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Civic Reasoning and Discourse

INTRODUCTION

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INTRODUCTION

Increasing polarization and division in society, as well as the ubiquitous availability of questionable digital information, has made the acquisition of civic reasoning and discourse skills progressively more important for students to develop. These skills are essential to cultivate as they prepare for their future roles as adults, citizens, and being full members of their communities. Increasingly polarized, racialized, and politicized climates have made it more difficult to dialogue across differences, which is compounded by eroding public trust in democratic institutions and processes (Pew Research Center, 2020; Hess & McAvoy, 2015; Somer, M., & McCoy, J., 2019). At the same time, there is a growing threat from organizations that espouse racist, xenophobic, anti-religious, and homophobic ideas as well as an FBI recorded rise in hate crimes in recent years (Balsamo, 2020; Southern Poverty Law Center, 2016). Advances in technology have also made it harder to trust information about the surrounding social world, as documented in the learning challenges that students have in distinguishing fact from fiction in online digital sources (McGrew, Breakstone, Ortega, Smith & Wineburg, 2018).

As vital public institutions, schools have not been unaffected by these developments. Schools have seen an increase in political awareness and activity (Hansen, Levesque, Valant, & Quintero, 2018), and research has shown that bullying, aggressive behavior, bigotry, and harassment have risen in the past several years (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2016). Increasing polarization is also being further exacerbated by growing inequality and the deleterious effects that this has on the learning and civic development opportunities for vulnerable and alienated students (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020; Duncan and Murnane, 2011; Kahne and Middaugh, 2008; Levinson, 2012).

Given the decentralized nature of American education, there is a stark difference in access to civic education across the country, with students of color and those from low-income families not given access to as many opportunities in the classroom for experiential civic development as white students from wealthier families (Hansen, Levesque, Valant, & Quintero, 2018). Measures of civic knowledge, which we think are highly relevant to civic reasoning and discourse, also show a pattern that is highly disturbing. The only assessments that we have in the broad area of civics is the NAEP Civics Assessment given every four years, alternatively at grades 4, 8 and 12 (with the most recent 2018 assessment for 8th graders). Similar to what we see in terms of access to high quality civic education, the NAEP Civics Assessment shows gaps based on race and income level (National Assessment Governing Board, 2018) At the same time, knowledge in the civic domain as measured by the NAEP is low for all students (See Figure 2). Whether in the 2014 or 2018 results, less than a quarter of 8th graders perform at or above proficiency. Figures 3- 4 below address trends in levels of proficiency for 12th graders from 1998 to 2006 to 2010. Similar to the findings for 8th graders in 2018, across these years only roughly one quarter of 12th graders demonstrate the skills constituting proficiency.

If one considers the additional scope of knowledge necessary for effective civic reasoning and discourse, as we discuss in this introduction and flush out in some detail across the chapters of this volume, the challenge is all the more daunting. The issues with which we wrestle in the civic domain inevitably entail knowledge reflecting all of the content areas students study in school (content, concepts, processes) as well as epistemological and ethical knowledge, and dispositions to empathize with others and to listen to and consider contrastive points of view.

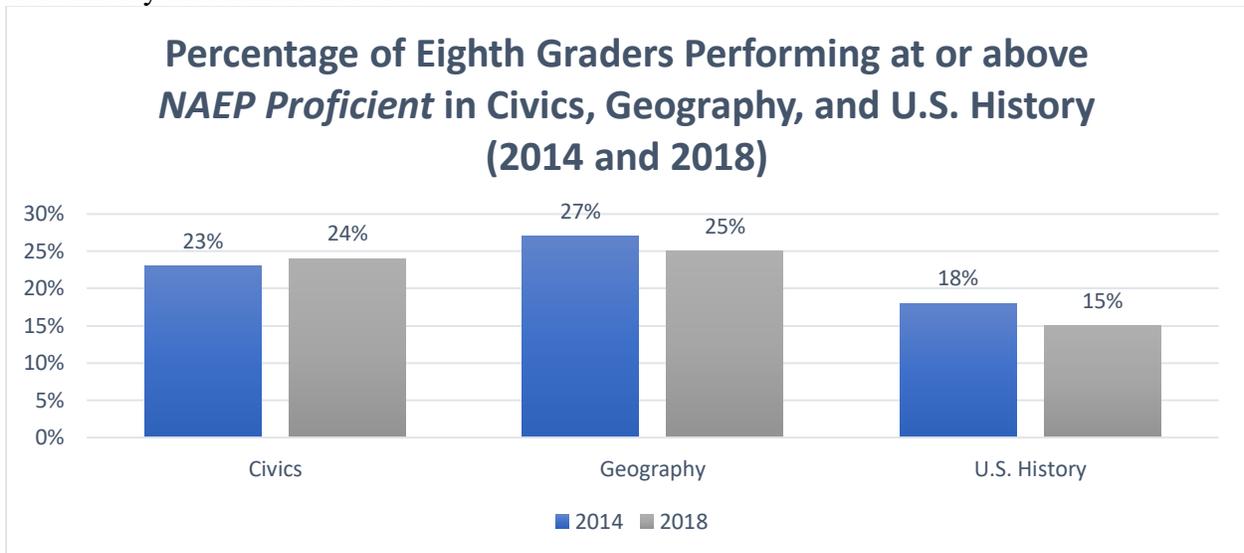
Figure 1: NAEP Civics Assessment Framework [placement: in sidebar]

- The civics assessment measures students’ knowledge and understanding of civics with three interrelated components: knowledge, intellectual and participatory skills, and civic dispositions. Taken together, these three elements are defined in the framework as the core elements of civics instruction in the U.S.
- The geography assessment combines key physical science and social science aspects of geography into a cohesive and topical whole by focusing on what students should know about geography to be competent and knowledgeable 21st century citizens. Its purpose is to provide a measure of students’ knowledge, understanding, and application of geography’s content and perspectives.
- The U.S. history assessment measures students’ knowledge and understanding of U.S. history in all its complexity – its major themes, periods, events, people, ideas, turning points, movement, and historical sources. The assessment examines students’ understanding of chronology, differing perspectives across time, and their grasp of historical facts and contexts.

