

Defining and Implementing Civic Reasoning and Discourse: Philosophical and Moral Foundations for Research and Practice

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CONTENTS

THE CIVIC QUESTION AND CITIZENS WHO ASK IT	24
CIVIC AND DEMOCRATIC ELEMENTS OF CIVIC REASONING AND DISCOURSE	26
COMPONENTS OF CIVIC REASONING AND DISCOURSE.....	28
Knowledge and Skills, 28	
Values, Virtues, and Dispositions, 36	
OBSTACLES AND FUTURE RESEARCH.....	42
Understanding Changes in Truth, Facts, and News, 42	
Attending to Changing Psychology of Citizens, 43	
Building Capacity for Civic Reasoning and Discourse Online, 44	
Supporting Diverse and Open Environments, 45	
Alleviating School-Based Problems, 46	
Allowing for Differences Among Citizens, 47	
MOVING FORWARD.....	48
REFERENCES.....	50

At the heart of civic reasoning and discourse is the key civic question: “What should we do?” (Dishon & Ben-Porath, 2018; Levine, 2016). It is a question that arises when groups of people face a problem or must reach a decision. It is a question that arises well beyond political or governmental domains and surfaces in our communities and in our interactions with others. While often oriented toward action and outcomes, this question also arises when groups of people are primarily concerned about their relationships with each other and how to live together as a group.

In this chapter, the author discusses the philosophical and moral underpinnings of civic reasoning and discourse. The author begins by defining civic reasoning and discourse when it works at its best, recognizing that we have a long history of falling short of that idealized conception and many examples of civic reasoning and discourse being used in ways that intentionally excluded or harmed some people. The author defines civic reasoning as the sort of reasoning we do as we answer the question “What should we do?” In other words, civic reasoning is the reasoning we do about what we should do. The chapter uses the term civic discourse to refer to a means or method by which groups of people engage in civic reasoning, and describes the knowledge and skills that support good or democratically healthy civic reasoning and discourse, including inquiry, fact-finding, logic, rationality, critical thinking, discussion, and deliberation. The author also details the values, virtues, and dispositions that support good civic reasoning and discourse, including empathy, an orientation toward consensus, a willingness to compromise, a collaborative spirit, and civility.

The author uses this model of good civic reasoning and discourse to reveal some current problems in our common practices of discourse and as a guide for how we might educate in ways that move citizen behavior closer to ideal practices. Throughout the chapter, there are suggestions for improved citizenship education, curricula, and pedagogy. Additionally, the author notes some current impediments to teaching civic reasoning and discourse in our non-ideal settings that arise from changing notions of truth, psychology of citizens, use of digital media, limited classroom focus, and environments that are increasingly segregated. The chapter closes with a call for further research in key areas related to understanding and educating for civic reasoning and discourse, hoping that the theoretical grounding for those practices described here might inform future research.

THE CIVIC QUESTION AND CITIZENS WHO ASK IT

Following the work of Peter Levine, the citizens’ question “What should we do?” can be broken up, with each word revealing the people, content, and values at stake and the physical, social, and emotional effort involved.

- What—the tangible or meaningful products and results of our discussions and actions. These could be objects we produce together, decisions we reach, norms we construct to shape our interactions together, and more. In many cases, they are empirical matters, dependent on facts and evidence.
- Should—a normative claim about how to better a situation, improve our relations together, or solve a problem. Each of these pushes us beyond what we merely *can* or *want* to do into making a claim about what it is *right* for us to do or what we may have an ethical responsibility to do.
- We—an emphasis on our shared fate in a community, collaboration in addressing issues, and our responsibilities to each other, especially as part of publics that form around mutual concerns. The individual’s question—“What should I do?”—also matters, but it becomes civic when it is about impact on or action with a “we.”
- Do—actions taken together, in parallel or individually, but may also entail engaging in discussion, building communities, and figuring out how to live together

well. The emphasis is on what we can achieve, rather than what we might expect others to do.

Importantly, legacies of injustice and patterns of marginalization reveal that the “we” in this question cannot be assumed. The history of civic struggle shows us that defining the “we” is a source of deep disagreement. One consequence of defining it narrowly can be to exclude people from the conversations that matter and essentially silence them. However, people have agency. When excluded from one “we,” they may create another, demand and gain a place in the group that excluded them, or both. Part of taking up the civic question is working through past exclusions to create new and more inclusive understandings of the “we” in the United States today.

Citizens compose the groups that take up this question. The word citizen is widely used to mean a person recognized by a given government as a member holding a full set of rights, especially in liberal democracies, like that of the United States. In the terms of political philosopher James Tully, this is a civil notion of citizenship that emphasizes legal status (Tully, 2008). An alternative understanding, which the author operates with here, defines citizens in terms of what they do: a citizen is someone who engages in diverse practices of citizenship that vary across groups and contexts, but crucially include forms of civic reasoning and discourse. In Tully’s terminology, this is a civic notion of citizenship. From this view, a citizen is someone who can and does seriously ask “What should we—the members of this group—do?”

Citizens, then, can be people who engage in activities of citizenship, yet are not granted citizenship in terms of formal legal or informal membership status. For example, undocumented immigrants have taken to the streets to make demands of the nation–state and Indigenous peoples have refused the jurisdiction of the U.S. government over their land as a way to require recognition of their sovereign status. In this way, citizens belong to and act within many groups that are not formally democratic yet are still civic. The author works with a broad understanding here of what counts as civic space and civic engagement, pushing us beyond common boundaries that limit such endeavors to the government or formal political spheres.

Most of the definitions and arguments offered in this chapter are phrased in universal terms. Every human being is part of many overlapping and nested communities that may employ or fail to honor civic reasoning and discourse. The characteristics of good reasoning and the threats that it faces seem widely shared. Nation–states have diverse political systems and political cultures, but a nation–state is just one venue of civic reasoning among many. Some important venues, from world faiths to Facebook, are transnational.

At the same time, most of the examples and research findings cited come from the United States; this chapter does not deeply explore whether aspects of civic reasoning and discourse should vary among regimes or cultures. This chapter might be read as a theory by and for people in the United States, but one that understands good American citizens as belonging to multiple communities (from the hyper-local to the global) and that favors relatively general principles instead of ones that are tied closely to the United States.

CIVIC AND DEMOCRATIC ELEMENTS OF CIVIC REASONING AND DISCOURSE

The reasoning we do in order to answer “What should we do?” can be civic in three senses:

1. Topic—As we consider what we should do, we are focused on issues important to our shared living. Civic reasoning is reasoning about civic matters.
2. Identity of the reasoners—Figuring out what we should do is a matter of our collective agency and is therefore concerned with who we are, who composes our group, and what our capacities are. Civic reasoning is the reasoning we do as civic actors.
3. Manner in which we relate to each other—Answering what we should do is not merely instrumental, focused only on actions and decisions, but rather is constitutive: it creates a “we.” This raises norms about how we exchange ideas and interact together. Civic reasoning is reasoning we engage in civically or civilly.

In this paper, the author starts from a picture of good civic reasoning as civic in these three senses. So understood, good civic reasoning represents an ideal of democratic practice. Not every instance of citizens discussing what to do together will satisfy these criteria, and not every (perhaps not any) encounter among citizens will realize this ideal. The author nevertheless tries to lay out here the components that go into this ideal of good civic reasoning in the hopes that it provides a framework for understanding its value to democracy, how and where we fall short of it, what might go into educating children in ways that facilitate their democratic engagement, and where the obstacles lie to doing so effectively.

Good civic reasoning is a plural and ethical endeavor that often entails inquiry, empirical investigation, and/or engagement with emotions. Civic reasoning is plural because individuals rarely have the wisdom, power, or resources to undertake tackling the question alone. Even apparently solitary civic acts, such as casting a secret ballot, are deeply shaped by those around us, including the opinions of others and media influences. Civic reasoning is ethical because answering the question pushes us to assess and determine which means and ends we ought to choose, including how they might impact those both in and outside of our group. Additionally, civic reasoning is ethical because it requires that we act with respect in that we treat each other as having standing in the situation and give each other’s claims consideration.

Let us consider an example of teenagers in a high school social studies class asking “What should we do?” as they deliberate about the best course of action regarding U.S. military intervention in the Middle East. Even if those children are not in a position to determine the outcome, they are role-playing or practicing deliberation in order to develop civic reasoning skills and to make and refine opinions about the actual decision makers. Forming opinions and arriving at shared views about state action can be a significant result of engaging in reasoning that is civic in topic. Ethically, students should weigh the risks of whether continued or further military intervention might put additional lives at risk or bring safety to large groups of people abroad or at home.

