



The Role of Civic Skills in Fostering Civic Engagement

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“We believe that our schools should foster the knowledge, *skills*, and virtues our young people need to become good democratic citizens... (including)... age-appropriate instruction in civic knowledge and *skills*...” (National Commission on Civic Renewal 1998, pg. 2).

“Schools achieve the best results in fostering civic engagement when they rigorously teach civic content and *skills*...” (Torney-Purta 2002 pg. 203).

“The process of political mobilization involves a growth in the number of supportive associations, an organizational construct, which promotes a greater *skill* and competence among the association members” (Miller 1982 pg. 83).

“It makes focal those opportunities young people have to experience membership in local groups, organizations, and institutions and to practice the *skills* that citizens in a democracy need” (Flanagan 2003 pg. 259).

The aforementioned quotes represent a range of disciplines but share a common interest in the idea of civic skills. However, only two of the four authors identify what they mean by the term "skill." Moreover, one refers to "skills" both in the abstract for the article and again in the conclusion but never provides a definition or measurement of skills in the empirical work reported in the article. These examples demonstrate the wide use of the term and the surprising lack of information about what civic skills are, how to measure them, and when they begin to be developed.

As we will see, the idea of a set of skills, usually called civic skills, which are required to effectively participate in civic and political life, is integral to many concepts of political participation. This literature search is designed to investigate what is known about civic skills empirically and theoretically including how they are defined and measured, and what relationship they have to political participation.

APPROACH TO THE LITERATURE SEARCH

This literature review began with the work most familiar to political scientists, Verba, Scholzman and Brady's seminal work on political participation, *Voice and Equality: Civic Voluntarism in American Politics* (1995). In this work, the authors define several civic skills and incorporate them into a larger conceptual framework on political participation. Importantly, the work is empirical so the definitions are converted

to survey questions generating measurable responses. Although a few earlier works exist, the majority of the political science literature most closely related to civic skills follows this book.

From political science, we moved on to the education field. Civic skills related literature here is dispersed in the civic education and service learning arenas. Those interested in civic education generally have coalesced around a set of four interlocking ideas, two of which are based in skill development. The core ideas form the backbone of both the national standards for civics education and the national assessment of education progress (NAEP). The four ideas seem to be rooted in political theory rather than empirical work.

We reviewed a third set of research focused on experiential programs including both service learning and youth development. The service learning literature is focusing increasingly on outcomes of programs and several authors have tackled empirical evaluations. Here though, most of what is measured is attitudinal rather than behavioral or explicitly skill related (Kirlin 2002; Perry and Katula 2001).

There is an increasing interest in civic engagement contained in the literature about youth development, the fourth body of literature examined. While not really a field or a discipline (Camino and Zeldin 2002b), those interested in youth development focus on youth programs as a vehicle for

civic engagement, an important area left unattended by many others. Here again there is an interest in civic skills but the idea is rarely developed beyond the passing reference.

Finally, we explored the psychology literature, looking at authors whose work has crossed between developmental psychology and political socialization and is related to skill development. This field has few people addressing the issue but they provide important contributions.

One conclusion of this search is also the major challenge confronted: the dispersion of the literature and the almost total lack of cross over work. Disparate fields seem to be doing important work, with significant overlap in findings and observations, but most authors seem to be almost oblivious to the existence of related literature outside their own discipline. Many authors stay largely focused on their own disciplinary predecessors, not venturing deeply into other disciplines to inform their work. Developmental psychologists are an important exception and two authors write broadly in psychology, education, sociology and political science venues.

Some definitions and exclusions are important to discuss at this point. This review is focused primarily on those skills that are most clearly connected to civic behaviors, for example, writing persuasive letters. This focus on behaviors is in contrast to authors

who focus on values and normative beliefs while calling them skills. The very nature of democracy includes normative concepts such as tolerance of opposing viewpoints but we have tried to clearly distinguish skills that include a normative perspective. For example, rather than using tolerance of opposing viewpoints as a skill, we have identified the civic skill of the ability to work with others with differing viewpoints to come to a consensus. We also do not review civic knowledge (i.e. factual information), a distinctly separate concept, although most authors acknowledge that the two go together.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS FOR THINKING ABOUT CIVIC SKILLS

Civic skills do not exist in a vacuum; they are part of a larger set of ideas about what is believed to be necessary for citizens to be engaged in public life. The notion that, in addition to knowledge, some type of “skills” are required in order to effectively participate in public life makes intuitive sense. The logic of civic skills as an important factor in political participation has found its way into many disciplines, particularly political science, education and developmental psychology. In each of these disciplines, the idea of civic skill development is related to other requirements for developing citizens. Suggested requirements regarding civic skills vary in part because of the disciplinary starting points and in part because of differing definitions of “good

citizenship.”

