
Democracy & Education

Civic Meanings

Understanding the Constellations of Democratic and Civic Beliefs of Educators

Elizabeth A. Lowham and James R. Lowham

Abstract

There is little doubt of public school's role in the enculturation of youth into American democracy. There are several aspects about which little is known that should be addressed prior to seeking options to understand and address civic education for the 21st century: first, the desired civic knowledge, skills, and predispositions are not clearly identified; and second, little is known about the knowledge, skills, and beliefs of the faculty, administration, staff and board of education members about democracy or the patterns of congruence among adults connected to K–12 education. In this pilot study, we investigate the patterns of beliefs through the use of an innovative Q-sort and interviews of participants among four public school districts, a statewide group of policy advisors, and some teacher union officials.

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STATE CONSTITUTIONS AND national rhetoric profess the importance of engaging youth in American democracy, arguing that civic education encourages participation in the institutions and processes of government. Public schools take up much of the obligation for the provision of such education. Two shortcomings to this arrangement are, first, students may not learn the desired civic knowledge, skills, and predispositions, and, second, what is learned may not serve its intended purpose if the students do not practice civic habits of thought and action.

There are several aspects about which little is known that should be addressed prior to seeking options to understand and address civic education:

1. The desired civic knowledge, skills, and predispositions are not clearly identified.

2. Little is known about the knowledge, skills, and beliefs of the faculty, administration, staff, and board of education members about democracy or the patterns of congruence among adults connected to K–12 education.

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Having multiple people in multiple contexts and subjects modeling aspects of civics, reinforcing and expanding concepts would be very powerful—if the individuals aligned beliefs, knowledge, and goals or if differences served as explicit teachable moments. Yet little is known about the beliefs related to democracy of the adults who operate and lead schools, let alone whether such beliefs are aligned or consistently modeled. The purpose of this pilot study was two-pronged. First, we aimed to investigate the democratic beliefs of K–12 educators and stakeholders, with a particular focus on the complexities of those subjective belief patterns. We believe that these patterns of beliefs are more complicated than the pedagogy of civic education presents. Further, we believe there may be nuanced and important variations in these patterns that are relatively underappreciated and potentially unknown. Little is known about the beliefs regarding power, authority, and governance of policymakers, administrators, teachers, and other adults connected to education; little is known about the beliefs of those from whom our students learn and of whom they see as in charge. In particular, we are interested in understanding whether the adults of the school system have similar knowledge, beliefs, and goals about democracy, power, and governance. Second, we aimed to field-test an innovative methodological approach for its ability to detect and highlight these patterns and the nuanced differences among them, even in a seemingly homogenous sample. We developed a Q-sort to examine educational stakeholders’ beliefs among four public school districts, a statewide group of policy advisors, and some teacher union officials.

Schools are organizations in which most Americans function for a minimum of ten years for approximately six hours per day (National Center for Education Statistics, 2012). The K–12 practitioners in these schools practice and model power, authority, and governance throughout the time students are in school. Hence, the efforts of the social studies/civics teachers and those in power, authority, and governance of the school come together to affect both the rhetoric and the results of enculturation of the youth into a democracy.

The Civic Mission of Schools

Historically, civic education has been an important goal for public schools, especially in the United States. References to the importance of civic education for the sustenance and structure of government and governance in the United States can be traced back to George Washington’s Farewell Address (Washington, 1796). Washington’s argument was premised on the idea that in order to achieve and maintain the public good, the government of the United States had a common interest in citizens with good public character. Usually this interest has involved a desire for students to learn civic knowledge, to acquire civic skills and civic dispositions, and to develop a propensity to behave democratically. Respondents in the 32nd Annual Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll ranked the statement “to prepare people to become responsible citizens” as the number one purpose of schools (Rose & Gallup, 2000, p. 47).

While court cases and state laws have reaffirmed general interest in promoting civic education in public schools (e.g., Pauley v. Kelly, 1979, pp. 705–706, 877), educational researchers Soder,

Goodlad, and McMannon (2001) have called for a resurgence of civic education, arguing that one of the primary goals of education is the enculturation of youth into a social and political democracy. Certainly, they are not alone in their focus on the importance of and calls for an increase attention to civic education (e.g., CIRCLE, 2013; Mlyn & McBride, 2014; Osguthorpe & Torrez, 2009). Yet, as Hoffert has argued, often we ignore this vital connection between public education and democracy. Hoffert presented two reasons for the dismissal of this link: It either baffles us or is satisfied by “patriotic mantras offered by pedagogical recipes focused on forms of participation” (Hoffert, 2001, p. 26).