Source: National Assessment Governing Board. (2018). Civics Framework for the 2018 National Assessment of Educational Progress.

Figure 2: 2018 Civics Assessment Results for Eighth Graders

“Across social science subjects one-quarter or less of eighth-graders perform at or above NAEP Proficient. In 2018, there was no significant change in the percentage of eighth-graders performing at or above NAEP Proficient on the civics or geography assessments compared to 2014; however, a smaller percentage of students performed at or above NAEP Proficient on the U.S. history assessment in 2018.”



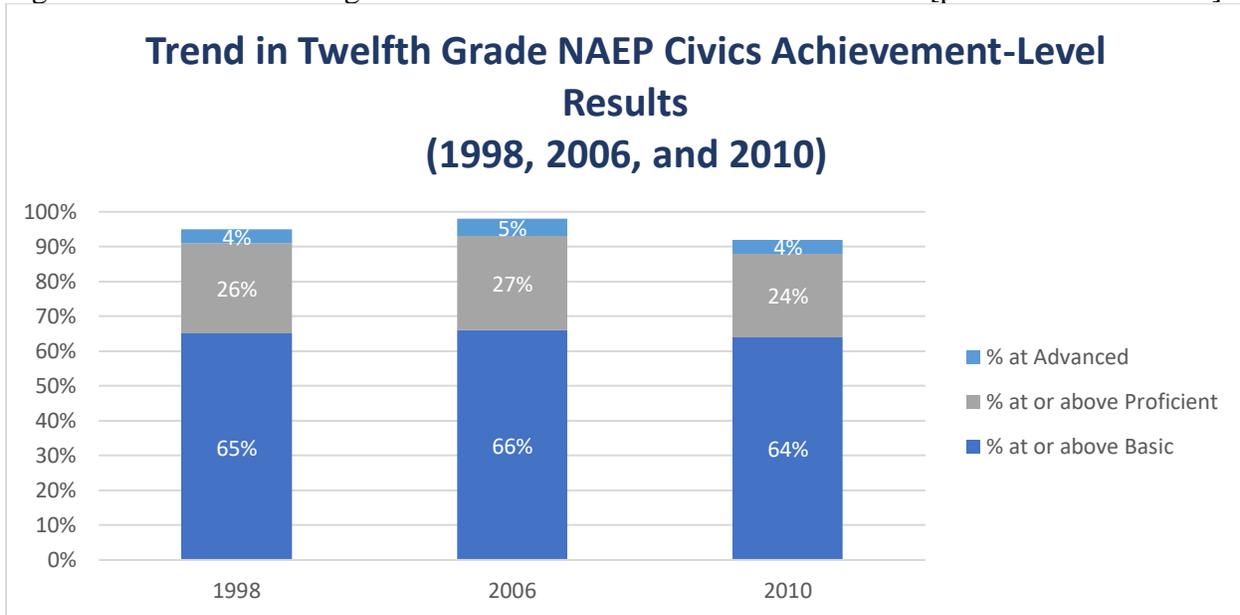
Source: National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). 2018. The Nation’s Report Card: Results from the 2018 Civics, Geography, and U.S. History Assessments.

Figure 3: Civics Assessment Achievement Level Description for Twelfth Graders [placement: in sidebar]

Twelfth-grade students performing at the *Proficient* level should have a good understanding of how constitutions can limit the power of government and support the rule of law. They should be able to distinguish between parliamentary systems of government and those based on separate and shared powers, and they should be able to describe the structure and functions of American government. These students should be able to identify issues in which fundamental democratic values and principles are in conflict—liberty and equality, individual rights and the common good, and majority rule and minority rights, for example—and they should be able to take and defend positions on these issues. They should be able to evaluate ways that law protects individual rights and promotes the common good in American society. They should understand how the application of fundamental principles of American constitutional democracy has expanded participation in public life, and they should be able to explain how citizens can work individually and collectively to monitor and influence public policy. These students should understand the importance and means of participation in political life at the national, state, and local levels. They should be able to evaluate contributions made by political parties, interest groups, and the media to the development of public policy, and they should be able to explain how public service and political leadership contribute to American democracy. They should understand how American foreign policy is made and carried out, and they should be able to evaluate the performance of major international organizations. Finally, these students should be able to discuss reasons for and consequences of conflicts that arise when international disputes cannot be resolved peacefully.

Source: National Assessment Governing Board. (2018). Civics Framework for the 2018 National Assessment of Educational Progress.

Figure 4: Trend in twelfth grade NAEP civics achievement-level results [placement: in sidebar]



Source: National Assessment of Educational Progress. 2010. The Nation’s Report Card: Civics 2010.

After years of neglect, the areas of civic education, reasoning, and student discourse are experiencing a renewed emphasis. An opportunity has manifest itself in the current polarized landscape, starting with an increased interest among researchers, policy-leaders, and other stakeholders to improve the civic preparation of students and to promote civil discourse. According to a nationwide survey of policy priorities conducted by the CivXNow Coalition (2020), having better civic education for students in K-12 is the one policy item that both parties reached consensus on, and teachers are the most trusted to advocate for a strong civics education. In a core sense, this is a return to an original purpose of education, such as Dewey’s belief in the need for “the improvement of the methods and conditions of debate, discussion and persuasion. That [he sees as] the problem of the public” (Dewey, 1927, p. 208). W.E.B. DuBois also believed that a foundational role of education was to position citizens to wrestle with the tensions and contradictions of history, particularly with regard to how we navigate persistent tensions around race, ethnicity and class (Rabaka, 2003). Such wrestling is complex and nuanced. It requires a depth of knowledge in many domains, but equally important for democratic decision making, it requires a disposition to hear and weigh alternative points of view that differ from one’s own.