Briefly, most political science literature suggests that civic skills are part of a larger package including knowledge, motivation or interest, connections to networks of engaged people, and resources (time and money) (Verba, Schlozman and Brady 1995). Educators have focused attention on a framework that includes civic knowledge, cognitive skills, participatory skills and civic dispositions (Patrick 2003). Developmental psychology conceptualizes civic skills within the framework of the family and social life of young people, and “the formation of identity, values, and social ties to others” (Flanagan 2003 pg. 257). Only the political science literature has attempted to empirically pinpoint the role of civic skills within the larger framework of political socialization or participation.

Westheimer and Kahne (2002) point out that there are several constructs of “good citizen” each with different implications for participatory expectations. Drawing on political theory and educational programs promoting democracy, they identify three broad types of citizenship: “personally responsible”, “participatory”, and “justice oriented” citizens. Implications for participatory expectations vary with the three different conceptions of citizenship and range from having good character and obeying the law (personally responsible), to participating in established community structures

(participatory), to questioning systems and structures when they produce injustices (justice oriented). For this review, we are most interested in the approaches seeking to promote citizens who are participating in community structures designed to improve the collective good, closest to the “participatory” framework that Westheimer and Kahne (2002) identified.

Much of the early work on civic skills occurred in the 1960’s and 1970’s as researchers tried to sort out questions about political participation. Writers began exploring the concept of skill acts (such as writing to a member of congress) and inferring a role for civic skills (Erbe 1964; Bendix and Lipset 1966; Verba and Nie 1972; Otto 1975; Milbrath and Goel 1977). By the early 1980’s researchers were discussing the linkage between civic skill development (through religious and associational activities) and political participation (Beane, Turner, Jones and Lipka 1981; Hanks and Eckland 1978; Nagel 1987; Martinson and Wilkening 1987; Leege 1988). A key early article is “Beyond SES: A Resource Model of Participation” (Brady, Schlozman and Verba 1995) where the authors define civic skills as capacities that are essential for political participation. The authors’ argue that civic skills are learned beginning in adolescence and developed into adulthood. The above is expanded further in the seminal work *Voice and Equality* (Verba, Schlozman and Brady 1995) the primary

source of virtually all the empirical work on civic skills. It is discussed first because of its centrality in the literature.

THE CIVIC VOLUNTARISM MODEL: POLITICAL SCIENCE AND CIVIC SKILLS

The Civic Voluntarism Model is developed from data contained in the Civic Participation Study, a survey of 15,000 individuals. The model, advanced in *Voice and Equality* (Verba, Schlozman and Brady 1995) identifies three components needed for adults to participate in public life: a) interest or motivation, b) a connection to the networks of individuals involved (usually by invitation), and c) resources (time or money) and the civic skills to use the resources effectively. The authors trace developmental roots of the three participatory requirements from characteristics at birth through experiences in adolescence and into adulthood. Civic skills are integrally related to the other components of the model; all three are necessary for individuals to be engaged in politics as adults. But for our purposes we are most interested in the discussions and findings about civic skills.

The discussion about civic skills contained in *Voice and Equality* makes several important contributions to our understanding about the role of civic skills. First, the authors provide a definition of civic skills. The Civic Voluntarism Model identifies a series of “organizational and communication skills” which allow the use of time and money

effectively in a political arena (pg 304). Specifically these authors define civic skills to include competency in English, vocabulary, writing letters, going to meetings, taking part in decision making, planning or chairing a meeting, and giving a presentation or speech. Verba, Schlozman and Brady (1995) make a distinction between political behaviors (writing a letter to a congressman) and the skills necessary to execute the behavior, the “skill” of writing a letter. This distinction becomes important as we untangle the relationship between civic skills and civic knowledge. Writing a letter requires a certain amount of skill, however, writing a letter to an elected official requires an additional set of knowledge about the issue at hand, how to contact an elected official, and, the appropriate venue for expressing political preferences.

Second, Verba, et al (1995) found that civic skills are more significant in predicting political participation than job level, organizational affiliation, religious attendance, free time, and whether English is spoken at home. Only education levels, vocabulary and citizenship status are also significant predictors of political participation. Possession of civic skills appears to be a very important component for political participation.

The Civic Voluntarism Model ultimately concludes that civic skills are most likely acquired in a variety of organizational settings beginning in adolescence and continuing into adulthood. The organization settings are

important because they allow for practice in understanding the way organizations function, hypothesized to be the basis for later participatory behaviors.

Figure 1 summarizes the stages and factors relevant to political participation in the Civic Voluntarism Model. Emphasis is added for those areas the authors believe are related to civic skill development.