We offer a third reason: Notions of what it means to be a citizen and participate in social and political democracies are complex, changing and made complicated by the growing reliance on standards and assessment. These changes increase the opportunities for participation, thereby increasing the demands on citizens to learn appropriate forms of and means to participation as well as to act. Thus, we would not expect one pattern of beliefs or set of practices surrounding democracy. Further, we believe that exposure to such variation is a powerful educational tool; however, we have little knowledge about the range of or patterns in the variation in belief structures.

As Campbell (2006) noted, scholars have not done a terribly good job narrowing the concept of civic education or understanding how schools may nurture such learning. At the most general level, “civic education” means all the processes that affect people’s beliefs, commitments, capabilities, and actions as members or prospective members of communities” (Crittenden & Levine, 2013). For some scholars, thus, civic education is more closely aligned with community engagement and living (e.g., Stoskopf & Strom, 1992); for others, there is an explicitly political component (e.g., Lennon, 2006). For some, civic education may be about creating a sense of civic duty based on emotional or symbolic ties (e.g., American National Election Studies, 1992); for others, it may be more about creating a sense of responsibility to the members of society (e.g., Dalton, 2009). We believe civic education as it is practiced and modeled in the K–12 educational system may reasonably include all of these, or elements of all of these, definitions. An appropriate methodological tool would allow for participants to select for themselves among these various elements as they define for us their conceptions of democracy and civics, so that researchers can begin to understand how practitioners define concepts of civics, democracy, and decision-making power for themselves.

Since organizational membership affects political attitudes, information about public issues, social networks, norms of participation, and civic skills (Olsen, 1982; Verba, Scholzman, & Brady, 1995), it is likely that school experiences help shape civic behavior in a host of intended (curricular) and unintended (noncurricular) ways. We contend, thus, that schools are organizations in which power, authority, and governance are modeled daily. It is widely believed that teachers’ beliefs make up important screens as teachers perceive, process, and act upon information in the classroom (Clark & Peterson, 1986). Yet there is some level of disagreement about how practitioners model their beliefs. Some studies found a consistency in the beliefs of teachers and their

practices (e.g., Shavelson & Stern, 1981). Other studies found inconsistencies among teachers' beliefs and their classroom behavior (e.g., Kinzer, 1988). Once democratic beliefs can be determined, the consistency or inconsistency (Fang, 1996) between democratic beliefs and behavior can be studied. Once determined and studied, researchers can begin to understand how these beliefs may be filtered out and enhanced by the complexities and intervening variables experienced by teachers, administrators, school board members, and other stakeholders. The researchers recognize that studying beliefs, as Kane, Sandretto, and Heath (2002) wrote, only tells half of the story, but identifying beliefs is the important first half of the story that will open the door to additional research about the similarities, differences, and effects of these beliefs.

As Benjamin Franklin said, "Tell me and I forget, teach me and I may remember, involve me and I learn." Sizer and Sizer (1999) argued that students are watching the organization called school. Students are watching everyone. Thus, in the broadest sense of the term, civic education "need not be intentional of deliberate; institutions and communities transmit values and norms without meaning to" (Crittenden & Levine, 2013). Students, parents, faculty, staff, and administrators learn who has power, what power individuals and groups have, and who makes decisions that directly impact their lives outside the formal practice of civic education. Students learn the governance model of the various classrooms and the school; students learn different norms of participation, behavior, and involvement. Importantly, there is little research about the beliefs of those individuals who model such behaviors.

The civic mission of schools coupled with the lack of knowledge about the beliefs and practices of governance in schools

guided the researchers to this Q-sort pilot study as a means to investigate the beliefs of adults connected to K-12 education.

Methodology

To examine potential differences in viewpoints and belief structures among those involved in education, we developed a Q-sort (Stephenson, 1953; Brown, 1980, 1993). The Q-sort asked participants to sort a sample of 36 statements about education and about democracy in public education (see Table 1). Participants were asked to sort these statements quasi-normally from -5 for most disagree to +5 for most agree. The quasi-normal distribution forced participants to carefully consider which statements represented their strongest beliefs, allowing them to more clearly differentiate those statements that provoked strong reactions from those that provoked milder responses. While each participant was asked to sort statements so they followed quasi-normal distribution, they were explicitly informed that they should deviate from the distribution if doing so would better represent their beliefs.

