

Introduction

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At the time of this report’s publication in 2021, multiple crises have made the need and urgency for skills in civic reasoning and discourse starkly evident. Increasing polarization and unprecedented strain on our democratic institutions coincided with social protests of persistent racial injustices. At the same time, a health pandemic, economic shock, and a continuing climate crisis challenged the world to take action. In the short term, there is a question of how we can, at multiple levels of society, strive to work together to address our collective needs. There is an equally important longer-term need to prepare a new generation of young people to take up the mantle of democratic participation and decision making.

It is most common for us to think about this preparation as the job of civics, social studies, and history courses in our schools. There are a number of recent reports that offer powerful insights and recommendations for teaching in these courses.¹ There are

BOX I-1

Defining Civic Reasoning and Discourse

Early in its work, the National Academy of Education Committee on Civic Reasoning and Discourse agreed on a shared definition of civic reasoning and discourse to guide the development of this report. The central question guiding the formulation of this definition concerns “What should we do?” and the “we” includes anyone in a group or community, regardless of their citizenship status. To engage in civic reasoning, one needs to think through a public issue using rigorous inquiry skills and methods to weigh different points of view and examine available evidence. Civic discourse concerns how to communicate with one another around the challenges of public issues in order to enhance both individual and group understanding. It also involves enabling effective decision making aimed at finding consensus, compromise, or in some cases, confronting social injustices through dissent. Finally, engaging in civic discourse should be guided by respect for fundamental human rights.

¹ Examples of recent reports include *Educating for American Democracy* (<https://educatingforamericandemocracy.org>); *College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework for Social Studies State Standards: Guidance for Enhancing the Rigor of K–12 Civics, Economics, Geography, and History* (<https://www.socialstudies.org/standards/c3>); and *Equity in Civic Education White Paper* (<https://www.icivics.org>).

also many projects, recent and long standing, taking place in school as well as community settings that engage young people in civic action.

This project, however, seeks to fill a void in conceptualizing the demands of preparing young people to engage in civic reasoning and discourse. The authors think this work serves as a useful and necessary corollary to the work currently under way in what is traditionally viewed as civic education. The fundamental questions examined in this report are:

- What are the cognitive, social, emotional, ethical, and identity dimensions entailed in civic reasoning and discourse, and how do these dimensions evolve? In particular, how do students develop an understanding of implicit bias and learn to weigh multiple points of view? How do educators understand the demands of conceptual change?
- What can we discover from research on learning and human development to cultivate competencies in civic reasoning and discourse and prepare young people as civic actors?
- What are the broader ecological contexts that influence the ability of our learning systems to support the development of these competencies? How do we create classroom climates and inquiry-oriented curricula that are meaningful to students' civic learning?
- In the context of schooling, what is the role of learning across content areas—social studies, geography, history, literacy/language arts, mathematics, and science—in developing multiple competencies required for effective civic reasoning and discourse? What are the pedagogical implications in these content areas?
- What supports are needed in terms of policy as well as in the preparation and professional development of teachers and school administrators to design instruction for effective civic reasoning and discourse that encourages democratic values and democratic decision making?

This report also acknowledges the important work carried out across the country to engage young people in the civics issues relevant to their particular communities, the larger nation, and indeed the world. This includes efforts initiated and led by young people themselves in developing public service projects with their families, peers, and neighbors, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. There is no question that families, social networks in communities, and a variety of institutional configurations play essential roles in preparing young people for civic engagement. It is a particular feature of our democracy that the range of and variation in how these family- and community-based efforts play out is richly diverse.

However, to the extent that there are foundational dispositions and competencies that young people need to engage with complex civic dilemmas, it is only through public schooling that a society can require a baseline preparation as public schooling is required for all children. The authors agree with Amy Gutmann (1999), who argues in *Democratic Education* that public schooling is a unique venue in a democracy that can require preparation for democratic participation. Gutmann notes:

Deliberative decision making and accountability presuppose a citizenry whose education prepares them to deliberate, and to evaluate the results of the deliberations of their representatives. A primary aim of publicly mandated schooling is therefore to cultivate the skills and virtues of deliberation.... Deliberation is not a single skill or virtue. It calls upon skills of literacy, numeracy, and critical thinking, as well as contextual knowledge understanding, and appreciation of other people's perspectives. The virtues that deliberation encompasses include veracity, nonviolence, practical judgment, civic integrity and magnanimity. But cultivating these and other deliberative skills and virtues, a democratic society helps secure both the basic opportunity of individuals and its collective capacity to pursue justice. (p. xiii)