Figure 1.
Stages and Factors Relevant to Political Participation
Summarized from Civic Voluntarism Model in Voice and Equality (*emphasis added*)

Stage/Factor	Brief description	Comments
Initial Characteristics		
Parents education	Educational attainment of both parents	Education is highly correlated with civic participation. Parental education benefits are passed on to a child before the child's own education benefits take hold.
Gender	~	Females are slightly less likely to participate than males.
Race or ethnicity	~	Whites are more likely to participate than other races and ethnicities.
Pre-Adult Experiences		
Exposure to politics at home	Especially discussions of politics while growing up	Exposure generates awareness and political interest. Education is highly correlated with civic participation although recent research indicates that while education levels are rising civic engagement seems to be declining (Putnam 2000).
Individual's education	~	
Extra-curricular activities during high school	Clubs and groups other than sports—sports are negatively associated with civic participation*.	These are thought to teach civic skills necessary for later participation and develop interest in politics.
Adult Institutional Involvement		
Job level	Rank in organization, types, and numbers of contacts with others	Higher-level jobs result in more contacts, better skills, and an increased need to understand and participate in public and civic life. Similar to extracurricular activities, affiliations provide civic- skill training organizations and opportunity to meet community leaders. A significant relationship appears to exist between active religious participation and civic engagement, thought to be related to civic-skill training and exposure to community issues and leaders.
Affiliation with non-political organizations	Clubs, hobbies, special activities	
Religious attendance	Active member of religious organization	

Source: Based on Verba, Schlozman and Brady (1995).

* This definition has been further refined by others to clarify that involvement in instrumental (not expressive) organizations is correlated with civic engagement.

Figure 1 suggests that civic skills can be acquired in several organizational environments, but there has been particular interest in the role of churches and civic (non-political) organizations in developing civic skills. Verba, et al found " ...the workplace provides, by far, the most opportunities for the exercise of civic skills, but does so in the most stratified manner. The chance to practice skills on the job rises steeply with family income, much more steeply than it does in organizations. In contrast, there is no systematic relationship between family income and the exercise of civic skills in the church" (Verba, Schlozman and Brady 1995, pg. 319). Schwadel (2002), however, finds that within individual religious congregations, civic skill developing opportunities are stratified according to income.

Other researchers have noted the relationship between church participation and civic engagement although only two specifically studied civic skills (Djupe and Grant 2001; Schwadel 2002). Djupe and Grant (2001) find that the relationship between church acquired civic skills and political participation is complex, suggesting that church participation may in fact develop civic skills but that the culture and history of different religious traditions influence whether or not individual parishioners chose to utilize their civic skills in a political environment. This is consistent with Verba, Schlozman and Brady's (1995) finding that Protestants have more opportunities than Catholics to practice

skills, a finding they believe to be related to the differing governance structures rather than to membership composition. Specifically, Protestants typically include more roles for congregants than Catholics do, a finding that contributes to the idea of the primacy of organization structure in teaching civic skills (Verba, Schlozman and Brady 1995).

Verba, Schlozman and Brady (1995) have made critical contributions to our understanding of civic skills providing definitions, empirical measurements, and helping to explain the relationship of civic skills to other components necessary for active political participation. In addition, they have helped to clarify the role of organizations in providing training grounds for civic skill development. Ultimately, "...acquisition of skills depends upon the level of skill opportunity provided by the domain; the extent to which involvement in the domain is socially structured; and the extent to which opportunities for skill development are socially structured among those affiliated" (Verba, Schlozman and Brady 1995, 320).

CIVIC SKILLS IN THE CIVIC EDUCATION LITERATURE

Researchers interested in civic education also find a place for civic skills, but these researchers discuss civic skills in the context of the requirements of a civic education experience in a school setting rather than with an explicit participatory interest (although participation is often one of several

education goals). Educators commonly approach the subject from a normative stance, what should students know, and an empirical stance, what do students know? Both are important, but turn out to be somewhat

disconnected when it comes to civic skills.

Beginning with the normative, Patrick has detailed a theoretical framework for K-12 civics education capturing most of the

Figure 2. Components of a Common Education for Citizenship in a Democracy As described by John J. Patrick (2003)	
1.	Knowledge of citizenship and government in a democracy (civic knowledge). <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Concepts and principles in the substance of democracy. b. Perennial issues about the meaning and uses of core ideas c. Continuing issues and landmark decisions about public policy and constitutional interpretation d. Constitutions and institutions of representative democratic government e. Practices of democratic citizenship and the roles of citizens f. <u>History of democracy in particular states and throughout the world</u>
2.	Intellectual skills of citizenship in a democracy (cognitive civic skills) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Identifying and describing information about political and civic life b. Analyzing and explaining information about political and civic life c. Synthesizing and explaining information about political and civic life d. Evaluating, taking, and defending positions on public events and issues e. Thinking critically about conditions of political and civic life f. <u>Thinking constructively about how to improve political and civic life</u>
3.	Participatory skills of citizenship in a democracy (participatory civic skills) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Interacting with other citizens to promote personal and common interests b. Monitoring public events and issues c. Deliberating and making decisions about public policy issues d. Influencing policy decisions on public issues e. Implementing policy decisions on public issues f. <u>Taking action to improve political and civic life</u>
4.	Dispositions of citizenship in a democracy (civic dispositions) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Affirming the common and equal humanity and dignity of each person b. Respecting, protecting, and exercising rights possessed equally by each person c. Participating responsibly in the political and civic life of the community d. Practicing self-government and supporting government by consent of the governed e. Exemplifying the moral traits of democratic citizenship f. <u>Promoting the common good</u>