Civic reasoning often requires empirical investigation or evidence gathering so that we may better understand a situation and the potential results that might follow from

our decision or course of action. For instance, the high schoolers may need to find out about the physical and political risks of U.S. military force in the Middle East, which may entail investigating political geography, past military intervention, and even weather in a desert or mountainous fighting environment.

To engage in civic reasoning is not to leave emotions behind or ignore them. Indeed, emotions figure into good civic reasoning in a number of ways. Emotions can serve as inputs to the reasoning process, such as when anger at injustice helps us to see the injustice in the first place. Certainly, women, African Americans, and others have productively used anger to help reveal and elevate the injustices behind their calls for civil rights. Emotions can also help reasoners see more clearly that a point of view should be taken seriously, such as when they are bound up in the personal experiences of the reasoners. In the example, some students may bring personal experiences with family members in the military or living in the Middle East to the classroom discussion. This may lead those students to feel frightened for their well-being or angry about being separated by military deployments, emotions that can draw attention to the seriousness of the matter. Finally, we may hope to engage or provoke certain emotions in the course of working out what we should do, aiming to call forth feelings that might help to motivate action. For instance, a student might share research on the lives of war refugees in a way that is designed to call forth sympathy from her classmates.

Civic discourse is a means or method by which groups of people engage in civic reasoning. Given our nature as largely interdependent beings that construct knowledge and solutions together, civic discourse is one key way that we reason together, through discussion and deliberation, to answer the question of "What should we do?" Civic discourse is also a social endeavor and is one way in which we relate to others. Civic discourse offers benefits rarely achievable when engaging in civic reasoning alone. For example, discussing with others can help to combat our individual cognitive and ethical limitations and biases.

Civic discourse can encounter problems. Civic discourse can go badly when a group excludes some perspectives, falls prey to groupthink, or succumbs to other dysfunctions of group discussion. It can also go badly when individuals do not relate to others well, perhaps by dominating the discussion or belittling the views of others. Additionally, while civic reasoning and discourse go hand in hand in ideal situations, sometimes that is not the case. An individual may be engaged in good civic reasoning, gathering evidence, and thinking critically about what to do, but may be unable to engage in civic discourse with a group that excludes or denigrates her or others. Alternatively, participants in a group may relate well to each other, yet their discourse may fall short of good civic reasoning because it suffers from epistemic blind spots due to lack of plurality caused by ideological homogeneity or other reasons. As a result, civic reasoning and discourse must be considered both individually and together as we seek to understand and improve them.

Civic reasoning and discourse play important roles in democracy. While the question "What should we do?" is most often posed within the civic sphere, we can engage in civic reasoning and discourse in an array of settings: from inside a religious organization, with friends on Facebook, among leaders of a private company, or among scholars in a scientific discipline. None of these are democracies, but democracy, as both a system of government and a way of life, particularly promotes and relies on good

civic reasoning and discourse. In a vibrant democracy, citizens not only self-govern and consent to laws, but also actively work with others to form publics around shared problems, to pose and evaluate solutions, and to engage in creative imagining of how their future might be improved. Good civic reasoning and discourse can keep democracy healthy by welcoming a plurality of perspectives, highlighting shared responsibilities for sustained and improved living, integrating citizens into decision making about the future of communities, and building a collective sense of “we.”

Schools are important institutions that can teach good practices of civic reasoning and discourse. Colleges and universities, many civic associations, and some media organizations also fulfill this function. Here, however, the focus is on K–12 schools because of their ubiquity and strong influence on developing youth. Teaching the cognitive, intrapersonal, and interpersonal aspects of good civic reasoning and discourse may lead not only to sustained and improved democracy by virtue of new generations of citizens that engage well in civic reasoning and discourse, but they may also enable other forms of learning in our schools as students experience the world together and construct new knowledge about it. In the next section, the author describes key components of good civic reasoning and discourse that may be taught before turning to current obstacles to improved civic reasoning and discourse inside and outside of schools.

COMPONENTS OF CIVIC REASONING AND DISCOURSE

Good civic reasoning and discourse require particular knowledge, skills, values, and dispositions. Here, the author summarizes some of the most important components. The groupings employed should not be understood as firm or clear distinctions; instead, the boundaries blur as components relate to and build on one another in different contexts. For example, a skill may be used because one has already established a disposition to act, or a value may rely on knowledge in order for it to be fulfilled.

Knowledge and Skills

Particular knowledge and skills work together to enable, support, and enhance quality civic reasoning and discourse. They play a role in inquiry, fact-finding, negotiating truth, reasonableness, critical thinking, discussion, and deliberation.

Inquiry

To be civic in topic is for reasoning to inquire into issues important to our lives with others. Inquiry is often triggered when we find ourselves in what educational philosopher John Dewey calls “indeterminate situations” (Dewey, 1927, 1938). These are moments when we are unsure how to proceed—moments that give rise to the question of “What should we do?” They also give birth to publics because they bring people together around shared experiences or struggles. For Dewey, inquiry is the process we use to investigate our world, hypothesize improved ways of understanding or living within it, and then experiment with them to gauge their usefulness for moving forward out of the indeterminate situation. Inquiry is cognitive and empirical, and entails determining the stakeholders that are impacted by a situation. It is experimental in nature

and invites multiple, and often conflicting, perspectives into communication with each other to imagine, create, and test potential solutions.

Although the focus of inquiry is more on how we can adapt ourselves and our current situations, which can require a host of different sorts of information, historical and political knowledge is often required in order to figure out what to do. Knowledge of what has been tried and accomplished in the past and historical consciousness (Clark & Grever, 2018) can help us make wiser judgments for the future. Skills of historical interpretation may be needed to distinguish facts from stories or myths and to reach conclusions based on evidence from multiple sources (Barton & Levstik, 2015; Monte-Sano & Reisman, 2015; Reisman, 2012; VanSledright, 2015; Wineburg, 2002). These include identifying legitimate sources, attributing the source to an author contextualized historically, understanding that author's perspective, and corroborating the source to assess its reliability (VanSledright, 2015). In part, this historical knowledge and content serves to identify the means and ends for answering the civic question, while also considering the relevant stakeholders and the individual and collective agency of those involved for taking up and solving "What should we do?"

Within the context of a democracy, citizens need more than just historical knowledge; they also need knowledge about politics and democratic practices and procedures. Citizens need to know what government is, what it does, who composes it, and how power operates within it. These can be thought of as "the rules of the game, the substance of politics, and people and parties" (Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996, p. 65). This sort of political knowledge can help us figure out the resources we have to answer "What should we do?" Importantly, citizens also need to have a working understanding of the law so that they understand potential constraints on what they *can* do in a representative constitutional republic (Parker & Lo, 2016) and whether they might need to work to change policies or leadership in order to achieve the sort of action they envision (Stitzlein, 2014).

While much of contemporary curriculum theory and research in areas of citizenship education are rightly concerned with "who" questions about stakeholders and "how" questions about skills, it is important that we not lose sight of the "what"—the content—that is needed to do civic reasoning well. However, citizenship education should not be boiled down to a fixed body of static knowledge to convey to children. Instead, knowledge should be taught as part of active inquiry into authentic controversies in our democracy and struggles to live well together within it. Such inquiry does not treat those controversies and struggles as mere issues to be grasped objectively from afar or to be dealt with later in life as adults, but rather immerses students into the complicated arena of real, present political life. Quality citizenship education teaches both for and with inquiry, where teaching *with* inquiry leads to learning content and teaching *for* inquiry develops the skills of doing inquiry itself (Swan et al., 2018). Together, inquiry-based learning attends to the real challenges of living in a democracy and brings "who," "how," and "what" questions to bear as we engage in civic reasoning.

Fact-Finding and Truth

Inquiry and knowledge often hinge on finding, analyzing, interpreting, agreeing on, making judgments from, and reaching conclusions about facts. Both empirical and civic

facts provide important tools for inquiry. First, empirical facts may form the basis of the natural or scientific phenomena we need to understand in order to address our situation. Second, knowledge of and access to facts about civic content increases our political knowledge, helps us to feel empowered, and improves our ability to influence the governing process. Scholars of civic participation Michael Delli Carpini and Scott Keeter (1996, pp. 6–7) explain:

A well-informed citizen is more likely to be attentive to politics, engaged in various forms of participation, committed to democratic principles, opinionated, and to feel efficacious. No other single characteristic of an individual affords so reliable a predictor of good citizenship, broadly conceived, as their level of [political] knowledge.

