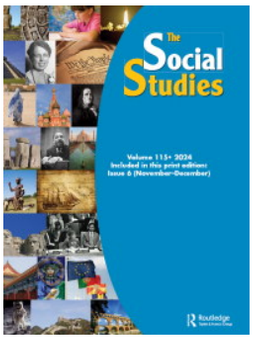

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Teaching Civics: An Overview of Instructional Strategies Using Primary Sources, Role-Play and Simulations, and Academic Service Learning for Teaching Civic Knowledge, Skills, and Dispositions

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ABSTRACT

Civic education is essential to the perpetuation of American self-government. Despite this important role, civic education in the United States has been neglected for several decades and is only recently seeing a resurgence in the classroom and as a focus of research. Conceptions of what constitutes effective civic education vary widely, creating a great multiplicity in what is measured and how, and obfuscating which pedagogical practices are most effective. This paper provides an overview of civic education and the outcomes—including civic knowledge, civic skills, and civic dispositions—that are the goals of such education. We then examine three pedagogies—instruction through primary-source analysis, simulation-based learning, and academic service learning—and review examples of the civic outcomes of these pedagogies. We seek to answer several questions: How are these instructional practices defined? What debates and challenges surround their implementation? What evidence is there that such techniques result in civic outcomes? Finally, what implications are there for the social studies classroom? We demonstrate that these three pedagogies have the potential to improve civic learning, and that a mixture of engaging and effective pedagogies is ideal. We encourage further research on the civic outcomes resulting from the implementation of various pedagogies.

KEYWORDS

Civic knowledge; civic skills; civic dispositions; primary sources; simulation-based instruction; academic service learning

> "Democracy has to be born anew every generation, and education is its midwife."
>
> John Dewey (Boydston, 2008, p. 139)

In the midst of concerns about democratic backsliding (Freedom House, 2016; Haggard & Kaufman, 2021; Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018; Luttig, 2023), Americans are remembering that education—civic education—must play midwife to democracy. Just as George Washington, John Adams, Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, and other founders and framers foresaw, civic education is essential to perpetuating American self-government (Fonte, 2006). One state legislature, upon earmarking funds for a Civic Thought and Leadership Initiative, stated "Public schools fulfill a vital purpose in the preparation of succeeding generations of informed and responsible citizens who are deeply attached to essential democratic values and institutions" (Utah State Legislature, 2022, p. 1). Other state and federal efforts have recently begun. For schools to fulfill this indispensable role, they must know what civic education is, plan learning objectives in civic outcomes, and utilize pedagogies which effectively support students in this education.

Civic education has been defined in various ways. Educating for American Democracy (2021) defined the word *civic* as "the virtues, assets, and activities that a free people need to govern themselves well" and argued that "where civic education succeeds, all people are prepared and motivated to participate effectively in civic life" (p. 9). The Institute for Citizens and Scholars (n.d., para. 1) defined *civic learning* as "the development of the civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions of people, resulting in citizens who are civically well-informed, productively engaged, and hopeful about democracy" (Gallos et al., 2023, p. 13). Knowledge, skills, and dispositions are

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In loving memory of Glori Smith, teacher, mentor, and friend.

repeatedly referenced in the literature on civic education, referred to using those exact terms (Center for Civic Education, n.d.; Diliberti & Kaufman, 2022; Gallos et al., 2023; Nokes & De La Paz, 2023), a combination of terms (Andolina & Conklin, 2021; Hoyer, 2020; Levy et al., 2023; Ward, 2022), or different but parallel terms (Cramer & Toff, 2017; National Council for the Social Studies, 2013).

Being civically well-informed requires *civic knowledge*, "a deep understanding of our history, culture, government, institutions, and current affairs from multiple media sources and diverse perspectives" (Institute for Citizens and Scholars, n.d., para. 7). Narrower definitions of civic knowledge include the "increased understanding of the institutions of constitutional democracy and the fundamental principles and values upon which they are founded" (Center for Civic Education, n.d., para. 1). Yet civic knowledge alone does not create civic competence. Cramer and Toff (2017) noted there is nothing inherently beneficial about information; "what matters is how people use it" (p. 755). Democracy also requires skills (being "productively engaged") and dispositions (being "committed to democracy") (Institute for Citizens and Scholars, n.d., para. 8, 9).

Civic skills are defined as "the abilities necessary to participate as active and responsible citizens in democracy. They are necessary for critical thinking and collective action, and include speaking, listening, collaboration, community organizing, public advocacy, and the ability to gather and process information" (Gould et al., 2011, p. 16). Frameworks categorize civic skills in different ways, such as participatory and cognitive skills (Chi et al., 2006; Patrick, 2003); cognitive, communication, group discussion, and news monitoring skills (Comber, 2005); and communication, collective decision-making, critical thinking, and organization skills (Kirlin, 2003).

Civic dispositions are defined as the "traits essential for democratic character formation and the maintenance of constitutional democracy" (Owen, 2015, p. 1). These dispositions support "the willingness to use democratic procedures for making decisions and managing conflict" (Center for Civic Education, n.d., para. 1) and are critical because "democracy demands that citizens grapple with each other's experiences and perspectives. Democracy is more than isolated individuals aggregating their preferences to govern themselves. Democracy is about people interacting together to collectively shape the communities" in which they live (Cramer & Toff, 2017, p. 767). Civic dispositions promote "concern for the welfare of people of all backgrounds …, working to improve trust in institutions and each other, and optimis[m] about the future of democracy" (Institute for Citizens and Scholars, n.d., para. 9). Owen (2015), using analysis of covariance, evaluated civic dispositions in six categories: (a) respect for the rule of law; (b) political attentiveness (following government and politics; critically consuming political news); (c) civic duty (voting in elections, serving on a jury or in the U.S. military); (d) community involvement; (e) commitment to government service; and (f) norms of political tolerance and political efficacy (belief that one's actions can make their communities better, which encourages future engagement). Owen's findings show a positive relationship between civic instruction and the development of civic dispositions. Nonetheless a survey of entering freshmen in the nation's colleges and universities showed a 30-year decline in "habits and dispositions deemed essential for effective democratic participation" (Johanek & Puckett, 2005, p. 148). Respondents had a very limited view of what being a good citizen involved, including behaviors such as voting and obeying the law but considering anything else, like gathering signatures and serving on a jury, "above the line of duty" (p. 148).

After briefly surveying the history of civic education, we will explore three pedagogies—instruction through using primary-source analysis, simulation-based learning, and academic serving learning—and present evidence of outcomes in civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions as well as suggestions for classroom implementation. Nokes and De La Paz have noted that few "rigorous studies have assessed the impact of instruction on young people's civic engagement" (2023, p. 29); we too will note the lack of research measuring specific civic outcomes for particular instructional strategies (Fitzgerald et al., 2021).

