

# Youth Civic Development & Education

*A conference consensus report*

WRITTEN BY

Heather Malin, Parissa J. Ballard, Maryam Lucia Attai, Anne Colby, and William Damon

CONSENSUS PANEL PARTICIPANTS

James A. Banks, William Damon, Carole L. Hahn, Diana Hess,  
Frederick M. Hess, Eric Liu, Rachel Moran, Marcelo Suárez-Orozco

Center on Adolescence, Stanford University  
Center for Multicultural Education, University of Washington, Seattle

## Stanford Center on Adolescence

William Damon, *Director*

Graduate School of Education

Stanford University

505 Lasuen Mall

Stanford, CA 94305

Phone: 650-725-8205

Email: [stanfordcoa@stanford.edu](mailto:stanfordcoa@stanford.edu)

Website: <http://coa.stanford.edu>

## Center for Multicultural Education

James A. Banks, *Director*

College of Education

University of Washington, Seattle

Box 353600, 110 Miller Hall

Seattle, WA 98195-3600

Phone: 206-543-3386

Email: [centerme@uw.edu](mailto:centerme@uw.edu)

Website: <http://education.uw.edu/cme/>

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# Background

On February 7, 2013, the Stanford Center on Adolescence hosted a campus-wide conference on the current state of youth civic development and education in the United States. Seven distinguished speakers, who have been leaders in the scholarship, practice, and policy of civic education, presented their views on what is needed to promote civic development among today's youth.

The seven speakers, in order of appearance on the conference program, were: **Frederick M. Hess**, Director of Education Policy Studies at the American Enterprise Institute; **Eric Liu**, civic entrepreneur and author; **Carole L. Hahn**, Charles Howard Candler Professor of Educational Studies at Emory University; **Diana Hess**, Senior Vice President of the Spencer Foundation and Professor of Curriculum and Instruction at the University of Wisconsin, Madison; **James A. Banks**, Kerry and Linda Killinger Endowed Chair in Diversity Studies and Founding Director of the Center for Multicultural Education at the University of Washington, Seattle; **Rachel Moran**, Dean and Michael J. Connell Distinguished Professor of Law at the UCLA School of Law; and **Marcelo Suárez-Orozco**, Dean and Distinguished Professor of Education at UCLA School of Education and Information Studies. In addition, **William Damon**, Professor of Education and

Director of the Stanford University Center on Adolescence, made introductory remarks and moderated the day's discussions.

Each of the seven talks, along with audience responses, discussions, and other conference proceedings, are available for view on the Center on Adolescence website, at <http://coa.stanford.edu/conferences>. The talks were lively and informative. Taken together, they provide a window onto leading thinking in civic education; individually, they reflect each speaker's own particular work and point of view. All talks were rich in ideas, analyses of present-day problems, and recommendations for possible solutions.

The speakers had a diversity of perspectives and areas of expertise, and this diversity was reflected in the extensive variety of matters discussed during the conference. This report does not attempt to capture the diverse wealth of insights and opinions expressed in the seven speakers' individual conference talks: for such a full account, we point the reader to the conference proceedings on the Stanford Center on Adolescence website. Rather, the purpose of the report is to highlight some points of agreement that emerged from the talks and discussions (including a post-conference day of additional discussions among speakers and Center on Adolescence staff). We believe that suggestions shared by this distinguished panel will have value for the broader community of civic educators, and that they contain important messages for all citizens concerned with the future of today's youth and tomorrow's democracy.

The need for  
greater attention  
and more effective  
approaches to  
civic education  
in our schools



Members of the panel shared the view that it is essential for schools to play a role in sustaining and promoting our democratic system by educating students in the values, skills, and knowledge necessary for full participatory citizenship. This view is by no means new in U.S. education, although it has become less commonly voiced in recent years. Historically, public schooling in the United States took on civic education as one of its primary mandates. But in the present environment, schools do not devote sufficient time and effort to civic education; nor is this mandate high on the priority lists of influential policy makers. The civic goal of education is being left unfulfilled and even ignored by many of our schools.

One source of this problem is the increasing emphasis on basic skills and high-stakes testing. This often single-minded emphasis has squeezed out the time and resources needed for the study of citizenship and related subjects. Schools often lack access to high-quality materials aimed at promoting civic education, and they receive little recognition for promoting it effectively. Lacking incentives for making citizenship a priority in the classroom, public schools today have distanced themselves from their once central civic mandate.

The demographic make-up of the United States is changing, which increases the need to revitalize civic education in our schools. In recent years, the high rate of immigration to the United States from Asia, Latin America, and the Caribbean has resulted in unprecedented diversity in the nation. A common grounding in the history, values, and workings of the American constitutional tradition is essential to ensure access and dedication to citizenship for all students in our increasingly diverse society.

