories of young people's struggles and successes

Teaching Activism means we give more than lip service to the revolutionaries, agitators, marchers, sign wavers, strikers and ordinary people who get motivated to do extraordinary things. **People who speak truth to power must be drawn to the center of our narrative.** Many of these people were young when they changed our lives forever for the better.

Help students understand the role of rights and resistance in shaping our history, and provide models of informed civic engagement. From women's suffrage to the civil rights movement to Standing Rock, our rights and activism resources can help inspire students to recognize and speak out against injustice.

“When you take stories of adversity and flip them into stories of glory—of how the human spirit is able to overcome, even in the worst of circumstances—there is power that our students stand to get from that.”

[Barbie Garayúa-Tudryn](#)

Greensboro Sit-ins, 1960

The lunch counter sit-ins that would change American history began with **four teenagers** who walked up to a Woolworth’s lunch counter in Greensboro, N.C., and refused to leave. Within three days, they were joined by some 300 others. By summer, the sit-ins had spread to more than 50 cities, and lunch counters were rapidly desegregating.

The actions of the so-called Greensboro Four led directly to the creation of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee,

University Uprisings, 1968

In the spring of 1968, **student protests** exploded on multiple continents. In Paris, some 20,000 [swarmed the Sorbonne](#) in May, turning cars into barricades and clashing with riot police. French labor unions and teachers joined a 24-hour general strike in support of the students, bringing the nation to a grinding halt but ultimately failing to topple President Charles de Gaulle.

Apartheid Divestment, 1970s-80s

The uprising was started by **public school students** in Soweto, South Africa. On June 16, 1976, several thousand students near Johannesburg began a peaceful march that turned deadly when the police attacked with guns and tear gas. They set in motion a global movement against apartheid. From the actions of the students of Soweto grew a vast campaign led by college students in the United States, who built shantytowns on campus quads, blockaded buildings and disrupted speeches by South African politicians. From Columbia University to the University of California, protests compelled administrators to withdraw billions of dollars in investments from companies tied to South Africa. Universities continue today to ethically evaluate their holdings.

Tiananmen Square, 1989

On June 4, 1989, several weeks of **student-led** pro-democracy demonstrations in Beijing [ended in slaughter](#) when thousands of Chinese troops began firing on crowds of protesters in Tiananmen Square. The crackdown provided a visceral demonstration of how far the government would go to suppress dissent. But [an iconic image](#) from June 5, of a lone, still unidentified man standing in front of a column of tanks, endures as an emblem of defiance in the face of overwhelming odds.

Velvet Revolution, 1989

Eight days after the Berlin Wall fell, signaling the beginning of the end of East Germany's Communist government, the **students** of neighboring Czechoslovakia stepped in to topple their own government. It was an extraordinary revolution — “swift, entirely nonviolent, joyful and funny,” [said the author Timothy Garten Ash](#) — and one of the most rapid and complete successes for a student-led movement in modern history.

Black Lives Matter, 2013-present

The Black Lives Matter movement began with three women in their **late 20s and early 30s**: Patrisse Cullors, Alicia Garza and Opal Tometi. But when it exploded into national view in 2014 after the police killing of Michael Brown, 18, many of the protesters who filled the streets of Ferguson, Mo., were students.

Like the students of Parkland, they were protesting gun violence — but by the police, often involving unarmed black suspects.

Black Lives Matter has had a fundamental impact on the national conversation about racial bias and the use of excessive force by the police.

Never Again, 2018 - present

The Parkland High School shooting in Broward County Florida on February 14, 2018 resulted in 17 deaths and **students** at the school saying “Enough is Enough”. They began with Twitter and #Never Again. Because the leaders had been studying drama, they have become a powerful voice for ending gun violence. Since they began their movement they have aligned with students from less affluent schools who are fighting gang and police shootings. Diane Wolk-Rogers teaches history at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida, site of a horrific school shooting on Valentine's Day 2018. How can we end this senseless violence? In a stirring talk, Wolk-Rogers offers three ways Americans can move forward to create more safety and responsibility around guns -- and invites people to come up with their own answers, too. Above all, she asks us to take a cue from the student activists at her school, survivors whose work for change has moved millions to action. "They shouldn't have to do this on their own," Wolk-Rogers says. "They're asking you to get involved."

