Introduction: civic engagement and education

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This *Handbook* provides a curated overview of a small number of selected themes in the field covering key theoretical aspects, developments, core topics, and comparative empirical research and studies in specific contexts that shed light on, identify key concerns, and provide concrete examples that contribute to shaping the field of civic engagement and education. Scholarly works and practitioner efforts relevant to civic engagement and education are informed by a broad range of approaches. They relate to history, psychology, sociology, media studies, political sciences, and education studies, among others. In short, much work has contributed to the understanding of the relationship between civic engagement and education. Not least, by shedding light on the formation and reproduction of social norms, identity formation, and education policy and practices. Two important distinctions are worthwhile pointing out among these works and efforts. In our view, these help to inform contemporary approaches as well as critiques regarding the possibilities and limitations of civic engagement and education, and thus contribute to the underlying narrative and structure of this *Handbook*. Foremost, a core distinction reflects the shift from structuralist to post-structuralist approaches in scholarship on civic engagement and education. The other distinction worth highlighting is between general research and more direct efforts to develop policy and practice. The following briefly discusses some of the scholarly works and practitioner efforts and associated developments in relation to these two distinctions.

As a starting point, research on the history of education has demonstrated how education as an institution (Foucault, 1995; Green, 1997) and teachers as a professional category (Meinander, 2001) have been instrumental in forging national identities. Historical examples of ideological movements, such as the common school movement, build on articulations that have served a backdrop for many commonsense ideas regarding the role of education and teachers in civic engagement today. In the eighteenth, nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, public national curricula were promoted by education scholars who were inspired by the agenda of the Enlightenment movement (Dewey, 1916; Grundtvig, 1832; Lönnbeck, 1910; Mann, 1848; Wollstonecraft, 1996). These were scholars who argued for the need to advance the reasoning skills of all citizens, for the benefit of the individual and the common good.

A distinct feature of the early promoters of national public curricula was that they promoted not only the development of public schools but also the development of popular culture and the inclusion of different social groups. Grundtvig promoted co-educational practices and the development of popular literature in the Danish language (Grundtvig, 1832). Cygnaeus promoted co-educational practices in teacher education and teacher training in the Finnish language (Lönnbeck, 1910). Wollstonecraft promoted co-educational practices (Wollstonecraft, 1996). Mann and Dewey promoted public education as a site where different social groups would learn to interact and co-exist (Dewey, 1916; Mann, 1848). The dual focus on emancipation, on the one hand, and the construction of a citizen and a national culture, on the other hand, motivated many of the above-mentioned education scholars.
The double focus on emancipation and the promotion of popular culture was continued by contemporary education scholars such as Freire in Brazil and bell hooks in the US (hooks, 2009; Torres, 2019). A crucial difference however in the work of these more contemporary scholars is that they have worked from a post-structuralist position that has sought to address poverty and racial inequities and associated injustices in the modern nation-state, whereas the efforts of the earlier scholars can be characterized as structuralist efforts related to the construction of modern nation-states.

The following discusses several further strands of research in relation to their relevance and impact on the development of the field of civic engagement and education.

Contributing to a life-cycle developmental perspective related to civic engagement and education, research in psychology has demonstrated how and at what ages children, on average, develop understanding and the ability to distinguish between concepts such as families, cities, communities, political units, governance and geographical distance (Piaget and Weil, 1951). In addition to theories on the cognitive process as such, research has been carried out on the development of values, identity and different conceptualizations of national identity (Barrett, 2007). Psychological research is important for understanding in particular the cognitive and emotive dimensions of civic engagement and education (see self-directed approaches: Ryan and Deci, 2000; see also the social context of cognition: Bronfenbrenner, 1977; Vygotsky, 1978).

Incorporating the dynamics of social and power relations, research in sociology has demonstrated, on the one hand, how education has contributed to the reproduction of social norms, social categories and societal groups (Bernstein, 1977; Bourdieu and Passeron, 1970; Coleman, 1990; Skoepol, 1995). On the other hand, research in sociology has addressed how changes in societies impact different societal groups (Beauvoir, 2011; Du Bois, 1903; Durkheim, 1919; Putnam, 2000). Sociological research is central for understanding inequities in civic engagement, for making sense of disparities in education and for understanding diverse strategies for civic engagement deployed by different societal groups and persons representing diverse social categories (Benhabib, 2006).