Despite the clear urgency of this mission, civic education as practiced in schools throughout the United States is not preparing students for effective participation in civic life. Few young people are sufficiently motivated to become engaged in civic and political activity. Students are not finding inspiration in civic values as taught in schools today, nor are they gaining a sense that they are able to engage effectively in civic and political domains. Not surprisingly, sectors of the population from low-income and marginalized communities have been most affected by what has been called the “civic engagement gap.” But in fact the problem extends to every sector of the contemporary youth population. It is difficult to find significant numbers of young people from any sector who have enough interest in civic affairs to inspire any aspirations to present or future civic leadership. Such a lack of civic preparation and motivation among the young places the future of our democracy in great peril.

*skills*

# The shape of civic education



*values*

*knowledge*





Civic development has three dimensions that are important to cultivate in order to educate young people for citizenship. The first dimension—knowledge—comprises the facts and ideas of democracy, citizenship, the U.S. government, and global concerns that students need to know to be informed participants in civic life. The second dimension—skills—includes the ability to navigate the rules and processes of citizenship and governance in our society. The third dimension—values—includes the democratic ideals and commitment to those ideals that motivate civic commitment.

While this three-dimensional model has been widely endorsed by civic educators, the evidence shows that the actual practice of civic education, as experienced by most students in the United States, is at odds with this view. Schools today limit their efforts almost exclusively to teaching civic knowledge, especially the kinds of knowledge that can easily be measured by standardized achievement tests. Discussions of democratic ideals and values are often neglected due to possible partisanship and politicization that arise when civic values are brought to school: some educators steer clear of such flashpoints, rather than allowing controversy to be explored in the classroom as a pedagogical method. For similar reasons, the civic skills that young people have a chance to learn at school are ones that usually avoid political controversy. Volunteering, fundraising, and service learning offer opportunities for students to learn about contributing to their community, but they do not fully engage the

skills needed to address problems of governance. By neglecting the values and skills dimensions of civic participation, civic education fails to prepare young people for full citizenship and leaves them unprepared to counteract an increasingly polarized political discourse. Schools should take a broad view of citizenship education and prepare their students to acquire constructive civic skills and values as well as necessary civic knowledge.

In addition, the meaning of citizenship contains several distinct elements: it can be understood as a legal status, as a requirement to take responsible action such as following the law, as a set of democratic rights of access, and as a responsibility to participate actively in civic affairs. In our currently dominant understanding of citizenship, we sometimes emphasize the rights of citizens and neglect the responsibilities that such rights imply. An initial mission of educators should be to convey to students both the rights and responsibilities of citizens in a democracy, thereby cultivating a commitment to contribute to the common good through active civic participation.

Moreover, the role of the United States in the world is evolving. Economics, technology, and politics are all being played out on an increasingly globalized stage. There is both a practical and a moral call for U.S. students to understand international issues related to citizenship. Schools should help students develop a global consciousness, making them aware of the interdependence of all people across the world.

The substance  
of civic education:  
Key concepts  
and values



3

Curricula for civic education should be centered on fundamental concepts that shape American democracy and civic life. Some of these key concepts are: *core values of the U.S. civic tradition, such as liberty, equality, opportunity, justice, independence, interdependence, and E pluribus unum; awareness of global civic issues; and power* (who has it, how do you get it, and what it means in a self-governing society). These three key concepts are elaborated in this section.

**Understanding and Valuing Core Constitutional Concepts.** The ideas that constitute the foundation of American democracy should also form the foundation of the civics curriculum. Liberty, equality, diverse views and values, responsibility, the common good, individual rights, and justice are not just concepts that young people need to understand, but also values that they need to identify with and be inspired by if they are to fully participate in and reap the benefits of belonging to a democratic society. Democracy can be sustained only if individual citizens understand and embrace these values, and uphold them through civic activity.

Understanding and embracing these fundamental values is not simply a matter of learning what they mean. They are complex, not only in isolation, but in relation to each other, and individuals need to develop a relationship with them that respects this complexity. In political discourse, advocates of the same value are often on opposite sides of an issue (advocating, e.g., freedom in the form of local control for school boards

versus academic freedom for teachers or freedom of speech for students). Tensions like this are at the heart of democratic decision-making. In fact, in many ways, the core democratic values are inextricably linked. This means that liberty and equality—generally considered the most powerful of the democratic values—cannot be fully understood apart from each other, but only in the relations and interactions—and at times the tensions—that exist between them. A nation cannot have authentic liberty, for example, if conditions of severe inequality render freedom an illusion for some members of the democratic community. Nor can we understand the areas in which equality is essential unless we link those elements of meaningful access and opportunity to the freedoms we ultimately must exercise in order to flourish throughout our lifetimes. Similarly, some citizens feel a loss of liberty when the government increases regulations of their personal and economic activities in pursuit of particular visions of equality. The values of liberty and equality, in turn, are connected to a core notion of human dignity.