Schools and community-based organizations serve as central sites within which youth have opportunities to practice skills of democratic participation and to learn about issues affecting their communities (Flanagan, 2013). However, these environments need to foster deeper and more collaborative learning. New approaches will need to be employed to ensure the use of new technologies, curricula, and assessments in the contexts of schooling be distributed across the curriculum (Levine & Kawashima-Ginsberg, 2015).

As it currently exists, research in civic reasoning and discourse is under-developed and fragmented, with missed opportunities to learn from research across disciplines. Although there have been some exceptions, civic education research has been siloed with “roots in different disciplines that place priority on different topics and prefer different methods of analysis” (Torney-Purta, Amadeo, & Andolina, 2010, p. 498). In addition, assessments of how students interact and communicate with one another and how they apply skills learned in a classroom to daily life are an emerging area for further development (Levine & Kawashima-Ginsberg, 2015). Existing lines of research on how students learn skills of argument (Kuhn, D., Hemberger, L., & Khait, V., 2016) also need further exploration for application across contexts and situations.

Moreover, much of the current attention to civic education is broadly focused on state policy initiatives to expand and evaluate current civic knowledge, with some attention to service learning, positive youth development, and projects that fall into the category of action civics. Those working in these areas tend to be from the practitioner and policy communities, and the number of researchers is relatively small despite the relevance of several areas of education research. The evidence-based guidance that does exist has been generated by a relatively small number of researchers, practitioners, and other stakeholders convened at conferences focused on promoting increased attention to currently understood best practices in civic education. While these are valued and important efforts, these convenings have given almost no attention to building a future research agenda, nor have they synthesized multidisciplinary research findings in a peer-reviewed, consensus-style study.

There is a pressing need to evaluate and synthesize research literature from diverse disciplinary fields to draw insights to improve our understanding of how knowledge and skills in civic reasoning and discourse develop and how they can be taught in various contexts. In particular, an underutilized opportunity exists to incorporate knowledge and practices from the broad knowledge base on how people learn. This includes work in the learning sciences as well as socio-cultural and deeper learning frameworks, human development, and the neurosciences (National Research Council (NRC), 2012) as well as research addressing learning in the academic disciplines. The aim is to engage students with diverse backgrounds in learning activities that will advance both their disciplinary knowledge and understanding relevant to issues in the public domain, and their ability to engage in civil discussion of civic issues (e.g., Barab, S. A., Schatz, S., & Scheckler, R., 2004; Gutiérrez, K., Baquedano-Lopez, P., & Tejada, C., 1999; Lee, 2008; Levinson, 2012; Nasir et al., 2006; and National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (NASEM), 2018; and Reisman, 2012; Nasir, Lee, Pea, & McKinney de Royston, 2020).

To address these critical needs, the National Academy of Education (NAEd) initiative on Civic Reasoning and Discourse aims to advance high-quality research in civic reasoning and discourse for use in educational policy and practice. The goal of the project is to improve students' learning in these areas by ensuring that the pedagogy, curriculum, and learning environments that they experience are informed by the best available evidence. This initiative was chaired by NAEd member and president-elect, Carol Lee, who worked with NAEd staff in advancing this initiative from initial project conception to the completion of this edited volume. Noting the concerning trends of polarization and politicization discussed earlier in this introduction, Lee charged her fellow NAEd members to consider how the NAEd could address the challenges of preparing young people to engage in civic reasoning and discourse. The NAEd approached the Hewlett Foundation, who agreed to support a project that includes the following key propositions: (1) that learning to engage in civic reasoning and discourse is sufficiently complex and needs to be addressed across the K-12 sector and across the curriculum; (2) that there is a need to synthesize what the science of human learning and development can tell us about the cognitive, social, emotional, ethical and developmental demands of such learning; and (3) that there is a need to situate the challenges of such teaching and learning in their historical and ecological contexts, including understanding the philosophical underpinnings about why attention to such issues matters.

To oversee and advance this project, the NAEd assembled an expert steering committee of researchers and other leaders in civic learning and student engagement. The steering committee is comprised of Carol Lee (Chair), James Banks, Sarah Freedman, Kris Gutiérrez, Diana Hess, Joseph Kahne, Peter Levine, Na'ilah Suad Nasir, Walter Parker, and Judith Torney-Purta. Under the interdisciplinary guidance of this committee, this volume provides a review and synthesis of research across disciplines and subfields to better understand the complexity of civic reasoning and discourse. One major contribution to the field is the identification of learning principles in intrapersonal and interpersonal domains that can be used to increase the application of research for course curricula and pedagogy as well as standards, assessments, informal learning opportunities, and teacher preparation. The volume further identifies policy recommendations and outlines a future research agenda.

