Asset and Action-Based Approaches to Civic Learning

A Review of Frameworks, Evidence and Approaches
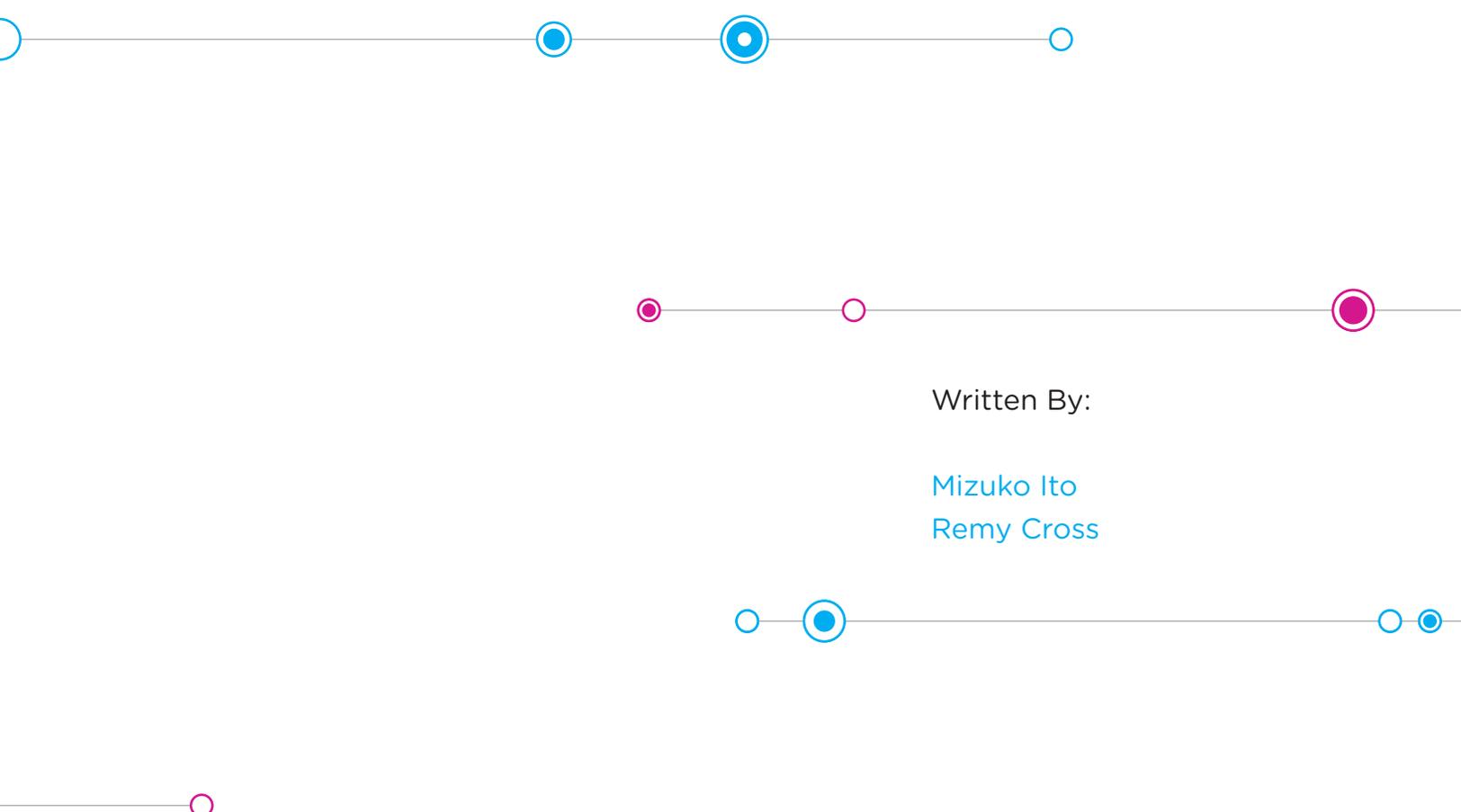
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report offers an orientation and frameworks for how experiences of civic engagement and community connection can contribute to positive educational and life outcomes for minoritized youth. The impetus for this work comes from a growing recognition that experiences of contributing to communities, and participating in movements for racial and social justice, have profound and wide-ranging influences on life outcomes. The report aims to be a timely and accessible field guide to a rapidly changing arena of work.

The research literature includes qualitative evidence of long term, transformative, behavioral and life outcomes of critically engaged civic experiences, including a disposition to continued civic and political engagement as well as a more positive orientation to schooling and educational attainment. Research has also documented the underlying experiences, cognitive and affective drivers of these long term outcomes for minoritized youth, including:

- **Critical civic learning**, which develops knowledge of political and social inequalities and systems, and cultivates critical consciousness, positive ethnic identity, and academic agency
- **Civic projects and action** that develop organizing and leadership skills and lead to, or enhance, civic self-efficacy
- **Developmental social supports,** which cultivate positive relationships with school and community, and lead to a sense of belonging in community and civic institutions.

This report also describes some of the key dimensions of programs that support these types of experiences, including:

- Integrating learning, action, and community connection
- Using culturally relevant frameworks in youth development
- Centering on youth interests, identities, and leadership skill development

In-school programs guided by an **Action Civics** approach, as well as community-based programs in the **Youth Organizing** tradition, exemplify these key dimensions. These approaches' focus on equity, youth engagement, and racial and ethnic identity have placed them at the forefront of developing research, programs, and assessments that center on outcomes for minoritized youth broadly valued by educators, parents, and community members. These include self-efficacy, communication skills, critical thinking, school and community connection, and social capital.

Asset and action-based approaches to civic learning are clearly efficacious, and can support more equitable approaches to civic learning and other areas of education and youth development. At the same time, the field faces significant challenges in broadening its influence, including:

- Adults have a pervasive cultural bias against taking young people seriously.
- Civic leaders and educators often lack capacity in engaging in youth-centered and critical ways, particularly around race.
- Assessment of outcomes of asset and action-based approaches requires a significant shift from established approaches to educational evaluation.

- Civic learning and youth leadership approaches are not aligned with the dominant norms and priorities of public education.
- The focus on activism and challenging inequality is inherently politically fraught.

Recognizing these challenges, we see the following areas as ripe for additional research investments:

- Investment in more longitudinal research that develops a more complete picture of the breadth and duration of impact of transformative civic experiences.
- More investment in mixed methods and quantitative research to complement a strong foundation of qualitative work in the field.
- Investigation of how outcomes differ for intersectional and mixed groups.

Development of more robust research on outcomes and impacts would ideally lead to broader investments and systemic integration of action civics and youth organizing in schools and civic institutions. Programmatic investment approaches might include:

- Targeting equity-oriented educational investments to asset and action-based approaches to civic learning
- Translating and adapting frameworks and tools developed in action civics and youth organizing for other subjects and fields.
- Investment in capacity building and supporting uptake in schools and community-based organizations, including educator and facilitator professional development, and developing institutional practices, policies, and incentive structures to support adoption.
- Investment in research-practice partnerships centered on co-design and driven by problems of practice.

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Acknowledgments

About the Connected Learning Lab

The Connected Learning Lab (CLL) is a research institute at the University of California, Irvine, dedicated to studying and mobilizing learning technologies and approaches in equitable, innovative, and learner-centered ways. The CLL supports interdisciplinary research and design and partnerships with a broad network of educational practitioners, community organizations, and technologists. The CLL's focus is defined by the "connected" in connected learning, which refers to both social relationships and emerging digital and networked technologies. The Connected Learning Alliance, a project of the CLL, is dedicated to building a cross-sector network of organizations dedicated to the spread of connected learning.

1. INTRODUCTION

In their 2018 report, *Let's Go There,* Cathy Cohen, Joseph Kahne and Jessica Marshall argue for the importance of "Lived Civics," an approach to civic education that is centered on "attention to race, identity, and the lived experience of youth." They review research evidence that youth of color are less likely to have civic learning experiences in school. Even when they do, they experience a "disconnect between civic ideals they learn in school and the social and political realities of their lives compared to wealthy white youth" (Cohen et al., p. 5; Rubin & Hayes, 2010). They also review evidence that youth of color realize a wide range of positive social, emotional and academic outcomes when they *do* have civic experiences that recognize their lived experience and include critical understandings of race, ethnicity, and power (Cammarota, 2007; Hope et al., 2016; Leath & Chavous, 2017; Leath et al., 2018). From the vantage point of 2022, in the midst of an ongoing global racial reckoning, this vision for Lived Civics is prescient and compelling.