The process of developing such a collective capacity in the United States is particularly challenging due to the federal system, where the primary responsibility for public education lies with the states. At the same time, the populace has evolved complex processes of negotiating relationships between federal authorities and the states, including local school districts. One hope of this project is to spur conversations and critical deliberations among multiple stakeholders around the propositions put forward in this report. The authors hope that the material in the ensuing chapters will be useful to the diverse audiences engaged in this work, including (1) those who study these issues in the academic community, including education researchers and research/practitioner organizations in the academic disciplines, as well as those engaged in teacher preparation; (2) policy leaders, including legislative bodies, federal agencies, state and local school districts, private foundations, and civics advocacy organizations; importantly, (3) those engaged on the front lines of education practice and youth development, including social studies, literacy, and media educators, as well as educators working within other academic disciplines; and (4) parent groups and community-based organizations.

In addition to developing our collective capacity to address the multiple crises facing the nation, this report seeks to address other social problems that challenge the functioning of our democracy. Increasing polarization and division in society, as well as the ubiquitous availability of questionable digital information, has also made the acquisition of civic reasoning and discourse skills progressively more important for students to develop. These skills are essential to cultivate as students prepare for their future roles as adults, citizens, and being full members of their varied communities. Increasingly polarized, racialized, and politicized climates have made it more difficult to dialogue across differences, which is compounded by eroding public trust in democratic institutions and processes (Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning and Engagement, 2019; Hess & McAvoy, 2015; McCoy & Somer, 2019; Pew Research Center, 2019, 2020; Rainie et al., 2019). At the same time, there is a growing threat from organizations that espouse racist, xenophobic, anti-religious, and homophobic ideas as well as a Federal Bureau of Investigation–recorded rise in hate crimes in recent years (Balsamo, 2020; Southern Poverty Law Center, 2016). Advances in technology have also made it harder to trust information about the surrounding social world, as documented in the learning challenges that students have in distinguishing fact from fiction in online digital sources (McGrew et al., 2018).

As vital public institutions, schools have not been unaffected by these developments. Schools have seen an increase in political awareness and activity (Hansen et al., 2018), and research has shown that rates of bullying, aggressive behavior, bigotry, and

harassment have risen in recent years (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2016). Increasing polarization is also being further exacerbated by growing inequality and the deleterious effects that this has on the learning and civic development opportunities for vulnerable and alienated students (Duncan & Murnane, 2011; Kahne & Middaugh, 2008; Levinson, 2012; Population Reference Bureau, n.d.).

Given the decentralized nature of American education, there is a stark difference in access to civic education across the country, with students of color and those from low-income families not given access to as many opportunities in the classroom for experiential civic development as White students from wealthier families (Equity in Civic Education Project, 2020; Kahne & Middaugh, 2008). Measures of civic knowledge, which the authors think are highly relevant to civic reasoning and discourse, also show a pattern that is highly concerning (see Box I-2 for a summary of the National Assessment of Educational Progress [NAEP] Civics Assessment Framework). The only assessment in the broad area of civics is the NAEP Civics Assessment given every 4 years at grades 4, 8, and 12 (with the most recent being the 2018 assessment for 8th graders). Similar to what we see in terms of access to high quality civic education, the NAEP Civics Assessment shows gaps based on race and income level (National Assessment Governing Board, 2018b). At the same time, knowledge in the civic domain as measured by NAEP is low for all students (see Figure I-1). Across two decades of NAEP civics performance results, less than one-quarter of 8th graders perform at or above proficiency.

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

After years of neglect, the areas of civic education, reasoning, and student discourse are experiencing a renewed emphasis. An opportunity has manifested itself in the current polarized landscape. This began with an increased interest among researchers, policy leaders, and other stakeholders to improve the civic preparation of students and to promote civil discourse. According to a nationwide survey of policy priorities conducted by the CivXNow Coalition (2020), having better civic education for students in K–12 is the one policy item that both political parties reached consensus on, and teachers are the most trusted to advocate for a strong civics education. In a core

BOX I-2

NAEP Civics Assessment Framework

“The framework for the National Assessment of Educational Progress in civics has three inter-related components: knowledge, intellectual and participatory skills, and civic dispositions. Taken together, these components should form the essential elements of civic education in the United States” (National Assessment Governing Board, 2018a).