Based on the current state of research in the field and potential for new interdisciplinary linkages, this multi-chaptered volume includes an expansive collection of research and recommendations on eight specific themes: (1) learning and human development (covering cognition and its relationship to identity, human development, & implicit bias); (2) history of education for democratic citizenship; (3) philosophical foundations of and moral reasoning in civics; (4) ecological contexts; (5) learning environment, school climate, and other supports for civic engagement; (6) pedagogical practices and how teachers learn; (7) digital literacy and the health of democratic practice; and (8) agency and resilience in the face of challenge as civic action across ethnic communities. The volume also includes a final chapter that provides recommendations for research, practice, and policy. As part of the development of this volume, the NAEd hosted a workshop in March 2020 and an online forum in November 2020, during which authors presented findings and gathered feedback from researchers and external stakeholders in attendance. The NAEd also reached out to external reviewers to provide additional feedback on select material. Upon completion, each chapter has gone through several rounds of review. In addition to review by committee members, staff, panel members, and external reviewers, the entire volume was then subject to a final peer review by the NAEd Standing Review Committee prior to publication.

BACKGROUND TO THIS VOLUME

In an early case study of democratic life in the U.S., Alexis de Tocqueville (1835) set out to learn if the young nation's experiment in transitioning from aristocracy to democracy could be sustained over time. In addition to having self-government and a robust civic sphere, de Tocqueville noted the necessity of education to cultivate the knowledge and skills necessary for democratic citizenship. However, at the time of de Tocqueville's observations in the early nineteenth century, full enfranchisement and citizenship were severely limited. The freedoms and ideals enshrined in the nation's founding documents were diametrically at odds with an entrenched system of slavery, as well as the ongoing domination and cultural erasure of Native peoples. De Tocqueville's writings also take place before the onset of the industrial revolution, and the effects it would later have on growing inequality (Goldberg, 2001) and setting in motion a future climate crisis.

The boundaries of citizenship in the U.S. are complex. From its very origins, the U.S. was a nation of immigrants (forced and by choice), who joined the indigenous nations residing here before the nation's founding. As the country grew in size and complexity, waves of immigration over two centuries created both celebrated diversity, but also social, cultural, and economic strife as the branches of the U.S. government and organized interests of the country's inhabitants wrestled with questions of citizenship and other rights, as well as cultural assimilation.

Throughout this history, people living in the U.S. have navigated a national identity as well as identification (through social networks and familial cultural practices) with their countries of origin. It is important to note that while ethnic diversity within the U.S. is higher than ever before, ethnic diversity is not new to the nation. How the nation addresses, accommodates, or works against such ethnic diversity is one of the persistent civic issues with which we continue to wrestle (e.g. from maintaining German in public schools in Wisconsin in the 19th century to

judicial decisions around how language teaching impacts opportunity to learn to the role of bilingualism in schools today as just one set of examples).

Civic reasoning and discourse inevitably involves how as a society we see ourselves – who and what is the United States. This story of ourselves is also inevitably related to how we understand our history as a nation, what that history reveals about the who and what of the United States. In the context of public education, this meta-narrative is communicated particularly in how our history is taught. This is a curricular space that has been highly and hotly contested over the history of public education. On the one hand, the United States represents one of the most powerful experiments in democratic decision making in human history. On the other hand, it is also a nation borne on the backs of two evils of history – the violent take-over of indigenous nations and near decimation of indigenous peoples as the nation’s borders advanced, and what many refer to as the holocaust of African enslavement. These massive historic actions evolved in the midst of the evolution of the new nation state. When the founding documents were written, there is no question that the call for inalienable rights to the pursuit of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness did not apply to white men without property, did not apply to women, and did not apply to those populations who were not designated as white (indigenous peoples, peoples of African descent, peoples who originally lived in Mexico before the U.S. annexation of land that was originally part of Mexico but would become because of war the states of Texas, New Mexico, California, Arizona, and peoples who immigrated in these early years from parts of Asia).

Anderson (2007) offers a detailed analysis of the debates in the Reconstruction Congress, after the terrible price in human life paid during the Civil War, over coming to a political compromise over how to articulate who has citizenship. He documents with precise examples from Congressional records how contestations over whether indigenous, African descent, Latinx, and Asian Americans would have birth right citizenship. We can also look at the evolution of immigration policies from the 19th century forward to see how through law, non-Anglo communities were limited in access to migrate to the U.S. and how even ethnic groups now understood to be “white” did not have the status of whiteness in earlier generations. It is a fact that the U.S. has a longer history of legal apartheid – known as the Jim Crow Era – than South Africa. And the fact that we continue to see the impacts of discrimination associated with race, class, gender, religion, and sexual orientation, among other ascribed statuses highlight that the nation’s wrestling with its history remains a civic challenge.

It is important to note, however, that recognizing the conundrums of our history – the historic disconnects between our stated ideals and our institutionalized practices – does not dictate how we resolve these conundrums, does not dictate whether we will pursue our civic reasoning through a progressive or conservative political lens. The point is that through civic reasoning and discourse, and indeed civic action, we have the opportunity to engage our differences, and ideally, find compromises rooted in democratic ideals. The question is how as a society do we systematically prepare our young people to engage in the complex work of democratic decision making, as well as ensuring that all student have a voice in that endeavor, including at times confronting social justice issues through dissent, or as recently passed Congressman John Lewis called this, “good trouble.”

In the ensuing centuries since the founding of the U.S., and with the global advancement of democracy in the modern era, social theorist T. H. Marshall viewed the attainment of full democratic citizenship by various groups within nations as a progressive realization of civil, political, and social rights and responsibilities over time. Although boundaries of citizenship may change from one society to the next, he ultimately characterizes citizenship as a “status bestowed on those who are full members of a community” (Marshall, 1950/1992, p.18). This volume is guided by this broader definition of citizenship, and we acknowledge the unfinished struggle that many groups and individuals experience in becoming and living as fully empowered members within the communities and societies in which they find themselves. This volume also takes a broader view of citizenship education as encompassing “all the ways in which young people come to think of themselves as citizens in local and cultural communities, the nation, and global society (Hahn, 2008, p. 263). Ultimately, a civic discourse challenge for the U.S. is to balance unity and diversity in ways that are mutually reinforcing (Banks, 2004, Kymlicka, 2004), especially in a globalizing world with an increasing ability to maintain diasporic and transnational connections and identities.

