

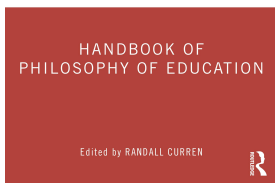
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CIVIC LEARNING FOR THE 21ST CENTURY: DISENTANGLING THE “THIN” AND “THICK” ELEMENTS OF CIVIC IDENTITY TO SUPPORT CIVIC EDUCATION

Danielle Allen and David Kidd

Alongside efforts to expand and invigorate civic education in the United States, researchers, educators, and advocates in disciplines from psychology to education to political science have worked to clarify how to best prepare young people for sustained, ethical, and effective civic participation that is supportive of democracy. The goal has been to lay a theoretical foundation for renewed investment in civic education. The challenge has been to integrate research on youth development from psychology with analysis from political science of the kinds of participation needed in healthy constitutional democracies. A potential pitfall has been that any answer to the question of how best to prepare young people for their roles in a democracy might implicitly translate the priorities of one or another partisan ideology into an educational framework.

In this chapter, we propose a framework for defining “deeper civic learning” that reaches beyond ideology to core elements of civic participation that are needed to keep any constitutional democracy alive. We will argue that deeper civic learning involves the development of a civic identity that can support the integration of personal identity elements, shared (or group) identity elements, knowledge-based understanding, and skills-based creativity in the successful performance of a civic role. First, we define Deeper Civic Learning, drawing on the framework of Mehta and Fine (2019). Then, we characterize the civic role that shapes the objectives of civic education, and we take up the concept of civic identity that anchors the performance of a civic role. Finally, we review the different components of identity development that must converge in the successful development of a civic identity. We leave for another occasion the question of how disciplinary knowledge and skills-based creativity are integrated into civic identity.

Deeper Civic Learning

Despite inevitable points of disagreement or ambiguity, there appears to be widespread agreement that civic education must constitute more than transferring knowledge of democratic institutions and practices from teacher to learner. Advances in learning science show that deep learning consists of more than knowledge transfer in nearly any domain (Mehta & Fine 2019). Additionally, decades of research on civic development and engagement more specifically show that knowledge may be necessary, but

that it is not sufficient to sustain authentic civic participation (Levine & Kawashima-Ginsberg 2017). Truly effective civic education prepares and encourages learners to take active roles as contributors within a domain, granting access to new communities of practice and identities (Lave & Wenger 1991), even as they integrate knowledge-based understanding into that role performance.

As Mehta and Fine (2019, 2015) argue, deeper learning involves a triad of identity, mastery, and creativity. Their research, based on close study of teaching and learning in three distinct types of schools, shows that learning is most effective and engaging when rigorous engagement with disciplinary content (i.e., mastery) is clearly connected to issues that matter to students and their communities (i.e., identity) and opportunities to put their knowledge and skills to use in the production of original work (i.e., creativity). In this view, which builds on sociocultural theories of learning (Lave & Wenger 1991), learning is a process of becoming a member of a community of practice. Students acquire a new set of skills and knowledge they can deploy in a new role that is valued and embedded within their broader personal sense of self or identity.

But if deeper learning depends on the performance role that students will adopt to integrate their motivation, understanding, and skills, which role defines the sphere of civic education?

The Civic Role and Civic Identity

Constitutional democracies invite citizens and residents into many roles: voter, elected official, public servant, community leader, activist, journalist, juror, and soldier, among others (Allen 2016). To understand the civic role that should anchor civic education in a democracy, however, we need to identify the role that serves as the foundation for all of these. We turn now to a definition of democracy and to identification of the core elements of a civic role in a democracy.

For our definition of democracy, we adopt that offered in the American Academy of Arts and Science (AAAS) report, *Our Common Purpose*:

In the twenty-first century, democracy refers to a political system in which legislative and chief executive decision-makers are elected by majority or plurality rule by eligible voters, with a presumption that the franchise approaches universal adult suffrage among legal citizens and that mechanisms are in place to protect ideological, religious, ethnic, and other demographic minorities. ... In traditions of American political thought, all these terms capture forms of rights-based representative government in which 1) elected government leadership is constrained by constitutionalism, the rule of law, the separation of powers, the free expression of the people, and the legal protection and moral affirmation of the rights of individuals; and 2) groups and parties that are not part of electoral majorities cannot easily be disenfranchised or suffer loss of rights. We do not naively claim that more democracy simply in the form of more participation will solve our problems. We seek instead to achieve healthy connections between robust participation and political institutions worthy of participation.