items supported by civics educators as shown in Figure 2, (Patrick 2000; Patrick 2003). The framework represents a core of four interrelated components that appear in the National Standards for Civics and Education (Center for Civic Education 1994) and are incorporated in the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) tests on civics but are augmented with additional detail by Patrick (2003). The framework suggests that both cognitive (#2) and participatory (#3) skills need to be developed in the education process.

Patrick indicates, "...there has been general agreement among civic educators about the four fundamental categories or components of education for citizenship in a democracy" (Patrick 2003, 7). (For example, an earlier framework with similar components is provided by Engle and Ochoa 1988.) Patrick goes on to argue that the above four components can produce the desired capacity and commitment in future citizens and makes several recommendations for changes to existing pedagogy and curriculum to achieve these ends. It appears that the framework, while intuitively logical and well connected to political theories about democratic education, is not rooted in the limited empirical work about civic skills, nor has it inspired additional empirical inquiry about the role of education in the development of the participatory civic skills. Engle and Ochoa (1988) address the importance of group work as a skill to be

developed and assessed by educators but, again, their arguments are theoretical.

Those interested in the empirical question of what do students know and learn from the civic education process, have made a compelling argument that the appropriate mechanism for measuring what students know is to ask factual questions about items such as governmental structure, current events, or elected officials (Neimi and Junn 1998). Using this approach, important empirical work has recently been done highlighting the importance of civic knowledge (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996; Nie, Junn and Stehlik-Barry 1996; Niemi and Junn 1998) but our understanding of how to measure participatory civic skills lags significantly behind.

For example, a recent survey of state level civics standards (Tolo 1999) acknowledges the crucial relationship between participatory and intellectual skills but was "unable to assess the participatory skills" in state standards. Their assessment of higher-order cognitive skills was limited to determining "the extent to which state standards' language signals attention to students thinking skills" (Tolo 1999 pg. 56). Even using this fairly limited approach, the researchers find that state standards place relatively little emphasis on the highest order thinking skills.

Having said that, much of the civic education research eventually suggests there may be some type of role for civic

skill development. For example, Nie, Junn and Stehlik-Barry (1996) analyzed the Civic Participation Study data in the context of the role of education in fostering democratic citizens. In the process, they suggest that there are two dimensions of democratic citizenship worth noting: enlightenment and engagement. While the enlightened citizen possesses adequate knowledge about democracy and the related norms such as tolerance, it is the engaged citizen who actually participates in political processes, particularly in "difficult" political activities requiring an additional commitment of time and energy. As might be expected, there are different paths from education to enlightenment and engagement. Both require education but the engaged citizen also has relationships to social networks that appear to be related to their involvement in public life. Relationships in social networks and organizations are hypothesized to be related to civic skill development (Verba, Schlozman and Brady 1995. Also see Kirlin 2003 for a review of the relationship between civic engagement and extracurricular activities).

Niemi and Junn (1998) using data from the 1988 NAEP civics tests, highlight the importance of the classroom delivery, in particular discussing current events rather than rote memorization, for positively affecting not only civic knowledge but also civic skills. Similarly, in an international study

Torney-Purta (2002) found that students in open classroom settings, where discussion by students is encouraged, are more likely to indicate they plan to vote than students in more traditional classrooms. Keeter, Zukin, Andolina and Jenkins (2002) find similar results for Americans. These authors also report higher levels of civic engagement among those who have been taught skills including letter writing and debate. Importantly, they find "...the link between these skills and participation is much stronger than is the more generic course requirement to follow politics and national affairs" (Keeter, Zukin, Andolina and Jenkins 2002, pg. 32) As we will see shortly, expressing political opinions is considered a civic skill by several researchers.

Similarly, writing about civic education Lempert and Briggs (1996) suggest there are three principles of social-contract democracy: 1) citizens as individuals negotiating their own needs - democratic education thus serves as a vehicle to develop strong individuals with skills to use the political system to meet their own needs while understanding the rights of others; 2) citizens as active participants in the political process and in civic activities - democratic education training citizens to participate in evaluating real policy issues and using the political process; and 3) citizens as consensus builders - developing skills to understand those who are different, as well as

learning how to compromise with their peers and using those to interact in a meaningful way in public life while working towards mutual objectives. Several civic skills are embedded in these ideas.