Complexities and Interdisciplinary Nature of Civic Reasoning and Discourse

Civic reasoning entails how people in a society think through problems that arise in the public domain. In a democracy such as the U.S., citizens are able to engage as active agents in such problems through an array of pathways. These include voting, collective action to make points of view public, and organizing institutional structures and social networks through which to carry out practices that address issues that arise in the public domain. In the U.S., there is a direct social contract between the state and individuals reflected at a macro level in the U.S. Constitution, including its amendments. The underlying warrant of that social contract, as articulated in the Declaration of Independence, is rooted in the proposition that all people have the inalienable right to Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness. The intense debates in the articulation of both the Declaration of Independence, the U.S. Constitution, and particularly its amendments reflect the complexities and tensions of that social contract.

Examples of such complexities include:

- How do we navigate tensions between the powers and limits of federal, state and local governments to protect the collective as well as the rights of people to assert individual rights around such issues as wearing a mask during this pandemic or requiring that children be vaccinated?
- What should be the relations among levels of government and collective actions to fight the pandemic?
- How do we navigate tensions between the rights of groups of people with diametrically opposed political and social views, including those who may hold racist, homophobic, and other deeply biased points of view, to publicly protest?
- What knowledge is required to critically examine displays of mathematical modeling produced for public consumption around trends in the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, around arguments related to economic trends, or around potential cause-effect relations among outcomes and processes?
- How to think about tensions among persistent examples of police violence against people (especially black and brown peoples), the needs for protection of the public and by

whom, the rights of police as public employees, the funding of police departments, and the training of police?

In this volume, we have combined a focus on civic reasoning with engagement in civic discourse. We define discourse as how we communicate with one another around challenges in the public domain and how we learn to understand how others communicate around such challenges to us (Figure 5). This includes communication between individuals, but equally important communication in the broader media from persons in positions of power – politicians, advocates, media outlets, and social media outlets. The rhetorical moves from persons in positions of power often obscure points of view and employ overly generalized language to portray their opponents. For example, at the time of the writing of this volume, the COVID-19 pandemic and the deliberation regarding opening supreme court seat highlight the need to know more highly specialized language to participate in these important societal issues.

Figure 5

In one of its initial tasks, the committee of this initiative sought to define the processes of what civic reasoning and discourse entails. Led by steering committee member Peter Levine, the committee developed a shared definition of civic reasoning and discourse:

To reason civically is to ask what we should do, where “we” is a group of any size, outside the family, to which the individual belongs. Examples include a small group deciding how to fundraise for an event or the American public asking what the United States should do or not do in the Middle East. The question always has an ethical dimension: which means and which ends should we chose? It is plural because individuals rarely have the wisdom or power to think and act alone; even apparently solitary civic acts (like casting a secret ballot) are deeply influenced by communication in groups. Civic reasoning is ultimately about decisions and actions, even if a group is not empowered to act. (For instance, students deliberating about what the US should do in the Middle East are not in a position to decide, but can form opinions about state action.) And the question requires a rigorous empirical understanding of the situation, the most relevant institutions, and the likely outcomes of various decisions. Emotions—from empathy to righteous indignation—also provide input for civic reasoning and should be influenced by reasoning.

Discourse is necessary because discussing with others is our best way of combatting our individual cognitive and ethical limitations and biases. But discourse can go badly because of group-think, propaganda, bias, lack of empathy, exclusion of perspectives, and other dysfunctions. Thus education (broadly defined) should motivate people to feel part of groups that reason together about what to do and should strengthen their dispositions, skills, and knowledge so that they reason well. Putting the results of a discussion into practice and reflecting on the outcome is one way to learn civic reasoning, but it is also possible to learn from simulations, observations, data, history, and the lived experiences of students.

We argue that learning to critically engage such issues is complex. It involves knowledge along multiple dimensions: epistemological dispositions to value complexity, ethical dimensions around moral considerations in decision making, and equally important, conceptions of what is entailed in democratic values. Ideally in a democracy such as the U.S., it also requires that people are able to consider multiple points of view, to be disposed to listen and consider

positions and points of view different from one's own, and to show empathy for others, especially for those who, for whatever reason, "we" designate as "the other." The knowledge base across all of these examples includes deep knowledge of history, of how government decision making operates in the U.S., of economic and political systems, of scientific knowledge of how the natural world operates, of how mathematical knowledge can be recruited as possible sources of explanation of phenomenon that can be quantified, and equally important of the diversity of cultural practices, of ways of being in the world that constitute the human experience. Such knowledge needs to be employed with critical analysis, or always questioning the sources from which we encounter information.

Development of empathy is another key aspect in learning the skills of civic reasoning and discourse. George Herbert Mead, a pioneer in social psychology, viewed social interaction with others as key to develop both personal identity as well as empathy for others. Meade also believed that reflecting on the social conditions surrounding oneself is a way to learn civic reasoning. It is important to note that we do not argue that the development of such knowledge and dispositions will inevitably lead to either progressive or conservative political orientations, but rather than they ideally will lead to reasoned orientations.

Developing knowledge, skills, and dispositions in civic reasoning and discourse remains essential to the future functioning of our democracy. However, interdisciplinary integration has not been the focus of most of the research carried out in the field of civic education, and the impacts of practice reforms have not had the widespread impact hoped for. We believe that critical engagement in civic reasoning and debate has several dimensions. It is rooted in responsive discourse practices, entails understanding how disciplinary knowledge in the social and behavioral sciences can ground civic action, recognizes the influence of identity (including perceptions of the self, others, and contexts), and considers the central role of affect as well as knowledge. In short, these are dynamic systems. Understanding such dynamic systems is a necessary pre-requisite to designing learning environments that can foster the kind of civic reasoning and discourse required to meet the complex demands of civic decision making and engagement in the future.