History of civic education

Civic education was the driving argument behind the establishment of public schools in the United States. Beginning with the founders and framers and continuing with Noah Webster, Horace Mann, and others, education was considered necessary to produce citizens capable of participation in the new republic (Fonte, 2006). By 1800, William Manning and others advocated for universal and free public schooling, offering an education in republican principles that would deliver "plenty of men to fill the highest offices of state" (Boonshoft, 2020, p. 7). This system of tax-supported schools would mix people of different backgrounds, reinforce the bonds of democracy in the new nation, and be "pillars of the republic" (Kaestle, 1983). By the eve of the Civil War, most free young Americans attended public elementary schools, and an increasing number entered public high schools (Neem, 2017).

Despite this auspicious beginning, by the late 1960s a reduced trust in government institutions led to skepticism about the validity, morality, and efficacy of teaching citizenship (Gould et al., 2011). The *American Political Science Review*, the flagship journal of the American Political Science Association, published an article by Langton and Jennings (1968) concluding that civics courses were ineffective in promoting civic tolerance, political involvement; and political knowledge. This article was at least partly responsible for the 50-year decline in civic course requirements across the United States (Galston, 2007; Gould et al., 2011). However the conclusions of Langton and Jennings may have been "misremembered" (Campbell, 2019, p. 34). Although their data, collected in 1965, found negligible effects of civic education in public schools with only White students, a noted positive impact was evident in Black communities. The improved civics knowledge, skills, and dispositions among Black students may have been a compensation effect for segregation and the inability to fully participate in the American political system. Ironically, "the same article that was thought to conclude that civic education is ineffectual actually contains within it the fundamental insight of where civic education matters most" (Campbell, 2019, p. 3). Indeed, Cohen et al. (2021) and Martens and Gainous (2013) reported that civic education is most effective for underprivileged students.

This decline in civic requirements and in research into civic outcomes is one reason why our attempt at a systematic review methodology was foiled. We searched across multiple databases, using terms related to civic education (*civic*, *civics*, *civic education*, *citizenship education*, and *civic engagement*), civic outcomes (*skill(s)*, *competence*, *knowledge*, and *disposition(s)*), and teaching methods (*pedagogy*, *teaching*, *teaching strategies*, and *teaching methods*), and then adding terms for specific teaching methods: primary-source methods (*primary source*, *primary documents*, *historical documents*, and *historical sources*); simulations and role-playing methods (*simulations*, *mock trial*, and *role*-play); or academic service learning (*academic service learning*, *service learning*, *experiential learning*, *action civics*, and *experiential learning*). Our results were disappointing; for instance, we received 22 results for primary source pedagogy combined with the civic education and outcome terms, none of which were useful. Instead we carried out an exploratory review, limited to English language articles on K–12 civic education carried out in the U.S. and published between 1970 and the present. These dates encompass the critical research mentioned above and two bicentennials (of the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution), both of which increased attention to civic education.

Civic outcomes across pedagogies

Our overview discusses civic outcomes—improved knowledge, skills, and dispositions—in K–12 instruction using primary-source analysis, simulations and role-playing activities, and academic service learning. Primary-source analysis teaches students civic knowledge through the words and perspectives of historical figures while also developing reading skills, historical literacy, and historical empathy. Simulation-based learning—including mock trials, simulated congressional hearings, and role-plays—increases knowledge retention, learner engagement, and civic skill development. Academic service learning also fosters engagement, student agency, and connections

to the broader community. Each strategy will be defined, historicized, analyzed, and applied to classroom settings.

Civic education using primary sources

Over the last several decades, the use of primary sources has increased in civics classrooms. In the 1987 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) survey, only 12% of 11th grade respondents said they used primary sources at least once a week and 45% said they never did (Ravitch & Finn, 1987, p. 190). In contrast, in 2022, 93% of eighth-graders reported using primary sources at least once or twice a month and 61% said they used primary sources once or twice a week or even daily. Only 1% of 8th graders said they never used primary sources (The Nation's Report Card, n.d.).

Of course, simply including primary sources in a lesson plan is not enough to enhance civic education; the pedagogy guiding the use of primary sources is critical. Hoyer (2020) asserted that we "have only just begun to explore the possibilities of teaching with primary sources to cultivate civic engagement" (p. 5). The following subsections briefly review the definition and history of primary sources in American civic education, clarify useful pedagogies, and present the evidence regarding increases in civic outcomes when primary sources are used.

Definition and history

Primary sources are "immediate, first-hand accounts of a topic, from people who had a direct connection with it" (Healey Library, 2019, para. 1); they include speeches, diaries, letters, interviews, newspaper reports, essays, survey data, texts of laws and other original documents, photographs, video, audio, and other materials created by people from the past. Unlike secondary sources, which "retell, analyze, or interpret events, usually at a distance of time or place," primary sources are "documents and objects that were created at the time under study" (Library of Congress, n.d.).

Using primary sources to understand civics and history is not new. The American founders consulted ancient Greek and Roman texts to consider previous forms of government. As history became a standard subject in the school curriculum at the end of the 19th century, the American Historical Association commissioned a Committee of Seven to foster uniformity in and make recommendations about history teaching (Bohan, 2009). The committee suggested that primary sources would show "the nature of the historical process, and … make the people and events of bygone times more real" (Reisman, 2012, p. 86). Committee member Lucy Maynard Salmon urged her students to "go to the source"—the sidewalks and streets—to "read" the natural landscape (Flad, n.d.). Salmon's focus on a variety of everyday primary sources lent her the epitaph Apostle of Democracy (Brown, 1943). Today, educators herald the importance of teaching with firsthand accounts to give students "the purest evidence about the past" (Nokes, 2022, p. 44) and "the raw materials of history" (Library of Congress, n.d.).

But the antedence and the purity of a text are not themselves enough to promote civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions. Sometimes primary sources are used simply to reinforce information found in a textbook (Nokes, 2022; Reisman, 2012), and instruction presents history as "a pre-established linear chain of events, free of interpretations, disagreements, or controversies" (Nokes, 2014, p. 376). A primary source may be a different type of document than a history textbook, but the intent may remain to convey information which the student should receive unquestioningly (Nokes, 2014). Civic knowledge may be the only measured outcome, neglecting skills or dispositions, and when poorly taught, one unlikely to stick.

With more intentional pedagogy, primary sources can not only deepen civic knowledge but also foster the development of the civic skills and dispositions "needed to solve society's problems collaboratively and deliberatively" (Nokes & De La Paz, 2023, p. 2). Primary-source analysis can train students in historians' heuristics, the sense-making activities that encourage users to "resolve contradictions, see patterns, and make distinctions among different types of evidence" (Wineburg, 1991, p. 77; also Bickford et al., 2020; Nokes, 2011). These activities include *corroboration* (comparing documents before accepting as plausible or

likely); *sourcing* (looking first to the document's source or attribution); and *contextualization* (situating a document). Such skills parallel and reinforce civic skills, behaviors, and dispositions; contribute to deeper historic and civic knowledge (Wineburg, 1991); and "play a pivotal role in preparing students for their future roles as democratic citizens" (Bickford et al., 2020, p. 250).