EXPERIENTIAL LITERATURE: "SUCCESS STORIES" INVOLVING CIVIC SKILLS

There are a number of studies showing linkages between the program or curricular design of youth programs and civic participation. These include extracurricular activities, service learning, community service, and other "youth development" programs and many of these programs have clear linkages to civic skills. This section is not meant to detail all of the possibly related research, but rather to make the point that a number of studies suggest that youth development programs are a promising arena in which to consciously develop research related to civic skill development and highlight the linkages between work that practitioners are doing and the contributions that academics studying civic skills can make (Flanagan and Van Horn 2003).

First, another report for CIRCLE (Kirlin 2003) details the repeated correlation between adolescent extracurricular participation and adult civic engagement, concluding with the observation that civic skill development may be a plausible explanation for the relationship

between extracurricular participation and later political participation. However, as noted in that review, civic skill development is only one of several hypotheses about the reasons for the relationship.

Researchers interested in service learning have examined civic skills in the discussion of successful programs. Morgan and Streb (2001) found that "...when students have real responsibilities, challenging tasks, helped to plan the project, and made important decisions, involvement in service-learning projects had significant and substantive impacts on students increases in self-concept, political engagement, and attitudes towards out-groups" (pg 166). Conrad and Hedin (1982a, 1982b, 1989) found that school-based experiential learning has a positive impact when, among other things, student decision-making is encouraged by teachers. More common than empirical studies are theoretical arguments that skill development is an integral part of successful service-learning programs (Battistoni 1997; Morse 1993). Similarly, specific programs will occasionally highlight the reasons they suspect their programs are successful (as distinct from empirical evidence to that effect). Exemplary of this is a discussion of three of the Constitutional Rights Foundation's (CRF) programs including a citizenship education component (Clark, Croddy, Hayes and Philips 1997). CRF "...places heavy emphasis on

student development of skills necessary for effective citizenship. These skills include communications, research, presentation, critical thinking and problem solving” (pg. 167). Kirlin (2002) suggests that the research indicates civic skill development may be an important component that is missing from many community service and service learning programs.

“Positive youth development” has also contributed to the literature about programmatic experiences that have positive outcomes with a relationship to civic skill development, even if the authors do not always specifically identify civic skills. For example, in an article intended to show how youth programs can offer an alternative to political/partisan civic engagement while still contributing to youth civic development, Stoneman (2002) argues that youth programming involving young people in project creation and governance of their organizations develops leadership and governance capacities that are useful for civic engagement. Similarly, Camino and Zeldin (2002b) point out that common themes in youth development programs include allowing youth to choose and plan their activities and encourage youth to participate in the decision-making and leadership of the organization. However, in another article (Camino and Zeldin 2002a) the authors argue that due to changes in industry, workplace, school

and family life, youth are highly segregated from adults who might otherwise serve as role models for learning to become civically engaged. In addition, many adults have negative perceptions about the abilities and interests of adolescents, leaving them even less likely to be included in community life (Camino and Zeldin 2002a). Hart and Atkins (2002) demonstrate that urban youth have even fewer opportunities to join organizations and develop civic competence than their suburban peers. Each of these articles contributes to a theoretical argument for civic skill development in youth organizations.

DEVELOPMENTAL PSYCHOLOGY

The final source of literature about civic skills is developmental psychology. While the number of individuals in the field studying the specific issue of youth civic engagement is relatively small, the contributions have been important and demonstrate yet another discipline which dances very close to theoretical and empirical evidence for civic skills as an important component of civic engagement.

Flanagan (2003) argues that developmental perspectives allow researchers to consider the everyday activities of adolescents as integral to formation of civic values and political views. The developmental perspective considers political and civic

socialization as "...integrally related to other aspects of human development (such as the formation of identity, values, and social ties to others)" (Flanagan 2003, pg. 257). Developmental perspectives also reveal the development process that young people undergo, including furthering our understanding of when individuals are ready for increased levels of sophistication and application of lessons learned.

In a recent article, Flanagan (2003) puts forward the argument that "the social incorporation of younger generations into the body politic and the development of habits that sustain the system are rooted in young people's experiences of membership in the institutions of their communities and the exercise of rights and fulfillment of responsibilities in those institutions" (pg. 257). She suggests that the developmental psychology approach "...makes focal those opportunities young people have to experience membership in local groups, organizations, and institutions and to practice the skills that citizens in a democracy need" (pg. 261).