Too often, educators avoid these subjective tensions, either for ideological reasons, or to maintain a classroom climate free of controversy. Moreover, schools discourage political disagreement in the classroom by treating as offensive opinions that depart from the community's dominant views, repressing the opportunity for students to explore diverse viewpoints and unique perspectives. Schools therefore need to be open to expression of diverse opinions and en-

courage engagement around disagreement rather than merely assuming that certain opinions are off-limits within the context of classroom discourse. The goal should be to provide an environment in which all students can feel ideologically safe, that is, an environment in which all students can discuss and argue on behalf of the values they feel passionately about. A safe environment should champion respect for ideological differences rather than tolerating the demonization of those who express personal beliefs that are unpopular within the school community and beyond. In a respectful, open-minded environment, vigorous discussions about the fundamental concepts of democracy can exemplify a fully participatory approach in which students can develop civic character and practice civic virtues that are imperative for healthy and vibrant democratic conversations.

**The U.S. Democratic Tradition and Its Global Context.** Teaching for participatory citizenship requires a recognition that U.S. citizens engage in civic action within their own nation's democratic structures and traditions. This requires an intimate knowledge of the particular constitutional system of the United States. The first and foremost responsibility of civic education is to provide students with an understanding of their nation's own constitutional principles, laws, doctrines, history, and traditions.

But U.S. citizens also must operate in a global context that will affect virtually every part of their lives as humans and civic actors. Now more than ever, the U.S. economy is dramati-

cally affected by economic activities taking place elsewhere in the world. The global nature of the 21st-century workforce has radically altered the landscape of opportunities in the United States, with serious implications for employment, education, cultural values, and distribution of wealth in this country. Likewise, regional political tensions well beyond our borders spill over not only into foreign policy issues that are highly consequential for the United States, but also into domestic policy issues such as homeland security and its relationship with civil liberties. There is now a growing awareness that the environmental health of any one region is inseparable from that of the world as a whole. Technological changes have made international communication and influence much faster and more potent than ever before. Civic issues ranging from economic policy to environmental regulation, immigration, workforce participation, and civil liberties must be taught against the backdrop of these global realities.

Increasing the priority given to educating for global understanding and concern should go hand in hand with strengthening education for U.S. citizenship and civic engagement. Instead of standing in opposition to each other, the two goals represent complementary aspects of a single, larger picture. A complete civic education is one that produces graduates who understand the political systems of the United States, who feel a commitment to its national ideals, but who also respect and feel connected to people living in other societies around the world.

**Power.** Power has been recognized throughout the ages as a—some would say the—central dimension of civic and political life. To understand civic life and history in the United States, as elsewhere, is to understand the nature and deployment of both individual and collective power. Yet this critical element in the dynamics of every society has been ignored in the most prevalent variants of civic education. This is a serious omission because civic and political competence require understanding how political power works, who has it, and how it can be attained. This is not achieved when the emphasis of civic engagement is limited to volunteer work and apolitical community service.

A better understanding of political power not only increases the sophistication of civic understanding and knowledge and the potential for effective civic action, it can also generate energy and inspiration. Treating political power as a central theme of civic education involves helping young people see how they can gain greater control and influence over the many issues that affect them and the people they care about. The value of self-determination is one that speaks to the heart of adolescent concerns while also being foundational to democracy. A flourishing democracy is first and foremost a system of self-governance and, as such, it requires citizens to claim the legitimate power that is available to them and use it to further their considered vision of a better society.

One reason that the understanding and skillful use of power is not often treated as a key goal of civic education is that, in many quarters, power has a bad name. Political reality, now as ever, includes abuses of power. Teaching students how to claim and deploy power risks exacerbating these problems as more dominant individuals attempt to exert control over those who prefer a more collaborative approach to civic life. This and other concerns about abuses of power are legitimate and important. When power is not firmly grounded in ethical principles, it becomes a notoriously dangerous force. Unaccompanied by attention to checks and balances, teaching about the centrality of power to political life may convey a distorted view of our democratic tradition. In order to mitigate these risks, the teaching of civic power must be coupled with efforts to foster civic character. This includes teaching about humility and responsibility in the use of power and helping students understand and wrestle with democratic and institutional constraints on power. Political power will continue to operate whether educators acknowledge it or not. It is precisely because of widespread imbalances and abuses of power that educators need to be explicit in teaching what power is, how it works, and how to use it with both skill and ethical integrity.