<https://www.ted.com/talks/>

[diane_wolk_rogers_a_parkland_teacher_s_homework_for_us_all](#)

#Me Too 2018

Young women are coming out about date rape, sexual harassment and unequal treatment on college and **high school** campuses. Bye Bye Plastic bags 2012 - present Two Thai sisters, Melati and Isabel Wijseh, **aged 12 and 10** in 2012 wanted to “do something now, not waiting till they were older”. They decided to get people to quit using plastic bags. Their organization is now global, enlisting kids and teens everywhere in the elimination and cleanup of plastic bag contamination.

Section Four

Creating Activist Projects

Learning about Activism is Good, Achieving Activist Goals is Better

First are activist project based lessons in the classroom, incorporating a strong art core. These lessons have a beginning in ho'oponopono where students identify projects they want to do. Then comes research on the problems the class wants to tackle. Students should find national and international information to gain a well rounded view of a situation, and should also look locally for information, advice and

mentorship. They may find that the problem they want to address already has a like minded local group working on it, or an expert nearby who they can learn from. If they develop an event they can look for possible sponsors and meet local reporters.

To make their project effective they need to approach it creatively and develop an artistic way to engage others. They can share and practice their projects in the classroom, but they won't become Activist Projects until they take the next and most important step, when they take action beyond the classroom. Not every classroom project will cross this bar, but the best ones should assume a life of their own in the wider world. **A classroom activist project contains an action plan that calls for something to change, be preserved, or enhanced outside the classroom.**

In a non judgmental egalitarian setting such as ho'oponopono students will soon grow comfortable expressing their feelings about serious problems and sharing personal fears and experiences. They may settle on one problem or several. Then they study the United Nations 17 Sustainable Development Goals Call to Action to Transform Our World by 2030, (listed below) and choose one that connects to the pressing local need(s) they have decided to tackle. They create groups to work on their chosen concerns. They must set attainable goals, develop an action plan to reach those goals, apply critical and creative thinking to see these projects through to an impactful result, which includes real world change.

These projects are student centered and developed. Teachers are there to share extensive resources, references and outside contacts. Teachers can help students build skills and pathways to the world outside of school. Sometimes this happens when a teacher creates changes inside their classroom and school that attract outside attention. Teachers need to draw on the experience and talents of other teachers, community members, and their students. This means

that they must constantly be updating their own knowledge, staying in touch locally and globally.

Making art central to activist projects

Art has always accompanied activism: holding groups together, driving them forward, reminding them of where they came from and where they want to go. Individual expression through the arts is perpetually in danger of repression and is often the focus of activism. Graffiti, street drama, signs, slogans, marching chants, songs, go hand in hand with activism.

But it doesn't stop there. Much of our most honored art residing in famous museums is a response to upheaval, civil unrest, war. Picasso's *Guernica* and Goya's *Horrors of War* are examples of artists' powerful responses to war.

Working creatively and making art together helps students express feelings that run deeper than research. When STEM projects become STEAM, science, technology and math come alive with the addition of the arts.

When students develop communication skills in: debating, acting, singing, music and multimedia, they are gaining the skills they will use

when they go public with a call to action. When a student learns to write poetry they can write anthems, slogans and marching songs. When they learn expository writing they can write grants. When they study graphics they can make activist banners, signs, logos and ads. When they study science, statistics and economics they can produce information design as Al Gore has done to make the statistical realities of climate change understandable to a broad public.