Research that has highlighted the importance of context specificity for understanding civic engagement and education includes notably research on anthropology, cultural studies and religious practices (Houtsonen, 1991), addressing importantly also the question of communities of learning (Holland and Lave, 2019; Lave, 1988).

Media studies and related fields such as critical media literacy continue to grow as contemporary fields of research that are important for understanding the development of values and identity (Kellner, 1995; Lemish and Pick-Alony, 2013). Social media and online communities provide opportunities for civic engagement in public spheres online and constitute important forms of contemporary popular culture. The presence of various interests online and the efforts by a number of national governments to regulate, censor, block and shut down practices, which have become possible through the use of online sites and online communication, demonstrate the contested and complex nature of the World Wide Web as a public sphere site (Fuchs, 2021; Shen, 2021).

Research in the political sciences, policy-related analysis and practitioner fields of management and leadership research contribute with insights to the different levels of governance contexts in which the relationship between civic engagement and education plays out. Notable are political regimes and social policy regimes on the macro-level of societies (Esping-Andersen, 1990; Green, Janmaat and Han, 2009), political processes such as decentralization of educa-
tion and the operations of non-governmental organizations on the meso-level of societies, and shifting political views and participation on the micro-level of societies. A related field of theoretical and practitioner-oriented scholarship that has grown in connection to the United Nations’ recent policy agenda for Education is Global Citizenship Education (Torres, 2017).

What characterizes the variety of research on the policy and governance context is that scholarly efforts represent a range from empirical (Esping-Andersen, 1990) and critically informed (Torres, 2017) to prescriptive (Mali et al., 2014; OECD, 2018; United Nations, 2018). An important distinction to make for research on policy and governance contexts is that there is on the one hand empirically and critically oriented research that serves a more general research purpose and includes post-structuralist approaches. On the other hand, there are a large number of papers and reports that seek to construct policies and describe and prescribe practices that serve specific political mandates using a structuralist approach. The work of international organizations such as the United Nations (UN) and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) falls in the latter group. Whilst producing relevant empirical research, the latter tend for the above reason to emphasize operational and technical aspects of civic engagement and education. An example is the promotion of “action” as an outcome of civic education in the recent conceptualization of “global competence” by the OECD (2018). What is gained by abstract simplifications, such as a decontextualized promotion of civic action, is what superficially comes across as general applicability and general validity. Whilst entirely blind to meaningful action, the decontextualized definition of civic action allows diverse political units to be brought in under an agenda that can subsequently be promoted globally. The construction of shared references and shared meaning is an important aspect of structuralist approaches. In summary, general and basic research on policies and governance of civic engagement and education seeks to construct balanced analyses of civic engagement and education; in contrast, research that serves policy mandates seeks to establish and promote shared norms in civic engagement and education.

ORGANIZATION AND OVERVIEW OF THE HANDBOOK

Systematic coverage of all the possible strands and particularities mentioned above would indeed produce a very large Handbook; however, as mentioned, this Handbook focuses on a curated overview of a small number of selected themes in the field covering key theoretical aspects, developments, core topics, and comparative empirical research and studies in specific contexts that shed light on, identify key concerns on and provide concrete examples that contribute to shaping the field of civic engagement and education. We have clustered a total of 22 chapters into five parts as follows: “Background and theory” (four chapters); “Social movements and orientations for social change” (four chapters); “Civic-oriented education, curriculum and outcomes” (seven chapters); “Studies using comparative data” (three chapters); and “Studies in specific contexts” (four chapters). The following provides a brief overview of each of the chapters.

Part I: Background and Theory

The book opens with a chapter by Susan Wiksten on “Civic education agendas: from popular education and nationalism to global efforts”. It provides a historical overview of ideas central
to the goals and purposes that civic education has served, specifically by considering structural changes in connection to: (1) industrialization; (2) following the Second World War; and (3) in the post-Covid context. Corresponding goals of civic education have included the formation of the nation-state, efforts to support world peace, and competition in a global knowledge economy. The opening chapter underscores the need to advance humanizing approaches for addressing student needs to understand how civic issues and participation at the local, regional, and global levels are interrelated and interact.