Civic virtues and  
character as the  
heart of constructive  
participation

VOTE

4

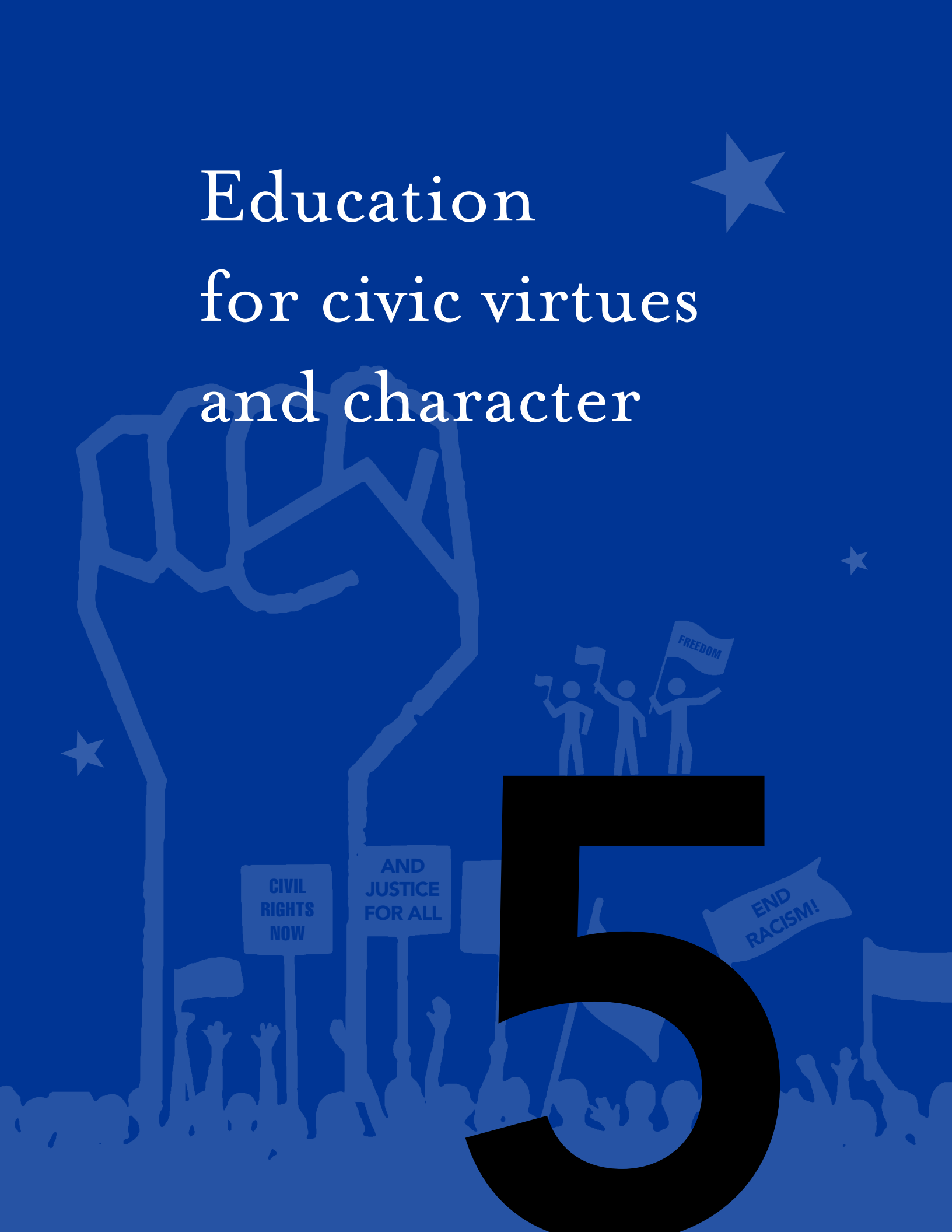
Revitalizing civic education must include the goal of preparing young people to participate constructively in the political process, both as a way of pursuing their own personal interests and as a way of seeking to improve their communities, their nation, and the world. When realized, this goal enables communities to sustain democracy and provides each citizen with the chance to flourish by making meaningful contributions to society. Fulfilling this goal requires more than conveying the facts of national history and government functions. It requires that schools cultivate civic character by encouraging active commitment to democratic values. Committed citizenship comes from a deeply felt attachment to democratic values, from which the individual can find inspiration to take action and the motivation to make personal sacrifices when necessary.

Democracy in practice is emotionally exhilarating and often conflict-ridden. Civic education should reflect this. Civic character and profound attachment to democratic values are not developed by teaching young people neutral historical facts and apolitical civic skills. Instead, the hallmarks of democracy—liberty, tolerance of diverse perspectives, inclusiveness, collaborative and cooperative problem solving, and willingness to make personal sacrifice for the good of the whole—can become integral to young people’s identities only when they engage in the authentic practices of civic life. Authentic engagement means experiencing the challenges of democracy

and learning to address them constructively. To that end, schools should strive to place the most essential and challenging concepts of American democracy at the heart of the civics curriculum, embracing their inherent controversies and tensions, while emphasizing the strengths shown by the U.S. throughout its history.

As current and future citizens, students need to learn the values that sustain American democracy, not without questioning those values, but rather by questioning them, arguing about them, and experiencing them. Civic virtues and the character they constitute are developed by practicing civic skills, gaining authentic experience by applying them, and wrestling with the concepts and values at the heart of American democracy. Civic character emerges when a person is challenged and pressed to take a stance in relation to democratic values, demonstrating his or her commitment through personal sacrifice. In so doing, a young person develops an attachment to these values and finds in them motivation for meaningful civic participation. This brings us to the question of how to educate for civic virtues and character.