(AAAS 2020: 2–3)

All students should enter adulthood with the knowledge and practice-honed skills they need for effective civic engagement in a constitutional democracy defined as above. They should come to understand themselves as *members of a self-governing community committed to shared decision-making*.¹ This is the core definition of the civic role in a constitutional democracy.

Fulfilling this role requires knowledge about the political institutions in which one fulfills that role, skills at carrying out the many functions necessary for the operations of constitutional democracy, and adherence to the norms necessary to maintain those twinned practices of self-government and shared decision-making. With regard to the necessary norms, political scientists Steven Levitsky and Daniel Ziblatt (2018) identify mutual toleration and institutional forbearance as normative guardrails for the

survival of democracy. We argue that, additionally, three core civic attitudes and dispositions – efficacy, equitability, and self-protection – are necessary to support the twinned practices of self-government and shared decision-making. In fact, these dispositions are closely related to the guardrail norms and support them.² As we discuss later, equitability on our definition sustains the norms of mutual toleration and institutional forbearance. Importantly, these norms and dispositions offer a “thin,” not “thick,” picture of what is necessary for a civic role in a constitutional democracy. Taken together, they by no means define the whole of what a person “ought” to do or what a “good life” consists of. They are only a “thin” layer of such a picture, leaving much for any individual to fill out to achieve a “thick” picture or comprehensive view about their definition of a good life.³

To put this in the terms of political philosophy, we identify those developmental elements that are necessary for people to make decisions together, including in conditions of diversity and disagreement, as definitional of the civic role, and we remain agnostic about the particular conceptions of a good life that any developing civic participant might integrate into their identity, provided that that conception of human goods does not undermine the norms needed for shared decision-making in a community of free and equal self-governing citizens. As Ronald Dworkin puts it:

People who take personal responsibility for deciding what kind of life is valuable for them can nevertheless accept that issues of justice – about how the different and sometimes competing interests of all citizens should be accommodated – must be decided collectively, so that one decision is taken as authoritative for all. There is nothing in that proposition that challenges individual responsibility to decide what life to live given the resources and opportunities that such collective decisions leave to him ... A genuine political community must ... be a community of independent moral agents. It must not dictate what its citizens think about matters of political or moral or ethical judgment, but must, on the contrary, provide circumstances that encourage them to arrive at beliefs on these matters through their own reflective and finally individual conviction.

(Dworkin 1996: 26)

This approach is also articulated by the philosopher John Rawls (1971) in *A Theory of Justice* as defining the parameters of a political system in terms of definitions of “right,” and the need for protections of the basic rights that support the operations of self-government among free and equal citizens, rather than in terms of “the good,” or a comprehensive view about all aspects of human morality.

To exercise their civic role and to form a complete civic identity, however, people have to work to integrate the “thin identity” elements of their civic role with the other elements of their identity, both personal and group identities, that contribute to their comprehensive picture about how to live and their thick conception of their own identity. Dworkin uses the example of a member of an orchestra as an analogy to a political community. Just as our political institutions make decisions that bind us all, an orchestra conductor may decide how the orchestra will interpret a particular piece and that decision must be “binding on all” (1996: 25) the members of the orchestra. In this context, Dworkin writes,

No musician sacrifices anything essential to his control over his own life, and hence to his self-respect, in accepting that someone else has that responsibility, but it would plainly be otherwise if the conductor tried to dictate not only how a violinist should play under his direction, but what standards of taste the violinist should try to cultivate. No one who accepted responsibility to decide questions of musical judgment for himself could regard himself as a partner in a joint venture that proposed to decide them for him.

(Dworkin 1996: 25–26)

Just as a member of an orchestra has to integrate the role identity of orchestra member with the personal and group identities that shape the musician's musical judgment, so too in civic life we have to integrate our civic role with the personal and group identities that shape our values and commitments. Along with acquiring civic habits and skills, the development of a civic identity therefore requires clarifying moral and ethical commitments.

The work of integrating our personal and group identities with our civic role is necessary for the achievement of psychological integrity. It does also, however, fulfill another function. While we may have a "thin" conception of identity with regard to our civic role, our motivation to participate as a member of the civic community will inevitably flow from our "thick" identities connected to our personal and other group identities. The "thin" elements of identity connected to our civic role help us know *how* to participate in civic life, but they cannot in themselves provide an answer to the question of *why* we should participate in civic life. For that, we need to rely on our fuller conception of the goods we seek. That is, an understanding of personal and shared values gives direction to individual engagement. This self-understanding of our thicker identities also provides a foundation for articulating civic aspirations that help to orient and motivate collective action, a critical task in a diverse democracy (Finnemore & Jurkovich 2020).