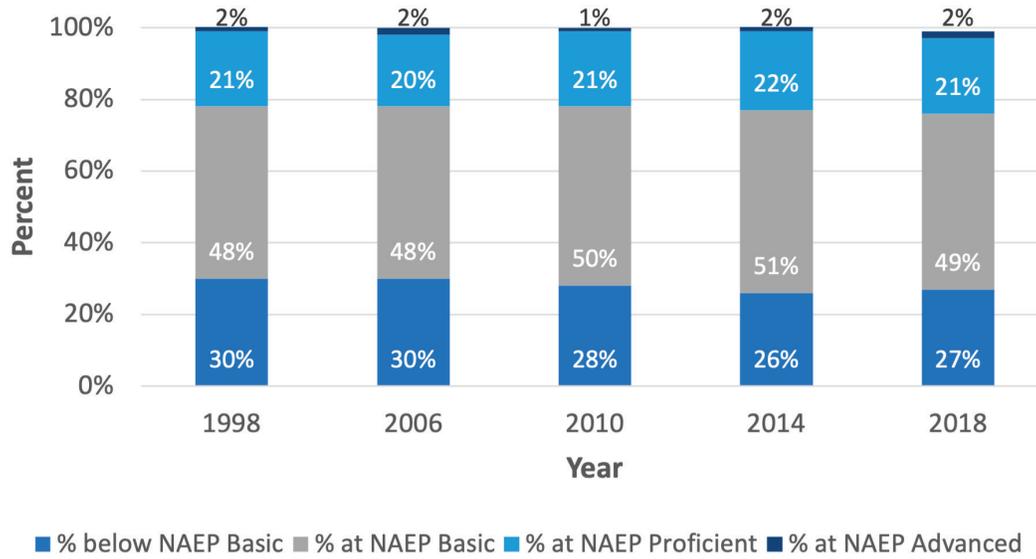


FIGURE I-1 Eighth-graders NAEP civics achievement-level results (1998, 2006, 2010, 2014, and 2018).
 SOURCES: Lutkus & Weiss, 2007; Lutkus et al., 1999; National Assessment of Educational Progress, 2010, 2018; National Center for Education Statistics, 2011.

sense, this is a return to an original purpose of education, such as Dewey’s belief in the need for “the improvement of the methods and conditions of debate, discussion and persuasion. That [he sees as] the problem of the public” (Dewey, 1927, p. 208). W. E. B. Du Bois also believed that a foundational role of education was to enable citizens to wrestle with the tensions and contradictions of history, particularly with regard to how we navigate persistent tensions around race, ethnicity, and class (Rabaka, 2003). Such wrestling is complex and nuanced. It requires a depth of knowledge in many domains, but equally important for democratic decision making, it requires a disposition to hear and weigh alternative points of view that differ from one’s own.

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

As it currently exists, research in civic reasoning and discourse is underdeveloped and fragmented, with missed opportunities to learn from research across disciplines. Although there have been some exceptions, civic education research has been siloed with “roots in different disciplines that place priority on different topics and prefer different methods of analysis” (Torney-Purta et al., 2010, p. 498). In addition, assessments of how students interact and communicate with one another and how they apply skills learned in a classroom to daily life is an emerging area for further development (Levine

& Kawashima-Ginsberg, 2015). Existing lines of research on how students learn skills of argument (Kuhn et al., 2016) also need further exploration for application across contexts and situations.

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

There is a pressing need to evaluate and synthesize research literature from diverse disciplinary fields to draw insights to improve understanding of how knowledge, skills, and dispositions in civic reasoning and discourse develop and how they can be taught in various contexts. In particular, an underutilized opportunity exists to incorporate knowledge and practices from the broad knowledge base on how people learn. This includes work in the learning sciences, cognition, social psychology—particularly understandings of the social and cultural nature of learning, human development, and the neurosciences (Nasir et al., 2020; National Research Council, 2000, 2012) as well as research addressing learning in specific academic disciplines. The integration of what we know about human learning and development from across these domains is a necessary move to understand the complexity of learning to engage in civic reasoning and discourse. The aim is to engage students with diverse backgrounds in learning activities that will advance their disciplinary knowledge and understanding relevant to issues in the public domain, their ability to interrogate the complexities of such issues informed by democratic values, and their ability to engage in civil and reasoned discussion of civic issues (e.g., Barab et al., 2004; Gutiérrez et al., 1999; Lee, 2008; Levinson, 2012; Nasir et al., 2006, 2020; National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2018; Reisman, 2012).

Thus, this report seeks to expand the scope of what the authors consider important to know to inform systematic opportunities for students, particularly in the K–12 sector, to learn to engage in civic reasoning and discourse.