The Parkland High School drama students are a perfect example of how important it is for students to learn to speak clearly and dramatically in front of audiences. Studying drama gave them skills and confidence. They were ready when the tragic need arose to speak out strongly for gun control.

Helping non-artistic teachers include the arts in projects.

It is a lot to ask teachers to engage in many forms of art making especially when many teachers think they are completely “non artistic”. Don’t worry. No one except perhaps Leonardo da Vinci is a master of all art forms. **Teachers do not have to do art, they just have to marshal the artistic talents of others.** Many students, some of them very young, already have extensive arts training. They love showcasing these talents and can even help instruct their peers and even their teachers. Utilizing these talents gives students meaningful recognition.

Look beyond the classroom. There are working artists and community arts organizations who are eager to work with kids. Students are often

impressed by these “professionals” and very receptive to what they have to share.

Non artists: don't sell your non artistic selves short. Even if you are not an *art maker*, **you can become an *art thinker*.**

Creative thinkers vs creative makers.

The arts are complex and demanding disciplines that take many thousands of hours and some natural talent to master. However becoming a *creative thinker* is something any teacher can master.

Creative thinking is the springboard to creative making. Long ago a Pope wanted the Sistine Chapel ceiling to tell the story of creation. He was the patron. It was Michelangelo who did the creative making. In the same way teachers can enable students to make art. You may not find a young Michelangelo among your students, but you will find students with talent and some with training and skills.

The art component of a project based lesson need not entail great skill or talent. It can instead be clever, surprising, witty, emotionally engaging. Ordinary people do extraordinary work when they are fired up. Look at the wonderful posters from recent women's marches. Creative thinking is often based on emotion, intuition, desire. However, creative thinking can also spring from more logical thinking. Scientists practice creative thinking when looking for new solutions to old problems. The person who invented the vacuum cleaner did not try to make a better broom. He saw a cyclone and decided to make a machine that would suck up dirt. He took two totally different ideas and put them together. That's creativity.



Think widely, experiment, play. Skip the old or accepted. Take sideways mental steps. Think simply. People often complicate when the best answer is a really simple one. Don't rush it. Take a walk, there's nothing like walking for creative thinking, and it's healthy.

Enrich your classroom. Gather materials, tools and instruments, costumes, cameras and editing software. Even if you don't know how to use something, someone else in the class will or they will be interested in learning how. Get donations and grants.

There are TED talks on creative thinking which are fun and exciting. [check out Simpllicable](#) for a good list of creative generators.

WARNING: Adding an art component to a project is not adding a tutorial for students to copy. Art skills should be developed without copying. The joy and value of art is that every student creates a different answer, some better than others, but all valuable.

Become an educated art critic

You may not be an art maker but you can become an art critic. Learning some art theory will enrich your life and your classroom. Studying the elements of art and principles of design, poetic structure, music theory, filmmaking theory will help teachers guide and assess student work. Knowing some art, music and film history helps everyone tell good art from bad, creative art from derivative. There are arts oriented professional development classes that are hands on and lots of fun. As a bonus they give credit toward pay raises. There are art, music and drama history and appreciation classes online and often free. The more you learn about the arts, the more you will help students perfect their projects.

Showcase student talents

Incorporate students' special talents into the group planning. This may lead the group down unexpected and interesting paths on the way to creating dynamic action.

Collaborate on projects

Collaboration between teachers adds rigor and excellence to project based lessons. If a Language Arts teacher wants her students to make a video she can collaborate with a Media teacher, leaving herself free to teach the writing aspect. Her students can create the script, write a song that music students can score and record. Graphics students can create titles and a movie poster. The media teacher's students can shoot and edit the video. This way a complex project would be completed with the expertise and talents of various qualified teachers and students. Going one step further, Social Studies students could research history for a video. An activist oriented science video could be created with the help of science teachers and students. Obviously this takes coordination, but ***when everyone does a little, a lot gets done. And excellent projects worthy of wider public attention are the result.***

Keep it fun, positive and busy.