The facts needed for good inquiry as a part of civic reasoning may be more complicated than one might assume. What we take to be facts may not be as straightforward as they seem; rather, they are influenced by their source and other factors. We typically come to uphold them because of their source; we accept the testimony or authority of some person or institution because of their expertise or credentials, or because we may have a personal relationship with them. Yet, the facts arrived at through empirical investigation and the social process of inquiry are shaped by an array of influences other than mere pursuit of truth. Accepting those facts is always a matter of trust.

For example, no one individual has directly examined and assessed all of the evidence that humans are causing the Earth to warm. No one can read all of the relevant research, check the data reported in the research, collect all of the data, design the instruments used to collect the data, train the people who design the instruments, or conduct the prior research that underlies all of these activities. Knowledge creation is profoundly social, often carried out by institutions—scientific organizations, think tanks, newsrooms, laboratories, and so forth. To have knowledge, therefore, requires that we trust others and trust institutions, yet many individuals and institutions are not trustworthy, nor is automatic trust rational. The hard question is which people and organizations to trust for the knowledge they produce. Learning how to make such decisions well is crucial to engaging in quality civic reasoning and discourse.

Facts may exist independently of us, whereas knowledge is something we construct and is mediated by an array of social institutions and relationships of trust between reasoners. While some of these facts may exist apart from our social contexts, the emphasis here is on inquiry as a social process of knowledge discovery—a moderate position between an extreme form of social construction or relativism and a positivist correspondence theory of truth. Thus, when people have seemingly irreconcilable disagreements about “what the facts are,” they are typically not suggesting that there are no facts or that all facts are relative. Instead, they are disagreeing about which sources of knowledge are trustworthy. Of course, they may be mistaken about this, but this is part of what citizens seek to sort out by engaging in inquiry and knowledge construction.

Understanding the problems we face and deliberating about what to do is not only a matter of figuring out facts; it requires thinking about values. This is often exemplified in cases of civic content, where the public good is at stake and competing normative frameworks may play a significant role shaping *what we should* do. The civic question leads us to have to consider what sort of ends we desire and who benefits from those

aims. We must consider what makes certain actions worth doing or certain outcomes worth pursuing. The way we answer “What should we do?” is a realization of our values. To answer the question well, we need the ability to think and talk about values, including what they are, how they relate to one another, and how they are best achieved. Sometimes, we face situations where we must resolve tensions between competing or conflicting values. Other times, we must recognize the possibility that no option may fully realize all of our values. So, in choosing among our options, we face tradeoffs in which values are realized and to what degree. We may have to prioritize one value over another. These situations require being able to articulate our own values—to describe them and qualify why they are important to us and to what extent. They also require being able to detect the values of others and engage in discussion and negotiation about them (Klein, 2019). In some cases, we may need to question or change our values because they lead us to biased or problematic behaviors, such as self-interested or unjust acts. As described later in this chapter, sometimes the values at stake are actually about how we relate to one another in a democracy, the third sense of reasoning as civic.

Relatedly, what each of us takes to be fact depends on our values, our background experiences, our sources of information, and who we trust. Indeed, our understanding of what the facts are often hinges on the truthfulness of the utterer, the influence of their personal beliefs and emotions, and our (potentially biased) interpretation of them. Importantly, though, different interpretations of facts can be a part of a healthy deliberation of open controversial issues or thorny public problems.

Which facts and how many we should know poses another complication. State standards for civics often suggest that developing citizens should mainly learn the structure of the United States government: the branches of government, federalism, civil rights, and related topics (Levine, 2013). Indeed, these *are* relevant, but the design of the government is only one relevant subject for citizens. It may be equally important for citizens to understand—and to be able to inquire further about—cultural groups, faith traditions, economic forces and institutions, biophysical conditions, sociological phenomena, historical achievements and injustices, other countries, and many other topics.

For instance, throughout history, marginalized and oppressed peoples have found ways of acting and effecting change in constrained circumstances, and yet many of these methods and achievements are not widely known or acknowledged as forms of engaged civic action. A curriculum that focuses on the formal structure of the U.S. government to the exclusion of social movements and other forms of “contentious politics” (Tarrow, 2011) increases the likelihood that students will miss learning about the agency of oppressed peoples. Understanding and appreciating such efforts as contributions to our civic life can improve the quality of our civic reasoning in part by opening our eyes to the many different forms it can take, as well as the often-overlooked contributions of subordinated people to the ongoing project of democratically living together.

One response might be that students would benefit from knowing a vast range of facts, but the information that would serve them as citizens is practically infinite. Instead, they should primarily learn skills for inquiry. But that approach seems to evade any need to identify especially important topics or to equip students with vocabulary and concepts that they need for inquiry. Wise policy navigates between assuming, on one hand, that some discrete “core” of knowledge (usually, an overview of the U.S.

Constitution and a dose of governmental structure) suffices for civic education, or assuming, on the other hand, that budding citizens should inquire about anything and everything. A moderate course sets priorities but defines them broadly and encourages students to pursue their own questions.

Logic, Rationality, and Reasonableness

Good civic reasoning requires that its participants use the skills of logic, rationality, and reasonableness. Logic concerns the formal relationship between statements, and so understanding logic can help reasoners think about when their conclusions are necessitated by their premises or to point out fallacies in the reasoning of others. Knowing, for instance, that the negation of “All swans are white” is not “No swans are white” but “Some swans are not white” is a matter of understanding the logical structure of language. Though some reasoning falters in its logical structure, a much more likely failure is in the substantive relation of reasons toward a conclusion. Here, the skills of rationality are relevant: understanding what counts as a reason for what.

Though rationality can help us assess whether means are appropriate to ends (instrumental reasoning) and whether the benefits are worth the costs (prudential reasoning or cost–benefit analysis), it can also help us think about what ends are worth pursuing, and how conflicting reasons relate to one another. It is important to recognize here that good reasons for adopting an end or a set of means need not be cold and calculating: a religious commitment or belief, or an emotional connection to a place or action or object, might be a strong reason for acting one way or another. Furthermore, working out the relation of reasons is not merely a matter of weighing pros and cons. Reasons relate to one another in all sorts of complex ways, and we can think of the skills of rationality as also including understanding how to think well about the relation of various reasons to one another.

Moreover, being rational involves being responsive to reasons, and this requires an openness to challenge, criticism, and contestation about the warrants and evidence cited in support of particular reasons and the conclusions they lead to. Rationality, so understood, is not a matter of merely accepting scientific or expert consensus on a topic.

When we think of reasoning as a social activity of reciprocal and responsive interaction, as it is in civic reasoning, then we also need the skill or virtue of reasonableness. Being reasonable in this sense involves not commanding or deferring but inviting and persuading others to see things as we do, and an openness to be moved by their invitations when they see things differently (Laden, 2012). It displays itself in a willingness to propose fair terms of cooperation and to abide by those terms even when doing so later is not to our advantage (Rawls, 1996). It involves the skills of listening and responding to others, not just working out the internal structures of our own thoughts and goals and making persuasive arguments. Reasonableness is cultivated through social interaction as we listen and talk with others about our thoughts, feelings, and reasons. Reasonableness, then, helps to span the divide between reasoning as a way of deciding what we should do and reasoning as a manner in which we relate to each other.

Critical Thinking

Quality civic reasoning is also facilitated by critical thinking. Robert Ennis defines critical thinking as “reflective and reasonable thinking that is focused on deciding what to believe or do” (Ennis, 2011, p. 1). Part of determining what to believe is not based on the ability to track down every empirical claim, but rather on understanding how individuals and institutions work to produce legitimate knowledge and what makes them trustworthy. Such understanding and related skills help us determine what knowledge is more solidly justified. It prevents the inquiry process from being a simplistic form of empiricism, where we naively set out to find the facts and apply them.

Certainly, this definition is well aligned with the account offered here of good civic reasoning and its guiding question, but it misses an important element that a focus on critical thinking can add to the picture under construction: a spirit of criticality. Criticality identifies and interrogates the power that influences and sometimes distorts knowledge and inquiry, and it reveals the struggles over power at play in group contexts. Recognizing the role of power helps groups of people to better understand how some shared problems may disproportionately impact certain members of a community. Critical thinking may also uncover how power operates to support or hinder the solutions put forward in an inquiry. When supported by democratic values like political equality, critical thinking leads us to ask important “who” questions: “Is everyone at the table that needs to be?”, “Who is being heard?”, and “Who stands to gain or lose?” Asking “who” questions can help students to name power, which is a helpful first step. However, students also need to be supported in going further to learn how to challenge and change power inequities, which includes cultivating students’ ability to imagine more just ways of being and the skills of dissent needed to put forward those alternatives. In this way, critical thinking can help us adjudicate not only what we should do, but what is feasible, right, or best to do and for whom (Lim, 2011).