With this background in mind, we can now define "civic identity." Civic identity consists of the integration of an individual's understanding of their role as a member in a community of shared decision-making with their personal and group-based identities and values as well as with the disciplinary knowledge and skills-based creativity needed for the performance of any specific instance of a civic role. In other words, civic identity integrates individualized and shared identity elements and manifests in uptake of a civic role that supports civic participation. Though the importance of values, attitudes, and dispositions to civic development is widely accepted in the field (e.g., Levine & Kawashima-Ginsberg 2017), there has been less consensus regarding exactly what they are and how they relate to civic identity. We seek to address this confusion by highlighting the need for civic participants to integrate "thin" identity elements with "thick" identity elements. The result of focusing on this work of integration in civic identity is a secondary recognition that the content defining civic identity will vary from person to person, depending on what elements of personal and group identity they bring to integrate into the performance of their civic roles, alongside the thin identity elements flowing from the civic role itself. This necessary variation in the content of civic identity from person to person perhaps helps explain why it has been so hard for researchers to pin down its exact content. All that can be pinned down *a priori* are the thin elements of civic identity attached to the civic role, defined as being *a member of a self-governing community committed to shared decision-making*.

With an account of civic identity in hand, we can now turn to developmental questions. Given the definition of civic identity we have set out above, how do young people come to develop their civic identity? Informing much recent work on active civic learning, Youniss et al. (1997) described a civic development trajectory in which young people become introduced to the practices of adult civic engagement, coming to form civic identities that sustain participation over time. With the thin conception of the civic role in a constitutional democracy in hand, and an initial idea of the work of integration necessary to form a civic identity, we can build on Youniss et al. to clarify the developmental trajectory that supports civic learning. To be useful in guiding civic education, an account of the developmental trajectory undergirding the emergence of a civic identity must provide a framework for distinguishing between personal, group-based, or ideological aspects of civic identity and those that should be held in common by virtue of flowing from the underlying, shared civic role. In other words, it is necessary to tease apart what elements of civic identity should be promoted in all civic education as elements of the civic role, and which should be determined by individuals and their most immediate communities. It is also necessary to consider how a civic education can effectively support the integration of personal, group-based, and ideological elements of civic

identity *that learners choose for themselves* with those shared aspects of civic identity *that flow from the civic role*. Deeper learning in the context of civic education, or “deeper civic learning,” consists of the activation of a civic identity to achieve two kinds of integration – integration of the individual and shared elements of identity; and integration of identity, disciplinary knowledge, and skills in the performance of a civic role. The theoretical foundation for civic education therefore depends on understanding these two projects of integration. In the remainder of this chapter, we focus on the first, reserving the second type of integration for another occasion.

Civic Identity Development

Adolescence as a Period of Exploration

Most civic education in the United States, when it happens at all, is focused in students’ late middle school and high school years, a period even casual observers can describe as one of rapid growth and, often, difficulty. Decades of psychological research tend to confirm this observation, at least in the United States and similar cultural environments. Dominant in developmental psychology, Eriksonian, or neo-Eriksonian, models of identity and its development are especially helpful to understanding civic identity, and adolescent development, more broadly (e.g., Damon 2008; Youniss et al. 1997).

Erikson’s (1950) theory of identity development, based in the psychoanalytic tradition, posits that individuals encounter crises or turning points as they age, with adolescents grappling with role confusion as they encounter new opportunities for autonomy equipped with rapidly developing social and cognitive capacities. Although subsequent researchers have largely concurred that adolescence is a key period of identity development, it is increasingly accepted that the process may continue well beyond young adulthood (Côté & Levine 2002). Regardless of their age, individuals are thought to formulate their identities by choosing among available identities, especially vocational and ideological identities, and synthesizing these into a coherent sense of self (Kroger & Marcia 2011). That is, they need to figure out *who they are*.