Art of all kinds finds a place in the having fun column. Comic relief is needed in hard times. Funny signs, costumes, songs and slogans. In the depths of war, correspondents send cartoons home. Charlie Chaplin took his own hard times in London slums and turned them into the *Little Tramp*. Today the *Borowitz Report*, *Jimmy Fallon*, *SNL* and a host of others turn even very bad news into daily doses of satire.

Activism should always include good times, good music, good food, good comradeship. If kids decide to do something, it has to be fun.

Hands on, real world and creative participation and collaboration are engaging. Even hard work like a beach cleanup or sign waving and marching for miles can be enjoyable. People will work hard when they are doing it in the spirit of collaboration and for a purpose that is bigger than themselves.

The theory of empathic arousal, sometimes called the Activist High, explains how good acts are motivated by the intrinsic psychological and physiological reward for the doer. When you extend yourself to someone else, it produces an altered state of consciousness. You feel aroused, you feel wonderful, you float on air.”

Boredom is a killer. No one should be sitting idly by waiting for someone else to finish a task. If one group finishes early have backup jobs ready. Classroom management depends on always having something to do.

Begin by letting students choose their causes. Stay local and personal.

Many things concern students that may seem inconsequential or even silly to teachers, but small concerns can lead to more important ones. A typical school issue concerns wearing school uniforms. Broader conversations can be made for and against wearing them: uniformity versus individuality, creativity versus conformity, cohesion versus exploration, equality versus diversity. Another common subject, bad cafeteria food, can be explored as a political, environmental, and health issue.



Sexism, privacy and fake news, immigration, domestic violence, drugs, agism, fair wages often directly affect students. Polar bears are beautiful, dangerous and dangerously threatened, but issues closer to home are likely to get more attention.

Use the United Nations 17 Goals to go global

For a comprehensive and positive approach to activism ask students to tie their local and personal concerns to one of the United Nations 17 Sustainable Development Goals to transform our world by 2030

Goal 1: End poverty in all its forms everywhere

Goal 2: End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture

Goal 3: Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages

Goal 4: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all

Goal 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls

Goal 6: Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all

Goal 7: Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all

Goal 8: Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all

Goal 9: Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation

Goal 10: Reduce inequality within and among countries

Goal 11: Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable

Goal 12: Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns

Goal 13: Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts* (this goal is emphasized by the the UN)

Goal 14: Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and

marine resources for sustainable development

Goal 15: Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems

Goal 16: Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development

Goal 17: Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development

These goals are being worked on worldwide by governments, NGO's, foundations, and individuals. Researching what is happening with these goals will give students and teachers ideas for action and connection. (Concerns not specifically mentioned in these goals such as gun control, the drug epidemic, illegal immigration do fit into them as safety, health and, human rights issues.)

Begin small but leave it open for future goals

A name like **Students for Sustainable Schools** allows a group to eventually work on a number of issues. They may have already decided on the immediate *issue* they want to pursue, say getting solar powered AC in all classrooms, but they can have a longer wish list. In fact, compiling a list of things that would make their school carbon neutral and self sustaining could be inspirational. They would be thinking big while beginning on something more doable.

Group size and composition

Two or three students could develop a powerful idea but they would probably need to persuade others to help them in order to implement it. Larger groups will have a greater impact and there are always many jobs to go around. Initially groups should make sure they include members who can fill the roles of spoke persons, media creators, organizational coordinators, researcher/writers, social media director, artists, promotional and community outreach persons.

An entire class can coalesce around one issue. There will be plenty of jobs to go around. If the class can't decide on one issue to work on, make sure the groups they form have the manpower and talent necessary to do a good job on their chosen issue. **Most importantly make sure every student in a group buys into the project. Starting off with internal dissension or lack of enthusiasm is crippling.** **Importantly, these projects could be created within a school club, honors society, student council, or athletic team.**

Set deadlines and keep them.