Critical thinking in this more specific sense enables thinkers to see and understand their relationships with others. It also pushes them into the fray of making sense of and acting in a context of multiple and conflicting perspectives, emotions, and moral claims. Indeed, critical thinking is a collective practice. Nicholas Burbules and Rupert Berk (1999, p. 62) explain that it is

a function of collective questioning, criticism, and creativity, it is always social in character, partly because relations to others influence the individual, and partly because certain of these activities (particularly thinking in new ways) arise from interaction with challenging alternative views.

Educational approaches that describe critical thinking in more individualist and instrumentalist forms of logic and argument analysis lack the components of criticality and collective work that are essential to such thinking and render it a valuable tool in civic reasoning.

Discussion and Deliberation

Civic discourse is perhaps best undertaken through discussion or deliberation. Diana Hess (2009, p. 14) defines the first of these terms:

discussion is dialogue between or among people. It involves, at a minimum, the exchange of information about a topic (e.g., a controversy, a problem, an event, a person, etc.). Second, discussion is a particular approach to constructing knowledge that is predicated on the belief that the most powerful ideas can be produced when people are expressing their ideas on a topic and listening to others express theirs.

To construct powerful ideas and piece together solutions, discussion seeks out multiple, varied perspectives and opens up all contributions to examination. This differs from debate, which typically begins with proposals formed in advance, operates to name one proposal as being better than another, and often is carried out in a more combative and less cooperative spirit. While debate is an approach to considering civic matters that is widespread in the United States today, this approach often forecloses some of the possibilities offered within discussion and deliberation and thus is not as aligned with ideal civic reasoning. In order for debate to play a more constructive role in fostering good civic reasoning, it needs to be understood not as a competition with winners and losers but as a means for exploring a topic and effectively bringing out various perspectives and positions in their strongest and most persuasive forms.

Discussion and deliberation require certain skills, values, and dispositions beyond those already mentioned. This is especially the case given that discussions may further entrench, rather than expose or challenge, inequities, oppressions, and subjugations between participants and the larger society. Discussion and deliberation require listening and leaving space for others, being open to and raising dissent, working through challenging ideas or competing perspectives in good faith, and vulnerability to being moved by what others say. To head off further marginalization or harm, they require active commitments to values of equity, anti-racism, gender equality, and other elements of justice, especially when situated among participants with differing degrees of power. Dispositions to authorize more voices and perspectives may help shore up civic reasoning as a plural and ethical endeavor (Mansbridge, 1991; Parker, 2006). Engaging in discussion can help develop the sort of democratic culture and political tolerance needed to more effectively work together to solve complex public problems. Put in terms of educating citizens, discussion is not just a high-quality strategy for teaching information, but is itself a means and an end for developing good citizens who can engage well in civic reasoning (Parker, 2010).

Deliberation is discussion aimed at a particular resolution, action, or outcome rather than discussion that creates shared understanding or just talk for the sake of talk—though, importantly, these can play a role in the health of a democracy (Parker, 2003). Deliberation is always an endeavor situated in uncertainty; it is about things that we do not know for sure and a future that we cannot fully predict. Deliberation is also one way that publics form, as it calls people together around a shared point of concern or decision making. Though useful across an array of philosophical understandings of democracy, deliberation is particularly valued within the framework of deliberative democracy (Gutmann & Thompson, 2004; Habermas, 1987, 1996). Within that framework, it is employed to make decisions and reach binding agreements, thereby giving heft and substance to conversations between citizens.

It is not enough to merely acknowledge pluralism or conflicting views on the good life, though; we must take seriously and be responsive to the dissent that arises from

them. Such dissent includes critiquing the status quo, challenging accepted views, and putting forward alternatives. Engaging in dissent is a form of participatory politics that legitimizes conflict and disagreement as not just facts of life, but sources for better civic reasoning. An influential critic of deliberative democracy, Chantal Mouffe (1996, p. 8), adds:

A pluralist democracy needs to make room for the expression of dissent and for conflicting interests and values. And those should not be seen as temporary obstacles on the road to consensus since in their absence democracy would cease to be pluralistic.

Here, she shows how dissent and differing opinions are not just something to work past during civic discourse, but are themselves an important part of a pluralistic democracy, goading change, at times, through conflict.

Within a deliberation, dissent can help to overcome groupthink momentum by pausing to expose contradictory beliefs or differing viewpoints that may highlight the perspective of minority members within or outside of the group, reveal faulty arguments, or improve the quality, depth, and sincerity of the conversation itself. Dissenters help to ensure that more voices are being heard and help to better ensure that just decisions are being made. However, rational-proceduralist forms of deliberative democracy, often attributed to Jürgen Habermas, which restrict legitimate deliberation to a strict formula of reason-giving, may prevent dissenters from using some of the tools of their trade, including emotional ploys, radical protest, and passionate disruption (Young, 2002). Civic discourse must not only preserve space for this sort of public work, but also foreground it for its ability to improve the quality of civic discourse and outcomes of civic reasoning. Citizenship education requires overtly teaching not only the value of dissent, but also the skills and dispositions necessary to engage it (Stitzlein, 2014).

Even if an openness to other viewpoints is an essential attitude in civic reasoning, many worry that this attitude can be taken too far. They argue that there are certainly some viewpoints that are hostile to the deliberative process itself or that aim to exclude certain others from full citizenship or personhood, and that good civic reasoning requires drawing a line that excludes such positions from even entering into or harming our civic interactions. For teachers, a familiar example occurs when one student comments on identity characteristics, such as race/ethnicity, religion, or sexuality, in a way that disparages some of the other students, possibly preventing them from participating fully in the discussion or feeling safe and valued in the school. Teachers face the dilemma of whether to block such statements. Freedom of speech is one condition of deliberation, but including everyone is another condition, and they can be in tension. The same tensions certainly arise in adult contexts, from social media platforms to public meetings. One problem with blocking speech is that it is unclear which principles to adopt to head off potential problems. Moreover, it is unclear on whose authority those principles would be adopted or how they might be enforced. Finally, it is unclear who gets to decide which people or views are to be excluded from civic reasoning and on what grounds.

A different way to approach this worry is to not have rules about who can speak or what can be said, but to empower participants to reject certain moves within the reasoning itself on grounds that they are inconsistent with the shared project or the inclusion

of all. That is, the shared aims a group of people have in engaging in civic reasoning (working out “What should we do?”) serve as the basis to argue, in the course of that reasoning, that certain positions or grounds ought to be rejected in the reasoning itself. Rather than bar the White supremacist from entering the room, as it were, we respond to her particular arguments and position by pointing out, among other things, their incompatibility with our engagement in a shared project. For this to work, however, citizens need to be equipped to make such arguments and to recognize the force of and respond to such arguments when they are made by others. In particular, those who are not specifically targeted or potentially harmed by the public expression of such positions need to take on an extra responsibility to be mindful of and speak out against those positions. This then points to another goal of education in civic reasoning: a sensitivity and responsiveness to such reasons, and attention to the conditions that make it possible for people to raise such reasons. The idea is that we need to cultivate certain deliberative virtues rather than work out rules of the game. These include an ability to face up to and work through complexity and fundamental disagreements rather than trying to legislate them out of sight.

In sum, civic reasoning is best facilitated through discussion and deliberation that engages inquiry, facts, knowledge, logic, reasonableness, values, emotion, and critical thinking. It relies on skills of openness and dissent.

Values, Virtues, and Dispositions

The author uses the term values to refer to ideas and ideals that people hold dear. Our values guide our actions by helping us determine whether a course of action or a given social situation is good or desirable. “Virtues” and “dispositions” refer to particular traits of individuals and their characters. Dispositions are traits of character that orient individuals to care about and act on certain values. Virtues are excellences of character. They involve not only being disposed properly to given values, but also the capacity to clearly see when a value is relevant to a situation and act decisively in response to that value.