This report takes inspiration from this earlier report, reviewing civic learning approaches and outcomes that align with a Lived Civics orientation, as well as related research theories and frameworks. The impetus for this work comes from a growing recognition that experiences of contributing to communities, and movements for racial and social justice, have profound and wide-ranging influences on life outcomes for youth. This report was commissioned by the Gates Foundation as part of a broader effort to develop more holistic and equitable approaches to assessing student success. It also builds on ongoing work at the Connected Learning Lab in reviewing and synthesizing research on ways that education and youth work can center programs on the culture, identity, and assets of diverse youth (Callahan et al., 2019; Ito et al., 2020).

The remainder of this introduction describes the focus and scope of this report, before turning to a review of research on the processes and outcomes of lived civic experiences, and then a discussion of programmatic approaches and examples.

1.1 Process, Scope, and Goals

We started our inquiry with the following guiding questions:

- What are key theoretical and design frameworks that differentiate and motivate programmatic approaches for youth civic and community engagement?
- What programmatic features and values best build on the assets of minoritized[1] youth and communities?
- What institutional and system level conditions influence the effectiveness of these programs?
- How do asset-based and equitable programs differ from more traditional and dominant approaches in civic education?
- How is growth being measured at the individual, program, and system level?

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[1] Advisors and authors differed on their preferred terms for describing youth who have been marginalized and oppressed, who do not see themselves as part of a dominant culture, or who identify as racial or ethnic minorities. We have used the term "minoritized" throughout this report while recognizing that it is a necessarily imperfect choice — specifically that it has an indirect and academic quality, and can also minimize the agency of minority and oppressed groups.

As we reviewed the literature and spoke to experts in the field, we saw an emerging consensus that minoritized youth don't see their identities and experiences reflected in many of the civic education and service learning experiences they encounter in school (NAEd 2021; Cohen et al., 2018). Nicole Mirra and Antero Garcia (2017) argue that civic education is often "based on the core assumption that the infrastructure of our democracy is sound—that all citizens enjoy equitable access to opportunity." They contend that for youth "who see the agency of their communities stripped away by systemic inequities in multiple areas of public life, including criminal justice and law enforcement, citizenship is a much more fraught proposition" (p. 137). Issues surrounding citizenship, belonging, and civic engagement are particularly fraught for undocumented youth (Unzeta Carrasco & Seif, 2014). Recognizing this, we use the term "civic" to include government institutions as well as organizations, communities, and movements that do not require state citizenship. The literature and our advisors were also clear that a critical perspective on dominant civic and political institutions, one that recognized the importance of race and ethnicity, was essential for youth of color to fully see themselves in civic and community engagement efforts. For these reasons, our review focused on experiences and programs that center on the identities, assets, and needs of minoritized youth, within the broader field of civic education, service learning, and youth organizing.

This report focuses on a set of experiences and programs that align with the Lived Civics framework and the critical vision of "the civic" that Mirra and Garcia put forth. In addition, we focus on programs with an experiential, action component connected to communities and institutions that matter to youth. Specifically, our review centered on experiences and programs with the following characteristics, which must be intertwined and integrated to be effective:

- **Critical inquiry and learning** that includes attention to structural inequity based on race and ethnicity, including intersectional identities and issues. Programmatic approaches that draw from fields such as ethnic studies, critical civic inquiry, and critical race theory are an essential aspect of ensuring an identity-affirming, asset-based orientation that supports the development of critical consciousness for minoritized youth. Recognizing lived experiences of minoritized youth, and framing these experiences as a source of strength rather than a deficit, is central to a Lived Civics orientation.

- **Civic action and organizing** is an essential experiential and project-based component of these experiences and programs. These approaches recognize the agency and voice that youth have in the here and now, and engage them in issues and problems that are relevant to them.

- **A positive youth development** orientation that recognizes and cares for the whole person, including social, emotional, and health needs, is another essential dimension of an asset-based orientation. This includes a culturally sustaining understanding of 'the civic' and service that grows from young people's connection to and personal relationships with their culture and communities. This also requires youth-engaging approaches to mentorship and apprenticeship that are grounded in partnerships between adults and youth.

We found no single unifying term to describe these experiences and programs, but saw alignment among a close family of approaches, including Youth Organizing, Action Civics, Critical Civic Inquiry, , Youth Participatory Action Research, Connected Civics, and Lived Civics. Experts were in agreement that all these approaches had alignment in values and goals, and shared attention to civic knowledge, youth development, and systems change. Approaches and programs differed in their relative emphasis on these dimensions, as well as the settings they took place in, and populations that they served. We follow Cohen, Kahne, and Marshall (2018) in using the term Lived Civics to describe an asset-based orientation centered on the lived experiences of minoritized youth. Our focus is on programs that combine both an asset-based, Lived Civics approach, and an experiential, project-based approach, and we thus describe them as "asset and action-based approaches to civic learning."

Critical Civic, Race, and Ethnic Studies

Youth Organizing, Action Civics, Critical Civic Inquiry, Lived Civics, Youth Participatory Action Research

Civic Action & Organizing

Youth Development & Community Connection
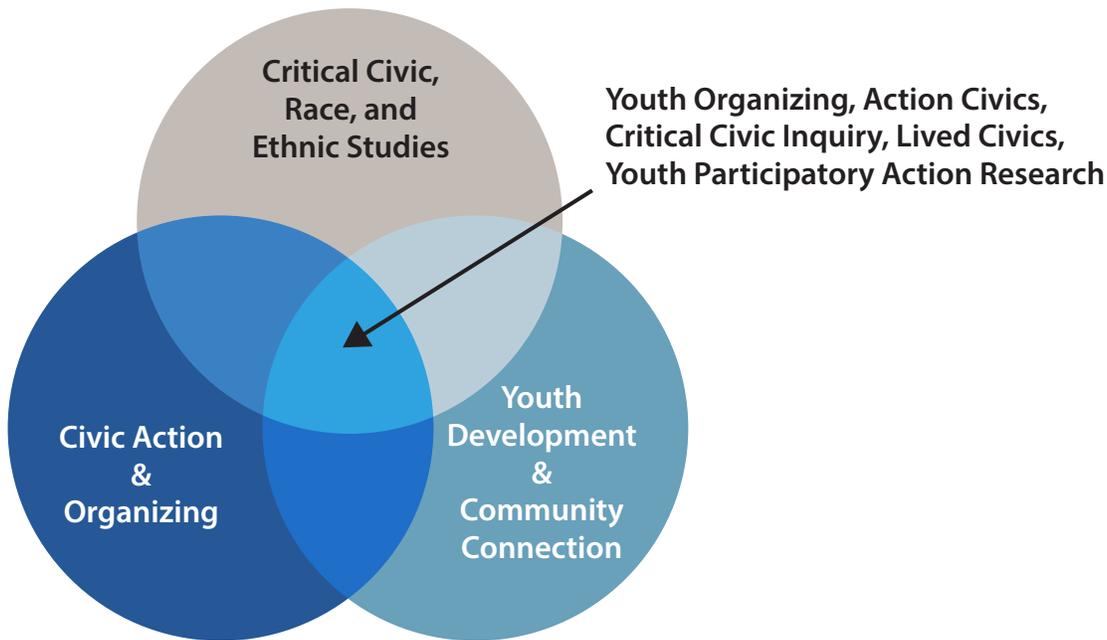
Asset and action-based approaches to civic learning lie at the intersection of three types of learning environments

Figure 1: Asset and action-based approaches to civic learning and engagement

The goal of this report is to offer an orientation and frameworks for how to understand asset and action-based approaches to civic learning and engagement, including a review of evidence of their efficacy in supporting positive youth outcomes. While the report identifies key features and mechanisms behind these experiences and approaches, it is not a comprehensive or specialized review of programs or research in this area. We surface design features and programmatic examples that may be of interest to practitioners, but do not focus on grounded or practical recommendations for designers, youth workers, and educators. Rather, the report aims to be more of a timely and accessible field guide to a rapidly changing arena of work.

2. THE IMPACTS OF ASSET AND ACTION-BASED APPROACHES

The impacts of asset and action-based approaches can be understood through several related bodies of research. The field has a limited number of studies of long term life outcomes because of the methodological challenges of conducting this kind of longitudinal research. These studies also tend to focus on highly engaged, movement-oriented activism and youth organizing rather than the effects of more short term educational or program-specific experiences. We cover this body of work in the following section on long term life outcomes. The subsequent section focuses on a larger body of theory and research that investigates the nearer term psychological, social, and cultural dynamics that drive these longer term life outcomes, and the kinds of programs and experiences that support them.