Other approaches to teaching with primary sources also mirror the historian's craft. Historical inquiry uses primary sources to "captur[e] the investigative work of historians as they seek answers to historical questions" (Nokes, 2014, p. 377), employing multiple primary sources with agreeing and conflicting points of view (Library of Congress, n.d.; Nokes et al., 2007). This inspires perplexity about the past (Barton & Levstik, 2004) and allows students to "move from concrete observations and facts to … asking questions, evaluating information, making inferences, and developing reasoned explanations and interpretations of events and issues" (Library of Congress, n.d.). Thus "inquiry teaching, or using primary sources, … is one of the most engaging ways to support students' higher order thinking skills and to develop the essential understandings and habits needed to be a citizen in a democracy" (Woyshner, 2010, p. 36). By teaching students to reach conclusions based on evidence, such methods "contribut[e] to participatory democracy and democratic pluralism" (Barton & Levstik, 2004, p. 190).

The College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework for Social Studies State Standards, developed by the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS, 2013) and 14 other collaborating organizations, notes that civic principles, virtues, and principles ae taught through primary sources such as the American founding documents as well as when we consider "the diverse arguments that have been made about these documents and their meanings" (p. 33). One of the four dimensions in the C3 Framework is source analysis, wherein students gather and evaluate primary and secondary sources, then make evidence-based claims based upon them.

Civic outcomes

What are the civic outcomes of teaching with primary sources? "Enthusiasm about the instructional potential of primary sources dates to the late nineteenth century and has been echoed recently … [but] no extended intervention study has been undertaken to test the effectiveness of primary source instruction in real history classrooms" (Reisman, 2012, p. 86). Hoyer (2020) noted, "Current tools for assessing the impact of teaching with primary sources do not evaluate the full framework of knowledge, skills, and agency" (p. 5). Here we present some limited research on how effective pedagogy using primary sources builds civic understanding, beginning with civic knowledge (possibly the simplest aspect of civic learning to measure) as well as civic skills and dispositions (requiring more complex methods of measurement).

Civic knowledge. The precise civic knowledge assessed will depend on course and discipline: A U.S. Government class might cover knowledge of the U.S. Constitution and Bill of Rights; Congress and how laws are made; the president and the Cabinet; the court system; state and local governments; political parties, elections, and voting; rights and responsibilities of citizens; and principles of democratic government (Niemi & Junn, 1998). A U.S. History class would cover different content knowledge.

How does instruction with primary sources affect civic knowledge outcomes? Reisman (2012) evaluated the effects of document-based lessons—containing background knowledge, central historical questions, close reading of historical documents, and discussion—on students' retention of factual knowledge about history, reading comprehension, and historical thinking. Students receiving document-based instruction scored significantly higher regarding factual civic knowledge than did counterparts receiving more traditional instruction.

Nokes et al. (2007) obtained similar results in a study of the effectiveness of different types of instruction, comparing traditional textbook use to "sense-making activities" (p. 493), wherein multiple primary sources—speeches, government documents, charts, historical photographs, and historical fiction—were considered evidence rather than simple repositories of facts. The researchers found that under both instructional

conditions, using multiple texts instead of a single textbook resulted in superior learning of historical information. Civic knowledge deepened when students were taught from a variety of primary sources that present both similar and conflicting points of view. Barton (2005) likewise confirmed the importance of multiple sources: "Ultimately, we cannot depend on any single source—primary or secondary—for reliable knowledge; we have to consult multiple sources in our quest" for understanding (p. 746).

Emerling (2018) reported on graduate and undergraduate instruction at West Virginia University that used the archives of former West Virginia Senator Jay Rockefeller. Although not involving K–12 students, the proposed pedagogy can apply. The archives of a senator, Emerling argued, are particularly fitting for understanding civic knowledge, including of the structure of government and the processes through which laws are made:

> Congressional papers are rich with materials ideal for engaging students from numerous disciplines with civic knowledge concepts. Legislative memos, briefing books, and drafts of bills reveal the complexities of the legislative process; correspondence and interactions with state and local governments and interest groups reveal the path of policy development and implementation; and correspondence, press materials, and more uncover the political process and the functions of a congressional office. (p. 313)

The archives not only brought knowledge about the workings of government to life but also demonstrated civic skills in action, including communication strategies and collective decision-making.

Table 1. Civic skills promoted by primary source instruction.

Civic Skill Outcomes (Kirlin, 2003)	Source
Communication	
Articulate how political positions impact society & citizens	Bickford et al., 2020
Find public platforms for sharing knowledge with others	Hoyer, 2020, p. 11
Listen ("good democratic listening")	Andolina & Conklin (2021, p. 393)
Persuasively defend interpretations	Nokes & De La Paz, 2023
Collective decision-making	
Collaborate with community stakeholders	Emerling, 2018, p. 313; Hendry, 2007, p. 120
Interact with others	Cramer & Toff, 2017, p. 758
Reason collaboratively about complex social issues	Nokes & De La Paz, 2023, p. 333
Recognize the perspectives of others	Cramer & Toff, 2017, p. 767; Hoyer, 2020
Share experiences, necessary to govern together	Cramer & Toff, 2017, p. 758
Critical thinking	
Analyze information: Form hypotheses, question, examine raw data, consider a variety of perspectives, draw conclusions	Bickford et al., 2020; Hendry, 2007, p. 119; Schamel, 1998
Construct evidence-based arguments about local issues	Hoyer, 2020, p. 11
Decode political messages & politicians' biases, beliefs, values	Bickford et al., 2020, p. 250
Develop mental schemas	Hendry, 2007, p. 118
Gather and weigh information	Nokes & De La Paz, 2023
Make informed decisions	Nokes & De La Paz, 2023; Hendry, 2007, p. 119
Reason deliberately about complex issues	Nokes & De La Paz, 2023, p. 333
Solve problems	Nokes & De La Paz, 2023
Utilize higher order thinking skills	Hendry, 2007, p. 120; Hoyer, 2020, p. 6; Levstik & Barton, 2001; Nokes & De La Paz, 2023; Woyshner, 2010
Organization	
None found in our review.	

Civic skills. According to Kirlin (2003), civic skills fall into four categories, which we use here to categorize our findings (Table 1). *Organization* skills are needed to accomplish tasks and navigate organizations. *Communication* skills include writing, language proficiency, and speech and presentation skills. *Collective decision-making* skills are those "necessary for a democracy" (p. 21), such as expressing an opinion, hearing others' opinions, and working toward a consensus. *Critical-thinking* skills are needed to describe, analyze, synthesize, and construct opinions on public issues.

Critical thinking. A large variety of critical-thinking skills are among the benefits of primary-source instruction. Schamel (1998) argued that using primary sources leads to "the development of broad cognitive and analytical skills" (p. vii). Woyshner (2010) claimed that primary source work "is one of the most engaging ways to support students' higher order thinking skills and to develop the essential understandings and habits needed to be a citizen in a democracy" (p. 36). Nokes and De La Paz (2023) explained that the skills and dispositions that comprise a historian's work—such as the abilities to gather and weigh information, make informed decisions, solve problems, and persuasively defend interpretations—"parallel the critical thinking needed for deliberative and collaborative reasoning about complex social issues" (p. 333). Bickford et al. (2020) studied fourth-graders' responses to a month-long structured inquiry unit containing primary sources and reported that "the analysis

skills gained from applying historians' heuristics play a pivotal role in preparing students for their future roles as democratic citizens" (p. 250; also Hoyer, 2020), including learning to "decode subtle political messages [and] analyze political candidates' biases, beliefs and values" (p. 250).

