

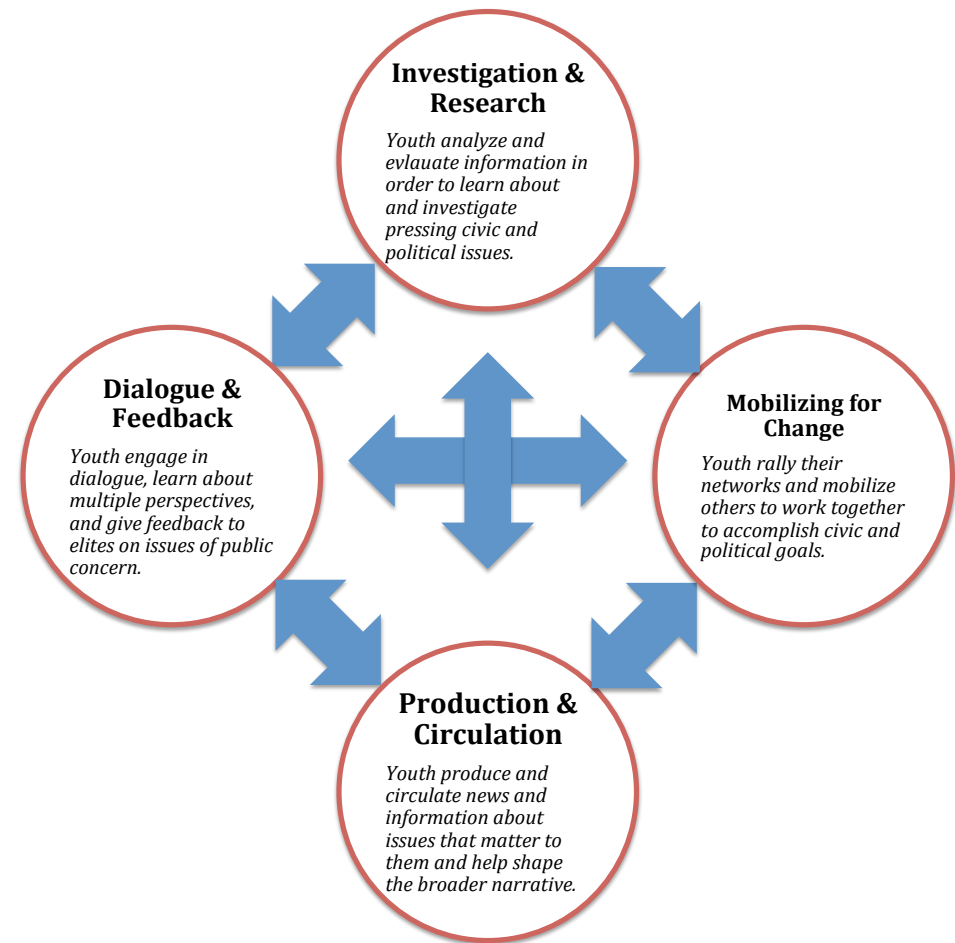
Redesigning Civic Education for the Digital Age

Changing Dynamics in the Digital Age

The digital revolution has enabled important changes in the practice of politics. Opportunities to engage in a particular form of civic and political engagement—a set of practices we refer to as participatory politics—have expanded significantly. **Participatory politics differ from more traditional institutional politics in that they are peer-based, interactive, and not guided by deference to traditional elites and institutions, such as political parties or newspaper editorial boards.** Responding to the significant opportunities and risks associated with these new dynamics requires significant shifts in civic education. Preparation for core practices of civic and political engagement, such as **investigation, dialogue and feedback, production, circulation, and mobilization**, must be taught differently because they are now frequently practiced differently and often in different contexts.

Empowered by the affordances of digital media, individuals and networks of young people are able to investigate issues they care about, engage in dialogue with their peers and community, produce and circulate compelling messages, and mobilize others around a common cause. Online participatory politics are now commonplace, and **youth are at the forefront**. In the pages below, we detail how these practices have changed in the digital age, the opportunities and risks these changes create, and the implications for educators.

For more information and related curricular resources, visit <http://ypp.dmlcentral.net/pages/educating-participatory-politics-resources>.



Core Practices for Educating for Participatory Politics

Investigation & Research:

Common Historical Practices	Expanded Practices in the Digital Age	New Opportunities for Youth	Potential Risks	Implications for Educators
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Broadcast media and newspapers were the main outlets for news on civic and political issues. · Research happened through trusted sources such as encyclopedias. · Information was highly vetted by elites, gatekeepers, and major institutions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · The Internet makes access to a wide range of information easier. · News and information is accessible through participatory channels, such as Facebook and Twitter. · Crowd-sourced information can be shared and co-created through platforms like Wikipedia. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Youth can easily tap a wider range of information, forms of data, and view points. · Research can be undertaken and shared independent of institutions and gatekeepers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · There is increased access to misinformation and information that is not sufficiently vetted. · Filter bubbles¹ and echo chambers² result in greater exposure to like-minded people and information and less exposure to divergent perspectives. 	<p>Support youth to engage in:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Effective search and credibility analysis · High quality investigation through multiple sources using digital tools and platforms · Tapping social networks to forage for information · Participatory action research · Information framing and story creation

¹ Pariser, E. (2012). *The filter bubble: How the new personalized web is changing what we read and how we think*, Reprint edition. New York, NY: Penguin Books.

² Sunstein, C. R. (2007). *Republic.com 2.0*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University.