2.1 Long Term Life Outcomes

The long-term effects of youth organizing and participation in civic and community causes is still understudied (Giugni, 2013), but several studies have demonstrated significant personal transformation from these experiences that persist across the lifecourse. The majority of research on outcomes of activism focuses on the political, policy, or cultural impacts of social change (Amenta & Caren, 2004; Earl, 2004). In this section we focus on the smaller but growing body of research on how activism impacts participants personally (Corrigall-Brown, 2012; Guigni, 2013; Hope & Jagers, 2014; McAdam, 1989; Klatch, 1999). These personal transformations offer insights into how educational institutions can support youth development, another important pathway to social change that complements more direct and immediate activism goals and outcomes.

Several of the experts we spoke to noted that youth who had participated in these sorts of programs went on to work and volunteer in their communities. **Solicia López**, Director of Student Voice and Leadership at Denver Public Schools has seen these impacts firsthand. "We have students that have gone into politics, or activism for themselves, or thinking about going to college for the first time and how they can come back and contribute."

2.1.1 Civic Engagement

People who were activists in their youth tend to retain a commitment to social justice and community service later in life. For example, McAdam (1989) and Klatch (1999) have found that participants in activism tend to gravitate towards helping professions such as teaching, nursing, or non-profit work, and are often willing to sacrifice or delay having a family until later in life, putting their activist and community work ahead of personal desires. These findings hold even for activists later in the lifecourse, who maintain a strong interest in civic issues and may return to activism in their later years (Corrigall-Brown, 2012). Naomi Maynard (2017) conducted interviews with 15 adults, 12 years after their involvement in activism through human rights organizations as teens. She found that while they were not as immersed in activism as they were as teens, they were still engaged in more embedded, everyday forms of activism. This includes creating opportunities for youth in their workplaces, or writing about related topics in their academic work. Recent work by Rogers and Terriquez (2013) also showed the impacts of youth activism and organizing for low-income youth of color, who grew

in their abilities to think critically, work together towards a common goal, and work for social change. Youth who had been involved in prior activism also reported higher rates of engagement compared to peers 10 years after graduation (Terriquez, 2015a), with 71% still involved in volunteering, 65% involved in community work, and 75% having registered to vote. Their peers in the control group reported lower rates of 48% having volunteered, 27% doing community work, and 64% having registered to vote.

Schools are key civic institutions for youth and families. Researchers have found that participation in organizing and activism is tied broadly to more engaged and positive relationships to school and education that relate to civic belonging. For example, several studies commissioned by the Funders' Collaborative on Youth Organizing (FCYO) have found that youth involvement in activism and organizing leads to improvements in daily attendance, graduation rates from high school, and college attendance at rates higher than similarly situated peers (Sabo Flores, 2020; Shah, 2011; Shah et al., 2018). Similarly, Gambone and her co-authors (2006) found significant increases in civic and community engagement at a rate of 46% among youth who had participated in youth organizing, compared to 20% for those who had not participated in any sort of youth organizing or identity support activities.

2.1.2 Educational Attainment

Studies led by **Veronica Terriquez** have also examined the longer term effects of participation in organizing and activism. One study examined the outcomes for youth who were civically engaged, youth who had participated in more traditional forms of in-school activities like student council or volunteerism, and a control group that had not participated in either. While both youth organizing and civic education resulted in boosts to civic engagement, those in youth organizing groups had more improvements in organizing skills and critical consciousness (Terriquez, 2015a). Another study documented outcomes of youth who participated in youth organizing as part of the Building Healthy Communities (BHC) initiative (Terriquez et al., 2021). Both studies saw increases in civic participation for youth involved in organizing, with the BHC cohort reporting higher rates compared to the control group of peers—for community involvement 61% to 12%, attending a protest or march 60% to 20%, and voting 71% to 49%.

Terriquez, Xu, and Reyes also saw educational outcomes. They documented higher rates of aspiring to attend 4-year colleges, with 64% for the civically engaged youth compared to 24% in the group that did not have any form of participation (Terriquez et al., 2021). Additionally, youth who had participated in the BHC initiative (Terriquez et al., 2021) had significantly higher aspirations for their educational attainment, with 45% planning to attend a 4-year college compared to 25% of those who had not participated in BHC or a similar civic group. Terriquez's (2015a) study comparing those involved in youth activism against those who had never participated saw increased rates of college attendance among activists, with 45% attending or graduating from a 4-year college compared to 33% of the control population, despite the activist sample being much more likely to be first generation and low income (15% had a parent with a college degree and 88% were low income, compared to control group of 35% parent with degree and only 38% low income).

2.2 Elements and Outcomes of Asset and Action-Based Approaches to Civic Learning

We turn now to research on more near term outcomes and their relationship to different forms of civic and developmental experiences. The experts we spoke to were united in describing three essential elements of civic experiences that support an interlinked set of cognitive, social, and affective outcomes for minoritized youth (see also, Generation Citizen, 2019). These elements correspond to three levels of learning and development. Youth are acquiring critical **knowledge** and civic **skills**, and developing **relationships** that connect them to school, community, and caring adults. Growth along these dimensions can be understood as a process of sociopolitical development (SPD), which Watts, Williams, and Jagers (2003) define as a system that "emphasizes an understanding of the cultural and political forces that shape one's status in society. We use it to describe a process of growth in a person's knowledge, analytical skills, emotional faculties, and capacity for action in political and social systems" (p. 185).

Advisors also stressed how sociopolitical development needs to be understood in relation to the barriers that minoritized youth encounter when engaging with educational programs that reflect the dominant culture, including racial stereotypes, bias, and lack of representation. These dimensions of identity and barriers are present in civic education as well. The lack of civic engagement of youth of color and those from low-income households is related to negative, deficit-oriented stereotypes that cast minoritized communities and cultures as inherently lacking in ability or willingness to participate in civic institutions and discourse (Chan & Hoyt, 2021; Logan et al., 2017; Rogers & Terriquez, 2013). This is a problem that is exacerbated by funders, politicians, and policy makers when they view non-participation by minoritized youth as a deficit on their part, rather than the result of structural factors that have excluded them from opportunities for participation (Baldridge, 2014; Logan et al., 2017). This relationship among youth development, identity, and structural barriers is also described in a prior Connected Learning Lab report for the Gates Foundation, which examined research on the development of occupational identity (Callahan et al., 2019).

A recent National Academy of Education report (2021) countered this deficit frame, locating the problem not in minoritized youth, but in civic education's failure to reflect the diverse backgrounds of public school students. Other researchers have noted how minoritized youth don't see themselves in the dominant vision of American democracy as most often taught in textbooks and classrooms (Brandle, 2020). Youth of color, and those who are undocumented or recent immigrants do not recognize themselves as agents in the project of American democracy when the agents of democracy are presumed to be White and colonial (Chan & Hoyt, 2021; Cohen et al., 2018; Kahne & Middaugh, 2009; Mirra & Garcia, 2015). These biases are also reflected in approaches to community service that assume a position of racial and economic privilege, and ask students to engage in charity and service to help remedy the deficits of less advantaged communities that are not their own. The field is increasingly recognizing that civic education and service learning need to recognize diverse identities and backgrounds and adapt to include and reflect the identities and lived experiences of minoritized youth. This changing awareness has recently been catapulted into public attention in the controversy over critical race theory making its way into public schools (Pollock et al., 2022).

The relationship between dimensions of asset and action-based civic experiences and cognitive, social, affective, and life outcomes is described in Figure 2. Asset and action-based civic experiences offer social and cultural "opportunity structures" and experiences that support the sociopolitical development of minoritized youth (Watts & Flanagan, 2007). It is important to emphasize that asset-based approaches differ from more traditional forms of civic learning in developing critical consciousness alongside civic self efficacy, skills, and developmental relationships. Although these three layers of experiences and

outcomes are intertwined and inseparable in asset and action-based programs, we explore the underlying processes and related outcomes in turn in the remainder of this section.them as "asset and action-based approaches to civic learning."