We created our Q-sample of 36 statements by applying four viewpoints on democracy to public education, schools, and decision making. For each topic (the far left column of Table 1), we presented a series of statements that correspond to a viewpoint on democracy, which were organized into two dimensions. Our intent was to develop a Q-sort that would allow participants to identify for themselves and for us the important aspects of civic practice in schools. That is, we wanted participants to be able to highlight which parts of the definitions of democracy, power, and decision making discussed above most closely aligned with their beliefs and which were most in opposition to their beliefs as they practiced civic habits in the K-12 system.

Table 1 Q-Sort Statements: The 36 Statements Participants Sorted as Part of the Q-Sort

	Distribution of Power		Distribution of Responsibility	
	<i>Elite</i>	<i>Participatory</i>	<i>Neoliberal</i>	<i>Communitarian</i>
<i>Statements about Education</i>				
Goal of Education	1. The main goal of education is to prepare students for the demands of higher education.	2. The goal of education is to prepare each student to facilitate his or her unique development.	3. Schools should seek to prepare students to be economically productive.	4. Education should ensure that students understand their responsibilities as citizens.
Civic Education	5. Public education should support and reinforce the culture and leadership structure of America.	6. Schools should provide students the opportunity to participate as members of a decision-making body.	7. Schools do not have a responsibility to provide civic education for students.	8. Public education ought to prepare students to make decisions for the common good.
Democracy	9. Democracy correctly allows those with more knowledge, skills, and means to have greater influence on decisions.	10. Democracy is not about getting what you want; it is a process of decision making.	11. Democracy should be more than a means of protecting individual rights.	12. Democracy requires that people be treated equally when making decisions for the greater good.

Table 1 Q-Sort Statements: The 36 Statements Participants Sorted as Part of the Q-Sort (*continued*)

	Distribution of Power		Distribution of Responsibility	
	<i>Elite</i>	<i>Participatory</i>	<i>Neoliberal</i>	<i>Communitarian</i>
<i>Statements about Education</i>				
Knowledge of Rights	13. Graduates should be able to recite the introductions to the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution.	14. A student should leave school knowing he or she has a voice and how to exercise it.	15. The fundamental right that students leave school with is freedom.	16. Students have only limited responsibilities to their communities upon graduation.
Managing Difference	17. In contentious situations, students should support leaders and rely on them to inform their views.	18. In contentious situations, students should invite opinions different from their own.		
Understanding Difference			19. In contentious situations, the market of public opinion should determine the proper outcome.	20. In contentious situations, differences of opinion should be explored to find common understandings.
<i>Statements about Decision Making</i>				
Governance Structure	21. As leaders, senior district administrators should set standards and rules for managing schools.	22. Parents and community members ought to have limited input regarding governance decisions.	23. School-based management is the ideal form of governance for educational institutions.	24. Any decision-making structure should make decisions in the interest of the broader community.
School Boards	25. School boards should make decisions concerning their K–12 systems in closed sessions.	26. School boards do not require input from the community to make good decisions.	27. School boards are too removed from the daily practices of schools to understand what policy is best for a particular school.	28. School boards always make decisions for the common good.
Role of Students	29. Only certain students have the knowledge and skills to participate in district-level decision making.	30. Students have a legitimate role to play in district-level decision making.		
Power in the Process	31. Power in the decision-making process should begin and end in the hands of senior administration.	32. Decision-making power should be distributed broadly throughout the community.		
Use of Power			33. Power comes from having more people on your side.	34. Power should be used to ensure the fewest people are hurt by a decision.
Participation	35. Only those leaders who are highly educated and well-informed should make decisions regarding district policy.	36. Individuals who believe they have a stake in the outcomes of a decision should be allowed to participate in making the decision.		

The Q-Sort was developed using two dimensions with two logical viewpoints under each dimension. The first dimension, the distribution of power, relates to theoretical expectations about involvement in decision making. The statements under this dimension relate to who should be appropriately involved in the process of decision making. Under this dimension, the researchers utilized two logical viewpoints, elite and participatory. An elite theory of democracy posits that power should be in the hands of a small number of privileged leaders, in part because the masses are rarely equipped to contribute to policy making. The main role for the masses in such a viewpoint is the election of officials, the elite, who make actual decisions and policy. A participative viewpoint on democracy argues that all individuals who have some stake or interest in the outcomes of a decision should be able to participate, or at the least have their interests directly represented, in a decision-making structure. The modern version of the participatory viewpoint is a response to dissatisfaction with both the outcomes and the processes that tend to subjugate individuals.

