PACE

*Philanthropy for
Active Civic Engagement*

PACE Imagination Sprint

Report-Out | Sprint 1: Civic Learning

July 20, 2020 - August 7, 2020

"Imagining civic learning without disparities in access"

So far, 2020 has delivered no shortage of world-altering events. When crises strike, the status quo is put into total upheaval, and *the previously impossible becomes possible.* Recent crises have challenged us to think differently and change the frame of what's possible about how we live as a society. We believe we have an opportunity to proactively and intentionally envision what we want our "future state" to look like, rather than be pushed into a "new normal." We are left asking, ***where could our imagination lead us?***

Through a series of imagination sprints, PACE aims to create a brief, immersive, and collaborative experience that accelerates creativity to specific problems across aspects of democracy and civil society. The end goal is to spark new ideas as we seek to understand, reflect, envision, and iterate on particular topics, and to share those ideas and the fruits of imagination with the broader civic philanthropy field.

PACE hosted its first Imagination Sprint from July 20 - August 7, 2020, focused on ***imagining civic learning without disparities in access***. We convened a group of 13 leaders with diverse backgrounds as funders, practitioners, and academics; a participant list can be found at the end of this report. Over five 1-hour virtual sessions, this group braved to imagine new ideas to an old and complex problem.

PACE's commitment to "learn out loud" motivates us to prioritize real-time sharing over polish and perfection, and as such, this report-out is being released just weeks after our sprint concluded. **This report should be viewed as documentation of the imaginative ideas that were discussed during our time together; it is NOT a list of recommendations or endorsements, and not every participant supports every idea.** Our hope in sharing this document is that it provides some insight into the potential for new ideas around civic learning and disparities in access, as well as inspires others to invest time and energy into the imaginative process while we—as communities and a country—craft our "new normal."

Design Guidelines

In taking on an ambitious imagination prompt, we made choices to narrow our focus. Here are the guidelines that directed our imagination process:
● The *purpose* of civic learning is to produce citizens who are well-informed, productively engaged in working for the common good, and hopeful about our democracy.[1]
● The *definition* of civic learning is understood across four dimensions:

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[1] Vinnakota, Rajiv, Red & Blue Works, *From Civic Education to a Civic Learning Ecosystem: A Landscape Analysis and Case for Collaboration*, 2019

- ○ Civic knowledge: an understanding of government structure, government processes, relevant social studies knowledge and concepts, and American history and political thought in a global context.
  - ○ Civic skills: competencies in the use of one's voice, including basic writing, speaking, and listening skills and skills of research, investigation, and critical thinking; competencies in the use of practices of democratic coordination, political institutions, and media literacy.
  - ○ Civic dispositions: attitudes important in a democracy, such as a sense of civic duty, sense of efficacy, concern for the welfare of others, and commitment to trustworthiness and bridge-building.
  - ○ Civic capacities: access to networks, opportunities to participate, and other forms of social capital that promote civic agency.[2]
- We narrowed our *user group* to all young people in the K-12 age range (5-18 year olds) in the United States, but did not limit our imagination to classroom contexts.
- Our conversations led us to recognize two dominant theories of change related to our imagination prompt: (1) civic learning without disparities in access, such that you put your energy into imagining ways to remove the current barriers to access, and (2) civic learning without disparities in access, such that you put your energy into imagining new ways to get civic learning to young people regardless of current barriers to access. We narrowed our focus on the second theory of change, reinforcing that we intentionally did not limit our imagination to the classroom.

As part of our process, we explored the formative and personal experiences participants identified as having a positive impact on their development as citizens. A few themes emerged, and we used those as prompts for targeted imagination. Those prompts were:
- What could we imagine that doesn't already exist to give more young people first-person exposure to the government?
- What could we imagine that doesn't already exist to help more young people become more skilled and comfortable with debate?

Ideas

These are the ideas that emerged during our conversations. Again, these are not recommendations or endorsements and not all ideas were embraced by every participant; they are, however, a glimpse into where our imagination process took us.