Dialogue and Feedback:

Common Historical Practices	Expanded Practices in the Digital Age	New Opportunities for Youth	Potential Risks	Implications for Educators
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> For youth, dialogue about social issues occurred either in private circles with family and friends or with peers in school. Structured forums for dialogue and feedback primarily happened at specified times and locations, such as a town hall or school board meetings. Many opportunities for feedback—such as voting, calling one’s representative, or writing a letter to the editor—were structured by institutions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There are increased opportunities for feedback in online forums, such as commenting on news websites, creating online petitions, and generating viral campaigns intended to pressure a representative. Dialogue about social issues can occur with a broader range of people in online spaces, such as Facebook, Twitter, chat rooms, etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Youth have increased opportunities to engage in dialogue and feedback outside of structured forums and institutional contexts. There are expanded chances for youth to voice their opinions and perspectives to a wide audience. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Youth only engage in spaces and dialogue with like-minded individuals, called echo chambers³. Incivility and offensive dialogue can dominate online dialogic spaces that are not regulated by any clear norms or guidelines and where anonymity is common. In an effort to draw attention, everyday experiences of ordinary lives and struggles can be crowded out by sensationalized accounts.⁴ 	<p>Support youth to engage in:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expressing one’s perspective persuasively in a digital format Sharing one’s point of view with respect and civility even when there is no face-to-face relationship Tapping social networks to engage in dialogue with people with diverse perspectives Reflecting on the impact of dialogue and expression on their own identity while being aware of the risks of disclosure, online bullying, and echo-chambers

³ Sunstein, *Republic.com 2.0*.

⁴ Soep, E. (2014). *Participatory politics: Next-generation tactics to remake public spheres*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press. Retrieved from <http://ypp.dmlcentral.net/publications/201>.

Production:

Common Historical Practices	Expanded Practices in the Digital Age	New Opportunities for Youth	Potential Risks	Implications for Educators
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The production of ideas and media was largely limited to elites and “professionals” within organizations and institutions. Youth were primarily consumers in relation to production. Exceptions included small scale activities possibly provided through school, youth organizations, or volunteering with an organization. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Accessible digital tools enable youth to engage in production from creating a video to building their own website. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There are new and expanded opportunities for youth to contribute to the flow of information and to shape the narrative around civic and political issues. Youth have voice and agency in spaces where they can also produce ideas and media. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> When working with limited resources, civic and political production projects can require an intensive amount of work over a long period of time that is increasingly unsustainable.⁵ 	<p>Support youth to engage in:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use digital tools and platforms for trans-media production Strategic use of the appropriate tools and the best use of the tools Determining how to craft a persuasive message that will reach a targeted audience

⁵ Soep, *Participatory politics: Next-generation tactics to remake public spheres*.

Circulation:

Common Historical Practices	Expanded Practices in the Digital Age	New Opportunities for Youth	Potential Risks	Implications for Educators
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The spread of information happened through structured civic and political organizations via mass mailings, flyers, posters, etc. Organizations and the media chose “experts” and “leaders” to speak on a topic and talk about its civic implications. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Information can be spread through participatory channels such as Twitter, Facebook, and Wikipedia. Social networks share and circulate information to an expanded audience by “liking”, forwarding, commenting, and remixing information. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Youth have increased opportunities for voice, agency, and creative expression through sharing information and their points of view. Youth help determine what information and views their peers are exposed to. Youth now have the ability to reach an expanded audience outside of an organizational structure using digital tools and online networks. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The nuances of an issue get lost when a message is trimmed and simplified to circulate quickly and broadly.⁶ Exposure to new information and ideas is limited by filter bubbles⁷ and one’s social networks. The digital afterlife of a message can take on a different shape or direction than was initially intended.⁸ Surveillance is increasingly possible as increased personal expression in online spaces can easily be tracked and traced.⁹ 	<p>Support youth to engage in:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The use of digital tools and platforms for multimedia circulation Tapping social networks to circulate information and messages Determining how to go public and cultivate an expanding online audience for the spread of information or one’s view points Predicting possible outcomes of civic and political activity, the footprint it may leave, and the digital afterlife

⁶ Soep, *Participatory politics: Next-generation tactics to remake public spheres*.

⁷ Pariser, *The filter bubble: How the new personalized web is changing what we read and how we think*.

⁸ Soep, *Participatory politics: Next-generation tactics to remake public spheres*.

⁹ Shresthova, S. (2013). *Between storytelling and surveillance: American Muslim youth negotiate culture, politics and participation* [YPP Working Paper]. Retrieved from <http://ypp.dmlcentral.net/publications/161>.

Mobilizing for Change:

Common Historical Practices	Expanded Practices in the Digital Age	New Opportunities for Youth	Potential Risks	Implications for Educators
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Political organizations mobilized large numbers of people around a civic or political cause using their capacity and resources, such as door-to-door canvassing or tapping an organizations' membership. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Social networks can be mobilized without the need for organizational resources. Young people might start a new political group online, write and disseminate an online petition, or raise money for a civic cause via a Kickstarter campaign. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Youth have relevant digital skills and capacities that can be turned toward mobilizing others to back a civic or political issue of concern. Social networks increase young people's opportunities to be mobilized and to respond to an issue shared by someone they know and trust. Youth can take advantage of varying levels of engagement through the fluid and flexible use of digital media. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Requests to get involved can come from individuals and groups that are unknown and potentially untrustworthy. Complex issues can be misunderstood and/or conflated when information is simplified and shortened to more easily mobilize others.¹⁰ Individuals and groups can mobilize around savior-like responses that do not effectively address the complexity of the situation.¹¹ 	<p>Support youth to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tap social and digital platforms to organize and mobilize others Determine tactics and strategies for building support Identify appropriate and relevant responses based on a nuanced understanding of an issue Anticipate the impact of action, and reflect on possible outcomes and unintended consequences

¹⁰ Soep, *Participatory politics: Next-generation tactics to remake public spheres*.

¹¹ Soep, *Participatory politics: Next-generation tactics to remake public spheres*.