Youniss, and McLellan (1997) have a similar perspective, arguing that organizations create a "civic identity" during adolescence and that participation in organized groups during adolescence "introduces youth to the basic roles and processes (i.e., organizational practices) required for adult civic engagement" (pg. 624).

While neither author expands on the

idea of civic skill development, both are clearly alluding to what others have called civic skills.

FOUR DOMINANT CATEGORIES OF SKILLS

Despite the significant number of authors directly or indirectly referencing civic skills, very few have actually gone on to specify what civic skills are and even fewer have done empirical work specifically looking either for the presence or the impacts of civic skills. Specific civic skills contained in theoretical or empirical frameworks fall into four major categories: 1) organization, and 2) communication (as initially described by Brady, Verba and Schlozman 1995 and continued in Verba, Schlozman and Brady 1995), 3) collective decision-making, and 4) critical thinking. Figure 3 groups the specific citations into the four categories above. There is overlap between the categories and some skills fall into more than one category but this typology provides a good framework for examining the distinctive environments for skill acquisition.

Figure 3

Author, year	Skills as defined by author(s)	Organization, communication, collective decision making or critical thinking	Empirical measurement if available
Batisttoni in Mann and Patrick 2000, similar listing in Battistoni 2002	"Listening, understanding places and interests of others in the community" pg. 35	Collective decision making	
Batisttoni in Mann and Patrick 2000, similar listing in Battistoni 2003	"achieve compromises and solve problems when conflict occurs" pg. 36	Collective decision making	
Batisttoni in Mann and Patrick 2000, similar listing in Battistoni 2003	Identify and solve public problems	Collective decision making	
Boyte in Mann and Patrick 2000	Work in a team	Collective decision making	
Morgan and Streb 2001	Make important decisions	Collective decision making	
Morse 1993	"practice in dealing with difficult decisions for which there are no right or wrong answers" pg. 165	Collective decision making	
Morse 1993	"build cooperative relationships between equals" pg. 166	Collective decision making	
Morse 1993	"listen, judge, discuss, confer and act on concerns" pg. 166	Collective decision making	

Author, Year	Skills as defined by author(s)	Organization, communication, collective decision making, or critical thinking	Empirical measurement if available
Hurtado, Engber, Ponjuan and Landreman 2002	"perspective taking skills" pg. 183	Collective decision making	"Participation in race/ethnic discussions, student clubs, and volunteer work, as well as studying with students of different groups and discussing controversial issues"
Patrick 2000; Patrick 2003	Interacting with other citizens to promote personal and common interests	Collective decision making	
Patrick 2000; Patrick 2003	Deliberating and making decisions about public policy issues	Collective decision making	
Verba, Schlozman and Brady 1995	Proficiency in English	Communication	What language do you usually speak at home, English or something else? *
Verba, Schlozman and Brady 1995a and 1995b	Vocabulary	Communication	Asked what is the best synonym for 10 words. Used by National Opinion Research Center.
Verba, Schlozman and Brady 1995	Write a letter	Communication	Written a letter?*
Verba, Schlozman and Brady 1995	Make a speech or presentation	Communication	Given a presentation or speech?*

Author, Year	Skills as defined by author(s)	Organization, communication, collective decision making, or critical thinking	Empirical measurement if available
Battistoni in Mann and Patrick 2000, similar listing in Battistoni 2001	Communication skills: "communication of our thoughts and actions, both vertically to our leaders and representatives, and horizontally, to our fellow citizens. Speech, argument and persuasive communication are all important elements of democratic literacy." pg. 35	Communication	
Boyte in Mann and Patrick 2000	Public speaking	Communication	
Boyte in Mann and Patrick 2000	Write letters	Communication	
Torney-Purta 2002	Skills tested in 14 year olds include the ability to interpret political communication (leaflets and cartoons)	Communication	
Schwadel 2002	Writing	Communication	
Schwadel 2002	Public speaking	Communication	
Patrick 2000	Monitoring public events and issues	Communication	
Patrick 2000	Influencing policy decisions on public issues	Communication	

Author, Year	Skills as defined by author(s)	Organization, communication, collective decision making, or critical thinking	Empirical measurement if available
Patrick 2000	Implementing policy decisions on public issues	Communication	
Patrick 2000	Taking action to improve political and civic life	Communication	
Patrick 2003 and National Standards for Civics and Government (Center for Civic Education 1994)	Identifying and describing information about political and civic life	Critical thinking	
Patrick 2003 and National Standards for Civics and Government (Center for Civic Education 1994)	Analyzing and explaining information about political and civic life	Critical thinking	
Patrick 2003 and National Standards for Civics and Government (Center for Civic Education 1994)	Synthesizing and explaining information about political and civic life	Critical thinking	
Patrick 2003 and National Standards for Civics and Government (Center for Civic Education 1994)	Evaluating, taking, and defending positions on public events and issues	Critical thinking	
Patrick 2003 and National Standards for Civics and Government (Center for Civic Education 1994)	Thinking critically about conditions of political and civic life	Critical thinking	
Patrick 2003 and National Standards for Civics and Government (Center for Civic Education 1994)	Thinking constructively about how to improve political and civic life	Critical thinking	