We might talk about the value of tolerance, for example, in terms of an ideal of accepting other people’s right to act differently than we do or to uphold values we do not. When we speak of a person as being tolerant, we mean not only that they recognize that tolerance is a value, but also that they are disposed to act in a tolerant manner when the opportunity presents itself. Considerations of tolerance have weight in their determinations of what to do. To talk of tolerance as a virtue or to say that someone has the virtue of tolerance is to say that they not only have a disposition toward tolerance, but that they have an acute sense of when tolerance is called for and the strength of character to act tolerantly in such situations even when it is difficult.

Values, virtues, and dispositions play a role in civic reasoning in at least three ways: First, the very activity of civic reasoning embodies and relies on certain values and virtues to be done well. Empathy, a willingness to compromise, a concern to look for consensus, a collaborative spirit, and civility all can improve the quality of civic reasoning. This makes them all what might be called civic virtues. They will be the main focus of this next section. Before turning to these values and virtues, the author briefly discusses additional roles that values play in civic reasoning.

Second, in the course of engaging in civic reasoning, we invoke and contest commitments to various values: both political values like liberty, equality and tolerance, and more particular values that are tied to other aspects of our identities or the situation at hand. Good civic reasoning is not a value-neutral or value-free activity. Figuring out what we should do involves figuring out what values we want to realize or be true to, which values we share, and how to best understand them. Thus, values can serve as the input and subject matter of civic reasoning. We might invoke a value like liberty when arguing against a law that would make it hard for certain religious communities to live according to their religious commitments. We might employ a value like equality when advocating for policies, like the recognition of same-sex marriage or civil rights for transgender people, that may conflict with certain religious teachings and commitments. In these cases, values serve useful roles in our reasoning.

In other cases, our civic reasoning might involve working out the precise nature of a value or whether it is truly shared. So, we can also reason about how to best understand the value of freedom or equality, and which conception of these values can serve as a basis for “our” decisions about what to do. Here, we are not directly asking a practical question about what to do, but working out something closer to where we stand vis-à-vis one another. In this sense, reasoning together about our values can be a way of working out our relationships to one another and to the extent we are interested in our civic relations, this highlights how civic reasoning is civic insofar as it concerns the civic identity of the reasoners.

Recognizing that civic reasoning not only invokes values but also can be *about* them means that civic reasoning necessarily involves contestation about what “our” values are. When someone invokes a particular value as “American” or “ours” in the course of genuine civic reasoning, then others are always open to reject or question that claim. That is part of what is involved in reasoning about such matters, and not merely dogmatically insisting on them. Because civic reasoning can invoke and be about questions of value, learning to engage in this kind of reasoning requires learning how to think about values. It also entails a disposition to work through moments when values conflict within ourselves or between us and other citizens. At times, we must navigate substantial lasting tensions between values.

Third, civic reasoning can generate new understandings of or commitments to various values and can be part of a process by which citizens come to develop or shift their dispositions toward those values and perhaps help them to develop the virtues necessary to pursue those values well. This can happen when citizens come to change their minds about a topic of civic reasoning: one might enter a discussion about who should be allowed to use which bathroom in a public school or whether we should change our immigration policy committed to a particular conception of tolerance but come away from that discussion with a transformed commitment to the value of inclusion or respect rather than mere tolerance. In addition, over the course of engaging in civic reasoning with others, one can come to change their values as a result of the process of reasoning itself: one might, for instance, develop a new understanding of equality as a result of being confronted with the positions of others, and learning to give them equal weight in deliberations.

In the U.S. context of liberal democracy, values like liberty, equality, and justice are often invoked and contested in the course of civic reasoning. Though these values

may play a direct role in the quality of civic reasoning by supporting practices that give everyone a say, they also play an important role in the second and third senses mentioned previously, and so participants in civic reasoning in an American context will be well served to understand these values, their various interpretations, and their role in unfolding debates about particular laws, policies, and decisions. Beyond training students in the skills needed to engage in civic reasoning, including reasoning about values generally, civic education designed to improve the quality of civic discourse needs to familiarize students with values that have played a role in the civic reasoning of a given country, including the various debates over how to understand them and their relation to one another. Admittedly, though, many citizens do not share these values and we must be careful not to assume that they are universally held or that they function to give us a shared language or aims for civic discourse.

In the rest of this chapter, the author focuses on the values, virtues, and dispositions that are central to engaging well in the activity of civic reasoning. These include empathy, a willingness to compromise, an eye on the possibility as well as the pitfalls of consensus, a collaborative spirit, and civility. Notably, this is not an all-inclusive list, nor should this list always be upheld as a set of ideal goals. For example, sometimes justified resistance or a resolute response to an injustice may require one to dig in one's heels and to hold tight to one's position, rather than to seek consensus or compromise. Additionally, not all learners are developmentally capable of enacting these values, virtues, and dispositions, nor can they do so in all contexts.

Empathy

Ideally, participation in civic reasoning and discourse is not just a one-way street emanating out from individuals. We must also take in the opinions, perspectives, and concerns of others as we work together to figure out "What should we do?" Listening has epistemic benefits. It can help us to see what we are missing or not sufficiently appreciating about an issue or its impact. Listening also has benefits for the manner in which we relate to each other. Active listening is ethical and relational in that it is a way of treating others as political equals, respecting them as individuals, and perhaps enabling relationships to form. Listening can help us to see that others have reasoned beliefs, many of which are worthy of our time and consideration, and may even come to influence our own beliefs. It can help us to see our shared humanity and our shared fate as well as appreciate our real and enduring differences.

Our capacities to be genuinely open to others can be blocked by attitudes and prejudices like sexism, homophobia, and other discriminatory practices that serve as impediments that prevent some citizens from treating others as equals, from forming relationships with them, and learning from them. While some aspects of listening may develop naturally, the sort of active listening needed for effective civic reasoning is best developed through overt curriculum and instruction that cultivates students' skills and dispositions to proceed cautiously with humility and reciprocity as they work to combat the lineages of injustice that they confront in the publics they inhabit and create (Allen, 2004; Parker, 2006).

Empathy—working to see the world from another person's perspective—can help us to overcome some of the impediments to listening and can improve our ability to

relate to each other civically. There are times when empathy may be rightfully withheld from those who have repugnant views. Indeed, to empathize with a racist, for example, might actually demonstrate a civic failing. Nonetheless, empathy generally offers significant benefits to civic reasoning and discourse. Through empathizing with others, we come to recognize their personal stake in issues and the emotions they experience related to those issues. These dispositions can lead us to make better decisions because they push us to attend to the well-being of our fellow citizens. They require openness to hear and learn from others, understanding of our own proclivities and limitations, openness to how others might reshape ourselves, and imagination to cross the boundaries between us. These social practices reveal that civic reasoning and discourse is not merely problem solving, but is a responsive and social endeavor where we become mutually attuned to each other (Laden, 2012). Moreover, Nicole Mirra (2018, p. 4) explains:

If we are able to adopt the perspectives of those unlike ourselves, then perhaps we are more likely to make decisions and take steps that benefit not only our own selfish interests, but the interests of those other people as well. Writ large, empathy becomes the foundation for a democratic society.

Empathy helps us to achieve democratic values of liberty, equality, and justice that are often upheld in the United States while also helping us to relate to each other as citizens working together toward shared understanding.

Empathy requires work, especially when employed with those quite different from ourselves. It may first require learning more about our fellow citizens, their lives, their experiences, and their worldviews. This is noteworthy when one takes into account that those who most need to learn empathy are often those from dominant groups, whose experiences and opinions tend to be reflected in mainstream outlets and who may have been able to traverse life without having to see or understand the perspectives of others. Those with less power, however, have often had to detect and navigate the perspectives of others to get by in life. Such power differentials should not be glossed over, but must be accounted for as part of what Mirra calls “critical civic empathy” (Mirra, 2018, p. 7). This notion of empathy acknowledges power inequalities, historicity, and positionality. It works to foster understanding across differences in ways that builds a new identity together as citizens, one directed toward equity-oriented action.

Consensus, Compromise, and Collaboration

As empathy helps to bridge between citizens when engaging in civic reasoning and discourse, so do an eye for the possibility of consensus and a willingness to compromise. Consensus entails coming to unanimously consent to the same desire or conclusion, even though not all differences between individuals’ desires or conclusions may be resolved. It builds solidarity and can produce a sense of being united with other citizens. Compromise, however, means being willing to strike a deal between one’s desire or conclusion and someone else’s desire or conclusion, often by giving up parts of it in order to reach an agreement with those whose views differ considerably from one’s own. It can help us to arrive at necessary agreements across warring groups or individuals, or to create middle or mutually acceptable ground.