The second chapter, by Raymond A. Morrow, is on “Habermas and civic education”. Morrow concisely summarizes key themes from Habermas’s body of work that are relevant for civic education. Although Habermas wrote very little explicitly on education, his critical social theory has had a significant, if indirect and uneven, impact on education theory and research, including civic education. The chapter highlights four aspects of his approach that are central to his reception in education: (1) collective learning as a key aspect of human evolution; (2) a theory of democratic legitimation crisis that contributes to a critical sociology of reproduction and transformation in education; (3) an epistemological conception of a critical-emancipatory knowledge interest and an ontology of communicative action that have influenced critical pedagogy; and (4) a theory of deliberative democracy and the democratic public sphere that has informed critical and radical democratic approaches to civic education.

This is followed by a chapter from Carlos Alberto Torres on “Seeking moral high ground – global citizenship education: the quest for a global planetarian ethics”. Torres highlights several theses defending a social justice education model based on human rights and a theory of values and puts forth a powerful argument advocating social justice for the planet. This is based on theories of the global commons, where global citizenship education is seen as an intervention to address emerging global challenges that require some form of collective response to find effective solutions.

The fourth chapter, titled “Social contract pedagogy: enabling communication and governance for the negotiation of balanced outcomes” is by Richard Desjardins. He introduces the novel concept of Social Contract Pedagogy and discusses the importance of lifelong learning systems for communication and the negotiation of balanced outcomes in society with an emphasis on civic and social outcomes. He summarizes the social contract pedagogy approach to education and communication and suggests that international education as an already established field of practice and research relates strongly to many of the principles outlined in the social contract pedagogy approach.

**Part II: Social Movements and Orientations for Social Change**

The first chapter in this part, “Education as social movement tactic, target, context, and outcome”), is by Tricia Niesz. She explores in detail the educational dimensions and implications of social movements. The chapter provides a survey of the multifield landscape of education scholarship addressing social movements. The intent is to highlight not only extant bodies of scholarship but also the possibilities inherent in the myriad relationships, contexts, and questions that reside at the intersections of social movements and education, all of which are compelling points of entry for researchers of civic engagement and education.

This is followed by a chapter from Sondra Hale on “Community engagement, feminist movements, and academia: the development of women’s studies in the United States”. Hale discusses the development of Women’s Studies in the United States and in doing so provides
reflections on feminist movements in relation to the academy. She shows some of the ways that feminist ideas permeated the first curricula of Women’s Studies programs in the US. Further, she reflects on the more recent neoliberal trend that has anchored itself within elite universities and as such how the atmosphere was not conducive for feminism to thrive – at least, not the feminism of the communities out of which particular notions of egalitarianism and freedom came. Some of the challenges of existing class and power structures in universities are described, including the development of a world free from systems of privilege, where knowledge is put into practice to engage in critical reflection and dialogue. The latter did not fit into a business model, namely one that was educating students to be consumers trained in how to seek privilege.

The chapter by Greg Misiaszek and Syed Nitas Iftekhar addresses “Ecopedagogy: teaching for socio-environmental civic actions through local, global and planetary lenses”. Misiaszek and Iftekhar provide an overview of the concept of ecopedagogy which is grounded in critical theories and rooted in the popular education approach of Paulo Freire. It problematizes pedagogies for “development” for, or against, planetary sustainability with citizenship pedagogies together. Planetary sustainability here indicates both socio-environmental justice and Nature’s wellbeing non-anthropocentrically. The focus is on the needs and possibilities of ecopedagogies to help guide students’ praxis by seeing themselves as global citizens being part of Nature (i.e. being planetary citizens). Their argument is that ecopedagogies are crucial for students’ civil engagement by becoming critical global and planetary citizens to end socio-environmental violence by disrupting false citizenship–development ideologies that separate “us” from “non-citizens” and from the rest of Nature.

Addressing the rise of neo-nationalism in the world, Amy Pojar, Yuqing Hou and Jason Nunzio Dorio discuss the potential and strategies of using “Global citizenship education to disrupt neo-nationalism”. The global resurgence of neo-nationalism poses a violent and radical threat to a more inclusive, multicultural, equity-driven, and global justice-based civic engagement and education. The chapter illustrates the threat by describing the character of neo-nationalism and its impact on education generally. They summarize results of a critical discourse analysis of Global Citizenship Education (GCE) mission statements, learning objectives, and marketing material to gauge the extent to which GCE programs are oriented toward neutralizing neo-nationalism, and provide recommendations to enhance curricula in ways that promote a transformative, global justice-based GCE.

