

CIVITAS opens with a rationale that argues the case for what R. Freeman Butts has called the "civic mission" of the schools. The rationale states that "Civic education in a democracy is education in self-government. Self-government means active participation in self-governance, not passive acquiescence in the actions of others....The ideals of democracy are most completely fulfilled when every member of the political community actively shares in government....The first and primary reason for civic education in a constitutional democracy is that the health of the body politic requires the widest possible civic participation of its citizens consistent with the common good and the protection of individual rights. The aim of civic education is therefore not just any kind of participation by any kind of citizen; it is the participation of informed and responsible citizens, skilled in the arts of effective action and deliberation."

Moreover, "No one's civic potential can be fulfilled without forming and maintaining an intention to pursue the common good; to protect individuals from unconstitutional abuses by government and from attacks on their rights from any source, public or private; to seek the broad knowledge and wisdom that informs judgment of public affairs; and to develop the skill to use that knowledge effectively. Such values, perspectives, knowledge, and skill in civic matters make responsible and effective civic participation possible. Fostering these qualities constitutes the mission of civic education."

Civic education should consist of: "...the intensive study and understanding of American political institutions, especially the system of self-government, its values, commitments, and assumptions; its relevant history, its problems, burdens, and opportunities; its challenges and alternatives, in short the theory and practice of free and open democratic society as it has developed in the United States" and "a study of the purpose of government, the nature of law, the way private behavior affects the public order and the political system, and the international context of politics. Citizens need to recognize the growing importance for the preservation of American democracy of the political, economic, environmental, and social context of the world beyond our borders. Finally, learning to develop and practice civic skills is essential to fulfill the promise of constitutional democracy."

The revitalization of education for citizenship is especially timely. The rationale notes that "the failure of citizens to take part in elections at every level is just one indication easily measurable and therefore unmistakable one of widespread disengagement of citizens from the responsibilities and rewards of involvement inherent in our constitutional system. Americans tend to perceive the Constitution "a machine that would go of itself." Our constitution's very success has created indifference in many citizens to investing themselves in the political system that sustains their prosperity and well-being."

But it is a dangerous illusion to suppose that American democracy is like a self-perpetuating mechanism. Beneath the discernible operation of constitutional machinery, the American system is not mechanical but organic. It is like a plant whose visible portion remains healthy only as long as its hidden but vital roots are watered and nourished. It does not "go of itself" but requires careful attention and assiduous cultivation.

"It is a general truth that societies that neither understand nor practice their own principles are liable to find their institutions in decay or overthrown. This could be said of the ancient Roman Republic, of royal absolutism, including the ancient regime in France, and of Communist states in the late twentieth century. The decline of institutions that follows the widespread disbelief or cynicism regarding the principles that underlie them is the political expression of the biblical proverb, 'where there is no vision, the people perish.'"

Moreover, many citizens lack an adequate understanding of fundamental constitutional features. But principles that are repeated simply as catechisms, rather than grounded in experience and understanding, rest upon weak foundations. The citizen needs a deeper understanding of the American political system than is currently commonplace, both as a framework for judgment and as common ground for public discussion. Events often vindicate the common sense and basic good judgment of the American electorate; but common sense is more reliable when rooted in clear understanding of basic principles.

Civic education's unique responsibility is not simply to increase the rates of civic participation, but to nurture competent and responsible participation. Such participation involves more than just attempting to influence public policy; competent and responsible participation must be based upon moral deliberation, knowledge, and reflective inquiry.

The central focus and purpose of this Framework is to foster the development of citizens who participate actively and knowledgeably in public affairs, acting in light of the civic dispositions and commitments described in the framework's Civic Virtue section. The emphasis on exerting influence, however, does not imply unconditional endorsement of all actions or policies that citizens may advocate. Since constitutional democracy itself is intended to advance such fundamental values as liberty, equality, justice, and the common good, citizens have an obligation to strive for governmental policies consistent with those values. Rather than providing a blank check for citizens to exercise their will in any direction, responsible self-government requires citizens to anticipate the consequences of their actions and to justify them in terms of fundamental democratic values. The process of assessing the extent to which proposed actions support or oppose fundamental values can be considered moral deliberation, and its promotion occupies a central place in the CIVITAS framework.