# Education for civic virtues and character





In order to cultivate civic virtues, civic education must address a number of issues that are currently overlooked or avoided in most schools. As we have discussed above, schools should promote, in the classroom and throughout the school, pro-social virtues such as *tolerance, open-mindedness, truthfulness, responsibility, diligence, self-control, empathy, and cooperation*, all of which are needed for constructive resolutions of political debates through civil communication and deliberative discourse. These virtues should be integrated with the teaching of civic skills by introducing controversial political issues for discussion in the classroom. Schools should also promote the values needed to sustain the common good, such as civic duty and willingness to sacrifice. This section elaborates these three approaches to cultivating civic virtues: teaching the controversies, encouraging attachment to one's society and to democracy, and promoting an ethic of sacrifice.

**Teaching the Controversies.** Civic life in a democracy is rife with political controversy. The trend in our society is for individuals to avoid controversial encounters by affiliating and interacting primarily with those who share their political perspectives. This is an unhealthy direction for our democracy, causing a decline in tolerance and civility, decreasing the capacity of citizens to hold reasoned debate on contentious political issues, and clearing the path for extreme political ideas to go unchecked. If we want democracy in the United States to con-

tinue to flourish, our young people need to be introduced to the realities of partisanship and political controversy. They need exposure to the diversity of perspectives that make up our political landscape, and they need to be taught how to engage respectfully and effectively with opinions that differ from their own. Classrooms offer an important forum for exposing young people to the controversies that they are unlikely to encounter at home and in their increasingly homogeneous neighborhoods.

In the classroom, young people can learn about the issues as well as be guided by a skilled teacher in discussing them. Constructive participation requires the ability to work with people one disagrees with in a respectful way and in a spirit of progress toward mutually beneficial outcomes. This involves skills of civil discussion and compromise, and also the ability to advocate and deliberate effectively and tenaciously about important issues. Deliberation requires that individuals assert positions they feel strongly about through reason and persuasion. By learning how to deliberate about controversial political issues, students also learn how to hear the opinions of others with an open mind, weigh diverse opinions and ideas, wrestle with a clash of principles that may never be resolved, and ultimately find a way forward. Schools should prepare students for constructive civic life by embracing political controversies and disagreements in the classroom and using them as a teaching tool.

As a starting point for embracing political controversy in the classroom, schools can reflect on their own unexamined assumptions: Is there an ideological slant in how we convey values to students? Does our practice as a learning community align with the values we propose to teach? Do all students feel safe in expressing their political opinions? Are we, as a school community, honest about what opinions we do and don't allow to be expressed? The people who make up a school community bring their own biases, which can fall anywhere on the political spectrum, and these biases influence the civic learning that takes place, whether consciously or not. A school that is reflective about its own political and partisan tendencies can then be open to genuine political disagreement and debate in the classroom. Such openness to disagreement enables students to share their own contested perspectives and learn how to engage in reasoned and respectful debate even when they feel passionate about an issue. This is vital to a vision of civic education that aims to cultivate civic virtues such as tolerance, open-mindedness, and compromise.

#### **A Felt Attachment to Nation and Democracy.**

Historically, public schools in the United States promoted national identity and patriotic sentiments as a matter of course. In a nation that has always been largely composed of immigrants, public schools have often taken on the role of promoting national cohesion by fostering attachment to the nation among diverse populations

of students. Most public schools in the United States still promote an awareness of national identity by celebrating national holidays, singing the national anthem at sports events, and presenting a narrative of U.S. historical events in required coursework.

But the concept of patriotism itself has become contested in U.S. schools for a number of reasons. First, patriotism is often understood in very different ways. Some lean towards a patriotism that advocates “my country, right or wrong,” while others favor a more discerning patriotism; this reflects a longstanding distinction between loving one's country unconditionally versus loving democracy by, at times, publicly criticizing the country's shortfalls. Some educators worry about indoctrinating students with chauvinistic or jingoistic forms of patriotism. Some worry that emphasizing the positive aspects of the United States through patriotic sentiments could lead to a complacency with the status quo and diminish efforts to further advance freedom and justice in our society. Some educators reject patriotism entirely, arguing that in the 21st century students' affiliation should be to global citizenship and worldwide human rights. Others, in contrast, are concerned that students who do not acquire a sense of patriotism will not develop the motivation to become dedicated citizens on either a national or global level.

Most educators, despite their differences, agree that nurturing a positive attachment to one's society is essential for preparing young people for constructive political and civic participation. But today there is need for a renewed vision of that attachment and its place in civic education. This renewed vision should address the controversies of patriotism noted above; it should celebrate a diverse society; it should revive the once widely held national ethos of *E pluribus unum*; and it should provide educators with a concept that can engender a shared attachment to the democratic ideals of the United States among students who are having experiences that fall short of the ideals set forth in the founding documents. This means a broad understanding of the concept of patriotism that inspires pride in the positive aspects of the United States, develops a critical stance about prior injustices, reflects the experiences that today's students are having in society, and allows citizens to debate and change aspects of their government and society that are not living up to the democratic ideals the nation represents.