Communication. Hoyer (2020) conducted three case studies in an outreach program at the Brooklyn Public Library's special collections and archives; the secondary students in the program developed "important skills for communicating about civic issues … and constructed evidence-based arguments about complex local issues, and they were then able to find public platforms for sharing their knowledge with others" (p. 11). Bickford et al. (2020) argued that using historians' heuristics for primary sources can help students to "articulate how political positions impact society and citizens" (p. 250). Andolina and Conklin (2021) expanded civic communication to include not only speaking but also listening. "Good democratic listening fosters community, builds empathy, and contributes to a sense of reciprocity" (p. 393); future research could investigate whether close reading of the different voices of primary-source documents also encourages close, empathetic, and democratic listening to others.

Collective decision-making. Andolina and Conklin (2021) argued that empathetic listening can also be "a crucial vehicle for nurturing relationships" and "the strength of civic relationships … generates the capacity for collective civic action" (p. 394). Such outcomes align with Kirlin's (2003) category of collective decision-making. Civic education prepares citizens "to interact with one another and share experiences as a necessary condition for collectively governing each other" (Cramer & Toff, 2017, p. 758). Hoyer's (2020) research shows that working with primary sources that have competing viewpoints helps students develop the skill of recognizing the perspectives of others. Cramer and Toff (2017) argued that this skill is a necessary part of competent citizenship, greasing the wheels of collective decision-making.

Civic dispositions. Though much research has yet to be conducted, primary-source instruction appears "to develop the essential understandings and habits"—the civic dispositions—"needed to be a citizen in a democracy" (Woyshner, 2010, p. 36). Here, we discuss some studies on primary-source instruction that have shown the following dispositional outcomes: (1) respect for the rule of law; (2) political attentiveness; (3) civic duty; (4) community involvement; (5) commitment to government service; and (6) the norms of political efficacy and political tolerance (Owen, 2015, p. 1). We have not yet uncovered a study demonstrating—or even just claiming—that primary-source instruction contributes to the rule-of-law aspect of civic dispositions, but various authors have asserted connections to the other civic disposition outcomes (see Table 2).

Political attentiveness. Barton (2005) explained that for over a decade, he had encouraged the use of primary sources as an alternative to lectures, textbooks, and worksheets and that he worried misunderstandings had led to greater primary-source use but fundamental misconceptions about history. After laying out seven misconceptions, Barton affirmed that there are at least four "unique contributions of original historical sources" wherein "they can serve better—and more authentically—than other approaches" (p. 751). Many of those contributions are outcomes in civic dispositions. For instance, Barton

Table 2. Civic dispositions promoted by primary source instruction.

Civic Disposition Outcomes (Owen, 2015)	Source
Respect for the rule of law	
None found in our review.	
Political attentiveness	
Construct more complex and nuanced understanding of past	Barton, 2005, p. 753
Encounter "clear and inspiring statements of principle"	Barton, 2005, p. 752
Motivate historical inquiry, stimulate curiosity, provoke questions	Barton, 2005, p. 751
Civic duty	
Cultivate a sense of motivation for their own involvement in civic issues	Hoyer, 2020, p. 6
Community involvement	
See themselves as change agents in their own communities	Hoyer, 2020, p. 6
Commitment to government service	
Civic engagement (vague term)	Hoyer, 2020
Norms of political efficacy and political tolerance	
Academic humility	Nokes & De La Paz, 2023, p. 18
Diverse students able to see themselves, their experiences represented in curriculum	Woyshner, 2010, p. 38
Willingness to deeply explore multiple plausible alternatives	Nokes & De La Paz, 2023, p. 29

argued that inquiry instruction involving primary sources stimulates political attentiveness, provoking questions, constructing more nuanced understandings of the past, and enabling students to encounter "clear and inspiring statements of principle" (p. 752; also Owen, 2015).

Political tolerance. Nokes and De La Paz (2023) argued that historians' heuristics are collaborative processes that support the dispositions of academic humility, appreciation of diverse perspectives, and willingness to deeply explore multiple plausible alternatives. Such dispositions are "essential for civil discourse" and reflect the norms of political tolerance (Owen, 2015, p. 18). The authors also asserted that "additional research is needed to identify instructional methods that might nurture a disposition of open-mindedness and perspective appreciation across contexts" (p. 29).

Community involvement, civic duty. Hoyer (2020) found that teaching with primary sources in a history-based partnership with underresourced public K–12 schools cultivated civic engagement, which the researcher defined as "a sense of responsibility for community issues and for other members of one's community" (p. 1). This concept aligns with Owen's (2015) dispositions of civic duty, community involvement, and perhaps commitment to service (though probably not government service, per se). Hoyer found that programs that "used primary sources depicting past civic engagement" helped students to "see themselves as change agents in their own communities" (p. 6).

Classroom applications

We encourage the teachers we work with to let parents know that their students will be studying certain primary sources and why. There is a gravitas to primary sources that helps to assuage "culture war" concerns. We offer a few additional suggestions for utilizing primary sources in your classroom that we have shared in our role as civic education fellows; we will do the same as we discuss simulations and academic service learning techniques as well.

As mentioned above, instead of using a single primary source to, for example, replace or reinforce a paragraph of secondary text, teachers can use multiple primary sources with varying, unique, and sometimes competing narratives to maximize the benefits in civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions. Educators must be thoughtful about learning objectives that recognize the importance of not only content knowledge but also the practice of skills and the development of dispositions. Teachers can guide students through inquiry learning around thoughtful questions which require them to interrogate the sources, and help them feel comfortable when there is not one "right" answer but various perspectives.

Students will require scaffolding as they learn how to approach primary sources. Teachers can demonstrate to the whole class, practice analysis together, and then allow learners to work in groups or partners before attempting individual work. The Digital Inquiry Group (previously the Stanford History Education Group) suggests working with students using these historical heuristics (Reisman, 2012):

- *Sourcing*: Who wrote this? What is the author's perspective? Why was it written? When was it written? Where was it written? Is it reliable? Why or why not?
- *Contextualization*: When & where was the document created? What was different then? the same? How might the circumstances in which the document was created affect its content?
- *Corroboration*: What do other documents say? Do the documents agree? If not, why? What are other possible documents? Which documents are most reliable? Why?
- *Close reading*: What claims does the author make? What evidence does the author use? What language (words, phrases, images, symbols) does the author use to persuade the document's audience?

Finally, primary sources can pose challenges due to vocabulary and structure that is different from students' usual manner of speaking and writing. Make sure the selections are age-appropriate. An elementary class may be able to understand one or two sentences from an original source, if given significant instruction.