A sense of urgency is important. Once the tasks are divided up, work can proceed quickly. The project should pick up momentum and keep it up. Students will be relying on each other to stay on schedule and not hang up progress. Peer pressure gets results.

The project may run in the background of regular class assignments and could last for a school quarter or longer but progress should be

continuous and demanding.

Keep projects rigorous

Besides the art emphasis in these lessons, they need to have a strong STEM or academic component. If students want to address societal, environmental and cultural problems they need to have their facts straight. They need to be experts in what they are advocating. They need to know history and science and they need to know how to communicate clearly truthfully and forcefully. Their activism also needs to be personal and engaging, not didactic.

Since students will be engaging with people who hold opposing views, they need facts and a clear interpretation of the situation. The question and answer period after any presentation should be as important as the presentation. Students need to know they are not finished until the last question is answered.

Learn from failure

There is always the chance that the moment is right and big changes will happen fast and that is a chance worth taking. But what if at the end of a quarter or semester or an entire year the project goal has not been reached? This is the real world and setbacks are at the heart of activism. That may be why it is called “struggle”. Recent notions in the tech world about the positive aspects of failure can inform the way forward. Of course young students don’t want to see their efforts not succeed, but they should not be stopped. They must analyze what happened. Were the odds against them too high? Were they depending on outside forces that did not come through? The **Never**

Again Students of Parkland have not changed gun laws ... yet. But they have a national platform and budding activist careers.

Alternative activism is often an entryway for students

Often events are staged to raise awareness and support for causes. The Walk for Life raises money for cancer patients. It encourages walking which is healthy and may lead students to meet people dealing with cancer or help them feel better about a friend or relative who has cancer but it is not a direct action such as volunteering for hospice, or protesting to eliminate carcinogens in a nearby stream.

Other ways of contributing to worthwhile campaigns include: competing in 5 and 10k walks and runs, auctions, attending banquets and fund raisers. Recently many online ways to contribute have popped up. They make a great difference but direct involvement should be encouraged over passive transfers of funds. Being the one to begin an online campaign would be a direct action.

When activities involve individual participant goals, like getting into shape or winning contests, they also become a good first step into community engagement because participants meet organizers. Merging personal goals like visiting Africa with a week of volunteering while you are there can be life changing.

Excitement outside the comfort zone

Although there is a comfort level for every activist, choosing to

instigate change is a risky business that goes beyond normal comfort zones. Speaking publicly about controversial situations is something most students have never done before. Confronting adversarial situations is scary, doing it with a like minded group is empowering, calms fears, and makes it exciting, building passion and commitment.

Responding to the response

From the response to its first public announcement a group gains valuable insight. Is the message clear? Do others care enough about the message to join in the effort?

If the response is negative or simply not there it is not time to give up a good cause. It is time to try again.

If the response is positive the group needs to be ready to incorporate new people, ideas, energy and resources. It is easy to run into problems at this point. Growing too fast or going in the wrong direction is common, but avoidable if the next steps have been anticipated.

Sometimes the originators of movements want to hold on and make a movement their own, to control its direction and to micromanage. This is particularly true when people are volunteering and the pay is not money but is status and power.

Without losing sight of its goals a group needs to be open to new ideas and leaders. If students want to establish a movement that will continue after they have moved on, they need to plan for transitions and build in flexibility.

Section Five

Projects that Grow

Build lasting, continuing change by creating an organization, recurring event or action.

What the class and the individuals do should not vanish or be dependent on the teacher to survive. Students want to see results that count. We'd all like to create something that lasts, is ongoing and builds. When students move on and know they are leaving a lasting mark, they are reinforced to do more. Have students build an element into their projects that can be passed on: a repeating event, membership in a larger group, or creation of a club or organization.

Groups that worked together and got a positive response to their projects should consider organizing a permanent action group. Teachers can help this happen by mentoring the following year's students. Some schools have actually created both non profit and for profit organizations that hire their graduates.