BACKGROUND TO THE REPORT

The National Academy of Education (NAEd) initiative on Civic Reasoning and Discourse aims to advance high-quality research for use in educational policy and practice. The goal of the project is to improve students' learning in civic reasoning and discourse by ensuring that the pedagogy, curriculum, and learning environments that they experience are informed by the best available evidence. This initiative was chaired by NAEd member and president-elect Carol D. Lee, who worked with NAEd staff in advancing this initiative from initial project conception to the completion of this report. Noting the

concerning trends of polarization and politicization discussed earlier in this introduction, Lee charged her fellow NAEed members to consider how the NAEed could address the challenges of preparing young people to engage in civic reasoning and discourse. The NAEed approached the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, who agreed to support a project that includes the following key propositions: (1) that learning to engage in effective civic reasoning and discourse is sufficiently complex that it needs to be addressed across the K–12 sector and across the curriculum;² (2) that there is a need to synthesize what the science of human learning and development can tell us about the cognitive, social, emotional, ethical, and developmental demands of such learning; and (3) that there is a need to situate the challenges of such teaching and learning in their historical and ecological contexts, including understanding the philosophical underpinnings about why attention to such issues matters.

To oversee and advance this project, the NAEed assembled an expert steering committee of researchers from across subject-matter disciplines and other leaders in civic learning and student engagement. The steering committee is comprised of Carol D. Lee (*Chair*), James A. Banks, Sarah Warshauer Freedman, Kris D. Gutiérrez, Diana E. Hess, Joseph Kahne, Peter Levine, Na'ilah Suad Nasir, Walter C. Parker, and Judith Torney-Purta. Under the interdisciplinary guidance of this committee, this report provides a review and synthesis of research across disciplines and subfields to better understand the complexity of civic reasoning and discourse. One major contribution of this report is the recommendations of learning principles and practices that can be used to support the development of course curricula and pedagogy as well as in standards, assessments, informal learning opportunities, and teacher preparation. Lastly, this report further identifies research areas for further development.

Based on the current state of research in the field and potential for new interdisciplinary linkages, this multi-chaptered report includes an expansive collection of research and recommendations on eight specific themes: (1) philosophical foundations of and moral reasoning in civics; (2) learning sciences and human development (covering cognition and its relationship to identity, development across the life course, and implicit bias); (3) history of education for democratic citizenship; (4) agency and resilience in the face of challenge in education for civic action across ethnic communities; (5) ecological contexts; (6) learning environment, school climate, and other supports for civic engagement; (7) digital literacy and the health of democratic practice; and (8) pedagogical practices and how teachers learn.

Each chapter was developed by panels that were overseen by members of the steering committee and that consisted of experts in each topical area. Panels also identified and vetted the major ideas to be addressed in their respective chapters. These substantive chapters include recommendations developed by chapter authors and panel members. The report also includes a final chapter that synthesizes recommendations for practice, policy, and research based on materials in the preceding chapters along with feedback from external stakeholders as well as further deliberation and vetting by the steering committee (see Appendix A for steering committee, chapter authors, and panel members).

² While this report specifically focuses on the K–12 sector, the authors also recognize there are foundational implications for early childhood education, particularly around the development of empathy.

As part of the development of this report, the NAEd hosted a workshop in March 2020 and an online forum in November 2020, during which chapter authors presented findings and gathered feedback from researchers and external stakeholders in attendance (see Appendix B for workshop agendas and participant lists). The NAEd also reached out to external reviewers to provide additional feedback on select material. Upon completion, each chapter has gone through several rounds of review. In addition to review by committee members, staff, panel members, and external reviewers, the entire report was then subject to a final peer review by the NAEd Standing Review Committee prior to publication.

Evolving Issues of Identity and Commitment in the U.S. Experiment in Democracy

In an early case study of democratic life in the United States, Alexis de Tocqueville (1835/2001) set out to learn if the young nation's experiment in transitioning from aristocracy to democracy could be sustained over time. In addition to having self-government and a robust civic sphere, Tocqueville noted the necessity of education to cultivate the knowledge and skills necessary for democratic citizenship. However, at the time of Tocqueville's observations in the early 19th century, full enfranchisement and citizenship were severely limited. The freedoms and ideals enshrined in the Declaration of Independence were diametrically at odds with the founding Constitution that failed to incorporate equality as its core principle (Allen, 2014; Morgan, 1956), especially given that it was written against the backdrop of the entrenched system of slavery, as well as the ongoing domination and erasure of Native peoples. Tocqueville's writings also took place before the onset of the industrial revolution, and the effects it would later have on both growing inequality (Goldberg, 2001) and setting in motion a future climate crisis.

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

Throughout this history, people living in the United States have navigated a national identity as well as identification (through social networks and familial cultural practices) with their countries of origin. It is important to note that while ethnic diversity within the United States as well as within individual states, regions, territories, and Indigenous communities is higher than ever before, ethnic diversity is not new to the nation (Drazanova, 2019; Fry & Parker, 2018; Hobbs & Stoops, 2002). How the nation addresses, accommodates, or works against such ethnic diversity is one of the persistent civic issues with which we continue to wrestle (e.g., from maintaining German in public schools in Wisconsin in the 19th century to judicial decisions around how language teaching impacts opportunity to learn to the role of bilingualism in schools today as just a set of examples).

