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Redesigning Civic Education for the Digital Age

by Erica Hodgjin

"Ms. Tate asked the ninth graders in her social studies class in Oakland to choose a contemporary issue related to a social movement they had studied and to develop their own Taking Action Plan. One student used Facebook to show her peers that feminism is still relevant today. On her Facebook page, she circulated links to information and thought-provoking memes about the status of women in today's society. Another student produced a music video about marriage equality that she circulated to her networks on



YouTube in order to raise awareness about gay rights. The ease with which these young people were able to produce and circulate content to a wide audience far outstrips what young people could typically accomplish without digital tools and social media."

In our recent article, *Redesigning Civic Education for the Digital Age: Participatory Politics and the Pursuit of Democratic Engagement*, Joe Kahne, Elyse Eidman-Aadahl, and I highlight examples of curricular reform — like the one above from Ms. Tate's classroom — to help frame an expanded agenda for civic education in the digital age. In the article, we conceptualize key changes in civic and political life. These changes, brought on by the digital age, have created new opportunities and challenges for youth to enact core civic and political practices, such as investigating issues of public concern, engaging in dialogue and feedback around their perspectives, producing and circulating civic ideas and content, and mobilizing others to get

involved. We also draw on the nationally representative Youth and Participatory Politics (YPP) survey to assess the frequency and expansion of these new practices that we call participatory politics.

EPP Framework

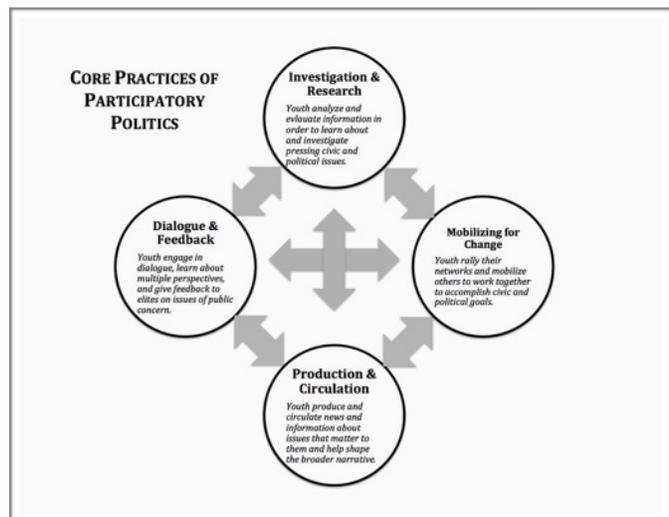
This article builds off of the research of the MacArthur Research Network on Youth and Participatory Politics, as well as the work of the Educating for Participatory Politics (EPP) project. The EPP project is an effort to develop a framework for education informed by the core practices of participatory politics growing out of the on-the-ground work by four teams based in three different cities. The EPP teams and the educators we partnered with created and piloted model educational resources that promote young people’s capacity to engage as civic actors in the digital age. And, finally, you can check out my last blog post — Educating for Participatory Politics in the Digital Age — where I describe some highlights from a webinar series that we co-hosted in March that included project staff and teachers talking about their work in Oakland, Chicago, and Los Angeles.

Four Core Practices

As we describe in the article, “We find that participatory politics hold great potential, especially for youth, as a significant support for the pursuit of a democratic and just society.” And, it is for this reason, that we believe educators play a critical role in redesigning civic education to take into account the new opportunities and challenges pertinent to educating for democracy in the digital age. In order for youth to be able to take full advantage of these opportunities and navigate the challenges and risks, educators must consider the knowledge, skills, and dispositions that youth require to participate effectively. In order to do this, we describe four core practices that are central to civic and political life in the digital age: investigation and research, dialogue and feedback, production and circulation, and mobilizing for change. We also detail in a series of charts (linked here) how these practices have changed in the digital age, the opportunities and risks these changes create, and the implications for educators.

YPP core practices graphic

Youth are at the forefront of these changes in the digital age. For example, like the students in Ms. Tate’s class, we see young people utilizing digital tools to cry out in response to the criminalization of Black youth and police brutality, to draw attention to the issues that matter to them in the lead up to the presidential election, and to organize others to push



back against North Carolina's anti-transgender law HB2. And yet, now more than ever, educators in and out of schools can play a vital role in supporting all youth to take advantage of these opportunities and to navigate the challenges of the digital age. "By attending to ways that the expansion of participatory politics is altering political practice, civic educators can better respond to the democratic purposes of schooling. These efforts will enable more youth to see and seize available opportunities for civic and political engagement that are empowering, equitable, and impactful."

Resources

Joseph Kahne, Erica Hodgins & Elyse Eidman-Aadahl (2016) *Redesigning Civic Education for the Digital Age: Participatory Politics and the Pursuit of Democratic Engagement*, *Theory & Research in Social Education*, 44:1, 1-35, DOI: 10.1080/00933104.2015.1132646

For more info visit <https://ypp.dmlcentral.net/>