The process through which people move beyond role or identity confusion is generally understood as entailing a phase of *exploration*, a period in which individuals learn about and experiment with different roles and identities, followed by *commitment*, the point at which an individual makes an informed and authentic decision regarding their identity (Marcia 1966). Depending on the completion of these two phases, an individual can be roughly categorized within four identity statuses (Kroger & Marcia 2011): Identity diffusion (no exploration or commitment), foreclosure (no exploration, commitment to externally assigned identity), moratorium (exploration but no commitment), and achievement (exploration followed by commitment). Adolescence is most often associated with identity exploration, with young people sometimes appearing or feeling unmoored but excited as they navigate the moratorium stage prior to making commitments and reaching the stage of identity achievement.

The process of integrating chosen identities into a global sense of self depends on personal and social factors (Côté & Levine 2002). Individuals need to find ways of reconciling the demands of new identities with their personality characteristics, experiences, and goals. In educational contexts, for example, students may more readily adopt discipline-specific identities (e.g., scientist) when they can link aspects of their personal identity (e.g., curiosity) to the new identity (Kaplan & Flum 2012; Brickhouse et al. 2000). The adoption and integration of new identities also depends on the ways in which the individual’s community affirms or contests the attainment of new identities (Côté & Levine 2002). Traditional gender stereotypes, for example, may increase the likelihood that others affirm a boy’s adoption of an engineer identity. Moreover, while a boy might find it easy to integrate their gender identity with their engineer identity, a girl may experience difficulty achieving coherence insofar as her

gender identity is seen as conflicting with her engineer identity (Godwin et al. 2016). In these cases, social factors suggest the compatibility or incompatibility of different social identities, rendering the task of achieving internal coherence of identities within a sense of self more or less difficult.

Connecting Eriksonian Models of Identity Development with Sociocultural Approaches

Research motivated by sociocultural, situationist, and social psychological theories helps ground the personal factors (e.g., attachment style; Kroger & Marcia 2011) and processes (e.g., exploration; Marcia 1966) focal in the Eriksonian tradition in a social context (Vignoles et al. 2011). Sociocultural or situationist models of identity development highlight the role of engaging with others and with a cultural tool kit (e.g., technologies, practices) in shaping identity. Participating in communities of practice allows an individual to begin mastering the knowledge, skills, values, and norms that, once acquired, form the basis of an individual's role-specific identity (Lave & Wenger 1991; Penuel & Wertsch 1995; Wenger 2010). Identity development, in this view, occurs through performing that identity in a way that is perceived as authentic by the self and by others.

Hand and Gresalfi (2015) describe identity development as a joint accomplishment, reflecting both the opportunities afforded to individuals and how individuals engage with those opportunities. In this view, individuals' differences in personality, values, and experiences may dispose them to take more or less advantage of various opportunities for participation within or across domains. Similarly, the range of opportunities for participation in activities may affect the extent to which engagement supports identity development. For example, a student's interest in the outdoors may increase their likelihood of developing a scientist identity if their science classes allow them to pursue that interest by studying ecological issues. In addition, their study of ecology in science classes should encourage active participation in scientific practices, allowing the student to see themselves and be seen by others as a practicing ecologist. This sociocultural approach resonates with research showing that learners are motivated by opportunities to satisfy basic psychological needs (Ryan & Deci 2017) of autonomy, competence, and relatedness (e.g., Liu et al. 2009; Makkonen et al. 2021). When activities are structured and presented in ways that provide clear opportunities for meaningful role adoption, self-expression, and collaboration, individuals are more likely to become deeply identified with the roles.

The sociocultural and situationist accounts of identity development draw attention to how individuals' identity is situated in a specific community and set of practices, norms, and tools. This approach explicitly recognizes that identities are, to some extent, linked to particular domains, such as science, but that they must also be connected to one's personal identity or global sense of self, including social identities. The affordances and constraints of that community present or limit opportunities for identity development (Hand & Gresalfi 2015). In this way, the sociocultural perspective helps clarify the tasks of educators interested in cultivating identity by focusing attention on creating learning environments and activities that acculturate learners into a disciplinary community of practice. For example, identity development can be supported by promoting understanding of the domain, helping learners identify and take on important roles, and providing opportunities for students to draw on their lived experiences (Godwin et al. 2016) and exercise agency in ways congruent with their personal identities (Brickhouse et al. 2000; Nasir & Hand 2008).