	LIVED CIVICS EXPERIENCES	COGNITIVE AND SOCIAL OUTCOMES	IDENTITY AND AFFECTIVE OUTCOMES	
LEARNING	Critical Civic Education	Critical Knowledge of Social and Political Inequalities	Ethnic Identity and Critical Consciousness	BEHAVIORAL AND LIFE OUTCOMES
ACTION	Civic Projects	Civic Organizing and Leadership Skills	Civic Self-Efficacy	Political and civic participation
CONNECTION	Developmental Social Support	Relationships with school, community, peers, and caring adults	Leadership, Citizenship and Belonging in community and civic institutions	Educational attainment Occupational choices

Figure 2: Elements and Outcomes of Asset and Action-Based Civic Experiences

2.2.1 Developing Critical Consciousness and Ethnic Identity Through Critical Civic Education

Educators and researchers have incorporated critical approaches into civic education, challenging assumptions that the goal of civic engagement is participation in dominant structures, and shifting the field towards critique and challenge of inequities in existing systems (Watts et al., 2011; Westheimer & Kahne, 2004). These approaches center on the concept of 'critical consciousness,' which originates from the writings of Paulo Freire (1973), and is an understanding that grows from "how oppressed or marginalized people learn to critically analyze their social conditions and act to change them" (Watts et al., 2011). **Julio Camarrota**, Professor of Teaching, Learning and Sociocultural Studies at the University of Arizona, who pioneered efforts to bring ethnic studies and YPAR into schools, describes his driving intuition. "If students of color understood how racism impacted their education, they would stop blaming themselves for difficulties or lack of success in school." **Matthew Diemer**, Professor of Education at the University of Michigan, and a faculty associate at the Institute for Social Research, describes the benefits of critical consciousness. "Minoritized young people all have this social structural system that is working against them and constraining them. Critical consciousness seems to be a protective factor or buffering factor to help people maintain agency, despite constraints." He and his colleagues (Diemer et al., 2017) have developed a scale for the measurement of critical consciousness, the Critical Consciousness Scale (CCS), which is being adopted by a range of researchers and organizations.

Civic education that has an explicitly critical dimension draws from disciplines such as ethnic studies or critical race theory. Ethnic studies challenges "the white racial frame" in US educational institutions, sharing knowledge about both the struggles and contributions of people of color, and challenging the representation of "people of color, particularly blacks, as negative and inferior, often regardless of their adoption of white cultural norms" (Slatton & Feagin, 2012, p. 291). A growing body of research sees the

sociopolitical development, or critical consciousness, of minoritized youth as tied to the development of a collective racial or ethnic identity (Corrigall-Brown, 2012; Hipolito-Delgado & Zion, 2015; Klatch, 1999; McAdam, 1999; Mathews et al., 2020; Bañales et al., 2019; Terriquez, 2015a, 2017; Taines, 2012; Diemer et al., 2021). These studies have relied on measures such as the Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM), developed by Jean Phinney (1992, 2010).

Terriquez (2015), using data from the California Young Adult Survey, drew comparisons among youth who had no level of participation, those who had participated in 'traditional' forms of volunteer and student government work, and those that had been part of youth organizing such as social movement participation, where they were more likely to develop a critical consciousness around civic issues. She found that by their mid-20's, those who had participated in both youth organizing activities and more traditional forms of youth civic engagement had increased civic capacity compared to the control group. Those who had participated in student organizing were *also* able to critically reflect on civic issues and had more skills to work towards common solutions on those issues. Other studies have also shown how critical consciousness is tied to broader critical thinking skills (Watts et al., 2018).

2.2.2 Developing Civic Skills and Self-Efficacy through Action

Research has described the importance of combining learning about civic and political systems with hands-on civic action projects, centered on issues important to youth in the here and now. It is through experiential engagement in organizing or service that young people develop organizing, communication, and leadership skills relevant to civic action. Research with participants of youth organizing groups found 84% reporting improved public speaking skills, 82% reporting a better sense of how the government impacts decisions in their community, and 76% reporting having learned how to organize their fellow youth for campaigns (Terriquez, 2017). Compared to their peers who had not participated in these kinds of youth organizing programs, youth who had were more likely to have worked on issues affecting their community (65% to 27%), be registered to vote (75% to 68%), and to have participated in a protest or rally (51% to 13%). These results illustrate the importance of engaging youth in action that is relevant and local rather than being taken to other communities or seen as "too young" to be actively involved.

The development of these skills and practices is in turn tied to the development of civic and political self-efficacy. Internal political self-efficacy is defined as "an individual's belief that he or she can affect political change" (Centellas & Rosenblatt, 2018, p. 641). Individuals with low political self-efficacy often opt out of the political process (Chan & Hoyt, 2021). Civic self-efficacy is framed more broadly, as a belief that an individual can effectively participate in both political life and civic and collective action (Miller, 2009). Emily Ozer, Albert Bandura, and Marieka Schotland (Ozer & Bandura, 1990; Ozer & Schotland, 2011) have developed the Research and Action Self-Efficacy scale, a tool for measuring empowerment among youth.

Self-reported rates of political efficacy tend to be higher across the board for white students, often increasing when exposed to traditional forms of K-12 civic education that do not center on a critical or asset based approach. By contrast, students of color do not see comparable gains in their sense of efficacy in being able to engage in meaningful civic action as a result of these more traditional civic education experiences (Nelsen, 2019). Studies in college settings have even shown decreases in political efficacy for students of color after taking political science courses (Centella & Rosenblatt, 2018; Chan & Hoyt, 2021). Levinson (2012) refers to this as the 'civic empowerment gap', and argues that low-income and schools that are majority students of color are most at risk. Conversely, programs that take an asset-based approach, with an explicit focus on racial justice and positive racial and ethnic identity, improve civic self-efficacy for youth of color. Hipolito-Delgado and Zion (2015) conducted an analysis of a critical civic

inquiry program and found that participants, particularly those from marginalized backgrounds, reported increases in ethnic identity development and civic self-efficacy, as well a general sense of psychological empowerment. Even participation in limited and lower impact types of activism have been tied to an increased sense of self-efficacy that seems to be persistent for years after participation in student organizing and activism has ended (Gambone et al., 2006; Maynard, 2017).

2.2.3 Developing Relationships and Connections to School and Community

A foundational dimension of asset and action-based civic learning is that youth are supported by caring and supportive relationships, the human connections to communities and civic institutions. Both program leaders and experts underscored the importance of attention to the social and emotional needs of youth that go beyond the specific project-based tasks or instructional focus. This attention to relationships and socioemotional support encourages connection to peers, institutional agents such as educators, and a stronger connection to school and community. Research has found that youth who participate in civic organizing report having an easier time with peer to peer relationships and in developing social-emotional learning skills and social capital (Sabo-Flores, 2020).

Taines (2012) interviewed the participants of several youth activism programs meant to develop critical consciousness for minoritized youth and found that students reported decreased alienation from the school environment, and were more likely to attend school, seek to graduate, and have post-graduation plans. The students also felt they had more ability to affect their schools and make positive change for themselves and other students. Other studies have also found that participation in activism within the school context supports a more positive orientation to schools, and has been linked to improved attendance and achievement (Mediratta et al., 2009; Oakes & Rogers, 2006; Schultz, 2008; Strobel et al., 2006; Su, 2009).

This sense of belonging and social connection interacts with civic self-efficacy in mutually reinforcing ways, propelling engagement in public institutions beyond school as well. For example, research by Bañales, Mathews, and Anyiwo (2020) drew on data gathered by the Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE) from 1605 young people, and found that the development of critical reflection on issues related to inequality was positively correlated with voting and sociopolitical action for both Black and Latinx youth. All these studies show that social connection and belonging drive an increase in sense of self-efficacy, as well as the capacity to both engage in and drive significant and meaningful change in communities and other contexts for youth. Studies of youth organizing found participants had a higher sense of hope for the future, and overall improved mental and physical health and wellbeing (Shah, 2011; Shah et al., 2018) after participating in some form of youth organizing. The collective approach to healing and wellness adopted by some of these groups is likely to contribute to these positive health and mental health outcomes (Ginwright, 2011; Ortega-Williams et al., 2018; Terriquez et al., 2021).

3. PROGRAMMATIC APPROACHES AND EXAMPLES

The research traditions and evidence we have reviewed are intertwined with ongoing efforts in schools and community based programs to develop civic education, youth development, and youth organizing. Much of the knowledge of young people's sociopolitical development, and how civic action impacts other life outcomes, grows out of research-practice partnerships between educators, activists, and researchers. This section focuses on the common elements and programmatic approaches that are supported by research on youth outcomes summarized in the prior section of this report.

3.1 Common Elements of Asset and Action-Based Approaches

Asset and action-based programs align with research that has demonstrated the importance of integrating learning, action, and community connections. In addition to integrating learning, action, and relational support, effective programs also have an emphasis on developmentally appropriate supports for youth, that take into account their need for safe and nurturing spaces, as well as a commitment to centering programs on youth voice, interests, and leadership. In doing so, programs draw from traditions such as Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR), Critical Civic Inquiry (CCI), Positive Youth Development (PYD), and Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP). These approaches, and supporting literature, are introduced in call out boxes in this section.