Beyond moral deliberation and the need for substantive knowledge related to specific problems, the thoughtful citizen is likely to confront persisting problems in dealing with the realities of everyday citizenship which call for reflection and decisive action. The framework urges educators to include teaching youth about the realities of everyday citizenship that call for reflection on the one hand and decisive and persistent action on the other. Moreover, educators should help students reflect upon their personal civic commitments. The framework suggests that it may help to consider at least three factors that influence students' personal commitments: efficacy, integrity, and responsibility. Thus, the possibility of being effective and of making a difference should be set before the student's eyes using real-life examples. The question of the relation between moral values and action must likewise be approached. The framework emphasizes that the preservation of rights and the furtherance of the common good depends upon an enlightened citizenry that participates in the common life of the political community, respecting its constitutional norms and adhering to its fundamental values. Finally, CIVITAS stresses that the right to participate in democratic politics and civic life carries with it certain moral and political obligations.

CIVITAS is concerned with identifying and fostering the skills required for competent civic action, its adherence to constitutional values and limits, and its adherence to constitutional morality. Thus, the framework discusses three central aspects of active civic participation: governing and managing groups; monitoring public policy; and influencing public policy; and it presents a full and detailed account of the step-by-step stages in the process of participation, from the decision to act to full involvement.

The framework's concept of civic participation adds a much-needed caveat to current thinking on the subject. The fulfillment of the democratic citizen's potential as an actor on the stage of democratic self-government is increasingly thought to have occurred when the citizen acts within the wide arena of society at large, outside of the institutions and processes of government and politics is known as "civil society." Broadly interpreted, civic participation involves the monitoring and influencing of the policies of any organization that significantly affects individual rights and the common good. But, while the CIVITAS framework recognizes the value of civic action in this realm, it adds that the foundations of American democracy are imperiled to the extent that citizens withdraw their attention and concern from political institutions in favor of primary or exclusive involvement with the broader arena of civic activities in civil society. Thus neither sphere of participation should be ignored.

Beyond these considerations about civic participation, the Civic Participation section of the framework does not neglect the historical richness of the American civic tradition. Finally, Part II of the framework closes with considerations on "methods of instruction," from the study of exemplary citizens to community research and action projects; and a scope and sequence for lower elementary grades.

By far the greatest volume of the CIVITAS framework is taken up by Part III, the extensive section on civic knowledge. Relevant knowledge is conceived as the proper foundation of civic virtue and participation. The coverage of civic knowledge in the framework ranges from considerations on the history of Western political thought and action to twentieth-century regimes, the nature of propaganda, the role of the press, and civil disobedience. The framework discusses the influence of the Exodus idea in the Old Testament on Western consciousness in general and the American experience, including black American history, in particular, and the idea of political authority and its history from ancient societies to the present.

The criterion used to include and exclude subject matter was a simple question: what should the citizen ideally know in order to be an effective citizen? The framework does not expect an adult, still less a student, to know more than a fraction of the extensive body of knowledge presented. But the adult should have some knowledge of most of the main points of the knowledge presented.

Of special importance for the civic education curriculum envisaged by CIVITAS is the three-fold division of the subjects presented. Each section opens with the main concepts of the subject-the "conceptual perspective." It is followed by a "historical perspective," which is followed by a "contemporary perspective," designed to inform the reader of the current significance of the concepts and the history that precedes it. Receiving attention in this part of the framework are core subjects of American politics such as Congress and the presidency, the judicial system, bureaucracy, state and local politics, federalism, the role of the press, and similar subjects along with more general topics as "Types of Government." The general topic "Politics and Government" contains pieces on morality and politics, economics, geography, religion and public life, gender issues, America and the international system, and racial and ethnic diversity. In addition, an extensive section discusses a number of aspects of law, from fundamental concepts to a conceptual and historical comparison of common and civil law systems, and a presentation of the concepts and history of Christian law to international law. Several non-Western subjects are covered in the framework. China is taken as an example of non-Western concepts of the state, and the history of China in the twentieth century, especially China under communism, is discussed. In the treatment of law, as an example of non-Western legal systems, extensive space is devoted to Islamic law. There are extensive sections on "Politics and government in the United States." Subjects treated under the heading of "informal institutions and processes of government" include television and politics, propaganda, environmental issues, public opinion and a the informal processes of Washington politics and other subjects.

Civic Knowledge concludes with "The role of the citizen." CIVITAS emphasizes the responsibilities of citizens, not only their rights. In addition to the responsibilities of citizens, this section contains a conceptual and historical account of individual rights and human rights. The framework closes with a general critical assessment of the current state of the citizen and the political process. This assessment underscores the

importance of a regenerated concept of democratic citizenship of constitutional democracy is to achieve its full potential.

Center for Civic Education

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