Ideas most fully discussed:

Civic Livestream: Leveraging the power of livestream and social media, young people could "follow" the livestream of a government official (representative, postal worker, etc) to understand the ins and outs of their work lives, interactions, and decisions on a daily basis. (Or perhaps it's structured as following an issue, versus a person).
- → *The opportunity for civic learning:* This would provide an unfiltered look at various types of government in action and provide an opportunity for young people to put themselves "in the shoes" of the people who make our government run day-to-day. It has the potential to increase accessibility, transparency and trust in government. There are countless variations on this idea (and potentially new technology or media) that could further maximize civic learning; for example, you could do a split screen of officials from both sides of the aisle as they go through

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[2] Dr. Danielle Allen, Harvard University, The Democractic Knowledge Project

their day or stream a representative's office hours to see the kinds of appointments and visitors she/he gets in a day.

➔ *The opportunity for increasing access to civic learning:* Young people have smartphones (53% by age 11 and 84% of teenagers) and they are increasingly spending close to a third of their day on their phones. Figuring out a way for young people to learn how the government works through the mediums they are already accessing is a big opportunity.

➔ *Acknowledged challenges/limitations/implementation questions:* If not developed correctly, will this create the wrong incentive structures for government officials livestreaming? Will sensationalization continue to become the currency, the way it has in other media? Will such transparency lead to privacy and/or security issues? The daily happenings in government can sometimes be boring; will this keep the attention and interest of young people?

Civic Passport: Young people get a stamp when visiting a government building, park, post office, etc.

➔ *The opportunity for civic learning:* This would encourage first-person exposure to government. Young people would see the broad spectrum of ways government is integrated and at work in their lives. The passport model gives young people something to "show off" as they collect stamps; it could become a badge that employers or admission offices take into consideration.

➔ *The opportunity for increasing access to civic learning:* This broadens "government" to more than the Capitol building. More places (and also, local places) means more accessibility for young people to learn about government. This could also become part of the in-school civics curriculum, and young people could get virtual stamps while becoming aware of other places to get physical stamps.

➔ *Acknowledged challenges/limitations/implementation questions:* Can we get to consensus about what civic activities count? Who is deciding that? Who administers it? Could it be designed in a way that circumvents traditional barriers to access (e.g. could each passport include bus tickets?) How do we avoid reinforcing existing inequity in access (e.g. some young people are more likely to come from families that have time, money, and other resources to support this)? Is a person or guide available to frame the passport for young people and/or help them reflect along the way (is there a national service opportunity here)?

Civic Birthright: Similar to the Jewish Birthright experience, an educational group trip for young adults designed to develop them as American citizens.

➔ *The opportunity for civic learning:* This would be deeply experiential, connecting young people to historical locations, context, and narrative and asking them to think critically. In a diverse peer group, a Civic Birthright would expose young people to other young people different from them, deepening their appreciation for the diversity that exists in America.

➔ *The opportunity for increasing access to civic learning:* The Jewish Birthright model pays for any 18-32 year old to go on the trip. Adjusted for and targeted within our user group (~16 million 15-18 year olds in the US today), this would significantly increase access to civic learning and create a "common experience" for young Americans.

➔ *Acknowledged challenges/limitations/implementation questions:* Who designs the Birthright trip and decides what American narrative should be told? Who pays for this trip? How would diversity be defined (socio-economic, race, gender, ethnicity, political, geographic, ideological, other factors)?

Family Constitution: Guided by parents, a constitution could be collaboratively drafted and implemented that sets the rules and processes for the home.