Authentic Activation of Civic Identity

With this sociocultural understanding of identity development in hand, we can more clearly understand the task of helping young people "thicken" their civic roles. Many people see American identity as largely overlapping with a White racial identity (Devos & Sadler 2019; Schildkraut 2014; Martinez-Fuentes et al. 2020; Molina et al. 2015; Phinney et al. 1997), and this identity "thickens"

the civic role by linking it to a particular set of cultural traditions, values, and goals (Brewer 2009; Hart et al. 2011; Martínez-Fuentes et al. 2020; Pehrson et al. 2009). Yet, it is not necessary that civic identity is construed in terms of a purportedly shared national identity, and how individuals “thicken” their civic identities may differ depending on their personal and social identities. That is, the civic role can be “thickened” in diverse ways without compromising its “thin” foundation, and capitalizing on this potential is important to authentic civic development.

Research on civic development brings more clarity to how youth link their civic identities to their other social identities, including but not limited to their national identity. Findings from detailed studies of civic purpose focused on members of minority groups provide a clear example: Civic purpose, often driven by shared democratic values, was further given direction and strength by concerns for the needs and interests of groups of people with whom young people identified, ranging from families or particular communities, to racial and national groups (Malin et al. 2015; see also Kirshner 2009). Other research has similarly found evidence of a positive relation between racial/ethnic identity development and civic efficacy among minority youth (Bañales et al. 2020; Hipolito-Delgado & Zion 2017). The link between racial/ethnic identity and civic identity, however, does not appear to entail a diminished sense of commitment to the nation as a whole, with minority youth endorsing patriotic statements to the same extent as White youth while expressing relatively greater concern for securing rights for minorities and improving race relations (Flanagan et al. 2009). Rather than tying their civic role identities primarily to a superordinate American identity narrowly defined to align with the thick identities of a subset of the population, young people, especially members of minority groups, may be most motivated to take civic action when they can “thicken” their civic identities with the values and aspirations of other social identities. This also opens up the possibility of evolving definitions of an American identity over time.

A Sociocultural Understanding of Civic Identity

Viewed through the lens of sociocultural theories of identity development, civic identity development can be seen as the consolidation of civic knowledge, civic skills, and civic attitudes and dispositions into a social role identity. This is most likely to happen when individuals are given opportunities for authentic engagement in the civic domain, and when they are able to integrate the identity elements connected to their civic role with other important identities, including personal, social, and other role identities (Flanagan et al. 2011; Levine & Kawashima-Ginsberg 2015). Accordingly, promoting positive civic identity development requires attention to both encouragement of authentic participation in civic roles themselves and strategies for helping individuals connect the identity elements connected to their civic role with knowledge, skills, values and aspirations associated with other identities.

The Relationship Between Ethnic and Racial Identity Formation, Hard Histories, and Civic Identity

Many sources of personal identity and group identity are relevant to the work of integrating the various features of identity into a civic identity, anchored in the civic role. These sources can include personality, religion, and cultural worldview. They can also include demographic or elective dimensions of identity: gender and sexuality, race and ethnicity, language community, profession, and so on. In the context of the U.S., ethnic and racial identity formation requires special attention because the prominence of race and ethnicity in American history and political life ensures that fulfillment of the civic role will require interacting with these conceptual categories. Civic participants need to understand their own relationships to ethnic and racial categories in order to have a

firm ground for their own choice-making and participation. How they perform their civic role will impact the operations of race and ethnicity in our society and in so doing will interact with those aspects of a learner's identity that are connected to race and ethnicity. In order for those interactions to support healthy growth of agency and self-understanding, learners need to find ways to bring to the surface those aspects of their racial and ethnic identity that are impacted by participation in the civic role, and they need to be able to achieve alignment.

Students often begin to engage with their civic roles by processing the news, and the news inevitably brings in questions of race and racism. As Adrienne Stang puts it:

Beginning in middle school, and often sooner, students come to the classroom with questions about what they are seeing. Many of them arrive with powerful emotions. They may be angry, scared, shocked or simply curious. Some may express feelings of shame or guilt; others may respond with denial. To understand the violence that they see on social media, they need to explore the history of race and racism. Part of this investigation requires that they learn about civic agents like [John] Lewis, who fought against institutional racism.

