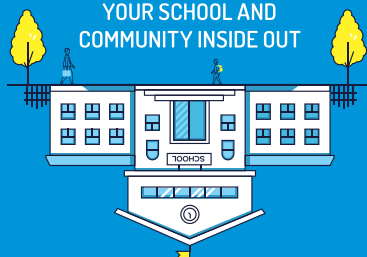


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WHY IT'S TIME TO TURN  
YOUR SCHOOL AND  
COMMUNITY INSIDE OUT



MALCOLM GROVES AND  
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## Chapter 13 Toolkit 2

### Learner Action Teams – a checklist drawn from the work of Roger Holdsworth<sup>1</sup>

#### Step 1: Teacher preparation

This first step involves the development of a shared understanding of what we want to do, including the theory behind the Learner Action Team approach and a commitment to student decision-making on real issues. It also includes planning for how this might fit into the curriculum, identification of possible partners and resources, and setting up the challenges.

This phase is driven by questions to schools and teachers: *What is this about? What are the external expectations? What are our views of students' roles? Who will be involved?* Its objectives are for the development of a shared commitment to the approach, the definition of the broad topic, specification of any external constraints and structures, and identification of funding and management structures.

#### Step 2: Engagement with the issue

The second step involves the identification of a real problem, challenge or issue: one in which it is not yet known what the outcomes might be, and to which students can bring some 'expertise' to achieve a solution. This challenge is put to the students in a way that can engage their commitment. Here the role of the outsider is important: someone to 'commission' the students, to challenge them to research and act, and to provide an audience for them to report to. Where Learner Action Teams operate within a cluster of schools, this challenge could usefully occur at an inter-school student forum.

This engagement is driven by questions to the students such as: *What is this issue all about? What is the importance of it? To whom? Why? And then crucially: Do we want to do this? Why?*

#### Step 3: Research

During these school-based steps, the students start by developing definitions of the research questions (what we already know, what we need to find out), and research methods (how we might carry out the research). It is sometimes useful to think about two research steps based on:

- what the issue **is** within our community (e.g. defining or prioritising the issue)
- what the issue is **about** (deeper research into the nature, causes etc. of the issue).

Students then carry out their research. This step is driven by questions to students such as: *What do we know already? What do we need to find out? How will we do this?*

Then, as the research process develops, they ask questions that define their methods: *Who? How? How many? When? What instruments? What questions?*

As they conduct research, they ask: *How is it going? Are we keeping to the timeline? What gaps? What changes should we make to our approach?* Students will need to develop and implement a structure for data collection, defining their methods, questions, observations and ways of recording this.

#### Step 4: Reporting the research

Reporting involves telling someone 'external' what has been found out. This might involve giving a report on the research phase to the 'outsider' (the group or person commissioning the research), to other students, or to the community as a whole. In a cluster of schools, this could be the focus of a second student forum.

1. You can access Connect, Roger's regular electronic magazine about student leadership, at <http://research.acer.edu.au/connect>.

There are both analysis and communication questions involved here:

- *What did we do? (A summary of the methods.)*
- *What did we find out?*
- *What is it like now? (An overall description.)*
- *What differences exist within the results?*
- *Who do we need to tell?*

### **Step 5: Designing the action**

These 'pre-action' steps are concerned with possible changes that are suggested by the research:

- *What is the big possibility for what could be achieved?*
- *What do we want to change for this to be achieved?*

Initially this involves making decisions on preferred outcomes, then on what needs to be done to achieve those outcomes. Students also need to think at this stage about how they will know whether they have changed anything:

- *What information we will need to collect about the way things are before we start our action?*
- *What information will we need to collect later on?*

This phase initially poses questions to students such as:

- *What surprises us about our research?*
- *What concerns us?*
- *Or makes us angry, annoyed, worried? Why?*
- *Do we all agree on this?*

It then moves on to ask:

- *What should it look like?*
- *What do we want to see happening?*
- *What needs to change to make it like that?*
- *What are the barriers to change?*
- *What is needed to overcome these barriers?*

This might involve 'dreaming' of desired outcomes in a changed world. Only then can students be asked:

- *What can we do to bring about that change?*
- *What forms of action can we take?*

Here they consider the options for education, encouragement, enforcement and engineering. They are challenged about the range of actions possible, so that students and schools don't just think about simply making a poster or, on the other hand, having to build something expensive.

Finally, the actions are defined further:

- *What?*
- *When?*
- *Who?*
- *How?*

The outcome should be an action planner and timeline with clear objectives and achievable steps.

### **Step 6: Implementing the action**

Having planned appropriate action, the students then carry out what they have planned: contacting, writing, producing materials, talking, protesting, lobbying and so on. This involves ongoing reflection to ensure not only that they remain on track, but also that they learn about consequences and limitations as others respond to their actions.

As they do this, students are asked:

- *How is it going?*
- *What do we learn as we do this?*

They are also asked to assess the impact of their actions:

- *What has changed?*
- *Why?*
- *How do we know we have made any difference?*

Reflection time is built in; collection of further data (questionnaires or observations) may be required in order to compare before and after.

### **Step 7: Reporting the action**

This step involves telling someone 'external' to the project – the 'outsider', other students or the community – what was achieved. Questions to prepare for this could include:

- *How do we know what was achieved?*
- *What have been the consequences of what we have done?*

At the start of this stage, students consider:

- *Who do we need to tell?*
- *How?*

They consider internal and external audiences, and effective means of presentation. They are accountable for the challenge they took on at the start.

### **Step 8: Reflecting on the journey**

The Learner Action Team should finally look at what was achieved, how it was achieved and what was learnt along the way. The key questions are:

- *What have we achieved?*
- *Where to now? Why? How?*
- *What did we learn?*
- *How could we improve next time?*

This is also a time for celebration, and for a new commitment (which takes us back to the start of the process again!).