Civic reasoning and discourse inevitably involve how members of a society see themselves, and are also inevitably related to understanding our history as a nation,

and what that history reveals about the who and what of the United States. In the context of public education, this meta-narrative is communicated particularly in how our history is taught. This is a curricular space that has been highly and hotly contested over the history of public education. On the one hand, the United States represents one of the most powerful experiments in democratic decision making in human history, one in which disenfranchised groups have utilized its founding ideals, its democratic institutions, and at times, the ability to mobilize effective social movement campaigns to achieve greater liberty and equality over time. On the other hand, it is also a nation borne on the backs of two evils of history—the violent takeover of Indigenous territory and near decimation of Indigenous peoples as the nation’s borders advanced, and what many refer to as the holocaust of African enslavement (Karenga, 2001; Spitzer, 2002).³ These massive historic actions evolved in the midst of the evolution of the new nation state. When the founding documents were written, there is no question that the call for inalienable rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness did not apply to White men without property, did not apply to women, and did not apply to those populations who were not designated as White (Indigenous peoples, peoples of African descent, Southwest peoples living in land that was originally Mexico before the U.S. annexation, and peoples who immigrated in these early years from parts of Asia).

Anderson (2007) offers a detailed analysis of the debates in the Reconstruction Congress, after the terrible price in human life paid during the Civil War, over coming to a political compromise on how to articulate who has citizenship. He documents with precise examples from congressional records how contestations over whether those who are Indigenous, of African descent, Latinx, and of Asian descent would have birthright citizenship. We can also look at the evolution of immigration policies from the 19th century forward to see how through law, non-Anglo communities were limited in access to migrate to the United States and how even ethnic groups now understood to be “White” did not have the status of Whiteness in earlier generations (Cherry, 2020; Gerber, 1999). It is a fact that the United States has a longer history of legal apartheid—known as the Jim Crow Era—than South Africa. Additionally, the fact that we continue to see the impacts of discrimination associated with race, class, gender, religion, and sexual orientation, among other ascribed statuses, highlights that the nation’s wrestling with its history remains a civic challenge.

It is important to note, however, that recognizing the conundrums of our history—the historic disconnects between our stated ideals and our institutionalized practices—does not dictate how we resolve these conundrums, and does not dictate whether we will pursue our civic reasoning through a progressive or conservative political lens. The point is that through civic reasoning and discourse, and indeed civic action, we have the opportunity to engage our differences, and ideally, find compromises rooted in democratic ideals. The question is how we, as a society, systematically prepare young people to engage in the complex work of democratic decision making, as well

³ Karenga (2001) defines holocaust as “a morally monstrous act of genocide that is not only against the people themselves, but also a crime against humanity” (p. 2). For more information, see United Nations Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect. (n.d.a). *Genocide*. <https://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/genocide.shtml>; United Nations Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect. (n.d.b). *Crimes against humanity*. <https://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/crimes-against-humanity.shtml>.

as ensuring that all students have a voice in that endeavor, including at times confronting social justice issues through dissent, or as the late Congressman John Lewis called it, “good trouble.”

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

Complexities and Interdisciplinary Nature of Civic Reasoning and Discourse

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

This report does not advocate any particular position with regard to how students think through questions that arise in the public domain. However, the authors believe it is important that youth are prepared to engage in civic reasoning and discourse in ways that value complexity and avoid simplistic answers to complex social issues. Examples of such complexities include:

- How do we navigate tensions between the powers and limits of federal, state, local, and tribal governments to protect collective well-being, as well as the rights of people to assert individual rights around issues such as wearing a mask during a pandemic or requiring that children be vaccinated?

- What should be the relations among levels of government and collective actions to fight a public health crisis or defend a national border?
- How do we navigate tensions between the rights of groups of people with opposing political and social views, including those who may hold racist, homophobic, and other deeply biased points of view, to publicly protest?
- How do we think about tensions among persistent examples of police violence against people (especially Black and Brown peoples), the needs for protection of the public and by whom, the rights of police as public employees, the funding of police departments, and the training of police?
- What disciplinary knowledge, skills, and dispositions are needed to critically examine information and evidence to inform civic reasoning and discourse? Examples include:
 - Interpretation and understanding of mathematical modeling produced for public consumption around trends in the spread of a pandemic or climate change;
 - Ability to examine arguments related to economic trends that should be considered in public policy;
 - Understanding of what to many are invisible algorithmic structures that govern what information is selected, curated, and highlighted; and
 - Knowledge of potential cause–effect relations among prior conditions, interventions, processes, and outcomes.