(Stang forthcoming)

Learners need an opportunity to develop understanding about their own racial and ethnic identity, about what it means to them in their own meaning-making, about how the meanings of ethnic and racial identities have changed over time. Importantly, students from different racial and ethnic backgrounds typically experience very different developmental trajectories (see Figure 2.1). As Beverly Tatum (2017) has argued, drawing on Janet Helms's (1990) work on racial identity development, the trajectories are necessarily different because students of color often wake up to the presence of race in our world because they experience a racist encounter. Anger, confusion, and alienation can result. In contrast, white students' do not themselves experience racism but do come to recognize its existence and the privilege of whiteness. Feelings of guilt and shame can result. Both students can also encounter racism, or discover privilege, by studying history. Teachers have the job of co-processing these moments of discovery with adolescent learners in ways that can help those learners re-integrate their psyches, and achieve a healthy connection with others of all races. The goal is for learners from both categories to internalize a positive identity self-conception, able and willing to work productively in multi-racial environments.

Racial-Ethnic Identity Development at School

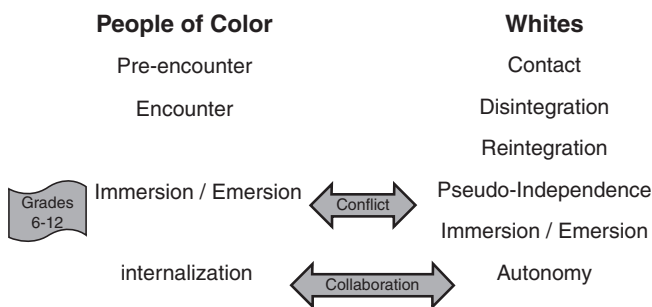


Figure 2.1 Racial-ethnic identity development trajectories for People of Color and Whites, as described by Helms (1990) and Tatum (1997).

In addition, issues of ethnic and racial identity interact with potential civic roles. Consider the different reactions to a Bill of Rights activity in a suburban classroom with a predominantly white population and an urban population with primarily students of color. The students in the first classroom gravitated in their interest to the First Amendment, and the themes of free expression. The students in the second classroom gravitated in their interest to the Fourth Amendment, and its treatment of rights in relation to search and seizure. In the context of the U.S., where the operations of our legal system unfold very differently for urban and suburban communities, communities of color and white communities, the salient features of our institutions will differ for different communities (Lerman & Weaver 2014). The civic role of the students in the urban classroom includes the experience of being over-policed. The civic role of the students in the suburban classroom does not include that experience. Students need to understand why they see and experience civic roles as they do, and part of the answer to that question lies in demographic features of identity. This example also underscores how much variation there will be for students, not only in what aspects of thick identity they bring to the formation of their civic identity, but also in which aspects of the civic role are most salient to them, as they consider forming their own civic identity and performing a civic role. The point of contact between ethnic and racial identities and understandings of potential civic roles is particularly fraught for young learners, and this demands of teachers that they bring great intentionality and care to their support of identity exploration and formation.

Integrating elements of racial and ethnic identity with identity elements connected to the civic role is of paramount importance. The need to achieve this integration further underscores how the journey to an authentic, integrated civic identity will be different for different students. Understanding that the developmental trajectory is itself diverse is fundamentally important for being able to support all learners in their civic development.

Core Attitudes and Dispositions of Civic Identity: Efficacy, Equitability, and Self-Protection

Personal development, the impacts of socio-cultural context, and the impacts of racial and ethnic identity in particular ensure that every learner will have a different path toward the development of a civic identity and that that identity will differ from learner to learner. Nonetheless, it is also important to identify the elements of identity connected to the civic role that all learners should be seeking to integrate with other aspects of their identity.

Shared Identity Elements Connected to Civic Role

We focus on three civic attitudes and dispositions: civic efficacy, equitability, and self-protection. Scholarship on civic development has, of course, considered a much wider array of attitudes and dispositions, including civic duty (Zaff et al. 2010), critical consciousness (Diemer et al. 2017), civic purpose (Malin et al. 2015), and nationalism (Hart et al. 2011), to name a few. These factors are clearly linked to how individuals understand themselves in relation to their communities, and there is good evidence that variation in each accounts for differences in civic behavior. In these ways, they contribute to individuals' civic identities.

Our goal, however, is to identify only the “thin” identity elements connected to the civic role as things that might be taught to everyone. The dispositional sets that scholars have historically focused on have often been broader. This reflects the fact that scholars often focus on painting a single, homogenized picture of civic identity that should be cultivated for all students, and they often implicitly import thicker conceptions into that picture. Yet the broad goals of civic education should be negotiated so that they do not inherently favor or discourage different political orientations, insofar as those political orientations are not fundamentally anti-democratic (e.g., totalitarian, theocratic). The attitudes and dispositions universally fostered by civic education should be as

relevant and meaningful to a democratic socialist as they are to a libertarian, to an activist concerned with LGBTQ+ rights as to one seeking to ensure hunters' access to firearms.