When a classroom project goes public students step forward and teachers can move into an advisory position. An organization that will grow must be set up so that new students can join as older ones move on. Sometimes former students return to work for these organizations after they have finished college or gained work

experience. Creating the opportunity for professional jobs is motivation for students to gain the skills they need and then to return to their communities lessening brain drain. Non profit organizations that began as school projects include Hana High School's CTE carpentry department that builds sustainable and inventive homes for people in need. Waianae's digital media program created Surfrider Productions as a pipeline to professional journalism and video production.

These programs began with one inspired teacher, but could not have grown without the participation of their communities and continuing buy-in from students.

Partnering with existing outside organizations also brings student voices into the mainstream. By creating Hiki No, PBS has enabled students throughout Hawaii to learn, practice, and showcase professional journalism skills on a weekly statewide TV show.

Build non hierarchical organizations

Today, organizing horizontally is preparation for much real world work. Traditionally as business grew they went vertical creating middle levels between executives and the bottom ranks. Today many large businesses have flattened their organizations, allowing communication to flow freely between the ranks. The horizontal organizational structure emphasizes an employee-centered approach using teamwork and collaboration. There is less frustration and good ideas and information don't get lost. (Big school systems could use more of this).

All organizations will run into hard patches. Without guidelines and procedures, progress can bog down into bickering. Power trips

can occur. This is when activities like ho'oponopono come into play.

It is essential that all group members have an opportunity to influence decisions. Some issues may be so important that consensus is needed, but other decisions can be decided quickly by a majority or plurality.

Set schedules, but remain flexible.

Guidelines for decision making should be determined and put into writing but should not be set in stone. When, how often, and where will you meet? How long will the meetings last? How will the group make the meetings enjoyable and worth coming back to? Once an activist group has moved outside the classroom it needs to determine long term goals. Students should set demanding goals for themselves. If they aren't getting the work done advisors and mentors should help get them back on track. Procrastination is almost a way of life for teens. Students don't like to feel bored, but they often need a push to get going. Peer pressure to get going is better than adult pressure. When they are not living up to the expectations of their peers they generally will work harder.

Start small, build confidence

A few can do a lot

Your project group, albeit small, will need to make a big splash before others will follow. Unless students are responding to an emergency, like a flood or fire, they will not get far trying to fundraise or attract a following without a track record. They need to leverage media and the arts to get their message to the public.

Social media is essential, but so are local newspapers, radio and TV. Local media can be taken up by bigger media outlets in the same way social media like Instagram and YouTube can go viral. Developing a logo and hashtag is an important part of getting started. A great logo or symbol can make a small group look bigger. The group should choose a spokesperson. They should yield to the most charismatic speaker. The entire group should back them up and be able to carry the message at public meetings, sign waving, and door to door canvassing, speaking to groups. Face to face contact is essential for building relationships.

Students often think bigger than they can act. They want it all, and they want it now. Teachers can help them set modest goals, learn to count their successes in smaller gulps. Where large systemic problems may be daunting, local problems may be solvable.

They are not saving the entire ocean when they undertake a beach cleanup. Trash will soon pile up again, but cleaning it is a good thing to do none the less. And a beach cleanup can lead to learning about greater oceanic problems and lead students to join far reaching causes.

Success is about setting rigorous but doable goals and then going all out to accomplish them. You'll have much more fun running a marathon if you first run short distances, then go long and slow and eventually grow comfortable with distance running. The big goal is always in sight, but finishing the daily run is a success in itself.

Spillover theory

Spillover theory is the notion that performing one action can make the adoption of other similar actions more likely. The easy environmental

behaviors we do like turning off the tap when brushing our teeth, or using the half flush on our toilets can be catalysts for engagement in more difficult and impactful environmental behaviors. They might lead to picking up other peoples' litter or buying eco-friendly products even though they are harder to find or more expensive.