In this report, the authors have combined a focus on civic reasoning with engagement in civic discourse, which concerns how to communicate with one another around the challenges of public issues in order to enhance both individual and group understanding. This entails communication between citizens, including persons residing in the country who may not hold legal citizenship. Equally important is the ability to critically analyze communication in the broader milieu from persons in positions of power such as politicians or advocates, as well as media outlets and social media platforms. An example of this is the understanding of how power, ideology, and technology (e.g., algorithms) can lead to biased narratives and filtered communication. In addition, there is a need for the public to discern highly specialized language employed in media communications and political forums. For example, public reports around public health emergencies or deliberations regarding the appointment of judges to the Supreme Court highlight the need for familiarity with specialized language in order to understand these important societal issues.

Learning to critically engage such issues is complex, and it involves knowledge along multiple dimensions: epistemological dispositions to value complexity, ethical dimensions around moral considerations in decision making, and equally important, conceptions of what is entailed in democratic values. Ideally in a democracy such as the United States, it also requires that people are able to consider multiple points of view, to be disposed to listen and consider positions and points of view different from one's own, and to show empathy for others, especially for those who, for whatever reason, "we" designate as "the other." The knowledge base across all of these examples includes deep knowledge of history, of how government decision making operates in the United States, of economic and political systems, of scientific knowledge of how the natural world operates, of how mathematical knowledge can be recruited as possible

sources of explanation of phenomenon that can be quantified, and, equally important, of the diversity of cultural practices, of ways of being in the world that constitute the human experience. Such knowledge needs to be employed along with critical analysis, or regularly questioning the sources from which one receives information.

George Herbert Mead, a pioneer in social psychology, viewed social interaction with others as key to the development of both personal identity as well as learning empathy for others. Mead believed that reflecting on the social conditions surrounding oneself is also important for understanding perspectives different from one's own. However, it is key to recognize the role that emotions play in this process. Current research in cognitive science (along with cognitive and social neurosciences) documents that how people process and interpret interactions with others is filtered by an intertwining of thinking and emotions, which happens both in the moment and in later reflection (Dai & Sternberg, 2004; Leong et al., 2020; Moore-Berg et al., 2020; Zajonc & Marcus, 1985). These theoretical and empirical insights illustrate the importance of teaching youth strategies for recognizing how their thoughts and emotions influence their interpretation of social experiences and the views they form. Lastly, it is important to note that development of such strategies is a neutral process firmly rooted in reasoning, and does not necessarily lead to the formation of either progressive or conservative orientations.

To truly understand the challenge of division and alienation in society, civic learning and discourse needs to be informed by a broader research literature that helps us to understand issues of implicit bias, identity orientations, and the intersection between identity, perceptions, and thinking. There exists a need to synthesize a foundational knowledge base that is complex, multidisciplinary, and integrated. It also needs to take a comprehensive view of human learning and development in various social contexts. This includes research in learning and development and how students cultivate expertise in civic reasoning and discourse, but also how students enact these explicitly social learning processes within communities of practice that take into consideration culture, context, interests, and students' sense of belonging (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Nasir et al., 2020; National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2018; National Research Council, 2012). This also involves improving students' capacity to "talk across political and ideological differences ... by teaching [them] to weigh evidence, consider competing views, form an opinion, articulate that opinion, and respond to those who disagree" (Hess & McAvoy, 2015, p. 5). Central attention needs to be given to areas of affect, identity, and culture, including the understanding of group context differences as well as the creation of learning spaces that facilitate respectful dialogue and an open climate for discussion for all students (Banks, 2004, 2008; Barber et al., 2015; Knowles et al., 2018; Ladson-Billings, 2004; Reichert et al., 2018).

Developing knowledge, skills, and dispositions for civic reasoning and discourse remains essential to the future functioning of our democracy. However, interdisciplinary integration has not been the focus of most of the research carried out in the field of civic education, and practice reforms have not had the widespread impacts that were hoped for. The authors believe that critical engagement in civic reasoning and discourse has several dimensions. It is rooted in responsive discourse practices (e.g., maximizing participation, respectful response to differences), entails understanding how interdisciplinary knowledge can ground civic action, recognizes the influence of identity (including perceptions of the self, others, and contexts), and considers the central role

of affect as well as knowledge. In short, these are dynamic systems. Understanding such dynamic systems is a necessary pre-requisite to designing learning environments that can foster the kind of civic reasoning and discourse required to meet the complex demands of civic decision making and engagement in the future. This also means that learning approaches such as teaching content knowledge in civics and developing knowledge and reasoning skills in other subject-matter areas are seen as complementary endeavors (Feuer, 2021).