Secondary students will be able to comprehend longer and more complex selections. There are thoughtful modifications which revise the language to be simpler but still true to the original documents (Digital Inquiry Group, n.d.; Nokes, 2019); presenting original and modification side-by-side can allow for differentiation among students, where those wishing for a challenge may peruse the original, checking their understanding with the modified version

Conclusion

For Hoyer (2020), the "current tools for assessing the impact of teaching with primary sources do not evaluate the full framework of knowledge, skills, and agency [dispositions] that are emphasized by initiatives that aim to teach civic engagement" (p. 5). The few studies we referenced are a start, but much more must be done to define, operationalize, and measure civic concepts in consistent and meaningful ways.

Civic education using simulations and role-playing strategies

Simulations engage students in enacting a civic event or process for the purpose of learning. Examples include mock trials, simulated congressional hearings, role-playing, and class- or school-wide elections. The Illinois Civics Hub (n.d.) explained that simulations allow students to "do civics" in an environment in which they can safely learn about and practice civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions. Research shows that even infrequent simulations (conducted a few times a year) have a positive effect on NAEP civics scores (Healy, 2015) and otherwise increase retention of civic knowledge. Simulations allow for meaningful practice of civic skills, such as teamwork, analytic thinking, and public speaking. They can also help students develop civic dispositions, including civility (Moore, 2012), engagement in learning, and belief in the importance of voting. If simulation activities are well designed, they can be academically rigorous and align with state standards (Owen & Irion-Groth, 2020).

Simulations and role-playing may be used in the classroom, in extracurricular teaching venues (such as Model United Nations clubs or Boys and Girls State), and in programs for specific groups (e.g., student councils); we encourage their use to promote civic engagement in all students, not just the elite or those predisposed to such activities. Of course, simulations must be used wisely: students could adopt roles as civic actors in mock trials, legislative hearings, or town halls, but they should not enact perspectives or personas that could cause trauma or harm to others (Illinois Civics Hub, n.d.).

Simulations and their civic outcomes

In a review of two simulation-based projects, Owen and Irion-Groth (2020) pointed out some of the civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions developed through simulations including:

- Using dialogue skills to build understanding (skills and dispositions), including of the perspectives of students with different backgrounds
- Employing analytical thinking, research, and presentation skills to prepare and deliver an argument or policy proposal (skills) that upholds the provisions of the U.S. Constitution (knowledge)
- Engaging in inclusive hearing simulations, in which all students collaborate to achieve a common goal while engaging in democratic practice (skills and dispositions)
- Participating in experiential and community-based learning (knowledge) through meeting with local resources and government representatives, interviewing peers and community members, and taking field trips to relevant sites (skills)

Civic skills in particular are strengthened during simulations (see Table 3). As Bennion and Laughlin (2018) stated when discussing instruction using simulations, "Skills developed in civic education courses, while useful in multiple arenas, are particularly important in giving students the tools needed to participate effectively in the democratic process" (p. 300). Bernstein (2008) studied the impact of simulations on civic competence in a university-level American government class and reported that civic

Table 3. Civic Skills and Dispositions Promoted by Simulation-Based Instruction.

Civic Skill Outcomes (Kirlin, 2003)	Source
Communication	
Ask candidate about position on political issue	Hall & Jones, 1998
Initiate political conversations with family	Hall & Jones, 1998
Interview peers and community members	Owen & Irion-Groth, 2020
Lawfully demonstrate	Owen & Irion-Groth, 2020
Meet with local representatives of government	Owen & Irion-Groth, 2020
Write to public officials	Owen & Irion-Groth, 2020
Collective decision-making	
Collaborate with peers on inclusive hearing simulations	Owen & Irion-Groth, 2020
Engage in democratic practice	Owen & Irion-Groth, 2020
Work with others to achieve political goals including the ability to disagree civilly	Bernstein, 2008, p. 6
Critical thinking	
Investigate difficult political issues	Owen & Irion-Groth, 2020
Make sense of the vast amounts of political information	Bernstein, 2008, p. 5
Understand the operations of the political system and how to use this knowledge to one's benefit	Bernstein, 2008, p. 6
Organization	
None found thus far.	
Civic Disposition Outcomes (Owen, 2015)	**Source Arguing for Pedagogy with Simulations**
Respect for the rule of law (Owen & Irion-Groth, 2020)	
Lawfully demonstrate	Owen & Irion-Groth, 2020
Political attentiveness	
Initiate political conversations with family over dinner	Hall & Jones, 1998
Stay abreast of government and political news	Owen & Irion-Groth, 2020
Watch political news broadcasts or read political articles	Chaffee et al., 1995; McDevitt et al., 2003; McLeod, 2000; Simon et al., 1998
Civic duty	
Accompany parents to polling places	Hall & Jones, 1998
Register to vote	Owen & Irion-Groth, 2020
Vote	Brody, 1994; Owen & Irion-Groth, 2020
Community involvement	
Solve a community problem	Barrows & Tamblyn, 1980; Parker & Lo, 2016
Volunteer commitment	McDevitt & Kiousis, 2006
Commitment to government service	
None found thus far.	
Norms of political efficacy and political tolerance	
Increase civility	Moore, 2012
Increase internal political efficacy (the belief that someone can understand politics) and external political efficacy (the belief that someone can make a difference in the political system)	Bernstein, 2008, p. 6
Oppose limits on freedoms of expression and due process rights	Owen & Irion-Groth, 2020

knowledge, skills, and dispositions were strengthened through simulations: (1) making sense of vast amounts of political information; (2) working with others to achieve political goals, including the ability to disagree civilly; (3) understanding the operations of the political system and how to use this knowledge to one's benefit; and (4) having increased internal political efficacy (the belief that someone can understand politics) and external political efficacy (the belief that someone can make a difference in the political system). But simulations are complicated to create; using a well-designed and prepared program, such as those described hereafter, can save time.

We the people (WTP). WTP is one of the oldest, best-researched, and perhaps best-known simulation programs. Started in response to the 200th anniversary of the U.S. Constitution, WTP has involved more than 30 million students and 75,000 teachers in all 50 states and the District of Columbia. Students study the Constitution and the historic events that preceded it, constitutional principles, the Bill of Rights, and Supreme Court cases, all of which are tied to contemporary issues and questions. The culminating activity is a simulated congressional hearing in which students answer questions from a panel of judges. In elementary schools, this hearing is in the students' own classroom or perhaps combines classes in a school. In middle and high schools, students can compete at the district, regional, and state levels; high school state-level winners compete at the national level (Owen, 2015).

The evidence that WTP makes a positive difference in constitutional knowledge, as tested on state assessments, has been accumulating for years (Brody, 1994; Owen, 2015). Skills and behaviors are affected too, as national WTP

finalists are more likely to register to vote, write to an official, investigate difficult political issues, lawfully demonstrate, and participate in boycotts—all civic skills that support our democratic republic (Owen & Irion-Groth, 2020)—and display measurable positive growth in important civic dispositions: respect for the rule of law, political attentiveness, commitment to civic duty, community involvement and government duty, belief in personal political efficacy, and political tolerance, as well as higher levels of self-confidence and the perception of fewer limits on students' political freedom. The higher the level of WTP participation, the more likely the students will oppose limits on free assembly; due-process rights; and freedom of speech, press, and religion. In the 2000 presidential election, 82% of WTP alumni voted, compared to 48% of all registered voters; voter turnout of alumni in 2008 was similar (Brody, 1994; Owen & Irion-Groth, 2020).