**Part III: Civic-Oriented Education, Curriculum and Outcomes**

In the first chapter of this part focusing more directly on civic-oriented education, curriculum and outcomes, David E. Campbell provides an overview of research on “Civic education and voting”. While formal civic education classes in secondary school have been found to have an impact on civic outcomes, particularly knowledge about government and politics, there is little evidence regarding their impact on young people’s subsequent voter turnout. However, classroom instruction does not exhaust the ways in which schools can provide a civic education, and thus affect voter turnout. He suggests based on research that students who develop “soft skills” learn to navigate the complexity of voting, and thus are more likely to vote. Similarly, he suggests that a school’s ethos can either foster or dampen voter turnout. Young people – especially people of color – who experience punitive and arbitrary discipline are less likely to vote as adults, while students who attend schools with a strong sense of community
are more likely to become voters. To fully understand how schools affect all forms of political engagement, future research should take an expansive view of what constitutes civic education for young people.

The following chapter by Jan Germen Janmaat provides a review of recent research on the link between “Education and tolerance”. Findings suggest that most of the reviewed studies record positive outcomes of education with respect to tolerance. However, whether these positive outcomes also reflect a genuine causal impact of education cannot be established in many cases. The evidence about causality is most convincing for studies examining the impact of particular programs (i.e. the curriculum) or teaching and learning practices (i.e. pedagogy), as there are many experimental studies recording positive effects of interventions related to these aspects of education.

The contribution by Xavier Mellet discusses research related to “Youth civic engagement”. Given the observation of a democratic decline in most of the major democracies in the world, this has become a key issue of concern for the future of democracies. He discusses different forms of influence of education over engagement that are found in the research literature, namely civic education courses, open classroom climate, and extracurricular activities – so as to illustrate how education may improve youth engagement.

In the chapter titled “Critical media literacy for civic engagement in the United States”, Jeff Share and Trent M. C. McBride discuss the theory and share examples of critical media literacy as a pedagogical response to the rapid growth of the world’s population connected to digital networks and exposure to information and media. Critical media literacy provides a framework and pedagogy to expand notions of literacy and civics to be more inclusive of all types of texts and deepen students’ potential to question the power of the word, sound, and image to represent social and environmental issues. When students learn to critically read and write with videos, music, social media, and print, they deepen their critical thinking skills and develop their identities as responsible and empowered global citizens.

With a more direct focus on civic education curricula, Najat Ouakrim-Soivio and Jan Löfström discuss the “Aims, concepts, and assessment of the citizenship education curriculum in northern Europe”. The connections between citizenship education, civic education and social studies are clarified, placing civic education as a broader umbrella concept under which citizenship education and social studies can both be located. They address themes related to: (1) cross-disciplinary (or transversal) competences and their potentially strained relationship with the concept of powerful knowledge in the context of civic education; (2) the competences of the good citizen as they are visible in the contents and aims in the civic education curriculum; and (3) the challenge of assessing student competences in civic education.

In the following chapter, Jan Löfström and Najat Ouakim-Soivio address the “Politics and ethics of civic and citizenship education curricula in Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden”. They suggest that in the context of the Nordic countries, teachers and principals tend to give a high priority to developing students’ generic civic skills in critical thinking rather than preparing students for political engagement. Given the ethical endeavor associated with civic education, they also suggest that the ethical and moral dimensions should be more visible in the curriculum.

In her chapter, Irina Golubeva discusses “Intercultural citizenship education in university settings”. Intercultural (or global) citizenship is frequently claimed as a goal of internationalization of higher education and a main outcome of participation in study abroad programs. She suggests, however, that the impact of study abroad on students’ civic growth is debatable.
Recent empirical data show that there is no relation between feeling like a citizen of a transnational community and being actively engaged in this community. Study abroad students also tend to rank increased civic responsibility lower compared with other outcomes associated with studying abroad. Consequently, the author suggests that intercultural citizenship education should be incorporated in higher education, in a more systematic way, for all students.

**Part IV: Studies Using Comparative Data**

In their chapter, Wolfram Schulz and Ralph Carstens outline the background, origins and conceptual approach as well as some key findings associated with The IEA International Civic and Citizenship Education Study (ICCS). Research by the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) has played a key role in advancing our knowledge about civic and citizenship education across different national contexts. The IEA ICCS is the only international study dedicated to this field of learning. They conclude that there is a need for future studies to increase emphasis on issues related to engagement via digital technologies, global citizenship and sustainable development.