In order to develop a positive attachment to our society, students need exposure to the values and ideals that constitute our national creed as well as to the sacrifices of many Americans past and present in service of these values and ideals. Schools should present the concept of patriotism in ways that allow all students to recognize themselves when the discussion turns to the values and convictions that make one patriotic,

and to feel a sense that they can truly endorse those values and recognize them as pertinent to their lives. Students must come to understand patriotism as a deeply felt attachment to what we share, as citizens of the United States, in all of our diversity, and a patriot as someone who stands up to uphold and sustain the ideals of liberty and equality that the United States espouses.

Rather than discussing patriotism as merely a narrow, chauvinistic attitude towards a particular country or homeland, it would be helpful for civic educators to discuss patriotism as a felt attachment to something larger than the self—to great ideas and to a community built around those ideas—that supports an individual's capacity for civic commitment, sustained participation, and willingness to sacrifice for the common good. Understood this way, patriotism has three parts that educators should address: 1) felt attachment to society and to the ideals that the United States has traditionally espoused; 2) willingness to criticize and change aspects of the country that do not live up to those values; and 3) commitment to make personal sacrifices, when necessary, for those ideals and for the common good. The first part has been widely recognized as an educational goal in U.S. schools for much of our history, and it continues to be valued today, even among educators who disagree with one another in other respects. The second part is more challenging to bring about, because it means both appreciating our distinc-

tive national creed and pushing the country to live up to that creed: it is this effort to close the gap between creed and actual practice that is the essence of reflective patriotism. The third part presents perhaps the greatest challenge. Patriotism requires an ethic of sacrifice and duty, and the capacity to act on that ethic. It requires sacrifice in the form of civic activity that involves giving something back for the benefit of the whole society.

**Sacrifice for the Common Good.** Democracy requires that citizens be willing to make personal sacrifices for the common good. Yet, in this era of self-absorption and single-minded striving for personal success, the value of sacrifice is rarely addressed with young people. Unlike cohorts of Americans who lived through prior times of national crisis, few young people today have been asked to sacrifice for their nation, or for any cause greater than themselves. There is expectation of government services without consideration of the cost of those services and the need to contribute to the society that offers them. Schools should introduce students to the idea that all citizens must be prepared to make sacrifices for the common good, especially in times of need. Students should be exposed to

the ethic of civic contribution expressed in President John F. Kennedy's inaugural address: "Ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country." In this sense, students must learn both the rights and responsibilities of citizenship. Students need to understand the civic demands of interdependence as well as their own rights to independence. They should learn what is truly meant by sacrifice for the common or greater good—that sacrifice can be expressed in many ways and at many different depths. It need not be a profound or ultimate sacrifice, but must reflect a commitment to interdependence and improving things for the many and not just the self. Furthermore, students ought to reflect on this principle in terms of a shared humanity beyond the boundaries of the nation, and from the perspective of future generations, considering the worldwide and intergenerational implications of the choices they will make.





# Enhancing civic pedagogy



# 6

The pedagogy employed for civic learning should embrace a concept-based approach that meaningfully incorporates opportunities for students to develop their knowledge through the study of primary documents, case studies of civic leaders, systems and structures, and the problems that result from diversity and racial and income inequality in the United States, within a curriculum based on knowledge, values, and democratic skills. Teachers should be encouraged to creatively incorporate interactive, participatory, controversial, challenging, relevant, inclusive, and inspiring assignments and activities, so that students are not simply learning history by memorizing dates and historical facts, but rather developing civic understanding.

Although textbooks have for years been used as the primary source for American history lessons, deep immersion in core documents such as the Declaration of Independence, the Emancipation Proclamation, the Seneca Falls Declaration, King's Letter from the Birmingham Jail, and cases such as *Brown v. Board of Education* can give students a livelier sense of how this nation has come to be. Contemporary documents, such as significant speeches by leading political figures and statespersons, should also be used. In other disciplines, it is very much a part of the curricular process for students to examine case studies. Civic educators should employ methods such as studies of local and contemporary leaders, civic youth exemplars, and other public figures whom students are able to relate to in their daily lives. In addition, educators can take advantage of extracurricular programs that engage students in

civic activities. Student-elected councils and governments, as well as clubs such as debate team, Junior State of America (JSA), Gay-Straight Alliance, and Amnesty International can help students connect their extracurricular activities with classroom experiences and further develop a disposition towards active civic participation in the greater society. School sports programs can be an elemental source for emphasizing civic values, and coaches should be encouraged to align their messages with the virtues that teachers are nurturing in the classroom.