James Madison legacy project (JMLP). The JMLP is a professional development program designed to strengthen teachers' knowledge of the U.S. Constitution as they prepare to implement WTP curriculum in their classrooms. The JMLP Expansion is specifically targeted toward teachers in schools that have a significant enrollment of students with high needs, including underserved populations such as English learners, students of color, and low-income students. After participating in the JMLP, teachers' civic knowledge increased by an average of 12%, and their middle school and high school students' knowledge increased 37% and 20%, respectively. Civic dispositions of students also improved, with 91% believing that it is important to vote and 66% and 73% of middle school and high school students, respectively, recognizing the importance of staying abreast of government and political news (Owen & Irion-Groth, 2020).

Kids voting. Kids Voting connects classroom instruction, including lesson plans and activities developed by civic education experts, with actual political experience. There is a great deal of flexibility in the program, which relies on volunteer commitment and the buy-in of school administrators and teachers (McDevitt & Kiousis, 2006). Depending on students' grade and teachers' choices, students may participate in cooperative learning, role-playing, classroom elections, development of policy options and solutions, formal debates, and field trips to or visits by local political candidates. The key element of Kids Voting comes on Election Day, when the students accompany their parents to polling places, where there is a Kids Voting booth. Students cast ballots; once tallied, the results are published in local news outlets (Hall & Jones, 1998).

Positive civic outcomes abound for both students and their parents. Surveys indicate increased political attentiveness, with 60%–70% of students in the program display talking to their parents about the upcoming election and about politics in general. In one study, up to 75% of Kids Voting students reported watching political news broadcasts or reading political articles in magazines and newspapers, stimulating family conversations and increased levels of political participation (Chaffee et al., 1995; McDevitt et al., 2003; McLeod, 2000; Simon et al., 1998). In addition to inspiring their parents to become more informed and to vote, students may surprise other adults as well: Hall and Jones (1998) told of a third-grader in Wisconsin who used communication skills then they approached a candidate and calmly asked, "Can you explain your position on abortion?"

Postelection surveys of teachers, students, and parents found the unanticipated "trickle-up" effect of adult turnout increasing everywhere there is an active Kids Voting program (Campbell, 2019; Hall & Jones, 1998; McDevitt et al., 2003). One study found that adult voter turnout for the civic duty of voting increased an average of 3% (an increase of 80,000 voters); in Georgia and Washington (state) the increase was 9% (Simon et al., 1998). Postelection survey results from five cities across the country where Kids Voting was implemented revealed that 5%–10% of adult respondents indicated Kids Voting influenced their decision to vote (Hall & Jones, 1998). Whether the phenomenon is referred to as "from the bottom up" or "a trickle-up effect," Kids Voting energizes democracy, bonding families and schools in the display of civic dispositions such as political attentiveness, civic duty, and heightened feelings of political efficacy (McDevitt et al., 2003; Owen, 2015).

Project- and problem-based learning. Project-based learning and the closely related problem-based learning are other well-researched strategies to engage students in civic content. Both are often weeks-long simulations meant to engage students in unscripted activities using questions, issues, and problems that are relevant outside of the classroom (Pagnotti & Russell, 2015; Parker & Lo, 2016). Project-based learning often engages students in discussion and research to solve a problem in their community; problem-based learning is more often related to an issue of governance, such as a current question before the Supreme Court (Barrows & Tamblyn, 1980; Parker & Lo, 2016). In both project- and problem-based learning, students may simulate the work of civil servants and government officials, accurately working through an authentic situation, though in a simplified way (Parker & Lo, 2016). Even in the midst of the pandemic, Owen (2024) found that project-based learning led to significant gains in civic knowledge and modest gains in civic skills (decision-making, critical thinking, and communication) and dispositions (civic duty), while Almazroui (2023) argued that the method led to the acquisition of skills "for dealing with contemporary social challenges" (p. 132), including collaboration, coordination, communication, negotiation, teamwork, higher-order thinking, and more.

Classroom applications

Simulations and role-play require significant instructor preparation, but using premade resources, including those from the groups mentioned above, can help significantly. When selecting or creating a simulation, consider these questions:

- *What is your goal?* Define the problem, content, or roles that you want to simulate. What is your overall outcome? What does success look like?
- *What is a scenario that means something to your students?* However, do not enact perspectives or personas that could cause trauma or harm to others.
- *What problem is to be solved?* Have a need to be filled, a problem to be solved, or a driving question to guide the simulation.
- *What is your end point?* Have a clear deadline or end and clear expectations of what is required.

Parents and administration should be informed ahead of time, even as early as the beginning-of-year disclosure, along with a rationale for using the simulation. Educators must explain how this activity will help students' learning, including content objectives, familiarize parents and students with any procedures that are part of the simulation, and be aware of any pertinent district policies.

Finally, as with primary source analysis strategies, teachers should be conscious of the civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions that can be developed during the simulation, incorporating them into learning objectives. It is in the debriefing following a simulation where much of the most important learning happens, including the development of skills and dispositions; teachers can be sure to incorporate sufficient time for students to ask questions, react naturally, and fully process the experience. For simulations, "less is more"—one particularly powerful simulation can be mower impactful than multiple less purposeful ones.

Conclusion

Simulations and role-playing activities require students to work together to acquire knowledge and build understanding (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005), but fewer than half of U.S. fourth-, eighth-, and twelfth-grade students have experienced a simulation in their civics courses (Levine & Kawashima-Ginsberg, 2015). We encourage schools and teachers to consider activities that allow students to take on new roles, disagree and agree, and think through alternative positions.

Civic education using academic service learning

Academic service learning, also known as service learning, is a frequently recommended method of teaching civic education. For example, since at least 2016, the Utah State Board of Education has featured service learning as one of six practice areas that can result in effective civic and character education in Utah public schools (Austin et al., 2016). The vast majority of service-learning studies report positive learning outcomes for students, but the research as a whole is inconclusive regarding civic knowledge, skills, and

dispositions. Outcomes vary based on the nature and implementation of individual projects, along with the varied classroom-to-community relationships; additionally, different students have varied outcomes from similar programming (Furco, 2002). Moreover the lion's share of research on service learning focuses on higher education. Most of the K–12 literature targets the secondary level, with only a few articles on the primary level (Shocker et al., 2016). Secondary schools are far more likely to use service learning in individual courses, whereas grade-wide initiatives are the most common technique at the elementary level (Stagg, 2004).

Definition, history, and controversy

Academic service learning is a strategy that "explicitly links community service to academic instruction. It is distinctive from traditional voluntarism or community service in that it intentionally connects service activities with curriculum concepts and includes structured time for reflection" (Filges et al., 2022, p. 1). Reflection is essential: In an analysis based on 49 service-learning studies (24,477 participants, 12–20 years old), researchers found that reflection was necessary to produce positive academic, personal, social, and civic outcomes. Effects increased as reflection increased (van Goethem et al., 2014).