Achieving ideological neutrality in the conceptualization of core civic attitudes and dispositions does not require that educators avoid controversial topics in the classroom or dissuade students from exploring different political philosophies. Instead, it requires that we focus on identifying as necessary only the limited set of dispositions actually needed to enable learners to function effectively as *members of a self-governing community committed to shared decision-making*. Attitudes and dispositions for efficacy, equitability, and self-protection are critical to navigating the diverse values and goals in increasingly complex democracies (Allen 2015). They are critical to helping people learn how to navigate conversations on critical issues. And they can be best developed through practicing difficult discussions and engaging thoughtfully with different perspectives. The point is to help young people feel competent to participate in civic life and do so with integrity and without seeking to dominate or exclude others. With this in mind, we define and argue for civic efficacy, equitability, and self-protection as the core dispositional elements of civic identity.

Civic Efficacy

Civic efficacy refers to a sense of being able to participate in civic life effectively, and it is therefore a direct indicator of the extent to which an individual feels they have agency within the civic community. Beyond navigating the institutions and processes of official government, efficacy in a democracy requires that one have the confidence and ability necessary to engage with others and persuade them to join a collective effort (Allen 2004). This view of civic efficacy is similar to that underlying a number of large-scale studies of civics education, including a state-wide study in California (Kahne 2005), and the 2009 International Civic and Citizenship Education Study (ICCS; Schulz et al. 2010). From a sociocultural learning theory perspective, feelings of efficacy, or the capacity for taking action within a domain, both reflect and motivate sustained participation (Takahashi 2011), and there is substantial evidence of a reciprocal relationship of civic efficacy and civic participation (Bandura 1993; Cohen & Chaffee 2013; Gastil & Xenos 2010; Schulz et al. 2010).

Researchers have also distinguished this form of efficacy from belief in the responsiveness and effectiveness of the government, or external efficacy. Compared to external efficacy, internal efficacy is more strongly related to civic participation (Gastil & Xenos 2010), and, in some cases, high levels of internal efficacy paired with relatively low levels of external efficacy may be most likely to prompt action, particularly among members of historically marginalized groups (Kahne & Westheimer 2006).

Equitability

Concern for equality is a core value of democratic societies, and its development has received substantial attention from researchers interested in civic education. Theoretical and operational definitions of equality vary in important ways. They range from conventional concerns for basic fairness in the distribution of opportunities and services (e.g., trust in the American promise; Flanagan et al. 2007) to critical identification and confrontation of systemic injustices (e.g., justice-oriented citizenship; Westheimer & Kahne 2004). In the context of civic education, definitions of equitability need to be compatible with different political beliefs and goals. One way of achieving this is to think of equitability in terms of how civic actors can manage competing interests as they work towards a more equitable democracy.

Creating an inclusive democratic society capable of maximizing the benefits of diversity and confronting injustices will require new or augmented modes of civic behavior (Allen 2016). To address these challenges, Allen (2004) argues that members of democratic communities should seek to engage in political friendship. In democracies, people will inevitably find themselves on the winning and losing

sides of different debates and deliberations. Rather than see the failure to achieve consistent consensus as a flaw, Allen (2004) argues that it should be accepted and dealt with openly. This requires acknowledging the sacrifices of others and helping ensure that their sacrifices will be reciprocated.

The long-term reciprocity described by Allen (2004) is probably familiar to anyone who has developed and maintained friendships, which are often typified by the pursuit of rough parity in what members of the relationship give to and take from each other (Fiske & Haslam 1996; Rai & Fiske 2011). The challenge is not to educate people so that they understand or value reciprocity – they already do – but to help them apply their capacities for friendship to the civic sphere. This means learning to share power when making decisions and to distribute benefits and burdens according to agreed upon standards of fairness. How power is shared, whether through joint decision-making or turn-taking, and how benefits and burdens are allocated, whether to establish equality of opportunity or outcome, will remain important questions to resolve, but political friendship provides a framework for equitably resolving these questions.