Author, year	Skills as defined by author(s)	Organization, communication, collective decision making, or critical thinking	Empirical measurement if available
Verba, Schlozman and Brady 1995	Knowledge of how to cope in an organizational setting	Organization	
Boyte in Mann and Patrick 2000	Plan strategies	Organization	
Morgan and Streb 2001	Students have “real responsibilities, challenging tasks” pg. 166	Organization	Self-concept and political engagement, tolerance, mostly attitudinal, some behavioral (pg 161)
Morgan and Streb 2001	Help to plan the project	Organization	
Schwadel 2002	Organizing	Organization	
Patrick 2000	Influencing policy decisions on public issues	Organization	
Patrick 2000	Implementing policy decisions on public issues	Organization	

Author, year	Skills as defined by author(s)	Organization, communication, collective decision making, or critical thinking	Empirical measurement if available
Patrick 2000	Taking action to improve political and civic life	Organization	
Verba, Schlozman and Brady 1995	Attend a meeting where decisions are made	Organization	Come to a meeting where you took part in decision making?*
Verba, Schlozman and Brady 1995	Plan such a meeting	Organization	Planned or chaired a meeting?*

* These questions all begin with: Here is a list of things that people sometimes do as part of their jobs (are asked to do as part of their involvement with organizations/part of their church activities). After I read each one, please tell me whether or not you have engaged in that activity in the last six months as part of your job. Have you... (Verba, Schlozman and Brady 1995)

Organization skills include those necessary for accomplishing tasks, for knowing “how to cope in an organizational setting” (Verba, Schlozman and Brady 1995 pg. 305). Specific skills here include organizing individuals to take action (Verba, Schlozman and Brady 1995; Brady, Schlozman and Verba 1995; Schwadel 2002), planning and running meetings, and planning to take action (Boyte 2000). These skills reflect the capacities needed to understand how most organizations operate and wend your way

through the process side of participating.

The most well-defined and consistently referenced skills are those falling under the communications category identified originally by Verba, Schlozman and Brady (1995) and Brady, Schlozman and Verba (1995). These include writing letters, being proficient in English, vocabulary, and making oral presentations or speeches (Verba, Schlozman and Brady 1995; Patrick 2000; Patrick 2003; Batisttoni 1997; Boyte 2000; Schwadel 2002; Torney-Purta 2002). These are perhaps

the most intuitive of the civic skills because many behaviors associated with political engagement, such as contacting elected officials, making presentations at public meetings and persuading others involve some type of communication skill.

Scholars have paid significant attention to the delivery of communications by politicians and leaders but almost no attention to the development of explicitly civic communication skills. Stotsky (1991) highlights the lack of understanding and attention paid to civic writing while giving a thoughtful discussion of the reasons that civic writing is important to democracy. In a later work (1996) the author brings together a series of essays about civic education and language education, demonstrating that many aspects of communication are similarly under-studied. This may prove to be more important than it appears on the surface. A study of the hurdles urban youth face in attempting to become civically engaged made a poignant observation (Hart and Atkins 2002). As part of a project, a group of teens were asked to write postcards to their parents. "Only a few knew how postcards work – where stamps are placed, where the address should go, and so on. ...we believe that these specific deficits reflect large holes in their knowledge of the United States and a broad lack of development of the skills necessary to participate in political life" (Hart and Atkins 2002, pg. 228).

The third set of skills is grouped under the heading collective decision making skills. I have labeled them such because these encompass a distinct set of skills and behaviors which are necessary for a democracy, as Patrick puts it, 'interacting with others to promote personal and common interests' (Patrick 2000, pg. 5). This skill set includes the interrelated skills of expressing your own opinion, hearing other's opinions, and working towards a consensus (usually involving some type of individual compromise) for the collective or common good. Much of the literature cited above references the opportunities that organizations provide to learn and then practice this type of civic skill. Mutz (2002) observes that political tolerance is about formalized ways in which people agree to disagree. Exposure to differing perspectives, often accomplished through participation in organizations, contributes to creating tolerance of those different perspectives (Mutz 2002). Similarly, working through differences to find a consensus is often done in organizational settings. On a less optimistic note, a recent study examined how students' pre-college experiences predisposed them to see the world from other's perspectives, believe that conflict enhances democracies, and view social action as important (Hurtado, Engberg, Ponjuan and Landerman 2002). These authors note positive relationships between extracurricular experiences and democratic values but overall,

find that college students are often poorly prepared to negotiate in environments with conflict, exactly the type of environment in which political decisions are often made.