Investigating public school participation in service-learning before the 1990s proves challenging; the terms *community service* and *service learning* were used interchangeably. Once Congress passed and funded the National and Community Trust Act in 1993 (Melchior & Bailis, 2002), federal legislation began encouraging service-learning programming. Approximately 9% of all high schools in 1984 used at least some service-learning activities; by 1999, 32% included them (Pickeral & Bray, 2000).

Eventually, two methods of service learning developed: traditional and critical. Mitchell (2008) explained, "A critical approach embraces the political nature of service and seeks social justice," focusing on social responsibility, critical community issues, and social and political reform (p. 51). A traditional service-learning project might involve taking food to homeless families in the community, then reflecting on how to effectively accomplish the project. In contrast, a critical service-learning approach would address the reasons why some community members are homeless and would seek to address the reasons, focusing on social change orientation, redistribution of power, and development of authentic relationships (Riley & Soslau, 2022). Thus, critical service-learning is "intentionally political and policy-oriented," with students "positioned as knowledgeable insiders whose insights enable them to make a positive contribution as effective and powerful agents of change" (Levinson, 2014, p. 69). This approach can be particularly impactful for low-income students of color, who are sometimes viewed in terms of academic failure, idleness, or criminal delinquency (Levinson, 2014). Yoon (2020) studied a critical service-learning curriculum in New York City and observed that through their conversations and play, elementary students lived out tensions regarding diverse identities and practices, such as religion, race, and gender.

The critical service-learning approach came to be known as *action civics* and took off during the administration of President Barack Obama. Researchers studying Generation Citizen, a leading organization for action civics, found that the strategy positively affects the academic engagement of students participating, with positive spillover effects in non-Generation Citizen classes (Cohen et al., 2021). But despite the positive impacts on student learning, action civics has spurred controversy; some predominantly conservative communities are concerned that the approach encourages progressive political activism (Pondiscio, 2019). Nonetheless, the terms *service learning* and *action civics* can be used interchangeably, as in the landmark civic education conference report *The Republic Is (Still) at Risk—and Civics Is Part of the Solution* (Levine & Kawashima-Ginsberg, 2017).

Civic outcomes

The terms for civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions are not often used in the service-learning literature, though some studies investigated *civic orientation*—an affinity for and awareness of

community good. Other studies explored the development of various skills, including academic skills. However, studies rarely specify whether specific civic skills were developed. Researchers have not usually tested civic knowledge, but knowledge of the community can sometimes be inferred as resulting from the learning experience. Filges et al., 2022 analyzed outcomes of 10 studies in the United States involving over 8,000 service-learning participants and found that the results were inconclusive because few studies reported the same results on the same types of outcomes.

Civic knowledge. In a 2021 study, Littenberg-Tobias (2021) found that state governments have taken two different approaches to K–12 civic education in the years prior to the study. The first, reasoning that civic knowledge is essential to being an active and engaged citizen, emphasizes knowledge of the structures and systems of the U.S. government. The other approach emphasizes civic experiences that model what adult citizens do in a democracy, such as engaging in civil discourse on controversial issues, researching and advocating for community issues, and volunteering. Thus, while gaining civic knowledge about processes and practices, students engaged in academic service-learning also encounter examples of civic skills and develop civic dispositions. For example, Massachusetts requires all eighth-graders to complete a student-led civics project that asks students to analyze complex issues, consider different perspectives, engage in logical reasoning with supportive evidence, and participate in civil discourse (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2018). A study on the program was not able to make causal claims, but the results suggest that instructional activities that promote active learning, including service learning, were slightly associated with an increase in students' civic knowledge. Other studies inferred that civic knowledge results from the service-learning program but did not directly specify the civic knowledge obtained.

We believe service-learning projects should begin with a foundational understanding of American principles, such as checks and balances, separation of powers, individual rights, human dignity, and citizens' responsibilities in a republic. As students understand how these foundational principles can be applied to their service learning, they can gain a deeper understanding of their chosen projects.

Civic skills. The literature on service learning referenced the development of skills but was usually vague regarding which skills were fostered (Table 4). Sabat et al. (2015) noted skills of critical thinking (obtain and apply core knowledge) and collective decision-making (work as a team, engage in civic dialogue). Pickeral and Bray (2000) found that service learning fosters communication skills (research and presentation skills, contacting public figures) and collective-decision making skills (strategizing action plans), in addition to academic engagement and retention in school.

Civic dispositions. We did not find the term *civic disposition* in our overview of the service-learning literature, but found many dispositional outcomes displaying *civic orientation*, a sense of civic responsibility and concern for the community (see Table 5). One meta-analysis of 62 studies involving 11,837 students found that compared to controls, students in service-learning programs demonstrated greater gains in five areas: attitudes toward self,

Table 4. Civic skills promoted by service-learning instruction.

Civic Skill Outcomes (Kirlin, 2003)	Source
Collective decision-making	
Consider different perspectives	Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2018
Exchange civil discourse	Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2018
Work on a team	Melchior & Bailis, 2002; Sabat et al., 2015
Communication	
Communicate with public figures	Pickeral & Bray, 2000
Communication skills (unspecified)	Melchior & Bailis, 2002
Presentation skills	Pickeral & Bray, 2000
Critical thinking	
Academic achievement, skills (Unspecified)	Pickeral & Bray, 2000; Root, 2017
Analyze complex issues	Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2018
Obtain and apply knowledge	Sabat et al., 2015
Engage in logical reasoning with supportive evidence	Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2018
Research skills	Pickeral & Bray, 2000
Organization	
Develop service leadership	Melchior & Bailis, 2002
Organize & take action	Melchior & Bailis, 2002
Strategize action plans	Pickeral & Bray, 2000

attitudes toward school and learning, civic engagement, social skills, and academic performance (Celio et al., 2011). Root (2017) noted that, in addition to academic gains, participation in service learning led to increased dispositions such as motivation, self-esteem, moral development; concern for the community and others; and civic engagement generally.

Campbell (2000) argued that student service-learning projects foster civic engagement, which then generates social capital—the social networks and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit. Social capital then produces economic prosperity; as youth are civically engaged, then, the economic success of the community improves. Several additional studies reported that by participating in service-learning projects, students gain a sense of agency, which often translated into awareness of the community. In a study on service learning, Black middle-class high-schoolers volunteered at a soup kitchen for a social justice class. The service experience appeared to be valuable only if it included classroom reflection about civic identity, moral agency, social responsibility, and the difference they could make in the world (Youniss & Yates, 1997). Another study of 200 students across 10 schools found that when students had a voice in service-learning programs, their self-concept and political engagement increased and they became more tolerant of out-groups (Morgan & Streb, 2002). Yet another study found that mandatory service-learning programs in Maryland and Washington D.C. did not influence students' civic engagement orientations unless accompanied by opportunities to receive social support. When there was a mentor for urban high school students, their civic engagement orientations—their dispositions—improved (Bennett, 2009).