On some occasions, consensus or compromise are aims we hope to achieve through our reasoning and discourse. In those instances, consensus or compromise may be seen as an indication of fulfilling the common good or achieving mutually beneficial goals. On other occasions, looking out for the possible paths to genuine consensus and being open to compromise can be important for engaging in discourse and reasoning well. On still others, they help us take up the civic question effectively so that we can move out of impasses between citizens (Thompson, 2008). Reaching moments of compromise, for example, may require changing our stances, giving some ground, or building new shared perspectives between us. Striking this middle ground may require skills of collaboration, where participants work together to understand their differences and propose alternatives that might be amenable to all parties. Similarly, compromise as a means of discourse may require the disposition of moderation, summarized by Robert Boatright (2019, p. 3) as

a willingness to pursue a pragmatic politics that accepts the humanity of one's opponents, that abandons the assumption that there is an ultimate goal for human endeavors, and that seeks to place the goal of fostering an inclusive political community above the goal of dictating what the community is or should do.

Rather than carving out middle ground, navigating and negotiating some situations may rely on skills of persuasion, including the ability to make a convincing case for one's stance and to persuade others to share it. Persuasion requires some handle on not only rhetoric, but also of the emotions and motivations that shape how others commit to a stance. Persuasion must be balanced, however, with appropriate accommodation and humility toward others. While there are some instances in which individuals are right and should aim to convince others of that case, we must be careful not to just assume that we are right or to behave in ways that foreclose our ability to hear and respond to the alternative stances put forward by others, for such actions shortchange civic reasoning.

We must also be careful that consensus or compromise do not become avenues to simply avoid confrontation, downplay significant tensions between values, or to do the hard work of reaching challenging or controversial conclusions. This is especially the case when there is a need to disrupt the status quo or work against power imbalances where more resolute stances may be necessary, especially in the face of injustice. We must be cautious that even a conclusion that seems to favor the common good is not hiding disparity or injustice. Similarly, we must be leery of a rush to consensus, as this may curtail or silence some perspectives or not sufficiently engage some points of concern. We must hold open questions and tensions during a discussion in order to provide sufficient time and space for inviting and reflecting on the contributions of participants (Backer, 2019). Sometimes, support networks and identity-based advocacy groups are needed to empower or champion those hidden or overlooked perspectives, instead of focusing on a shared conclusion (Mansbridge et al., 2012). In sum, values that enable good civic reasoning and discourse include willingness to compromise and appreciating the solidarity-building of consensus, but remaining open to new views and challenges to conclusions.

Civility

Civility is sometimes affiliated with a call to compromise, especially between feuding political groups. However, as this chapter will explain, holding firm political views may be warranted, especially when that view is on the side of justice, promotes equal participation, and supports relationships between citizens. Many people more quickly define civility by what it is not than by what it is, pointing to instances of ad hominem attacks, the demeaning of opponents, and rude, vulgar, or threatening speech. When citizens do speak affirmatively of civility, it is often invoked merely in terms of manners, as being polite or respectful in civic discussions, especially when it comes to the tone and content of what we say. However, civility should be understood in a richer way. Rather than think of civility in terms of politeness, we should think of it primarily in terms of responsiveness (Laden, 2019).

Civility is a form of engagement with others that relies on skills and dispositions of being open to and cooperating with diverse participants toward continued mutual engagement in a just dialogue. It affirms the dignity and humanity of one's interlocutors, even as it allows for questioning or critiquing their claims. It is aligned with values of equal participation and inclusivity. In order to be aligned with liberty, civility must not overly restrict free speech. It has significant democratic implications for the outcomes of our reasoning, as well as the manner in which we engage in discourse, because it foregrounds relationships. Civility requires participation that emphasizes respect for others and could actually help to build democracy, not only sustain it through discussion or enable it to move smoothly.

Understood this way, civility can actually be compatible with impolite speech or action, especially when it is necessary to express outrage, forward a political cause (Rossini, 2019), or "transform unjust relationships into just ones. Hence, civility can only be measured within the context of existing and aspired relations, rather than according to a predetermined code of conduct" (Dishon & Ben-Porath, 2018, p. 439). To enact civility in civic discourse, then, one must focus on the impact of one's participation (in content, form, and tone) on the ability of others to participate and hold oneself accountable to reacting to and reshaping unjust interactions.

When civility is seen only as politeness, norms of politeness can be used to silence or marginalize some participants, often by holding them to participation norms that they did not create or that may favor other participants. This loses sight of whether one's participation is responsive to others. Civility supports civic reasoning in the sense of not only the manner in which we relate to each other, but also civility, as responsiveness, impacts our identity as reasoners together. Under that understanding, civic reasoning entails foregrounding how we respond to and work together as members of society and how our relations with each other may give rise to some responsibilities and may call for enacting certain virtues.

In sum, knowledge, skills, values, and dispositions related to listening, empathy, consensus, compromise, collaboration, and civility all work together to help us engage well in civic reasoning and dialogue. They also help to produce better outcomes in terms of our civic inquiries as well as our identity and treatment of each other as citizens reasoning together.

OBSTACLES AND FUTURE RESEARCH

We must prepare students not only for an ideal democracy, but also to live in and improve the one that currently exists (Dahl, 1999). That is one area where civic reasoning and discourse are often bogged down or steered off course by hyper-partisanship, fake news, uncivil behavior, and other problems in our physical and digital communities. Citizens shout at each other in the streets and attack each other on social media. Some engage in civic discussions in ways that flout rationality or dodge empathy. Citizens struggle to reach consensus or agree on foundational understandings or values. Even when a consensus is reached or a course of action is decided, it is often met by ongoing contestation. Navigating and responding to that contestation is an important part of continued civic discourse. Finally, even when some citizens wisely and rightfully engage in political dissent or resistance, our society often structurally withstands or silences their efforts. We are far from the best forms of civic reasoning and discourse depicted here, though, with improved education, we may move closer toward them.

There are many constraints on and disincentives to engage in civic reasoning and discourse. Some of those are institutional, others are cultural, and others are psychological, while still others are based on peer group norms. In this section, the author describes some of those obstacles, using them to highlight areas particularly in need of ongoing or future research, and also offers a few suggestions for improved citizenship education curricula and pedagogy, beginning with general challenges arising in society and then moving into particular challenges in schools.

Understanding Changes in Truth, Facts, and News

Inquiry, facts, and the historical and political knowledge related to them inhabit an especially precarious position in the United States today. Acknowledging the connection between truth and facts, some argue that we currently live in a “post-truth” world, where “objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief” (*Oxford English Dictionary*, 2019). Relatedly, “truth decay” describes the social phenomenon whereby members of a society increasingly struggle to draw clear and sharp distinctions between fact and opinion, where personal experience outweighs fact, and where traditionally respected sources of facts, such as newsrooms and scientific reports, are increasingly distrusted (Hodgin & Kahne, 2019, p. 93).

Engaging in civic reasoning requires some level of trust as we sift through varied ideas and accounts. Yet, the problematic situation today has been exacerbated by fake news, which no longer is a term that simply indicates information that is verifiably false, but now also refers to a host of other problems. Sometimes news outlets circulate only limited facts or emphasize some stories over others, which provides only a partial or distorted account to citizens. Sometimes news sites circulate targeted disinformation, which misleads or tricks citizens. Sometimes media outlets present incorrect information as fact to nefariously back particular political positions. Sometimes factually accurate news that contradicts one’s ideological beliefs is delegitimized by calling it “fake” (Journell, 2019). Fake news sows confusion, doubt, and mistrust. In this way, it disrupts civic reasoning that is topical as well as reasoning about our shared identity and ways of relating to each other. Information derived from fake news can mislead civic reasoning and concerns over fake news can bring reasoning to a halt or even turn

us away from our fellow citizens. Given the challenges of fake news and post-truth, careful research is needed in these areas and investigations of how we might head off problems related to them through quality citizenship education.

Importantly, fake news is not just about accepting different or competing facts; problems posed by fake news are matters of trust. Fake news derails quality civic reasoning because it prevents citizens from appealing to a shared set of accepted facts or sources of information because they disagree about who is trustworthy and how much trust to put into our knowledge of facts. Seen this way, educating for improved civic reasoning would require learning how to assess the trustworthiness of authority figures or institutions. This is a set of skills that one can learn through social studies classes on critical media literacy, but also in literature courses that examine character and motivation and in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics courses that focus on good argumentation and data sourcing.