Teachers are in the best position to develop curricula and identify materials that will make civic learning meaningful and compelling for their students, but they cannot do so in isolation. New technologies have introduced a number of ways that teachers can collaborate, share ideas that work, and be publicly encouraged to develop innovative curricula. For example, online platforms offer teachers the opportunity to share lesson plans, exchange commentary about lessons, and develop communities for sharing civic education practices. Online forums can also be developed to invite demonstrations of successful civic curricula and instructional strategies, which then can be curated for quality. Technology also provides the opportunity to encourage teachers to develop innovative civic curricula, for example by using an "XPrize" method to reward and publicize teachers for developing innovative and successful approaches to civic education.

Support and  
incentives for a civic  
education agenda





As noted earlier in this report, the high-stakes testing of basic skills is a potent force pushing civic education to the margins of contemporary schooling. Given the role that testing plays in setting (as well as reflecting) the nation's educational agenda, it will be difficult to gain the momentum needed to revitalize civic learning without establishing some accountability for these outcomes. The only way to do that is to broaden the learning outcomes that are regularly assessed to include the basics of civic learning. As important as this is, however, the power of assessment is a two-edged sword. On the one hand, if civic learning is regularly assessed, with real consequences for failing to meet standards, this will surely make it a higher priority for educators. On the other hand, the wrong kind of assessment can distort teaching and learning in this area, potentially reducing it to the outcomes that are easiest to measure—that is, factual knowledge. Complex, authentic, performance-based assessment is very difficult to achieve in this area, as it is in other domains. But the importance of civic learning warrants a serious investment in developing assessments that will work toward representing and evaluating the critical capacities we need in citizens of our democracy.

Important as they are, the incentives provided by assessment and accountability are not by themselves adequate for stimulating and supporting a renewed commitment to civic education. When principals, teachers, and school staff share a vision for preparing students as responsible

and effective civic actors, and a commitment to implementing that vision throughout the school, the results will go well beyond what a standardized test is likely to measure. This commitment needs to come from a real understanding of the importance of this agenda for the students and the country. But, even then, it may be unrealistic to expect that the effort will be self-sustaining without outside support and recognition.

Civic leaders and educators are generating many creative ideas for recognizing and supporting civic learning programs, which are already being implemented to good effect in some schools. One approach that is gaining traction is to recognize schools that have high-quality civic education programs and reward their achievements. For example, the Democracy Schools initiative of Illinois recognizes schools that have demonstrated a commitment to teaching students to become active participants in civic life. In another example, the California courts established an award program to recognize schools that are doing an outstanding job of civic education, and 22 California schools were recognized with these awards in 2013. Awarding professional development to teachers who have shown special commitment to their students' civic learning can also provide valuable support for this agenda. Likewise, educators and policy makers have generated some innovative incentives for recognizing students who exhibit outstanding civic engagement, including college scholarship programs, badges indicating civic commitment that can

be used on college applications, and awards for students who have made important civic contributions to their schools or communities.

An obvious barrier to implementing these strategies is lack of funding and other resources needed to put them in place. With school budgets tight and class sizes growing in many schools, even highly motivated educators find it difficult to develop new programs. In light of ever-tightening financial constraints, private foundations and individual philanthropists have important roles to play in moving this agenda forward. If they make preparation for responsi-

ble citizenship a priority in their funding objectives, philanthropic foundations can encourage the creation of mechanisms for civic learning that are cost-effective as well as educationally powerful. Among other things, this might include the development of technology-based platforms for students' civic learning, the sharing of lesson plans among teachers, the creation of virtual communities of like-minded educators, and other programs for teacher and principal professional development.



# Conclusion

In recent years, educational policy in the United States has focused largely on the issue of academic inequality as measured by graduation rates and proficiency in literacy and numeracy. Basic academic skills are certainly important for success in work and life, and it is vital that we do all we can to help all students master these skills. But young people need more than basic skills alone to gain control of their destinies. High on the list of capacities that young people need is the ability to participate constructively in their civic society. This ability includes cognitive as well as motivational dimensions: students need to know about the civic realities of their society, and they need to develop an inclination to become engaged in active citizenship. If sectors of the student population lack sufficient opportunity to acquire such civic knowledge

and civic purpose, the resulting inequity is every bit as grave as inequalities in academic skills. The future of our democratic society, and the future of all our youth, depends on providing a sound civic education for every student. At the present time, this is clearly not happening. This report calls upon all schools throughout our nation to take greater responsibility for the civic education of their students, and it offers a set of methods to guide this effort in ways that address the needs and interests of our diverse student population in the 21st-century United States.

## The Panelists

**James A. Banks** is the Kerry and Linda Killinger Endowed Chair in Diversity Studies and Founding Director of the Center for Multicultural Education at the University of Washington, Seattle. He is a past president of the American Educational Research Association (AERA) and the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS). He is the author of *Cultural Diversity and Education: Foundations, Curriculum, and Teaching* (6th ed.) and editor of *The Routledge International Companion to Multicultural Education* and the *Encyclopedia of Diversity in Education* (4 volumes). His current work focuses on diversity and citizenship education in multicultural nations.