In addition, among the most important goals of public education is to prepare young people to engage in informed civic action predicated on a disposition to grapple with the complexities of social issues and policy responses in a diverse society. The political, economic, and moral dilemmas that are central to accusations of “fake news” actually entail complex issues along with competing interests and warrants. As a consequence, weighing alternatives in order to decide a policy question (i.e., deliberation) is not only a matter of weighing evidence and judging the credibility of sources. While the belief is widespread that accurate information is the keystone of democratic decision making, accurate information is itself now a contested construct. It is well known that directional motivation influenced by emotions or “hot cognition” biases information processing (Adam, 2012; Lodge & Taber, 2005; Nasir et al., 2020; National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2018). This is especially the case when that information is about controversial policy issues where biased information processing tends to further polarize one’s political attitudes (Leong et al., 2020; Moore-Berg et al., 2020). Furthermore, in today’s oversaturated information environment resulting from the proliferation of mass media (social, print, cable, etc.), even sincere persons are likely to believe “alternative facts.” To navigate through the information overload, one prominent study centered media literacy education as an effective way to improve youth’s judgment about accuracy of information and pointed out that political knowledge alone is insufficient when dealing with controversial public issues (Kahne & Bowyer, 2017). Does this suggest that opportunities to acquire media literacy (knowing how to judge truth claims and their sources) should be as important as other educational interventions, such as courses in history, government, science, and literature? Or are there propositions about human learning and development that can substantially increase the ability of educators to prepare young people to actually wrestle with complexities? The task requires that people understand civic and political issues as framed within a dynamic system with multiple entry points. This is one reason why the committee conducted an interdisciplinary project.

CHAPTERS WITHIN THIS REPORT

This report provides insights from multiple disciplinary fields to foster a better understanding of how civic reasoning and discourse skills develop and how they can be taught in different contexts.

The *Defining and Implementing Civic Reasoning and Discourse: Philosophical and Moral Foundations for Research and Practice* chapter begins by grounding the readers in the key question of “What should we do?”, a question that arises well beyond the political domains and often concerns one’s relationship with others. The author defines civic reasoning as “the sort of reasoning citizens do as they answer this question” and

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

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

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

An important dimension of historical understanding is how communities that have faced persistent challenges with regard to equality in opportunity have organized themselves in preparing generations of young people to tackle the demands of citizenship and full democratic participation. The chapter *Agency and Resilience in the Face of Challenge as Civic Action: Lessons Learned from Across Ethnic Communities* offers examples of civic agency in diverse ethnic communities that have historically been negatively positioned through structural practices: Indigenous peoples, African Americans, Latinxs, Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders, and residents of rural Appalachian communities. These histories highlight agency in how these communities over the decades, indeed centuries, have organized to prepare young people for civic

engagement. These efforts have included the work of educators, community organizations, and families. These histories examine the complexities of citizenship and cultural membership in this multi-cultural democracy in light of the political complexities of the meaning of citizenship in the United States.

The ecological contexts in which young people grow up influence their knowledge of their civic responsibilities and motivation to participate in public life. The *Civic Reasoning and Discourse Amid Structural Inequality, Migration, and Conflict* chapter explores the varied social and political contexts that shape the civic identities and experiences of youth as well as discussing the disjuncture between current civic education and the diverse range of students' lived experiences. Specifically, the authors highlight three underexplored areas of structural inequality, migration, and inter/intranational conflict that frame young people's civic learning opportunities and their connections to and participation in public life. The chapter further sheds light on the possibilities for new expressions of civic engagement that are attentive to the differentiated pathways of young people's civic development. The authors encourage diverse forms of civic participation, including activism, critical curricular approaches, youth participatory action research, and arts-based approaches, that help students from different backgrounds to cultivate their civic voices.

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

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

focus to consider the diverse forms of youth civic participation and provide effective curricula equitably so as to prepare students for digital citizenship.

Educators play a key role in preparing all students to participate effectively in civic deliberation and engagement, and their pedagogical practices will need to be guided by the best evidence available. The *Pedagogical Practices and How Teachers Learn* chapter examines the curricular and pedagogical scaffolds that are effective for civic learning, investigates the role of students' identities on civic engagement, and provides evidence for pedagogical practices that support students' civic learning. The authors challenge the persistent focus on content knowledge. Instead they argue that inquiry-oriented curricula and pedagogical approaches leverage all students' lived experiences and knowledge to engage them in authentic investigation of political issues while also fostering deeper learning and the development of civic skills and dispositions. Consistent with learning theory that shows high-quality learning must be built on students' existing experiences, knowledge, and identities, the chapter addresses the importance of embracing students' out-of-school experiences and ensuring that their voices are represented in classrooms. Teachers also require adequate support to develop knowledge and understanding of the social context, their own identities, and pedagogy to engage students in meaningful discussions.