Attending to Changing Psychology of Citizens

The spread of fake news and mistrust of other citizens is also related to several other recent alarming trends in the psychology and behaviors of citizens (Garrett, 2019). Some of the phenomena are longstanding, but they are increasing in intensity and impact, and others are being brought under study and classified in new ways. Recent hyper-partisanship is having a marked impact on the makeup of groups and the reasoning that occurs within them. Citizens increasingly engage in echo chambers, surrounding themselves with peers and news sources that confirm their worldview. In some instances, citizens willfully chose to isolate themselves in these ways, but in others, socioeconomic and racial segregation exacerbate citizen silos. Sometimes these communities develop groupthink, which blocks thorough and effective civic reasoning and keeps it from being sufficiently pluralistic. In part, citizens may be prone to motivated reasoning, where their social group or political affiliation may lead them to advantage their previously held views when they encounter new information (Kraft et al., 2015). In other words, citizens are resistant to information that would cause them to change the worldview they already have. These citizens accept what matches with their current views and dismiss the rest. Hence, this limited form of rationalizing is only mobilized to support conclusions already reached and it falls far short of the plural endeavor of civic reasoning.

Similarly, confirmation bias leads citizens to only seek evidence that is partial to their current beliefs or to interpret evidence in ways aligned with hypotheses that they already hold. When they encounter evidence that counters their views, they dismiss that information and double down on their prior beliefs—a phenomenon known as the backfire effect. Additionally, a process known as magical thinking happens when what citizens desire to be true comes to feel more true or real than actual reality. It leads citizens to treat their subjective experiences and desires as facts. Finally, affective polarization occurs when individuals not only seek out similar peers, but evaluate those from their own political party positively and those in opposition parties negatively (Clark & Avery, 2016).

Collectively, these psychological responses suggest that we cannot improve civic reasoning simply by giving citizens more information. While integrating citizens into

more diverse communities can have positive benefits, some citizens will continue to engage in self-confirmatory practices. Indeed, one study revealed the worrisome result that even when given extensive evidence, citizens disregarded it in favor of their own previous beliefs and another study showed that motivated reasoning is actually greatest among those with the most political knowledge (Crocco et al., 2017; Kahne & Bowyer, 2017). Yet, political knowledge is also known to increase positive civil participation and identity (Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996).

Citizens need more skills and motivation to work against or overcome confirmation bias. This is an area especially in need of research in both general public life and in schools. Such research might include studies of how classroom teachers use metacognition to attune students to their own biases and experiences of positive or negative feelings to opinions encountered; studies of how employing critical media literacy may reduce biased practices; studies of how teachers' own political partisanship and political environments influence their teaching of civil reasoning (Curry & Cherner, 2019); studies of how to genuinely engage with competing perspectives when situated in increasingly ideologically, racially, and socioeconomically homogenous schools; and studies of how classroom deliberations work through instances of these problems critically, while still allowing for students to hold strong views (Kahne & Bowyer, 2017; Lavine et al., 2012; Nyhan & Reifler, 2010).

Building Capacity for Civic Reasoning and Discourse Online

Given the prevalence of using online materials to find facts, problems related to sources and verification are especially prevalent today. In online spaces, many people are irresponsible in their employment of facts, so consumers of online information have to employ a heightened level of scrutiny and care. As indicated by studies of civic online reasoning by the Stanford History Education Group, citizens need dispositions and strategies to ask questions, investigate sources, and verify claims online (McGrew et al., 2017). Such determinations expose the influence of power on facts and knowledge. A 2009 National Council for the Social Studies position statement importantly highlighted the need for developing critical media literacy skills to detect and analyze power and ideology at play in media and how they can manipulate our emotions and our cognitive biases. Additionally, new curricula are needed to help budding citizens understand the complex ways in which knowledge is produced and credentialed so that they have principled grounds for trusting some online sources over others.

Another perennial obstacle related to civil reasoning is that public deliberation, and even classroom deliberation, is often irrational and not driven by facts, justified reasons, or efforts to remove problematic bias. Indeed, some citizens even seem to prefer those sorts of exchanges over calls to rationality and order, and some are quite adept at using persuasive tricks and disinformation (Segall et al., 2019). These sorts of practices may further drive away citizens who increasingly feel cynical about democratic life and may exacerbate the distaste of those who already feel dissuaded to participate in civic discourse because they feel that participation is inauthentic or not likely to actually influence public policy (Stitzlein, 2020). Researchers might craft curricula that guide teachers on how to detect these sorts of persuasive tricks and walk students through understanding how they are manipulative approaches that lead to unwise reasoning

and discourse that runs counter to longstanding values of democracy, as well as giving them means to respond to such discourse in ways that steer it toward better civic reasoning.

The longstanding struggle to achieve broad and inclusive communities of inquiry faces particular challenges in digital spaces today. Patterns of media usage tend to reflect distinct demographic groups and citizens seek out like-minded peers online. Many of the psychological phenomena posing problems in our face-to-face communities are even more pronounced online. Changes within the media environment have also exacerbated the problems, including the diminished role of gatekeepers, enabling wide circulation of inaccurate information and increasingly partisan interpretations of news (Hodgin & Kahne, 2019).

Relationships that support good civic reasoning and discourse can be especially challenging to achieve and maintain in online spaces, where we are separated from our fellow citizens by time and space. Moreover, online settings sometimes produce a “disinhibition effect,” where people are emboldened to act in more outlandish or disrespectful ways behind a screen of anonymity than they typically would in face-to-face conversation (Suler, 2015). Yet, online spaces also provide important outlets for airing perspectives that run counter to the mainstream, where the anonymity of the screen may also provide protective cover. Future research into the skills and dispositions of civility and dissent in online spaces is needed.

Importantly, today’s digital platforms also present significant tools for finding alternative views, seeking out minority perspectives, and reaching out to other citizens otherwise separated by space, time, or other constraints. Additionally, digital platforms offer opportunities to expand beyond our face-to-face networks and form new relationships. Civic reasoning and discourse would be improved by learning more approaches to fulfilling diversity, inclusivity, and equality through technology and media. We must also simultaneously nurture the proclivity of citizens to use media and technology for civic purposes, rather than narrowly viewing it merely for entertainment or even education (Levine, 2015).

Supporting Diverse and Open Environments

Open environments, where citizens are invited to discuss meaningful and controversial issues, can help build inclusivity and tolerance, especially when participants discover that they learn from and improve their overall decision-making processes as a result of including multiple and conflicting perspectives. Yet, despite these benefits, civic and classroom deliberations often are, in some ways, exclusive. We know that many civic decisions are made in spaces that include only a small subset of the overall population and that often those who participate or are welcomed to contribute are those who inhabit positions of power by virtue of their demographics, wealth, community status, and more. Exclusivity and elitism tend to lead to some voices wielding more power or impact than others, if those others are even included at all.

Additionally, we know that classrooms are increasingly racially and economically segregated, making it even more challenging to create diverse and inclusive communities within the confines of the school. These conditions call for additional research to understand how we can work within them to teach and enact civic reasoning, as well

as research into how trends of exclusion and segregation might be countered. Such research might entail demonstrating for civic and school groups the improved reasoning that comes about through more inclusive decision making, as well as its positive impact on the identity of the group of reasoners. Relatedly, recognizing that all groups cannot be fully inclusive, research into how to educate citizens to understand and assume the responsibility of being representatives for those not present is needed.

Alleviating School-Based Problems

In addition to influences that seep from larger society into our classrooms, schools also face challenges in teaching good civic reasoning and discourse. While all classrooms are civic spaces and ideally should contribute to citizen development, that does not mean that all classes are equally tasked with emphasizing citizenship or preparing for democracy. These aims have historically been most pronounced in social studies and history courses. Put simply, there is often insufficient time and attention devoted to citizenship education across the curriculum. This is especially the case in social studies and history. While some recent trends show renewed emphasis on these areas, they have been squeezed from the school day in order to accommodate more instruction in heavily tested subject areas like math and language arts across the past two decades (Gould et al., 2001; Hodgins & Kahne, 2019; McMurrer, 2008). Within the social studies and history courses that do remain, more focus should be placed on determining the content needed within them and how it might be tied to the teaching of related civic skills and dispositions situated within an inquiry-based classroom.