The second dimension, the distribution of responsibility, relates to theoretical expectations regarding the process of decision making, including about which substantive areas different processes should make decisions. Under this dimension, the researchers utilized two logical viewpoints, neoliberal and communitarian. A neoliberal viewpoint on democracy argues that little to no interference from government is the optimal form of decision making. Markets and open competition, not governments, should make most decisions, particularly about socially controversial subjects, because only competition is able to effectively overcome the inherent self-interest of individuals. A communitarian viewpoint on the proper scope of policy outcomes in a democracy argues that decisions should be made for the public good and that often only governments are able to adequately understand the scope and impact of such decisions.

These two dimensions, distribution of power and distribution of responsibility, are properly orthogonal because the first dimension relates to who should make a decision and the second dimension relates to the normative beliefs about the process and focus of those decisions. For a Q-sort, it is not necessary, nor in this case is it expected, that these viewpoints be mutually exclusive. The researchers are not interested in testing the particular viewpoints on democracy, but rather, we are interested in understanding what participants believe about democracy and public education. Some statements in our Q-sample run deliberately counter to that viewpoint's theoretical perspective to possibly elicit a negative response on the negative valence of the statement. The researchers have modified, tested, and revised statements several times for improved clarity and communication.

As opposed to traditional surveys, Q-sorts encourage participants to rerank and reevaluate statements as they evaluate new statements from the Q-sample. Thus, statements within the Q-sample are thought of as interrelated. That is, researchers analyze and understand a participant's perspective by analyzing the entire ranking of statements; each statement has meaning only in relation to how a participant ranks all the other statements (Vogel & Lowham, 2007). As a methodology, Q-sorts sit nicely between

traditional surveys and semistructured interviews. Q-sorts are "sensitive to context [and] amenable to statistical analysis" (Vogel & Lowham, 2007, p. 21).

The sample for this study utilized the 48 respondents who have participated in the Q-sort. These participants were a convenience sample selected from four different organizations, the Collaboration Leadership Team (CLT),¹ Natrona County School District #1 (NCSD #1), Laramie County School District #1 (LCSD #1), and the Wyoming P-16 Council. The CLT is a national organization devoted to the training and use of collaborative decision making, primarily in the educational arena. The CLT focuses on training districts to use a participatory and inclusive model of decision making, thus providing a potentially very different modeling of civic behavior. The CLT conference participants included school board members, district- and school-level administration, teachers, classified and professional staff, union employees for both administrator and teacher unions, university faculty, and educational consultants from Wyoming, Wisconsin, Colorado, and Maryland. Conference participants were contacted in person during their 2010 summer retreat. Twenty-nine percent of the sample is primarily identified with the CLT (14 people).

During summer 2010, the researchers visited each school district and delivered a number of Q-sort packets to various district employees, including school board members, district and building administrators, classified and professional staff, and union representatives. Each participant was asked to complete his or her own Q-sort and then to distribute the remaining packets to other individuals involved in education in the district who might have different perspectives. Thus, the sampling process for the districts was a modified snowball sample, where researchers devolved control over the sampling process to the participants themselves. Thirty-nine percent of our sample was from NCSD #1 (19 people); 18.8 percent of our sample was from LCSD #1 (9 people).² The school district participants included building administrators, district administrators, teachers, union officers and employees, classified personnel, and board members.

The final organization included in the sample of participants is the P-16 Council. This council comprises people appointed by the governor of Wyoming for the purpose of coordinating and improving transitions between school levels and outcomes of education for all ages (prekindergarten to baccalaureate). The council includes teachers, administrators, employers, university faculty, union leaders, a representative from community colleges, and a representative from the state Department of Education. We felt that including members of the P-16 Council allowed for the representation of viewpoints from the state of education that are outside traditional district structures but are important contributors to or beneficiaries of public education in the state. Each member of the P-16 Council was mailed a Q-sort packet and asked to mail the results back; 12.5% of our sample (six) was from the P-16 Council, including a K-12 teacher, the executive director, a member of the university faculty, and a union official.

This pilot study was an attempt to explore and understand the similarities and differences in beliefs amongst the participants. Our sample included teachers, administrators, professional staff,

union officials, university faculty, educational consultants, board members, and state education officials. The participants were fairly evenly split between genders; most participants were in their early 40s to mid-'60s. Most of our sample (77%) hailed from the state of Wyoming, and many of these individuals worked in one or two districts in the state. Those who were not from Wyoming belonged to an organization that promotes a collaborative form of decision making, which in and of itself may promulgate certain beliefs about democracy, power, and civic practices.