3.1.1 Integration of Learning, Action, and Community Connection

Both the research literature and programmatic leaders were clear that the exemplary programs and approaches rested on an intertwined set of characteristics that integrated learning, action, and community connection. Leaders and researchers stressed that it is the integrated development of knowledge, skills, and socioemotional development that makes critical and asset-based approaches uniquely efficacious, particularly for minoritized youth. **Veronica Terriquez**, Professor of Chicana/o and Central American Studies and Urban Planning at UCLA and Director of the Chicano Studies Research Center, offered an overview of these elements and outcomes in relation to youth organizing:

> They provide robust critical civics education, by giving young people a history of their communities and ethnic backgrounds. They help them understand the basis of political and social inequalities they see. Young people also learn about systems, so people begin to learn about the functions of city government, the county government, and the school district. They scaffold civic action, so that youth receive support in speaking at a meeting or a hearing, organizing a protest, rally, or community event—so young people aren't expected to take charge overnight or speak without knowing the issues or having experience of speaking in front of adults. They also provide developmental support. That's one way that youth organizing is different from adult organizing. They engage members in healing and self-care, discuss daily challenges, and do fun things, whatever it is the youth are into. Some groups provide academic supports and basic job training.

Programs draw from traditions such as YPAR and CCI that integrate research and investigation of issues with civic action in their own schools and communities. This integrated approach contrasts with purely classroom-based civic learning or research that does not have an experiential, project-based component. These programs also contrast with many forms of individualized community service or volunteering that lack a critical understanding of social inequity, or where youth do not feel a sense of connection to the community or issue. In contrast to approaches where privileged groups enact change through individual service and charitable giving, critical and asset-based approaches rest on an awareness of underlying systemic inequities and injustices. **Solicia López** stressed the importance of developing youth leadership in communities: "Our concept of leadership is cultural communal leadership, and community driven because when there is one of us driving, then we can all drive, and we can take care of each other."

Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) — YPAR "is an innovative approach to positive youth and community development based in social justice principles in which young people are trained to conduct systematic research and improve their lives, their communities, and the institutions intended to serve them" (YPAR Hub, 2021). Scholars such as Adelman (1993) have taken the concept of action research first conceptualized by Kurt Lewin (1946) and melded it with participatory action research that first emerged in South America as a revolutionary way to address inequality through community-based and popular education (Fals-Borda, 1987; Freire, 1970). YPAR has also been taken up as an approach to bringing in the voices of research participants in a way that is more direct and authentic than other forms of youth-involved research (Cammarota & Fine, 2008). YPAR distinguishes itself from the types of participatory action research that spawned it due to the inclusion of youth in issues they are often affected by but denied a voice in. At its most basic level, YPAR is the teaching of research methodologies in a way that allows youth to develop criticality around issues of impact to them while working alongside, but not subordinate to, educators. Recent research utilizing YPAR approaches has emphasized that both parties bring something to the table. Often, though not always, educators bring their training and expertise in conducting research, and the youth bring their lived, cultural, and ethnic experiences that inform the direction and focus of the research (Kirshner et al., 2021; Mackey et al., 2021). More detail on YPAR and its development and uses can be found in these resources:

Cammarota, J., & Fine, M. (Eds.) (2008) *Revolutionizing education: Youth participatory action research in motion* (pp. 213–234). Routledge.

Research Hub for Youth Organizing — at the University of Colorado Boulder

YPAR Hub — at the University of California Berkeley

Critical Civic Inquiry (CCI) is an approach that involves partnering with secondary teachers to engage students in participatory action research as a vehicle for learning and equity-based school reform. CCI emphasizes five practices, summarized in Table 1. CCI aims to "center the life experiences, funds of knowledge, and aspirations of youth of color from low-income communities, while also creating opportunities that expand their knowledge and skills as leaders and agents of change" (Kirshner et al., 2021, p. 2). It has developed out of a desire to infuse YPAR and similar youth participatory approaches with an anti-racist and critical approach, leveraging the experiences of minoritized youth as a way of empowering them to see and effect structural change in their lives and communities (Hipolito-Delgado & Zion, 2015). CCI integrates action civics with critical consciousness, so that youth are able to better learn the underlying structural causes and propose policy solutions for these social problems. (Hipolito-Delgado et al., 2015; Kirshner et al., 2021). Critical elements include supportive adult relationships, inquiry-based learning, and critical conversations about social and educational inequities. More on CCI can be found in these resources:

Hipolito-Delgado, C. P., & Zion, S. (2015). Igniting the fire within marginalized youth: The role of critical civic inquiry in fostering ethnic identity and civic self-efficacy. *Urban Education, 52*(6), 699–717.

Kirshner, B., Zion, S., Lopez, S., & Hipolito-Delgado, C. (2021). A theory of change for scaling critical civic inquiry. *Peabody Journal of Education, 96*(3), 294–306.

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Transformative Student Voice — Critical Civic Inquiry

Table 1   Critical civic inquiry in schools.

Key Practices	Definitions and Examples
Sharing power with students	Educators make an effort to learn about young people's lives and the kinds of knowledge they develop outside of school. Students experience scaffolded choice related to curriculum and classroom activity. Students gain practice in how to make collaborative decisions. Sharing power is fundamentally a relational approach to teaching. This means that educators also share something of themselves: They locate themselves for their students and aim to be an ally for their students' development.
Exploring critical questions	Educators invite students to discuss topics related to race, ethnicity, power, and privilege. Why are AP classes in my school racially segregated? Why is this school in a food desert? How can ethnic studies classes foster student engagement? Critical conversations recognize that current conditions are not natural or inevitable. They can broaden the topics that students are comfortable exploring and discussing in class.
Participatory research	The centerpiece of CCI is an action-research project in which students study about a barrier at their school and develop solutions to it. Students learn how to conduct interviews, administer surveys, and perform archival research. They analyze data to identify patterns and themes. Students are encouraged to begin their research inquiry by inquiring about their own lived experiences.
Structured presentations to the public	Students formulate an evidence-based policy argument that they share with external audiences, including guests from outside the school. This is both an opportunity for institutional change and leadership development for students.
Sustained youth-adult partnerships	Our ideal outcome of CCI projects is that they lead to ongoing partnerships between adult school leaders and students to design, pilot, and evaluate school or district-level change efforts.

Kirshner et al., 2021

3.1.2 A Developmental Orientation

The experts and leaders we spoke to also stressed that educational and youth development programs differed in important ways from more organic, voluntary participation in movement activism. The programs we highlight include an educational or outreach component that is intended to broaden access to civic experiences and learning beyond youth who are already highly engaged. The field draws from a positive youth development approach that rests on caring relationships and recognition of social, emotional, health, and safety needs. **John Rogers,** Professor of Education at UCLA and Director of the Institute for Democracy, Education, and Access, and an expert on equity and education, describes the importance of recognizing that "young people live in communities that have been economically and

racially marginalized, and often experience threats. It is critically important to have a space that is safe that young people consider to be home."

Experts and leaders mentioned providing food as one expression of care that can draw young people in. **Veronica Terriquez** offered the example of "a hungry ninth grader who showed up, and at first ... he didn't care about what was going on in the meeting. He went for the free food. And they invited him to come back. He said, 'They tricked me into coming again!' He soon became invested in the group's mission and helped run meetings, learned organizing skills, and testified at the school board and a number of other public hearings." Ben Kirshner, Professor of Education at the University of Colorado Boulder, who has been a leader in youth development research centered on YPAR and youth organizing, also emphasized how "more experienced youth and adults build on these caring relationships through complex forms of apprenticeship learning and youth-adult partnerships."

Positive Youth Development (PYD) "refers in broad scope to childhood and adolescent development experiences that provide optimal life preparation for the attainment of adult potential and well-being" (Catalano et al., 2014, p. 423). PYD as a theory merged approaches that focus on the strengths of youth and positive psychology to generate what scholars and practitioners call the 5 Cs: Competence, Confidence, Connection, Character, and Caring or Compassion (Lerner et al., 2005). By emphasizing and reinforcing "a cluster of developmental factors including bonding, resilience, social and emotional competence, and prosocial norms" (Anderson & Mezuk, 2015, p. 363), youth will be drawn away from antisocial or harmful behaviors and given opportunities to engage and develop the 5 C's. Research on PYD's outcomes has shown strong positive effects on at-risk and marginalized youth for schooling, social emotional learning and development, critical consciousness, and social capital acquisition (Sabo-Flores, 2020). While recognizing PYD's successes in repositioning youth as assets rather than problems to be solved, scholars have also pushed for more recognition of the social and economic structures that oppress and limit minoritized youth (see Ginwright & Cammarota, 2002). More on PYD can be found in these resources:

Anderson, S., & Mezuk, B. (2015). Positive youth development and participation in an urban debate league: Results from Chicago public schools, 1997–2007. *The Journal of Negro Education, 84*(3), 362–378.