Moreover, even within the heavily tested disciplines, more integration of the knowledge, skills, values, and dispositions of civic reasoning is needed. This includes mathematics education that engages in data literacy, explanatory modeling, and making arguments based on numerical evidence from charts and info graphs. It also includes science education that helps students to understand how scientific communities work in order to build justified trust in them and participation in them (citizen science, for example), while also enabling budding citizens to critically investigate scientific information. Math and science curricula should be organized around joint problem solving as well as critical discussions of methods and results. Finally, this includes focus in language arts and foreign language classrooms on exploring differing points of view, practicing empathy with characters in literary and non-fictional texts, engaging with morally complex scenarios, practicing self-reflection sparked through engagement with literature, and learning critical media literacy.

Even when citizenship education is taught, we know that there is considerable inequity in its quality and quantity, with poorer students and children of color more likely to be underserved (Levinson, 2014). Moreover, the digital resources and critical media literacy instruction needed to attend to the particular challenges raised in online settings varies considerably across places and populations (Kahne et al., 2012). Within schools, we must also draw attention to the conditions that run counter to participation in civic reasoning and discourse. Silence policies and “no excuses” disciplinary approaches stamp out spaces for practicing discourse, let alone engaging in warranted dissent (Ben-Porath, 2013). Yet, even in far less extreme situations, the norms of our schools may favor passive learning about government operations over the sort of active

engagement needed to cultivate habits of participation in civic reasoning and discourse. Instead, we must craft engaging action and experiential civic education that takes up the civic question, that *does* civic reasoning and discourse, rather than simply teaching about it, if at all.

Teacher education courses can equip teachers with approaches that help to establish new classroom norms and particular knowledge of critical civic media literacy that can be shared with students. Education scholars, including curriculum designers, might especially focus on practices that align the College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework for Social Studies State Standards and socio-emotional learning (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning and others) with civic reasoning and discourse, offering approaches that integrate teaching for civic reasoning and discourse with other valued aspects of the curriculum. The C3 Framework, for example, is an inquiry-based approach to compelling and authentic questions that requires inclusive participation and aims to answer those questions with a summative argument, an approach well aligned with that articulated here. Finally, educational publics composed of education researchers, curriculum makers, teachers, and members of particular school communities must take up the question of “What should we do?” as they deliberate and determine the particular content knowledge, skills, and dispositions needed for learning how to participate well in civic reasoning and discourse.

Allowing for Differences Among Citizens

While the author has articulated knowledge, skills, dispositions, and values that support and enhance civic reasoning and discourse, not all citizens should be expected to learn and demonstrate the same ones. Indeed, we can bring differing and complementary components together to produce good civic reasoning and discourse.

But, significantly, not everyone is situated in our society as equal reasoning partners and some of the components of civic reasoning and education for it as depicted here have long been wrapped up with practices of injustice and inequity in the United States. Some have been systematically denied to Americans of color or those with less wealth or power. Some have been crafted by only a sliver of the population and therefore lack not only the voice and input of others, but also fail to encapsulate the experiences of those for whom some longstanding American ideas have rarely been achievable or equitably provided. Yet, it is important to recognize that despite those injustices and inequitable educational opportunities, many members of communities not in positions of recognized power have substantially contributed to civic reasoning and have resisted undemocratic practices.

On the other hand, the reasoning of citizens inhabiting positions of privilege is also sometimes undermined by an array of limitations that arise from their privilege, some of which are overlooked or downplayed because they are common among powerful or mainstream people. These components, then, have been shaped by agendas of power that must be acknowledged, analyzed, called out, and challenged. While we do need some shared ways of communicating that build on common skills and values, we can also be more inclusive of multiple approaches and more critical of dominant ways. Some of the prevailing ways that have served many Americans well in the past may then be revised, broadened, and improved to serve us well now and in the future.

Recognizing that demographics and injustice impact participation and the development of citizenship, our schools may need to vary the knowledge, skills, dispositions, and values they teach. Given inequitable starting positions for participation that grow out of social injustice as well as differing experiences at home, some citizens may need to learn components that depend on how they are positioned in society or on aspects of their personalities. As just one example, some may need to develop assertiveness, while others learn humility. Given problems in our non-ideal democracy, we may need to emphasize some components over others. Currently, this might mean teaching more about digital civility and critical media literacy. While educating for civic reasoning and discourse requires sufficient access to the knowledge, skills, dispositions, and values depicted here, teachers and communities can vary their emphasis on those components to respond to the strengths and needs of their citizens as well as the particular struggles they face in democracy.

MOVING FORWARD

In this chapter, the author has articulated civic reasoning as the reasoning we do as we answer the civic question of “What should we do?” Such reasoning is civic in that it addresses topics of shared concern, is a matter of our collective identity, and shapes the manner in which we relate to each other. Civic discourse is a means or method by which we engage in civic reasoning. Both face some significant challenges today. Better understanding the obstacles and constructing pathways past them will require cross-disciplinary research, bringing together education scholars with philosophers, psychologists, political scientists, and more. Moreover, we must go beyond just civic reasoning and discourse to understand and nurture civic action and agency in students. The contributions of this chapter on the philosophical and moral foundations of civic reasoning and discourse may help lay a groundwork for continued discussion as we work to determine what we should do about citizenship education.¹

¹ The author thanks Anthony Laden for his significant contributions to the section on logic and rationality and the section on values, virtues, and dispositions. The author also appreciates Jennifer Morton for bringing attention to some of problems of civic discourse, and Walter Parker, whose work not only shapes the vision for citizenship education advanced here, but also for helpful suggestions throughout this paper, including emphasizing the role of content in education for civic reasoning and discourse. The author thanks Barrett Smith for his careful reading of a draft. Finally, a special thank you to Peter Levine, whose ideas on the key civic question, trustworthiness of knowledge creation, and ideas on balancing inquiry and content in citizenship education have significantly shaped this chapter.

Recommendations for Practice

- **Collaborative problem solving using an inquiry approach:** Civic reasoning often arises when we find ourselves facing problems. Inquiry brings citizens together to make sense of and solve problems together. Inquiry is invoked to investigate the world, hypothesize ways to solve our problems, and experiment with solutions. The best forms of citizenship education model and practice this sort of critical, problem-based learning. They move beyond just civics content knowledge to teach both *with* and *for* inquiry.
- **Development of informed trust of institutions and authority:** Knowledge creation occurs socially and is often carried out by institutions. Having knowledge typically requires that we trust other people and institutions, especially those with expertise. It is not rational, however, to automatically trust others; rather, citizens must learn how to decide which people and institutions are worthy of trust.
- **Critical media literacy:** Given the pervasive use of technology and media to circulate civic knowledge and engage in civic discourse, critical media literacy is an essential skill for navigating such spaces well. Critical media literacy can help students identify fake news, biased interpretations, or otherwise faulty information. Moreover, it can help students detect and analyze power and ideology at play in the media, including identifying how they manipulate emotions and cognitive biases.
- **Empathy building:** Working to see the world from another person's perspective can help us better relate to other citizens. Through empathizing, we come to recognize the personal stake and emotional ties others may have to an issue. This can then dispose us to make more informed decisions that better attend to the well-being of others. Empathy requires us to listen and learn from others, to imagine the emotions and experiences of others, and to be open to changing ourselves as a result.
- **Civility as responsiveness:** Too often, civility is understood merely as being polite in civic discussions. But civility should be understood in a much richer way as responsiveness. As a form of engagement with others, civility concerns our disposition toward open and ongoing cooperation in a just dialogue with others. It affirms the dignity and humanity of others, even as we may disagree with or challenge them.
- **Skills of and disposition to dissent:** Healthy democracy relies upon quality dissent, where citizens critique the status quo, raise awareness of problems, and put forward alternatives. This sort of disagreement can be a source of better civic reasoning for it brings forward minority views, reveals faulty beliefs, and overcomes some of the problems group think or inertia. Citizens need to learn how to take seriously and respond to the dissent of others so that their civic reasoning is better informed.
- **Openness to compromise:** To move forward out of moments of impasse, citizens must be open to compromise, where they may strike a deal between their own desire or belief and someone else's. Sometimes, this entails giving up parts of one's own stance in order to reach an agreement with those whose stance is considerably different. Other times, this entails crafting new shared perspectives between disagreeing parties.
- **Content knowledge:** While inquiry may be the primary process for solving shared problems, it often relies upon content knowledge, including political and historical knowledge. Citizens need to know about politics and democratic practices and procedures. Knowing what has been tried in the past can help us make wiser decisions for the future. Skills of historical interpretation can help us use identify legitimate sources and use evidence to reach justified conclusions.

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