➔ *The opportunity for civic learning:* This would provide an introduction to government structure/processes and systems of power while leaning on the American Constitution as a model to consider. Beyond teaching critical skills (writing, research, listening, case-making, compromise, etc) it would also teach young people how to "speak democracy" and gain awareness and appreciation for interests across a community. Notably, a family constitution would build young people's capacities and expectations for participation, which could carry into other parts of their lives, including school. Lastly, an opportunity exists for parents/guardians, as they would be "brushing up" on their civic education to guide the Constitution process at home.
➔ *The opportunity for increasing access to civic learning:* A high percentage of young people live in family units, making this a model that can be scaled.
➔ *Acknowledged challenges/limitations/implementation questions:* What is the role of social emotional learning to be able to manage this process (for kids and parents/guardians)? What are the intended outcomes of this idea? With various family structures and philosophies, can you expect that all families would embrace this idea? What barriers to access would carry into this idea's implementation, and how could we solve for those proactively?

Ideas discussed at a high-level:
- Civic Internship Lottery: Elected officials host a young person per week as an intern (52 a year); the slots are filled through a voluntary lottery to ensure equity.
- Brown Bag Lunch Series: Elected officials regularly come to schools and informally share about their jobs, ask student opinions on issues, etc.
- Campaign Debates in Schools: Candidates host their debates in schools with students as the primary audience.
- Embed Debate across Curriculum: An intentional effort is made to embed debate skills in more parts of curriculum beyond social science (e.g. what does debate in science class look like?)

Additionally, here is a list of the broad range of open challenges, questions, and areas of future exploration that were raised during our imagination process. We raise them here to reflect the fullness of our discussions and, where relevant, spark further imagination.
- What is the role of social media in increasing access to civic learning? Is the media underutilized as a tool for civic education?
- We spent time identifying the positive formative civic experiences that helped participants develop into citizens. We recognize not everyone's formative civic experiences are positive or should have the goal of replication.
- Some participants reflected on the role of debate in developing citizens. What should success for debate look like? How do we move from a "win/lose" frame to a "deepen my understanding" frame? How do we create norms around debate (make it ok to be wrong, make it ok for others to be wrong, make it part of daily life)? What is the difference between debate and civic discourse?
- Perhaps the way to realize civic learning without disparities in access is to not develop a new program but to work at a systems-level of what already exists.
- Is there a backbone organization or coordinating body for all the efforts that exist? Is anyone tracking the fullness of what is already happening? Is anyone ensuring there is coverage across communities? Maybe overcoming disparities in access is not a "numbers game" but an "organizing game."
- While we were imagining beyond the classroom, traditional educational settings will still play a role in civic education. What is the role of teacher training?
- What does civic learning look like in the COVID era? What does it look like in the COVID classroom?

APPENDIX

"Warm Up" Reading List

As part of the Participant Overview presented on the first day, a "warm up" reading list was distributed. We know that imagination is successful when we can achieve both a diversity of perspectives and also a common basis of understanding. In that spirit, below is a list of resources that we asked everyone to familiarize (or refamiliarize) themselves with before the first call, which allowed us to proceed with the confidence that everyone would have at least the same base-level understanding on the issue.

Foundation-Setting Resources *For productive imagination, it is important that we collectively have a working understanding of the history, definitions, challenges, and current landscape of civic learning today. Many of you may be familiar with these publications; please re-familiarize yourself with them before our first call.*		
Resource	**This resource provides...**	**Time**
Brookings Institute: The need for civic education in 21st-century schools By Rebecca Winthrop, 2020	An overview of the history, definition, delivery, challenges, and case for civic learning in the 21st-century.	15 mins
From Civic Education to a Civic Learning Ecosystem: A Landscape Analysis and Case for Collaboration By Raj Vinnakota for Red & Blue Works, 2019	A comprehensive study of the civic learning space, a framework for conceptualizing and discussing shared goals, and the case urging funders, educators, practitioners, researchers, and the general public to develop a new conception of civic learning that goes beyond high school civics class.	60-90 mins
Specific Resources on our Topic *These resources will ground us in various issues specifically related to disparities in civic learning access, which we will explore further in our first call. They were recommended by multiple sprint participants as the go-to resources they share when trying to help others understand disparities in civic learning.*		
Center for American Progress: Strengthening Democracy with a Modern Civics Education By Ashley Jeffrey and Scott Sargard, 2019	A state-by-state analysis of civics education requirements and civic engagement measures [Why we selected this piece: To help us consider metrics for civic education and civic engagement and to illuminate disparities across states and regions.]	20 mins
Let's Go There: Making a Case for Race, Ethnicity and a Lived Civics Approach to Civic Education By Cathy Cohen, Joseph Kahne, and Jessica Marshall, 2018	An introduction to "Lived Civics" -- a civic education approach that centers race, identity, and the lived experiences of youth. [Why we selected this piece: Disparities in civic education by race are a common trend we need to understand. This piece also provides a solid literature review, demonstrating the value and impact of integrating educational approaches that address race, ethnicity, and lived experiences of young people of color into civics curriculum.]	30 mins
$23 Billion Report By EdBuild, 2019	A data-centered look at educational inequality based on school districts' race and economic demographics. [Why we selected this piece: Overall educational inequalities shape disparities in civic learning, and we need to understand how those	15 mins