Catalano, R. F., Toumbourou, J. W., & Hawkins, J. D. (2014). Positive youth development in the United States. In L. Nucci, D. Narvaez, & T. Krettenauer (Eds.), *Handbook of moral and character education, 2nd Edition* (pp. 423–440). Routledge.

Preus, B., Payne, R., Wick, C., & Glomski, E. (2016). Listening to the voices of civically engaged high school students. *The High School Journal, 100*(1), 66–84.

Sabo Flores, K. (2020). *Transforming positive youth development: A case for youth organizing.* Funders Collaborative on Youth Organizing.

Table 2 Working Definitions of the Five Cs of Positive Youth Development

Five Cs	Definition
Competence	Positive view of one's actions in domain specific areas including social, academic, cognitive, and vocational. Social competence pertains to interpersonal skills (e.g., conflict resolution). Cognitive competence pertains to cognitive abilities (e.g., decision making). School grades, attendance, and test scores are part of academic competence. Vocational competence involves work habits and career choice explorations.
Confidence	An internal sense of overall positive self-worth and self efficacy; one's global self-regard, as opposed to domain specific beliefs.
Connection	Positive bonds with people and institutions that are reflected in bidirectional exchanges between the individual and peers, family, school, and community, in which both parties contribute to the relationship.
Character	Respect for societal and cultural rules, possession of standards for correct behaviors, a sense of right and wrong (morality), and integrity.
Caring or Compassion	A sense of sympathy and empathy for others.

Lerner et al. (2005)

3.1.3 Centered on Youth Interests, Identities, and Leadership

Another essential characteristic that leaders and experts emphasized was the importance of centering programs on youth interests, identities, and leadership. All asset and action-based programs elevate youth voice and leadership, and recognize interests and diverse identities. The programs we focused on all engaged majority minoritized youth. The programs varied in the degree to which they included racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic diversity. Many of the experts we spoke to described the power of centering programs on specific ethnic or cultural identities, and incorporating culturally relevant pedagogy. For example, FCYO explicitly centers their programmatic focus on "youth most impacted by injustice and systemic oppression" (see https://fcyo.org/info/youth-organizing/). Some experts spoke to the unique dynamics of understanding and trust fostered in programs where participants had shared cultural, ethnic, and racial backgrounds. **Seanna Leath**, Assistant Professor of Psychology at the University of Virginia, who has conducted extensive research on the development and civic participation of Black girls and women, underscored the psychological benefits of same race friendships and affinity groups for Black youth, particularly when they are in majority White schools. She also described some of the complexities of Black students being asked to describe their experiences within racially mixed settings. "It's this notion that they're on display or talking about their experiences for the benefit of folks who do not share that experience. At the same time, interracial group dialogue can be an avenue for building empathy and coming up with creative solutions."

Programmatic leaders also emphasized the value of bringing together youth from diverse backgrounds, and drawing in youth who may not have an existing interest in activism or social justice. For example, **Elizabeth Clay Roy,** Chief Executive Officer of Generation Citizen described how it's important that Generation Citizen is part of required classes, so that even students who aren't interested in civics or activism take part. "That's how our democracy actually runs, and all of us have different levels of interest and enthusiasm." Advisors described how young people find out about youth organizing groups through friends, other programs, and youth-friendly spaces in their community, attracting youth who may not initially see themselves as activists. They also emphasized that youth organizing has a stronger orientation to systems change than participation in existing democratic institutions. **Eric Braxton**, Executive Co-Director of the Funders' Collaborative on Youth Organizing, describes how in youth organizing, "the

individual transformation of young people and the systemic change are actually deeply linked to each other and can't be separated."

Leaders across these varied programs recognized the importance of this entire spectrum of approaches that captured young people with different interests and identities. Even programs like Generation Citizen that are part of a required school curriculum have space for young people to center the projects on issues that matter and are relevant to them. Leaders and researchers also recognize that minoritized youth need both spaces of safety and affinity as well as experiences of participating in racially and economically diverse settings and coalitions. Even as she advocates for the importance of programs that reflect diversity in democratic participation, **Elizabeth Clay Roy** notes, "I continue to believe in the power of affinity groups as long as we continue to be a society that quite strongly marginalizes folks." Advisors emphasized the importance of a both/and approach, supporting both identity-affirming affinity spaces as well as spaces for intergroup dialog and coalition building.

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy — is an approach that believes "equity and access can best be achieved by centering pedagogies on the heritage and contemporary practices of students and communities of color" (Paris & Alim, 2014, p. 87). It asks educators to consider the perspectives and experiences of students, and incorporate and build on the students' cultural backgrounds (Kirshner et al., 2015) rather than unquestioningly adopting dominant pedagogical approaches. By engaging in this way, culturally relevant approaches and pedagogies can cultivate student voice and agency among students who might not otherwise feel empowered (Cammarota, 2007). Culturally relevant pedagogy seeks to go beyond mere 'understanding' of cultural differences and stresses adapting teaching and learning to culturally responsive traditions such as *sankofan* approaches (Watson & Knight-Manuel, 2017) or traditions of storytelling (Wilkins & Ball-Rokeach, 2006). Practitioners and youth who have participated in programs using this approach report increased youth interest in civic and community issues, and that youth are more likely to see themselves as agents of change (Cammarota, 2007). For more on culturally relevant pedagogy, and related approaches such as culturally sustaining pedagogy, see:

Paris, D., & Alim, H. S. (Eds.). (2017). *Culturally sustaining pedagogies: Teaching and learning for justice in a changing world*, Chapter 8. Teachers College Press.

Ladson-Billings, G. (1995). Toward a theory of culturally relevant pedagogy.⤢ (PDF), *American Educational Research Journal, 32*(3).

Paris, D., & Alim, H. S. (2014). What are we seeking to sustain through culturally sustaining pedagogy? A loving critique forward. *Harvard Educational Review, 84*, 85–100.

Connected Civics — is civic and political engagement grounded in young people's deeply felt interests and identities. The framework was developed through an integration of the 'connected learning' framework for supporting social and interest-driven learning with research on civic engagement and participatory politics. This framework emphasizes the new affordances of social, digital, and networked media that have enabled young people to gain access to new tools for organizing and self-expression, and that have increasingly been mobilized for organizing and civic causes ranging from fan activists to DREAMers. For more on Connected Civics, Connected Learning, and Participatory Politics, see:

Ito, M., Soep, E., Kligler-Vilenchik, N., Shresthova, S., Gamber-Thompson, L., & Zimmerman, A. (2015). Learning connected civics: Narratives, practices, infrastructures. *Curriculum Inquiry, 45*(1), 10–29.

Connected Civics: Civic Engagement in a Networked World — Connected Learning Alliance resource site

Ito, M., Arum, R., Conley, D., Gutiérrez, K., Kirshner, B., Livingstone, S., Michalchik, V., Penuel, W., Peppler, K., Pinkard, N., Rhodes, J., Salen Tekinbaş, K., Schor, J., Sefton-Green, J., & Watkins, S. C. (2020). *The Connected Learning Research Network: Reflections on a decade of engaged scholarship*. Connected Learning Alliance. https://clalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/CLRN_Report.pdf

3.2 Types and Examples of Programs

Programs that embody an asset and action-based orientation can be broadly categorized into two types: **Action Civics** programs that operate within schools, and **Youth Organizing** programs that are supported by community-based organizations.

3.2.1 Action Civics

Action civics is an approach that brings a reflective, youth-centered and project-based orientation into the civic education curriculum of schools. **Ben Kirshner** sees action civics in schools as creating a "bigger tent" that has been important for school adoption. Recognizing that there is a healthy diversity in approaches inhabiting this bigger tent, he sees a common focus on "civic education as experiential cycles of learning, reflection, and action." The term was originally coined in 2007 by **Mikvah Challenge**, which continues to be a leader in the field.

In recent years, action civics programs have seen growing success at scaling through school systems, and developing research-practice partnerships to advance theory and practice. **Carlos Hipolito-Delgado,** Professor in the School of Education and Human Development at the University of Colorado Denver, and an expert in sociopolitical development and civic engagement, describes how the Critical Civic Inquiry group has been working over many years, in partnership with the Student Voice and Leadership department of Denver Public Schools, on a three pronged approach: supporting curriculum and teacher professional development, conducting research and assessment, and working within the district to scale the program. He describes this opportunity to work in a sustained way within the district as "the most fulfilling part of the work, to take things to the next level and investigate different angles of things — not just the impact on students, but also what it takes for a teacher to be skilled in delivering this type of work." We spoke to leaders and researchers of two prominent action civics groups: **Generation Citizen** and **Student Voice and Leadership**.