**William Damon** is Professor of Education and Director of the Center on Adolescence at Stanford University. Damon has written on character development at all ages of life. He is author of *The Path to Purpose: How Young People Find Their Calling in Life*. At present, he is working on projects aimed at promoting purpose, character, good work, and participatory citizenship.

**Carole L. Hahn** is the Charles Howard Candler Professor of Educational Studies at Emory University. She is the author of *Becoming Political: Comparative Perspectives on Citizenship Education*, and an editor of the 2008 edition of *The Sage Handbook of Education for Citizenship and Democracy*. She is a past president of the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) and a recipient of the Jean Dresden Grambs Distinguished Career Award for Research in Social Studies from NCSS.

**Diana Hess** is the Senior Vice President of the Spencer Foundation and Professor of Curriculum and Instruction at the University of Wisconsin, Madison. She researches how secondary students experience and learn from the discussion of controversial political issues in social studies classes. Her first book, *Controversy in the Classroom: The Democratic Power of Discussion*, won the Exemplary Research Award from NCSS in 2009.

**Frederick M. Hess** is the Director of Education Policy Studies at the American Enterprise Institute. An educator, political scientist, and author, Hess has penned several books, including *Cage-Busting Leadership; The Same Thing Over and Over*; and *Common Sense School Reform*. He is also the author of the popular *Education Week* blog “Rick Hess Straight Up.” Hess serves as an executive editor of *Education Next* and as lead faculty member for the Rice Education Entrepreneurship Program.

**Eric Liu** is an author, educator, and civic entrepreneur. He is founder of Citizen University, which promotes and teaches the art of great citizenship through a portfolio of national programs. He teaches civic leadership at the University of Washington and serves on numerous nonprofit and civic boards. His books include the national bestsellers *The Gardens of Democracy* and *The True Patriot*, both co-authored with Nick Hanauer.

**Rachel Moran** is Dean and Michael J. Connell Distinguished Professor of Law at the UCLA School of Law. Her numerous activities in the legal community include research and writing on race, education policy, equality, and law. Her publications include *Educational Policy and the Law* and *Race Law Stories*.

**Marcelo Suárez-Orozco** is Dean and Distinguished Professor of Education at UCLA School of Education and Information Studies. His research focuses on cultural psychology and psychological anthropology with an emphasis on mass migration, globalization, and education. He is the co-author of *Learning a New Land: Immigrant Students in American Society*, and co-editor of *Educating the Whole Child for the Whole World*; and *Learning in the Global Era: International Perspectives on Globalization and Education*; as well as many other volumes and scholarly articles.





## Stanford Center on Adolescence

The Stanford Center on Adolescence aims to promote the character and competence of all young people growing up in today's world. The Center's research examines issues of adolescent learning, identity, and character formation in an array of settings found in modern society. It addresses questions about the role of youth in civic life and the contributions that they make to society, how to engage youth constructively in their communities, and how to prepare them for the competitive, entrepreneurial, and technological economy of tomorrow.

The Stanford Center on Adolescence partners with organizations to support positive youth development in the schools and the everyday lives of adolescents. These collaborative efforts focus on fostering purpose in schools and understanding thriving in young people.

## Center for Multicultural Education

The Center for Multicultural Education focuses on research projects and activities designed to improve practice related to equity issues, intergroup relations, and the achievement of all students. The Center also engages in services and teaching related to its research mission.

RESEARCH related to race, ethnicity, class, language diversity, and education represents the central mission of the Center.

PUBLICATIONS such as the *Handbook of Research on Multicultural Education*, *The Routledge International Companion to Multicultural Education*, and the *Encyclopedia of Diversity in Education* provide remarkable depth and breadth and an impressive look at research and scholarship in the field.

THE SYMPOSIUM-LECTURE SERIES focuses attention on topics related to race, ethnicity, class, language, and education.

GRADUATE STUDY with top university scholars at the master's and doctoral levels prepares educators for working in an increasingly diverse nation and world.

A WIDE RANGE OF COURSES in multicultural education offers opportunities to build a broad and deep understanding of the issues confronting our society and the world and the means to reconcile them.

Stanford Center on Adolescence

Graduate School of Education

Stanford University

505 Lasuen Mall

Stanford, CA 94305

Phone: 650-725-8205

Email: [stanfordcoa@stanford.edu](mailto:stanfordcoa@stanford.edu)

Website: <http://coa.stanford.edu>

Center for Multicultural Education

College of Education

University of Washington, Seattle

Box 353600, 110 Miller Hall

Seattle, WA 98195-3600

Phone: 206-543-3386

Email: [centerme@uw.edu](mailto:centerme@uw.edu)

Website: <http://education.uw.edu/cme/>