The chapter by Eva Kosberg and Tessa Eriksen Grevle is a “Review of International Civic and Citizenship Education Study data analyses of student political efficacy”. This review of 193 articles focuses on articles which analyze the data from either, or both, cycles of the ICCS of 2009 and 2016, to develop and clarify findings that regard both civic education and political efficacy. An important finding is that the articles that explored the connection between education and political efficacy underscored that it is imperative for schools to focus on increasing adolescents’ political efficacy as this is positively correlated with the enablement of their future engagement.

On the basis of data from the OECD Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC), Takashi Yamashita, Wonmai Punksungka and Phyllis A. Cummins discuss in their chapter the relationships among “Volunteer participation, STEM background, and basic skills among adults in the United States”. Their analysis suggests that adults with a STEM background are more likely to volunteer, and those with STEM as a background who also have higher basic skills as measured in the PIAAC show an even higher likelihood of volunteering. That is, the positive associations between volunteering and a STEM background are likely to be moderated by basic skill proficiencies. Based on the findings from this study, preliminary policy implications and important future research areas are evaluated.

**Part V: Studies in Specific Contexts**

The first chapter in this part by Andrew Swindell, Brian McCommons and Kathlyn Elliott focuses on “Civic and social engagement outcomes of education in emergencies: perspectives from varied contexts”. It discusses the subfield of Education in Emergencies in the context of social and civic outcomes of education in three areas: (1) civic, peace, social-emotional-learning, and resilience education in conflict and post-conflict settings; (2) how refugees and migrants in Finland are received by the Finnish education system, and their impact on nationalism and education nationally; and (3) the impact of interrupted education during the COVID-19 pandemic and political turmoil in Bolivia.

Hanna Toiviainen and Elina Weiste summarize the results of a unique project involving expert-by-experience (EbE) participation as a form of civic engagement in their chapter.
titled “Learning for change in health and social care: expertise by experience as a new form of civic engagement”. Trained health care volunteers with lived experiences of life and health challenges are referred to as experts-by-experience (EbEs). A set of organized interactions in Finland is used as an example of collective development that brought together researcher-facilitators, professionals, clients, patients and EbEs to advance a shared understanding of how client involvement can be enhanced in work and everyday care. Findings highlight the contribution of EbEs to conceptual, practical, and collaborative development of practices.

In their chapter, titled “Civic engagement during the biographical transition to retirement in Germany”, Bernhard Schmidt-Hertha and Veronika Thalhammer discuss civic engagement in the context of the post-retirement phase. The results of their research indicate that civic engagement in middle adulthood can have a preventive effect against psychological stress in the phase of transition to retirement.

The last chapter by Aline Soares is titled “Integral education in Brazil: the main elements of the debate applied to an adult and youth school in São Paulo”. Soares introduces the debate on the concept of integral education in Brazil. Integral education is an approach that considers the multiple dimensions of human development and acknowledges the importance of the education of autonomous citizens. It explores the historical roots of integral education, notably Dewey’s progressivism and Freire’s legacy, and draws on the work of current scholars to discuss the main elements of the integral education debate. It then examines these elements in the context of implementing integral education by introducing an adult and youth school in São Paulo, the CIEJA Campo Limpo. By cultivating the elements identified as central to integral education, CIEJA’s approach shows that integral education in this case resulted in an educational experience that connected to participants’ life experiences in ways that support meaningful academic and social outcomes.

Together, the contributions in this Handbook underscore the complex relationship between civic engagement and education at all stages of life. Some of the challenges for different generations of students are also identified, including the growth of a digital divide and a pressing need for critical media and ICT literacy in post-Covid civic education. A key point that emerges across chapters is that civic engagement is best supported by education practices that are characterized by humanizing, negotiated, collaborative and dialogical approaches. Notable are approaches that support students to develop not only civic knowledge and critical thinking skills but also a sense of moral and ethical values as well as a willingness to make efforts towards shared references across lines of difference. As reflected by UNESCO’s Global Citizenship Education agenda, a particular challenge in the context of accelerating societal and planetary change is the support that students need to understand how global challenges such as environmental change, pandemics, poverty, migration, and critical participatory citizenship interrelate and interact at local, regional, and global levels. The forging of shared references to enable communication and to address common interests and problems such as the need to promote peace remains as relevant and crucial today as it was in the post Second World War era. Importantly, further research and analysis are needed for the continued development of our understanding of how civic engagement can be supported by educational practices to advance much needed renegotiations of societal agreements. We hope that together these chapters can contribute to further research that can empower generations to come, to make their own decisions about civic engagement in well-informed and equitable ways.
REFERENCES