Generation Citizen

Founded in 2010, Generation Citizen is a well-established action civics approach that has brought Lived Civics experiences to young people in schools across the country. Generation Citizen works with schools to transform their civics curriculum to an action civics orientation. They accomplish this by providing teacher professional development and an action civics curriculum. Students begin by thinking about broad issues in their community, narrow their topics to one local issue, and then specify a root cause that contributes to the problem. They then identify a main goal for their project, think more broadly to identify the targets of their campaign, and then choose tactics that they will utilize to get there. Generation Citizen also works with communities to encourage the adoption of project-based civic education.

Over the past 11 years, Generation Citizen has served an estimated 115,000 students across 10 states. Youth that have participated report higher rates of community engagement, voting enthusiasm, and connecting to their teachers. Additionally, students who have participated in Generation Citizen have achieved tangible progress in their communities and in policy change, drafting and helping to pass legislation, leading efforts to expand civics education, and leading a variety of educational initiatives (Generation Citizen, 2020).

The Executive Director of Generation Citizen, **Elizabeth Clay Roy**, spoke of how she has been focused on a roadmap to center racial equity in the organizational strategy. She also spoke to how the focus on educator training is essential in the current moment of debate about having critical discussions about race in schools. "When you look at the totality of American history, from whichever vantage point you look, frankly, there were uncomfortable truths. It does not actually serve anyone's present or future to pretend those don't exist, we think it is especially important that around hard history, difficult topics, it is even more important to invest in teachers' ability to have developmentally appropriate conversations with students that help guide them."

Student Voice and Leadership

The Student Voice and Leadership department in Denver Public Schools operates several programs that use action civics and youth voice to empower young people. They employ both Critical Civic Inquiry and Youth Participatory Action Research, and partner closely with researchers who have studied and defined these approaches. Their programs are currently in 24 of the district's 38 schools and they plan to keep expanding.

Student Board of Education (SBOE) is a program of the Denver Public School system directed and facilitated by the Student Voice and Leadership department, and has taken a district-wide approach to research-practice partnership. It is currently in 24 high schools and has between one and two dozen students at each site and approximately 220 students participating per year, mostly in grades 10–12. The youth involved operate as a collective and collectively decide what issues to research as well as co-facilitating the process of learning and taking action. While there is adult mentorship and partnership, the students are still the driving force, with **Solicia López** describing the work of SBOE as students who "organize around an issue and go deep on it and come up with a policy narrative." The SBOE groups also prioritize equity within the group and use critical and ethnic studies approaches to teach understanding, for the youth and adults who work with them.

Like SBOE, the Young African American and Latinx Leaders (YAALL) program is a Denver Public Schools program directed and facilitated by the Student Voice and Leadership team. It is a smaller program that was originally founded by four African American male students in 2016 after the release of the Dr. Sharon Bailey report showing that the school system marginalized Black students at higher rates than all other students. The YAALL founders decided to unite and create a space open only to BIPOC students, employing an in-depth ethnic studies pedagogy rooted in solidarity and critical ethnic identity. A smaller and more targeted program than SBOE, the YAALL program has between 15 and 20 students per cohort and is run like an afterschool program, with weekly meetings and three annual retreats.

YAALL is a student-led program that addresses the systemic inequalities in DPS that perpetuate the school-to-prison-pipeline through direct action, policy reform, and empowering their peers to grow as Education Justice leaders. They have tackled topics such as school resource officers (SROs), mental health, sexual health, and other topics that impact students.

Like other forms of youth voice, the student voice and leadership programs are more interested in process and growing critical thinkers than predetermined outcomes, with López stating that the adults involved "often struggle with [the students] hitting benchmarks, but we want them to experience the research process and create their narrative and story around the issue and understand that change takes time and can't be forced via artificial benchmarks."

3.2.2 Youth Organizing

The Funders' Collaborative for Youth Organizing (FCYO) offers this definition of youth organizing: "Grounded in racial, gender, and economic justice, youth organizing is the process of engaging young people in building power for systemic change while supporting their individual and collective development." **Eric Braxton** describes youth organizing as "a triple benefit with individual young people developing leadership and social emotional capacities, communities benefiting from campaigns that promote equity and justice, and finally the long term benefits of more active and engaged community leaders." Advocates of youth organizing argue that it brings young people directly into the civic process and allows them to gain hands-on experience in leadership, organizing, politics, and public engagement. Youth organizing programs tend to be located outside of schools, in activist and community based organizations. While they incorporate inquiry and learning, the emphasis on action, political engagement, and systems change is stronger in youth organizing than in action civics.

Unlike action civics, which has several large district-level or national organizations, youth organizing groups tend to be smaller, more diverse, and embedded within specific communities or regions. Many of them were founded and led by local youth leadership. Unlike approaches where action centers on presenting to and persuading adult decision-makers, youth organizers work directly to build a power base, alliances, and membership within their communities. Listen Inc. (2000, p.9) describes how youth organizing "pushes the adult-determined boundaries of traditional youth work" by "providing young people with the tools necessary for them to challenge systems and institutions on their own." We offer two programs as examples of youth organizing groups: **RYSE** and **Californians for Justice**.

RYSE

Founded by a coalition of youth, community activists, and local leaders in 2008, RYSE is a youth community space located in Richmond, CA that serves youth between 13 and 21 years old and provides a spectrum of youth services centered around youth organizing and empowerment. The space and organization offer a variety of youth oriented benefits including a safe space to eat, study, and rest; tutoring services; leadership and job training; and counseling services, all in a space that is centered around youth voice and participation. They are in the process of expanding, with a new building for youth slated to be completed in the Spring of 2022 that will allow them to serve even larger numbers of youth.

The main RYSE facility boasts near-constant use by youth after normal school hours. Besides offering support and services, many of the members also participate in a variety of programs meant to empower their peers and communities. Besides youth organizing, RYSE members also participate in efforts to bring about better community health, provide opportunities for media and arts participation, and educate themselves and peers on topics related to education and justice.

In speaking of RYSE, **Eric Braxton** referred to it as "a victory of youth organizing, a comprehensive youth development center done with a perspective around political development." This speaks to RYSE's commitment to empower youth to be active and aware participants in their community, while also imparting culturally relevant education on topics such as justice, community health, media, arts, and organizing the next generation of youth. The organization prioritizes putting youth voices and leadership forward and collaborating with their youth members in major decision making.

Californians for Justice

Californians for Justice is a statewide organization in California that seeks "to unlock the power of [youth] voice and possibility for the future" (CfJ) by engaging youth in campaigns and policy work around issues related to racial, educational, and economic inequality. They are primarily concentrated in the cities of San Jose, Oakland, Long Beach, Fresno, and Sacramento, where they work to organize local youth around the issues affecting their communities (Corpuz & Bell, 2021). They have organized over 2500 young people to work on matters as diverse as ballot issues, increased access to college, and working with schools to provide better educational alternatives and career readiness and training.

While many of the issues of interest for CfJ deal with education, the organizing is entirely separate from any school or district and represents an example of youth organizing outside of schools. While they are still engaged around issues of equity in education and able to empower students within their schools, they do not work exclusively within the structure of established districts or schools. Additionally, CfJ gets youth involved in democratic institutions and civic engagement by mobilizing youth around issues that are most impactful in their communities.

3.3 Assessment Approaches and Tools

Action civics and youth organizing efforts have developed frameworks and tools for students, educators, and organizers to assess their programs and work in both formative and summative ways. These assessments include evaluation at three levels.

- **Program, organizational, and systems level change.** This includes whether schools, communities, and government organizations have adopted changes, and created more opportunities for youth leadership and involvement in social change.
- **Adult adoption of youth engaging approaches and attitudes**. Successful implementation of youth organizing and action civics often means shifts in practices and attitudes for how educators, administrators, and youth workers engage youth in schools and other organizations.
- **Youth development of civic knowledge, skills, and social capital.** Civic action programs generally focus on communication skills, self-efficacy, and development of social relationships that give youth support as well as access to power and influence. In particular, more critical youth organizing groups focus on critical consciousness development among participants, or whether youth organizers develop a more structural understanding of inequality, feel able to act on inequalities, and engage in collective action to produce social change.