People working on bettering healthcare might eventually see that as one aspect of ending poverty and begin to endorse a multi pronged approach. Many women who initially worked for civil rights for blacks eventually realized they needed to work for equality for women of all colors and became feminists.

Section Six

Create Activist Schools

We cannot expect teachers, alone in their classrooms, to transform society unaided.” *It takes a “village”.* *Teachers need school environments that focus on everyone, teacher, student and administrator alike participating actively and responsibly in the causes and problems confronting us on all levels.* Basically change must happen simultaneously in schools and among teachers. Personal and institutional change must happen together.

It is going to take entire schools focusing on activism, using arts centered instruction, STEAM, and political discussion, putting study and practice into action to empower students to have a real say in their futures.

This can begin with building strong, active student councils, student newspapers, student and teacher forums that are given real power in decision making. This will include strong teacher unions that work to support more than the status quo. Teachers must advocate for themselves and for their students especially when it means overturning stale, outdated school environments.

Challenging the status quo is as the heart of activism. Change agents must be willing to ask the hard questions others would rather not hear. Use Ho'oponopono or Consciousness Raising to begin the discussion.

Anyone who has participated in whole school change will confirm that leaders alone cannot change a school and neither can teachers. Only by establishing shared values, a common language and whole school objectives can a school redesign its vision, its behaviors and its destiny.

Before teachers can move forward to improve their schools, they must discuss difficult realities with each other, with their students, and with administrators. Everyone's perspective is necessary if everyone is eventually to buy into the difficult job of changing old ways of thinking

and doing. Together everyone must honestly determine what practices, organizational structures, and economic factors need to change within their school. Even if they know many of the items they discuss are not practically doable in the near term dreams need to be included. In the right setting no questions should be considered too contentious or delicate or farfetched to be asked.

Reach out to visionary leaders

Although it may feel like it sometimes, especially if you work in a school or district that is highly resistant to change, you are not the only person trying to change the educational structures for the better. Engage with like-minded local educators as well as leaders at the national and global level to build your own network of change agents who you can turn to for guidance and support.

Visit schools with varying philosophies and structures. Look at a wide range of schools, from rigid to easy going, both private and public. Be open to new ways of doing things.

Build on your school's strengths

Generally groups get together to work on problems. All the talk is about what is wrong. But it is the strengths that are going to solve the problems. Start with the strengths and use them.

Find student's favorite teachers and watch them teach. Seek out best practices. Integrate a variety of ideas in your classroom. Treat the classroom like an experiment, hoping for certain outcomes, but readily accepting failure as a way forward. Build a positive school spirit.

Establish a culture of change

Organizational change is not easy, but it can be made easier by establishing a culture that embraces change as opportunity. This starts by embedding readiness to change within the very organizational structures you wish to transform. Do this by rewarding innovation and improvement. Allow teachers to safely air their gripes and grievances which generally get no further than the lunchroom and which inevitably result in stubborn resistance to anything that is seen as more work or more useless ideas. Anyone with new ideas should be able to present them. And the fact that there is no one right answer should be honored. Everyone does not need to be on the same page all the time. Failure should be accepted as a good attempt and a learning opportunity.

Teachers really do want to get through to their students. They may say they are just giving out the information and if the student doesn't want it, so what? But those sort of statements come from frustration. Connecting with and seeing students engage and achieve is what makes teaching joyous.

Engage with the community

In order to turn parents and community members into advocates, it's important to share your goals for a school committed to change. Their input is essential. They need a voice especially when it comes to their children becoming activist outside the school. They may naturally have fears for the safety of their kids or feel that academics are being overlooked for activism. Be sure to address and include resisters and people with diverse points of view. There will also be people who want to help with your efforts. Asking for involvement is one of the strongest predictors of collective action in any cause!

**What is all this going to get
you? ...**

You'll be remembered as
THE TEACHER who made
a difference, who was their
turning point

**The one they
remember.**

BE THAT TEACHER

ALOHA NUI