To truly understand the challenge of division and alienation in society, civic learning and discourse needs to be informed by a broader research literature that helps us to understand issues of implicit bias, identity orientations, and the intersection between identity, perceptions, and thinking. There exists a need to synthesize a foundational knowledge base that is complex, multidisciplinary, and integrated. It also needs to take a comprehensive view of human learning and development in various social contexts. This includes research in learning and development and how students cultivate expertise in civic reasoning and discourse, but also how students enact these explicitly social learning processes within communities of practice that take into consideration culture, context, interests, and students' sense of belonging (Lave and Wenger, 1991; NASEM, 2018; NRC, 2012; Nasir, Lee, Pea, & McKinney de Royston, 2020). This also involves improving students' capacity to "talk across political and ideological differences...by teaching [them] to weigh evidence, consider competing views, form an opinion, articulate that opinion, and respond to those who disagree" (Hess and McAvoy, 2015, p. 5). Central attention needs to be given to areas of affect, identity and culture, including the understanding of group context differences as well as the creation of learning spaces that facilitate respectful dialogue

and an open climate for discussion for all students (Banks, 2004, 2008; Barber, Torney-Purta, Wilkenfeld, & Ross, 2015; Knowles, Torney-Purta, & Barber, 2018; Ladson-Billings, 2004; Reichert, Chen, & Torney-Purta, 2018).

In addition, among the most important goals of public education is to prepare young people to engage in informed civic action predicated on a disposition to grapple with the complexities of social issues and policy responses in a diverse society. The political, economic, and moral dilemmas that are central to accusations of “fake news” actually entail complex issues along with competing interests and warrants. As a consequence, weighing alternatives in order to decide a policy question (i.e., deliberation) isn’t only a matter of weighing evidence and judging the credibility of sources. While the belief is widespread that accurate information is the keystone of democratic decision-making, accurate information is itself now a contested construct. It is well known that directional motivation or “hot cognition” biases information processing (Adam, 2012; Lodge & Taber, 2005; National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2018; Lee, C. D., Meltzoff, A. N., & Kuhl, P. K., 2020), but this is especially the case when that information is about controversial policy issues. “Emotions are an essential and ubiquitous dimension of thought, and emotional processing steers behavior, thought, and learning” (HPL II). Furthermore, with our wildly proliferating media (social, print, cable, etc.), there is ever-increasing opportunity for sincere persons to believe “alternative facts.” One prominent study found that political knowledge itself did not improve people’s judgment about the accuracy of information; rather, media literacy did (Kahne & Bowyer, 2017). Does this suggest that opportunities to learn media literacy (knowing how to judge truth claims and their sources) should be as important as other educational interventions, such as courses in history, government, science, and literature? Or are there propositions about human learning and development that can leverage the ability of educators to prepare young people to actually wrestle with such complexities? The task requires that we understand civic and political issues as framed within a dynamic system with multiple entry points. This is one reason we propose an interdisciplinary project.

CHAPTERS WITHIN THIS VOLUME

This volume provides insights from multiple disciplinary fields to foster a better understanding of how civic reasoning and discourse skills develop and how they can be taught in different contexts. We hope that the material in the ensuing chapters will be useful to diverse audiences engaged in this work, including (1) those who study these issues in the academic community, including education researchers and research/practitioner organizations in the academic disciplines, as well as those engaged in teacher preparation; (2) policy leaders, including legislative bodies, federal agencies, state and local school districts, private foundations, and civics advocacy organizations; and importantly, (3) those engaged on the front lines of education practice and youth development, including social studies educators as well as educators working within each of the academic disciplines; parent groups, and community-based organizations.

The *Philosophical and Moral Foundations for Research and Practice* chapter begins by grounding the readers in the key question of “What should we do?”, a question that arises well beyond the political domains and often concerns about one’s relationship with each other. The

author defines civic reasoning as “the sort of reasoning citizens do as they answer this question” and civic discourse as “a means or method by which groups of people engage in civic reasoning”. The chapter addresses this central question by probing into the philosophical and moral underpinnings in ideal situations in hope to inform practices and understanding of civic life in the real contexts. This entails examining the knowledge and skills that enable, support, and enhance civic reasoning and discourse, including inquiry, fact-finding, logic, rationality, critical thinking, discussion, and deliberation. It also highlights empathy, consensus, compromise, collaboration, and civility as central values, virtues, and dispositions to engage in civic reasoning. The chapter finally draws on the current impediments to civic life and provides paths for future research.

While civic education nowadays is often reduced to one course in high school, it has been a central purpose of schooling in the U.S. since the American Revolution. A critical analysis of the history of democratic education in the U.S. provides young people with a holistic lens to examine the legacies, challenges, and progress made as the nation strives for a multi-racial multi-ethnic society. Drawing upon historical examples, the *From the Diffusion of Knowledge to the Cultivation of Agency: A Short History of Civic Education Policy and Practice in the U.S.* chapter sheds light on the importance of history as an essential part of civic learning to confront the past, cite evidence and examples, and cultivate agency. Through detailed analysis of seven historical examples, the chapter illustrates how people in the past confronted history and demonstrated resilience and agency by challenging the common narratives about who should be included in American history. The authors also emphasize the importance of positioning ourselves within historical trends as active civic agents and utilizing civic education to advance racial justice.