Even as action civics programs and research have expanded, they have retained an emphasis on these broad categories of outcomes. Since the release of the College, Career and Civic Life (C3) Framework for Social Studies State Standards in 2013, programs have worked to align these longstanding commitments to common standards (see for example, the Civic Action Project). Publicly available assessment tools and resources that have been developed by action civics and youth organizing groups include:

- The Action Civics in School Districts report from Generation Citizen includes frameworks for aligning action civics with literacy, equity, and SEL outcomes for schools.
- The Civic Action Project offers teacher-created assessment tools, including peer and group evaluation tools and rubrics for evaluating presentations.
- Hello Insight offers a range of evaluation tools for youth development programs, including some for youth leadership and action.
- The Measure of Youth Policy Arguments is an observation protocol for action civics student team presentations developed by the Critical Civic Inquiry Group.
- Mikvah Challenge free educator resources includes the Project Soapbox rubric for assessing presentations, and an active listening framework.
- SOUL School of Liberation and Action has curriculum manuals for youth organizing and political education that can be ordered online.
- Youth Engaged in Leadership and Learning Handbook includes a complete youth leadership curriculum and assessment frameworks.
- Youth Participatory Action Research Resources from the YPAR Hub at UC Berkeley offers a range of rubrics and assessments for youth and facilitators.

Researchers have also been refining measures of sociopolitical development, including critical consciousness and ethnic identity, and supporting uptake by school leaders and educators. Scott Seider and Daren Graves (2020) conducted a longitudinal study of the development of critical consciousness in five high schools, and have offered related workshops for educators and school leaders. **Matthew Diemer** shared that school leaders in both the U.S. and abroad have reached out to him about using his Critical Consciousness scale, and the newer Short Critical Consciousness scale to measure changes in critical consciousness over time (see Diemer et al., 2015; Diemer et al., 2017). Both scales have been translated into Spanish, French, Portuguese, and a number of other languages.. Measures such as the Multigroup Ethnic Measure-Revised (MEIM-R) (Phinney, 1994; Brown et al., 2014) and the Ethnic Identity Scale (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2004) are also valuable resources for researchers and educators to evaluate outcomes relevant to civic engagement and sociopolitical development.

Action civics and youth organizing fields offer concrete tools and frameworks for a more equitable and youth-centered approach to assessment and accountability. Working closely with researchers who have been studying and operationalizing foundational constructs such as critical consciousness and ethnic identity, educators have been expanding and refining methods for documenting a wide range of outcomes that speak broadly to skills, dispositions, and life outcomes valued by educators, parents, and communities.

4. CHALLENGES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This review of asset and action-based approaches to civic learning has revealed a robust and growing field of intertwined research and practice that has gained momentum through national attention to issues of racial justice. The strengths and efficacy of a Lived Civics, asset-based orientation, a focus on action, as well as socioemotional, developmental supports is strongly validated in the research literature and programmatic outcomes. Strong school-based programs such as Mikvah Challenge, Generation Citizen, and Student Voice and Leadership continue to gain support from school leaders, educators, communities, and most importantly, young people. Support for youth organizing efforts have also been buoyed by the public strength and visibility of youth-led movements for justice on a national scale (eg. Burton, 2019; Kindalan, 2020; Summers, 2021).

This arena of research-practice partnership has particularly strong contributions to make to informing how schools consider assessment and accountability. The historic focus on equity, youth engagement, and racial and ethnic identity has placed this field at the forefront of developing research, programs, and assessments that center on youth outcomes broadly valued by educators, parents, and community members. These approaches and tools have applicability beyond the field of civic learning. These include self-efficacy, communication skills, critical thinking, school and community connection, and social capital.

Asset and action-based approaches to civic learning are clearly efficacious, and can support more equitable approaches to civic learning and other areas of education and youth development. At the same time, the field faces significant challenges in broadening its influence, evidenced in the literature, as well as highlighted by the leaders and researchers we spoke to. These include:

- ◉ Adults have a pervasive cultural bias against taking young people seriously.
  Julio Cammarota described this as 'adultism', which he defined as "the patronizing view, or infantilizing view that adults may have of young people and they just don't want young people speaking up." Experts all saw this as inhibiting the ability of young people to be heard and seen as legitimate actors in their schools and communities.
- ◉ Civic leaders and educators often lack capacity in engaging in youth-centered and critical ways, particularly around race. Many of the experts and leaders we spoke to underscored the need for educational efforts focused not just on youth, but on adults in youth-engaging, critical and culturally relevant approaches. Facilitation and educating in these ways requires skillful practice and professional development (see also Graves & Seider, 2020).
- ◉ Assessment of outcomes of asset and action-based approaches requires a significant shift from established approaches to educational evaluation. Outcomes do not align with standardized tests, and because programs are often voluntary, evaluators cannot rely on traditional random assignment approaches. While the field has made significant progress in developing measures and approaches to assessing outcomes, institutionalized assumptions and practices for educational evaluation are challenging to change.
- ◉ Civic learning and youth leadership approaches are not aligned with the dominant norms and priorities of public education. Asset and action-based approaches require foundational changes to not only assessment, but to teacher-student relationships and norms for honoring diverse cultural assets. This misalignment means that these

programs tend to lack buy-in and funding within school systems. This also means that adapting youth-led and community based approaches for schools in ways that retain their criticality and focus on structural change can be challenging.

- The focus on activism and challenging inequality is inherently politically fraught. Public educational efforts that center on race, inequality, and political processes are often refracted through a political and partisan lens, as seen most recently in the debates over critical race theory in schools.

Recognizing these challenges, we see the following areas as ripe for additional research investments:

- Investment in more longitudinal research that develops a more complete picture of the breadth and duration of impact of transformative civic experiences, building on foundational studies that have examined critical consciousness and socioemotional outcomes of critical and youth organizing experiences (Seider & Graves, 2020; Pinedo et al., 2021). This includes ripple effects on parents, siblings, peers, and communities that have barely been investigated. Notably, some cross-sectional research documents impacts of organizing on school and community settings (see Shah & Mediratta, 2008; Speer, 2008; Voight, 2015). The field has demonstrated how asset and action-based civic experiences are qualitatively different from more circumscribed educational interventions, but documenting this full impact requires significant and sustained research investments.

- More investment in mixed methods and quantitative research. The field has begun to enrich the strong body of foundational qualitative research with quantitative measures and studies. In order to fully impact systems and policy, this body of research requires additional investment.

- Investigation of outcomes for intersectional and mixed groups. The field is just beginning to broaden its focus to include intersectional identities as well as experiences of White youth in mixed settings (Godfrey & Burston, 2018). **Veronica Terriquez** (2015b) demonstrated the use of 'coming out' language among undocumented activists, in their intersectional alliances with queer youth in immigrant rights organizations. **Seanna Leath** described the importance of an emerging generation of intersectional scholarship; for example, considering the unique experiences of Black girls and Black queer youth (see for example, Watts & Flanagan, 2007; Pender et al., 2019). While educators see critical consciousness and allyship as positive outcomes for dominant groups, related programmatic supports and impacts are still understudied.

Development of more robust research on outcomes and impacts would ideally lead to broader investments and systemic integration of action civics and youth organizing in schools and civic institutions. Advisors emphasized that it was important, however, not to sacrifice the emphasis on critical consciousness and structural change in the process of systemic integration — some forms of organizing and transformative civic learning may not be transferable to public school settings. We see the following opportunities for programmatic investments:

- Research has clearly demonstrated how essential and impactful the integration of a critical orientation is to civic learning for minoritized groups of youth. This argues for equity-oriented educational investments to be targeted to asset and action-based approaches to civic learning.

- The frameworks and tools developed in action civics and youth organizing can be translated and adapted for other subjects and fields. The underlying insights and approaches for engaging youth and recognizing racial and ethnic identity developed by

this field are broadly relevant and applicable beyond civic education. For example, **Carlos Hipolito-Delgado** notes that CCI has been working to integrate criticality and elements of YPAR into writing courses.

- ⦿ Growing the field and its impacts will also require investment in capacity building and supporting uptake in schools and community-based organizations, including educator and facilitator professional development, and developing institutional practices, policies, and incentive structures to support adoption.
- ⦿ Investment in research-practice partnerships centered on co-design and driven by problems of practice such as sustainability will also be essential to continue to grow the field and ensure impact.

Research literature and advisors have noted significant headwinds and challenges to increasing investments and uptake of asset and action-based approaches. At the same time, both the research and practice in the field has produced evidence of impacts that can't be ignored in any efforts to forge a more equitable educational system and civic society. We hope that this report has offered some visibility into the important strides that this field has taken, and the broader impacts it could have if these approaches are more widely embraced.

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