After Congress passed the National and Community Trust Act in 1993, an independent third party evaluated the three programs created with federal funding: Serve-America, Learn and Serve, and Active Citizenship Today, measuring civic attitudes and behaviors as well as impacts on academic and behavioral outcomes. The first set of measures looked for the dispositions of civic duty (a sense of personal and social responsibility for the social welfare of others), community involvement (personal and social responsibility, involvement in community service, service leadership), and political tolerance (acceptance of diversity). They also measured civic skills (communication), academic impact (attitudes toward school, attendance, suspensions, course failures), and risky behaviors (self-reported drug and alcohol use, delinquency, violence). A year later, the researchers found that long-term impacts were rare after one-time involvement in service-learning programs, but students who participated a second year displayed more lasting changes in civic attitudes and behaviors. The researchers concluded that the programs helped youth identify issues in the community and act on them; feel more confident in their ability to identify issues, work with others, organize, and take action; and build a more lasting commitment to civic participation. They also determined that service-learning programming must be carefully designed and implemented to achieve these modest outcomes (Melchior & Bailis, 2002).

Table 5. Civic dispositions promoted by academic service-learning instruction.

Civic disposition outcomes (Owen, 2015)	Source
Respect for the rule of law	
None found in our review.	
Political attentiveness	
Improve attitudes toward learning	Celio et al., 2011; Melchior & Bailis, 2002
Strengthen political engagement	Morgan & Streb, 2002
Civic duty	
Develop sense of civic identity	Youniss & Yates, 1997
Increase sense of social responsibility for welfare of others	Melchior & Bailis, 2002
Community involvement	
Foster civic engagement	Bennett, 2009; Campbell, 2000; Celio et al., 2011; Root, 2017
Gain awareness of community; help students identify community needs	Melchior & Bailis, 2002; Root, 2017; Youniss & Yates, 1997
Generate social capital, social trust, social networks, which produces economic prosperity, which raises success of community	Campbell, 2000
Give community and volunteer service	Melchior & Bailis, 2002
Increase sense of social responsibility for community; build a commitment to participate over the longer term	Melchior & Bailis, 2002
Commitment to government service	
None found in our review.	
Norms of political efficacy and political tolerance	
Become more tolerant of out-groups & diversity	Melchior & Bailis, 2002; Morgan & Streb, 2002
Build self-concept	Morgan & Streb, 2002
Develop sense of agency	Youniss & Yates, 1997

Studies have mixed results for whether service learning motivates civic engagement and increases academic achievement among minority youth. One study from a predominantly Black urban high school in Washington, D.C. showed that when students reflected on a class community service experience at a soup kitchen, they both developed a sense of social responsibility and civic commitment and began to see themselves as agents in society (Youniss & Yates, 1997). Curtis (2018) highlighted risk factors for minority and underserved youth and suggested that service-learning could be a protective factor for marginalized youth. On the other hand, an analysis of studies shows that high school coursework containing a service-learning component did not appear to help a particular racial or ethnic group more than other racial or ethnic groups with respect to scholastic achievements (Dávila & Mora, 2007).

Classroom applications

Once again, it is important to inform parents and administrators of plans to include academic service learning in instruction. Teachers can be open about any procedures and aware of any district or school policies which need to be followed. They can also be clear about how the experience will help their students, meet content objectives, and help to develop civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions. Service learning can be clearly connected to an understanding of American principles such as separation of powers, checks and balances, individual rights, human dignity, and citizen responsibilities in a free republic. When students understand how these principles can be applied to service learning, they will gain a deeper understanding of the value of their chosen project.

Because of concerns about forced student "activism," it is vital for educators to allow students an element of choice. In preparation for their choice, teachers may discuss with students the actual needs and problems of the classroom, school, or broader community; then identify resources and organizations and give students the chance to research ways in which they can make a difference. It is also important to let students know that members of the chosen community may have different values, income, and cultural practices. Educators can help their students know that everyone should be treated with respect. Academic service learning encourages an attitude of concern and interest in their community (Campbell, 2000; Morgan & Streb, 2002; Youniss & Yates, 1997), as well as promoting positive attitudes toward self, school, and learning (Celio, Durlak, & Dymnicki, 2011).

Conclusion

Service learning creates engaging learning opportunities for students. It can be part of a constellation of civic education methods and include integration with civic knowledge about founding ideals and principles, the constitutional framework, functions of government, and responsibilities of citizenship. These topics contextualize the service-learning projects, blending the social responsibilities of citizens and a sense of agency into the broader picture of the rights and responsibilities established in the Constitution.

Discussion and conclusions

Discussion of core findings

As we noted earlier, with the decline in civic education over the past 50 years, it is little surprise that scores released by the NAEP in 2023 demonstrate decline in civic knowledge. To combat this, it is vital to advance our understanding of the pedagogies that improve civic learning outcomes. We found that primary-source analysis, simulation-based instruction, and academic service learning have the potential to improve civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions.

However, our overview points to weaknesses and questions in the field. When a study states that a teaching method increases civic skills, which skills does the study mean? When a study refers to academic service learning, how was civic knowledge integrated? Are certain simulation-based activities better than others? As noted, the word *dispositions* did not appear in the literature on academic service learning, though parallel terms did. The lack of clarity regarding terms and frameworks obfuscates the research we are interested in. In an exceptional study, Chi et al. (2006) created a set of tested,

reliable measures of civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions. More research like this study is critical.

To foster a common language, we used Kirlin's (2003) framework of civic skills and Owen's (2015) framework of dispositions. When the literature was analyzed this way, we saw that primary-source analysis was particularly noted for teaching the critical-thinking aspect of civic skills and that simulations were frequently noted for promoting communication skills. None of the studies mentioned primary sources or simulations as improving organizational skills, but multiple studies stated that service learning improves these skills.

Thus, a mixture of effective and engaging pedagogies is ideal. A single teacher cannot possibly try all the methods and activities that we described, but perhaps a school or department could decide to implement some in specific courses or grade levels. A geography course could include academic service learning, a U.S. history course could use WTP, and government classes could adopt Kids Voting. All courses could incorporate multiple primary-source documents representing various points of view.

Limitations and suggestions for future research

We struggled to find studies that measured clearly defined outcomes of interest to us—civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions—in the context of specific pedagogies—instruction through primary-source analysis, simulation-based learning, and academic service learning. We encourage further research that goes beyond this exploratory study and that investigates the effects of particular pedagogies on carefully conceptualized civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions.

Another important gap is the lack of longitudinal research in the current literature. Such research is difficult to conduct, particularly with public school students. Nevertheless, identifying an effect that endured into adulthood would be more notable than an effect that faded with time. The gold standard would be to establish causal relationships through randomized interventions, where possible (Campbell, 2019). Likewise, literature regarding the K–12 level was sparse; research at the university level, where students are adults and where professors can include their students in research, is simpler.

Finally, we encourage research that helps practitioners implement high quality civic education for all students. As Fitzgerald et al. (2021) wrote, "The literature of the last decade has demonstrated the importance of active civic education; the next decade needs to focus on providing that education for all students" (p. 243). For this to happen, educators need greater support. Chi et al. (2006) noted that even when teachers "recognize an increasingly grave need to develop students' civic skills and dispositions [and—we would add—knowledge, they] … do not feel systematically supported to provide such opportunities" (p. 23). Teachers must be instructed and then empowered to use the best pedagogies and resources to enhance students' development of civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions.

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