It is important to clarify that we do not propose that achieving political friendship is an easy task: Over the course of the history of the U.S. the sacrifices of entire groups have been systematically ignored or devalued just as benefits flowing from those sacrifices have accrued to dominant members of society. Accordingly, for political friendship to provide a basis for equitability, we must be clear-eyed about our difficult histories and their persistent impacts. This is true for both beneficiaries and victims of historical or current inequities, but the burdens and challenges of this work will vary for these groups.

Self-Protection

Increasingly, and especially among young people, civic engagement is pursued online, and recent work examining youth online civic engagement has highlighted the need to develop motivation for responsible and self-protecting participation that accounts for risks including misinformation and harassment (Allen & Light 2015; Choi et al. 2017; James et al. 2010; Kahne & Bowyer 2017; Kim & Choi 2018; Levine & Kawashima-Ginsberg 2017). Online forums for discourse can quickly become toxic (Jones et al. 2013), and seemingly private behavior or speech can easily become part of a lasting and very public digital record (Shresthova 2016). Discourse surrounding civic issues online often includes misinformation, which can lead to diminished trust and increase the likelihood of radicalization (Hodgin & Kahne 2018), and sharing it can threaten one's credibility.

These threats to young civic actors are not unique to online environments, of course, and the ethical commitments that attenuate them are equally relevant offline. Respectful online behavior is associated with lower likelihood of perpetrating or becoming the victim of online harassment (Jones & Mitchell 2016), and reflecting on one's own biases and the quality of the information one consumes online can reduce vulnerability to fake news and propaganda (Hodgi & Kahne 2018; Vraga et al. 2015). Self-protective commitments to interpersonal respect and intellectual integrity, though especially vital in the online environment, help set ethical guidelines relevant to all civic engagement.

Conclusion

Educating for an inclusive, just, and resilient American democracy in an increasingly diverse and complex society requires that we disentangle a “thin” civic role from the “thick” identities that give it direction and authenticity. In this chapter, we link political philosophy and psychology to clarify the developmental tasks of emerging civic actors and to do so in ways that attenuate the risk of ideological bias in civic education. This account highlights the importance of helping young people understand the “thick” identities they and others bring with them into civic life, while emphasizing the need to connect those “thick” identities to a “thin” concept of the civic role that represents the knowledge, skills, and attitudes and dispositions needed to sustain constitutional democracy and a

community of self-governing equals engaged in shared decision-making. Focusing on the attitudes and dispositions central to the civic role, we describe how efficacy, equitability, and self-protection support sustained, ethical, and productive civic engagement without tilting the scales in favor of conservative or liberal conceptions of an ideal democratic society.

Civic knowledge and skills, too, are important, and they should be clearly defined in future work that attends to how they can best support the authentic integration of “thick” identities with the “thin” civic role for young people. Grounding this work in a commitment to helping learners become efficacious, equitable, and self-protecting civic actors directs attention to what knowledge and skills young people will need to operate their democracy effectively and ethically. Educators, in this view, need to be equipped to support students as they develop their “thin” civic role identities, and educators must be accorded the flexibility needed to accommodate and respond productively to the “thick” identities their students bring into the classroom. Students should graduate with a clear grasp of key civic knowledge, skills, and, especially, attitudes and dispositions that ensure they pursue their civic goals in ways that are effective, equitable, and self-protecting. At the same time, their motives, aspirations, and strategies in civic life should authentically reflect their own identities and values. This will strengthen the bonds of reciprocal trust needed to realize the benefits of diverse experiences and values that constitute one of democracy’s greatest promises.

(Related Chapters: 1, 3, 14, 21, 22, 26, 27, 31.)

Notes

- 1 The definition of this role is expansively treated as a concept of moral membership in the community of a constitutional democracy in Ronald Dworkin, “The Moral Reading and the Majoritarian Premise”: “A political community cannot count anyone as a moral member unless it gives that person a part in any collective decision, a stake in it, and independence from it” (Dworkin 2017: 24). See *Law’s Empire* (Dworkin 1986), and “Equality, Democracy, and Constitution: We the People in Court,” (Dworkin 1990).
- 2 These three dispositions align with the three conditions of moral membership in the community of a constitutional democracy outlined by Ronald Dworkin (2017). See note 1.
- 3 The original contrast between “thick” and “thin” normative views derives from the work of Clifford Geertz (1973) to develop a methodology for the “thick” description of culture. This analytical vocabulary was then extended to moral and political philosophy by Geertz’ colleague at the Institute for Advanced Study, Michael Walzer (1994), in his book *Thick and Thin: Moral Argument at Home and Abroad*.

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