How can educators help young people become successful changemakers?

Sixties activists insisted the personal is political. Change-makers in the digital age get that idea, and one-up it with another rallying cry: the political is social and cultural. Your platforms and digital strategies need to make this principle count, so that you, your peers, and your audiences engage each other, and the allies you all want, in high-quality, equitable, and effective participation in digital-age civics, activism, and politics. What’s more, you need digital environments that actively support the secure development of your identities as participants in public spheres, so your civic and political engagement today doesn’t harm or haunt you later. Thinking that through comes first.

Rather than a list of to-dos, we opted to form a framework for thoughtful practice. The framework is based on 10 key questions. With these principles, we seek to help change-makers get smarter about the best use of digital tools and platforms for their specific efforts, based on what we’ve learned from youth-driven campaigns and organizations pursuing a hugely diverse range of civic and political activities across the US. We seek to cultivate nimbleness in the people who use these principles—not entrenched practices but the capacity to adjust and pivot as circumstances change, which they always do. Here, we run through the ten principles. Each one is an example that will serve as a mini case-study to spotlight what that principle can look like in action.

The 10 Questions for Young Changemakers framework can help young people achieve successful—equitable, effective, and self-protective—participation in a new media environment.

Democratic Knowledge Project
10 Questions for Young Changemakers

Harvard University
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How to Use the 10 Questions?

A range of educators including school teachers, curriculum developers and librarians, have demonstrated the great versatility of the 10 Questions in various contexts, going far beyond the digital realm: historical analysis, debates, political conversations, student research projects, service-learning, book discussion, and action projects. Such flexibility is a great strength of the 10 Questions framework for civic education, and we design a structured implementation model that consists of the “understanding - inquiry - action” flow.

The 10 Questions framework is primarily oriented around thinking about the present and the future. But it can also be used as a lens for reading the past. The Ten Questions encapsulate, we believe, timeless ideals of participation: self-reflection on authentic motivations, pivoting from individual to collective action, expanding the scope of collaboration, coordinating divergent self-interests, guarding ourselves from pushbacks, and getting from voice to influence.

Structured Implementation. Understanding is an introductory step, in which students and educators learn about the basics of the 10 Questions framework—what each question means, how the three essential values are represented through the 10 Questions, and how they follow a developmental sequence (e.g., “Facing History with the 10 Questions frame”).

For the next step, educators can use the 10 Questions framework for a civic inquiry project about present issues. In an inquiry project, students investigate civic participation cases that matter to them (e.g., “Political Discussion in a Classroom”).

Next students can bring knowledge they accumulated from inquiry projects into action projects to make change in the future. (e.g., “Youth Participatory Action Research”)

Professional Development Opportunities for Teachers and Librarians. Under the auspices of Harvard’s Democratic Knowledge Project, the 10 Questions team continues to build on professional development opportunities for teachers and public/school librarians.

- Teacher Leader Program
- University-School Partnership: Cambridge Rindge and Latin School, Cambridge, MA.
- Massachusetts Civics Reform
- Young Changemakers in the 21st-Century Library

Assessment Tools. The 10 Questions team is currently working to develop formal assessment tools to evaluate the impact of this framework on student learning with respect to the three core pillars of the 10 Questions Framework: equitability, efficacy, and self-protection.

Educational Resources. We offer a variety of educational materials including videos, a teaching guide, and a bibliography on our website.

Visit yppactionframe.fas.harvard.edu for more information

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