The final category of civic skill is critical thinking, referred to in much of the education literature as cognitive skills. These include identifying and describing, analyzing and explaining, synthesizing, thinking critically and constructively and formulating positions on public issues (Center for Civic Education 1994; Patrick 2003). This set of skills presents challenges because of its very general nature. That is, how do you distinguish describing political activities from describing historical activities or any other category of knowledge. This set of skills may be best left to those broadly considering educational outcomes but these are clearly important developments along the path to gaining and using political information.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The literature about civic skills is very promising but leaves many unanswered questions. We have shown that several disciplines are intrigued by the concept of an underlying set of skills that are related to political participation. However, we have also shown that very few authors have gone beyond theoretical perspectives. Only the work of Verba et al (1995) has resulted in comprehensive definitions of civic skills that are empirically testable. Two others studies

have tested for items that are plausibly related to civic skill development (Morgan and Streb 2001; Hurtado, Engber, Ponjuan and Landreman 2002). We are left with several observations about the state of knowledge concerning civic skills and a full menu of questions worthy of research attention.

- 1) Civic skills are not well defined. Verba, Schlozman and Brady (1995) provide a very good beginning for defining communication skills, and an acceptable start for identifying organization skills, but more remains to be done in the remaining categories of collective decision making and critical thinking.
- 2) We need to better understand the process of how to measure many of the items that are emerging as civic skills. For example, once we have a better definition, how do we measure whether an individual possess the civic skills needed to effectively work in a collective decision making arena?
- 3) Concepts about how civic skills relate to broader questions of civic engagement, civic socialization, and political participation differ between disciplines. A cross disciplinary approach is likely to be the most fruitful for getting more complete answers, especially as it relates to the process of civic skill acquisition for adolescents.
- 4) There is a dearth of literature behind

individual skill acts, even for those we have reasonable definitions of such as writing. Stotsky's (1991; 1996) observations about the need for a better understanding of civic writing by ordinary citizens still holds true. The more complex skill acts, such as learning to work with others to achieve a common good, are even less well understood at an individual level.

- 5) Civic skills are probably acquired in some type of developmental trajectory; that is, some of the skills are likely related to each other and learned sequentially while others can be learned simultaneously. Similarly, there are probably cognitive milestones that are important to achieve before some civic skills can be fully developed. The Standards for Civics and Government may provide a useful starting place for sorting out these questions. The standards link particular skills to particular age groups. Presumably this was done with knowledge about the capacity of young people to understand and perform different tasks. Further exploration of the rationale for placement of the skills into specific age groupings may reveal knowledge about appropriate developmental trajectories, useful for furthering our efforts to place other skills into appropriate age cohorts for acquisition.
- 6) The concept of skill transfer is implicit in much of the literature we reviewed and explicit in the Civic Voluntarism Model. It seems that skills learned in one arena such as an extracurricular activities can be transferred to the political arena. We need to understand the skill transfer process more effectively including enriching our knowledge about causal relationships. For example, does having the skills make one more likely to participate in politics or do those interested in social activities acquire the skills in as a natural part of their interest in politics, in other words, a self selection model? The literature search about extracurricular activities (Kirlin 2003) poses similar "self-selection" versus mobilization questions. Evidence of a correlation between civic skills and political participation exists in a preliminary fashion but causal information remains largely theoretical.
- 7) Organization structure appears to matter quite a bit for civic skill development. Evidence from religious institutions suggests that governance structures and role opportunities for members are related to participation. A related finding is that there are differences in outcomes for participation in instrumental versus expressive organizations (Kirlin 2002). Both lines of thinking suggest that the

structure of organizations may be an important component in whether civic skill development opportunities exist or not.

- 8) Civic skills should not be considered in a vacuum; they are likely related to a wide array of behavior and beliefs which, taken in total, lead to participation. Possessing civic skills does not equal political participation. Exemplary of this is Cassel's (1999) finding that learning civic skills in church is not correlated with increased voter turnout. Verba, Schlozman and Brady (1995) also caution that the skills allow other political resources, such as time or money, to be used effectively. However, even then the individual requires some type of connection to the relevant political networks and motivation to get involved.
- 9) Ultimately, this research is useful not only for understanding factors in political participation, but also for encouraging political participation. Thus, civic definitions must eventually be linked to pedagogical, curricular, and program design elements and subsequently made available to teachers and program developers.

in a democracy seem to be an orphan of sorts; many disciplines explore parts of the concepts but none take full responsibility. However, the intuitive appeal of civic skills, the early empirical evidence and the variety of contributions to be made by different disciplines, make research into civic skills a fruitful area for those willing to tackle the topic.

The questions related to the definition, development and measurement of the civic skills necessary for effective participation

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