	inequalities are shaped by race and economics.]	
Where Left and Right Agree on Civics Education, and Where They Don't By Frederick Hess and Matthew Rice, 2020	A report-out on a series of conversations with education leaders across the political spectrum, which offers a roadmap of where there is consensus, where there is confusion, and where there are fundamental differences. [Why we selected this piece: To offer insight into the ways people on the left and right approach this issue, to acknowledge the differences, and to consider potential areas for common ground.]	20 mins

Optional Additional Resources
In respecting your time, we are only making the six resources above "required reading" before the sprint, but these resources were also recommended by your fellow participants during sprint enrollment. Please view this list as optional reading for the sprint and/or resources for continued learning on the topic.

Reports
- Joseph Kahne and Ellen Middaugh, "Democracy for Some: The Civic Opportunity Gap in High School" (brief on major findings available here)
- Peter Levine, Kei Kawashima-Ginsberg, "The Republic is (Still) at Risk– and Civics is Part of the Solution"
- Karon LeCompte, Brook Blevins, Tiffani Riggers-Piehl, "Developing civic competence through action civics: A longitudinal look at the data"
- Brooke Blevins, Karon LeCompte, Michelle Bauml, "Developing students' understandings of citizenship and advocacy through action civics"
- Generation Citizen, "360 Civic Learning: A Study of the Practices that Cultivate Civic Engagement Among Youth from Underserved Communities"
- PACE and National Conference on Citizenship, "Recommendations for Exploring Civic Learning as a Pathway to Equity and Opportunity"

Readings
- Meria Levinson, "Chapter 13, The Civic Empowerment Gap: Defining the Problem and Locating Solutions."
- PACE Interview with Amber Coleman-Mortley, "Civic Education Through the Eyes of Young People"
- CivXNow Interview with Raj Vinnakota, "Research Highlight—Civic Education Landscape Analysis"
- James Baldwin, "A Letter to My Nephew"
- Peter Levine, "What does youth civic engagement have to do with inequality?"
- Generation Citizen, "How Civic Education Breaks Barriers of Systemic Inequities"
- Alia Wong, *The Atlantic*, "The Sesame Street Effect"

Podcasts/TED Talks
- Malcolm Gladwell, *Revisionist History*, S2E3, Mrs. Buchanan's Period of Adjustment
- Nikole Hannah-Jones, *The New York Times,* 1619
- *Hip-Hop Can Save America: The Podcast*, S1E1, Dr. Bettina Love [Hip-Hop Education, Civics]
- Hip hop, grit, and academic success: Bettina Love at TEDxUGA

Organization Websites
- iCivics
- Center for Educational Equity
- CIRCLE (specifically their Equitable K-12 Civic Learning work)

Links and Resources Offered During the Sprint
- Civic Science
- PACE Language Perceptions Project
- Question storming (here and here)

Participant List *(in alphabetical order by first name)*

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Guest Speaker: **Raj Vinnakota**, President, The Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation

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