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

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

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

The political and ideological divisions within the United States are deep and long-standing. At the time of the production and publication of this report (2021), the country was grappling with the confluence of several major crises: a worldwide pandemic and the resulting shock to the economy, social unrest arising from the continuing impacts of systemic racism, and a continuing climate crisis. The authors argue that as a society, we have the responsibility to prepare young people with the civic reasoning and discourse skills necessary to meet these types of challenges in addition to the unknown crises that they as adults have yet to encounter.

The killing of George Floyd—at the time a recent pernicious example of Black and Brown people dying at the hands of police officers under deeply questionable circumstances—sparked mass protests across the country and indeed the world. What has been most interesting in these protests is the makeup of those protesting (multi-racial, inter-generational, in large cities and small towns, and in cities and nations around the world ranging among Hong Kong, Karachi, Kyoto, London, Nairobi, and Paris). At the same time, there have been counter-protests, and in some cases, eruptions of violence. There have also been complex issues around targets of violent attacks (e.g.,

public buildings, small and large businesses). These responses have led to debates that require civic reasoning and discourse regarding how to think about issues around public social protests. Examples of topics include how to think about the functioning of police departments; what, if any, limitations are legal and appropriate; what levers of government should be at play in challenges that arise from such protests; how to safeguard the rights of competing protest groups; and what laws and practices need to be in place to address why these cases of police–civilian violence not only remain but disproportionately affect Black and Brown populations.

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

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

The nature of heated public debates over these current challenges and the seeming difficulty of political leadership to work collaboratively to address these issues all attest to how essential it is to our democracy to prepare our young people to engage in such civic reasoning and discourse. Although the vast majority of school children under the age of 18 are not eligible to vote, they are developmentally able to, and indeed do, engage in civic activities, examine social issues, and express their points of view (Sullivan et al., 2020). The public organizing of young people across the nation after the horrific shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida, attests to this civic potential, as does the youth-led global movement to confront climate change. While the authors focus much attention on the role of public schooling, it is equally important to recognize the important civic work that takes place in community organizations, especially community organizations that are either run by young people or that focus on youth development and engagement.

Ultimately, we must ask ourselves how it is that adults can come through the K–12 public education system and still be prone to hate, or how a seemingly educated populace rejects scientific findings that scientists across the world have reached near-universal agreement on. These concerns are particularly salient in light of the attack on

the U.S. Capitol on January 6, 2021, in attempts to interfere with the lawful counting of state electoral votes to certify the election and proceed with the peaceful transition between presidential administrations.

While the authors have sought to focus attention on civic challenges, it is equally important to highlight sources of hope. As Martin Luther King, Jr., said, “the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice.” The state of racial inequality in 2021 is not the same as it was in 1775 or 1865. The evolution of Supreme Court decisions around issues of individual and group rights has evolved toward greater pathways for justice across the centuries. While evolving in deeply contested arguments, the amendments to the constitution have each articulated expanded rights. Social movements over the course of history have led to monumental shifts in rights, including the abolitionist movement, the movement for women’s right to vote, movements for civil rights, social activism around health access and environmental safety, and the current social movements around racial justice and climate change. The range of political leadership at every level of government is more diverse than ever. Our students need to understand both the persistent challenges and the ways that U.S. structures of governance and activism have changed trajectories toward greater equality.

The authors conclude with an inspirational example reflected in a letter to President Barack Obama from a 6-year-old boy named Alex who saw on the news the horrors of the Syrian civil war (see Box I-3).

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

BOX I-3

A 6-Year-Old Boy’s Letter to President Obama

Remember the boy who was picked up by the ambulance in Syria? Can you please go get him and bring him to [my home]? Park in the driveway or on the street and we will be waiting for you guys with flags, flowers, and balloons. We will give him a family and he will be our brother. Catherine, my little sister, will be collecting butterflies and fireflies for him. In my school, I have a friend from Syria, Omar, and I will introduce him to Omar. We can all play together. We can invite him to birthday parties and he will teach us another language. We can teach him English too, just like my friend Aoto from Japan.

Please tell him that his brother will be Alex who is a very kind boy, just like him. Since he won’t bring toys and doesn’t have toys Catherine will share her big blue stripy white bunny. And I will share my bike and I will teach him how to ride it. I will teach him additions and subtractions in math. And he [can] smell Catherine’s lip gloss penguin which is green. She doesn’t let anyone touch it.

Thank you very much! I can’t wait for you to come!

Alex
6 years old

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