One of the important contributions of the volume is connecting research on how people learn and subject-matter disciplinary understanding to education in civic reasoning and discourse. The *Civic Reasoning and Discourse: Perspectives from Learning and Human Development* chapter argues that addressing the challenges of engaging students in civic reasoning and discourse requires multiple resources. Attending to the robust teaching and learning of disciplinary knowledge, including history, literature, mathematics, and science, equips students with the core skill sets they need to reason with complex civic issues. Other resources include dispositions such as moral reasoning, ethical concern for both the self and others, and epistemological commitments to engaging in complex civic problem space, as well as identity commitments to considering multiple points of view and interrogating one’s own assumptions. The chapter calls attention to the challenges of conceptual change and implicit bias and emphasizes the critical role of schools in recruiting the multi-dimensional resources in preparing students as civic agents.

The ecological contexts in which young people grow up influence their knowledge of their civic responsibilities and motivation to participate in public life. The *Civic Reasoning and Discourse amid Structural Inequality, Migration, and Conflict* chapter explores the varied social and political contexts that shape the civic identities and experiences of youth as well as identifies the disjuncture between current civic education and the diverse range of students’ lived experiences. Specifically, the authors highlight three underexplored areas of structural inequality, migration, and inter/intra national conflict that frame young people’s civic learning opportunities and their connections to and participation in the public life. The chapter further sheds light on the

possibilities for new expressions of civic engagement that are attentive to the differentiated ways of young people’s civic development. The authors encourage diverse forms of civic participation, including activism, critical curricular approaches, youth participatory action research, and art-based approaches, that help students from different backgrounds to cultivate their civic voices.

Focusing on the social and contextualized nature of the civic learning process, the *Learning Environments and School/Classroom Climate as Supports for Civic Reasoning, Discourse, and Engagement* chapter argues that the success of civic education also depends on the environments that such learning takes places in. Through examining the conducive and inhibitory elements in formal learning environments, this chapter provides the research base to define and outline the characteristics of supportive learning environments at both classroom and school level with special attention to how youth with varying experiences might perceive and respond to the environments differently. High-quality civic learning environments entail a sense of belonging in a community that welcomes individual and group participation and respect for varied views and backgrounds. The chapter further identifies the need for research beyond traditional classes and school environments and emphasizes the importance of teachers and administrators being cognizant of the larger societal context as they promote student agency and voice in school.

The digital space drastically changed the way people interact with each other. To address civic reasoning and discourse in the digital age, the *Rethinking Digital Citizenship: Learning about Media, Literacy, and Race in Turbulent Times* chapter focuses on youth civic engagement in the fast-changing digital space that mirrors the social, cultural, and political context in the larger society. As youth increasingly participate in interactive and peer-based online activities that are generally not guided by formal institutions, this chapter examines the opportunities and challenges presented by this shift in the digital space and analyzes efforts that help youth to engage in online civic actions safely, responsibly, and intelligently. The authors call for the need to re-design civic education to prepare youth for a digital democracy beyond the current emphasis on safety and civility. The chapter highlights critical digital literacy as a lens for youth to acquire and develop the necessary knowledge, skill, and awareness to reasonably engage with race-related media content, understand how technologies impact social positioning of different groups, and challenge structural inequities. Current civic education will need to broaden its focus to consider the diverse forms of youth civic participation and provide consistent and effective curriculum to prepare students for digital citizenship.

Educators play a key role in preparing all students to participate effectively in civic deliberation and engagement, and their pedagogical practices will need to be guided by the best evidence available. The *Pedagogical Practices and How Teachers Learn* chapter examines the curricular and pedagogical scaffolds that are effective to civic learning, investigates the role of students’ identities on civic engagement, and provides evidence for pedagogical practices that support students’ civic learning. The authors challenge the persistent focus on content knowledge and argue that inquiry-oriented curriculum and pedagogical approaches leverage all students’ lived experiences and knowledge to engage them in authentic investigation of political issues while also fostering deeper learning and the development of civic skills and dispositions. Consistent with learning theory that shows high-quality learning must be built upon students’ existing experiences, knowledge, and identities, the chapter addresses the importance to embrace

students’ out-of-school experiences and to ensure their voices are equally represented in classrooms. Teachers also require adequate support to develop knowledge and understanding of the social context, their own identities, and pedagogy to engage students in meaningful discussions.

An important dimension of our historical understanding is how communities that have faced persistent challenges with regard to equality in opportunity have organized themselves in preparing generations of young people to tackle the demands of citizenship and full democratic participation. The chapter *Agency and Resilience in the Face of Challenge as Civic Action: Lessons Learned* offers examples of civic agency in diverse ethnic communities that have historically been negatively positioned through structural practices: Native American, African American, Latinx, Asian American and Pacific Islander, and residents of rural Appalachian communities. These histories highlight agency in how these communities over the decades, even centuries, have organized to prepare young people for civic engagement. These efforts have included the work of educators, community organizations, and families. These histories examine the complexities of citizenship and cultural membership in this multi-cultural democracy in light of the political complexities of the meaning of citizenship in the U.S.

The volume ends with a final chapter on recommendations for practice, research, and policy. Utilizing the interdisciplinary research base in the above eight chapters, the final chapter provides a summary of key findings as well as identifies cross-cutting recommendations to advance the quality of learning skills in civic reasoning and discourse.

As the chapters in this volume show, the sources of knowledge and dispositions that young people need to develop to engage in civic life are indeed complex. To break down this complexity, each chapter is an attempt to provide analysis from their unique disciplinary perspective to disentangle the problem space and offer recommendations on how young people can work through differences in democracy.

CLOSING

The political and ideological divisions within the U.S. are deep and long standing. At the time of the production and publication of this report (2020), the country was grappling with the confluence of several major crises: a worldwide pandemic and the resulting shock to the economy, social unrest arising from the continuing impacts of systemic racism, and a burgeoning climate crisis. We argue that as a society, we have the responsibility to prepare young people with the civic reasoning and discourse skills to meet these types of challenges, in addition to the unknown crises that they as adults have yet to encounter.

The killing of George Floyd – at the time a recent pernicious example of black and brown people dying at the hands of police officers under deeply questionable circumstances – sparked mass protests across the country and indeed the world. What has been most interesting in these protests is the make-up of those protesting (multi-racial, inter-generational, in large cities and small towns, and in cities and nations around the world ranging from Nairobi-Kenya, Kazakhstan, Hong Kong, Kyoto-Japan, Karachi-Pakistan, Paris-France to London-England). At the same time, there have been counter protests, and in some cases eruptions of violence, with

many questions raised about the potential array of people – typically not those engaged in peaceful protests – engaged in racist and violent acts., as well as the targets of violent attacks (e.g. public buildings, small and large businesses). These responses have led to debates that require civic reasoning and discourse regarding how to think about issues around public social protests. Examples of topics include how to think about the functioning of police departments; what if any limitations are legal and appropriate; what levers of government should be at play in challenges that arise from such protests; how to safeguard the rights of competing protest groups; what laws and practices need to be in place to address why these cases of police-civilian violence not only remain but disproportionately affect black and brown populations, etc.

At the same time, we are living through a worldwide pandemic. Living with this pandemic has raised multiple challenges in the civic domain: what does it mean for the public to understand the scientific bases for the spread of COVID-19 (e.g. the mathematical and scientific modeling of the spread of the virus); how does the public disentangle mixed messaging coming from across levers of government and from scientific organizations and sites; how does the public wrestle with the tensions between public safety and the economic challenges of the public not having face to face access to businesses and schools; and how to understand our inter-dependence with other parts of the world – in terms of health, economics, and institutional alliances (e.g. our relationship with the World Health Organization, travel regulations between nations); navigating rights of individuals (e.g. whether to wear masks) versus the public health needs of the majority); and how to safely organize (in-person or remotely) the continuation of vital institution such as education of children.

These two current challenges highlight the complexity of the demands of civic reasoning and discourse. We can also think about the impacts of the climate crisis – the wildfires in California, the unprecedented hurricane seasons in the Gulf Coast – including the contestations over whether these natural or unnatural phenomenon are the result of climate change and what role human activity plays in their unfolding. Our current generation of school children will be on the front-lines of dealing with the social and economic impacts of the increasing frequency of these ecological disasters, as well as the dislocation caused by acceleration of sea level rise in this century.

The nature of our heated public debates over these current challenges and the seeming difficulty of our political leadership to work collaboratively to address these issues all attest to how essential to our democracy it is to prepare our young people to engage in such civic reasoning and discourse. Although the vast majority of our school children under the age of 18 are not eligible to vote, they are developmentally able to, and indeed do, engage in civic activities, examine social issues, and express their points of view. The public organizing of young people across the nation after the horrific shootings at Stoneman Douglass High School in Parkland, Florida attests to this civic potential. While we focus much attention on the role of public schooling, it is equally important to recognize the important civic work that takes place in community organizations, especially community organizations that are either run by young people or that focus on youth development and engagement.

Ultimately, we must ask ourselves, how is that adults potentially come through our K-12 required public education system and still learn to hate, or how does a seemingly educated

populace reject scientific findings that scientists across the world have reached near universal agreement upon? While we have sought to focus attention on our civic challenges, it is equally important to highlight our sources of hope. As Martin Luther King has said, “the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice.” The state of racial inequality in 2020 is not the same as it was in 1775 or 1865. The evolution of Supreme Court decisions around issues of individual and group rights has evolved toward greater pathways for justice across the centuries. While evolving in deeply contested arguments, the amendments to the constitution have each articulated expanded rights. Social movements over the course of our history have led to monumental shifts in rights – including the abolitionist movement, the movement for women’s right to vote, movements for civil rights, social activism around health access and environmental safety, and the current social movements around racial justice and climate change. The range of political leadership at every level of government is more diverse than ever in our history. Our students need to understand both the persistent challenges and the ways that our structures of governance and activism have changed trajectories toward greater equality.

We conclude on a note of hope in a letter to the president from a 6-year-old boy named Alex who saw on the news the horrors of the Syrian civil war (figure 6):

Figure 6: A six-year-old boy’s letter to President Obama

Dear President Obama,
Remember the boy who was picked up by the ambulance in Syria? Can you please go get him and bring him to [my home]? Park in the driveway or on the street and we will be waiting for you guys with flags, flowers, and balloons. We will give him a family and he will be our brother. Catherine, my little sister, will be collecting butterflies and fireflies for him. In my school, I have a friend from Syria, Omar, and I will introduce him to Omar. We can all play together. We can invite him to birthday parties and he will teach us another language. We can teach him English too, just like my friend Aoto from Japan.
Please tell him that his brother will be Alex who is a very kind boy, just like him. Since he won't bring toys and doesn't have toys Catherine will share her big blue stripy white bunny. And I will share my bike and I will teach him how to ride it. I will teach him additions and subtractions in math. And he [can] smell Catherine's lip gloss penguin which is green. She doesn't let anyone touch it.
Thank you very much! I can't wait for you to come!
Alex
6 years old

In the letter, Alex reflects what we know, that young children are naturally and inherently ethically conscious of right and wrong. His compassion and empathy for the Syrian boy he saw in the ambulance reflects the moral foundations that are required of democratic values, both within the nation and across an interconnected and interdependent world. In this report, we seek to understand how to build on Alex’s goodness, on his empathy, and on his attention to and interest in what is happening in the world around him.

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