There are competing tensions within our sample. On the one hand, we might expect quite similar views on democracy—the participants' similar ages, that many individuals came from similar political and demographic backgrounds and worked together on a day-to-day basis. On the other hand, our participants represented many different stakeholder roles in the educational arena, implying the potential for substantial differences in beliefs about democracy, power, and decision making. Our goal was to investigate if the Q-sort we developed would elucidate potential variation and similarities in meaningful ways given these competing tensions toward uniformity and difference.

Results

We extracted six unique perspectives using a cluster analysis that grouped respondents together based on squared Euclidean distance between their complete statement rankings.³ On an individual level, participants presented a range of beliefs across most dimensions (see Table 2). Of the 36 statements, participant opinion on 14 statements had a range of 9 or 10, meaning that individuals either strongly supported or disagreed with these statements. Participants held divergent views in every content area. There were only 6 statements that had a range of 5 or less, meaning there was relative consensus on these statements.

To analyze the perspectives of the participants, we averaged values across all individuals in each of the six clusters. To interpret each perspective, we considered all statements with an average absolute value of 2.5 or greater to be important for understanding the cluster's beliefs. We considered statements with lower average scores to reflect low intensity or low consensus within the cluster. Overall, there is little question about the importance of the civic mission of public schools in the United States. Following the literature, all clusters believed strongly in the mission of public schools enculturating youth into social and political democracies. This was, however, the *only* statement on which clusters agreed (see Table 2). The following descriptions represent the perspectives across individuals within a particular cluster (see Table 3).

Middle-of-the-Road Cluster

In many ways, this cluster represented the “most common denominator” pattern. They believed, in general, in the opening of district decision-making structures to the community and to all those who had a stake in the decision. Yet they shared few other beliefs in common.

This cluster was the largest and the most diverse in terms of positions/backgrounds and experiences and had the fewest common beliefs. This cluster believed that schools should facilitate

the unique development of students [2].⁴ Part of that development includes ensuring the development of student's voices as well as ensuring students know how to exercise it [14]. Additionally, this cluster believed that school boards should be open to decision-making bodies—they should not make decisions in closed sessions [25] and should seek input from the community [26]. In general, this cluster sought to broaden participation in decision making; they believed that all individuals who had a stake in a decision should be allowed to participate [36].

Process-Focused Cluster

This cluster focused on democracy as a process, rather than as a set of outcomes. The individuals in this cluster believed that democracy is, at its core, for the people and should be by the people, though they were less clear than some other clusters were about whom “the people” ought to include.

This cluster did feel strongly about four of the five statements about democracy. Other clusters only felt strongly about two, at most. Further, this cluster appeared to hold fairly strong antielitist tendencies, yet they did not necessarily hold strong opinions about who should be included. This cluster viewed democracy as a process of decision making, not a way of obtaining a preferred outcome [10]; democracy should also do more than protect individual rights [11], and it ought to strive to make decisions for the common good [24]. Interestingly, they also believed that democracy does not require people to be treated equally when making decisions for the common good [12]. This cluster was interested in the process of decision making. When making decisions in conflict, parties should explore those disagreements to find common understanding [20], and the market of public opinion should not always determine the outcome [19].

This cluster also appeared to hold strong antielitist opinions. As with other clusters, they believed that district decision making should not occur in closed sessions [25] and that parents and the community should have a role at the district level [26]. Unlike the perspective of some other clusters, this need for openness may stem from their belief that school boards do not always make decisions in the common good [28]. This cluster felt that power should extend past senior district administration and that decision making should include non-elites [31, 35].

Finally, this cluster appeared to believe that schools have an important role in enculturating students with their responsibilities to their communities after graduation [16] and that part of that responsibility includes the exercise of one's own voice [14]. Despite their belief that democracy ought to make decisions in the common good, members of this cluster did not hold strong beliefs about whether public education has the responsibility to prepare students to make decisions for the common good [8].

Common Good/Equal Treatment Cluster

This cluster held that schools have two primary responsibilities related to democracy. First, schools should prepare students to make decisions for the common good [8]. Second, for this cluster, it appeared as though part of the common good may include

Table 2 Cluster Profiles

Cluster	Mission of Public Education	Civic Education	Student Participation	Inclusion— Breadth and Elites	Decision-Making Processes	School Boards	Democracy
Middle-of-the Road	Understand responsibilities as citizens Unique development	Exercise voice		All who have a stake		Open sessions Community input necessary	
Process-Focused	Understand responsibilities as citizens	Exercise voice Responsibilities to communities		More than elites Beyond senior administration	Explore differences for commonalities Form own opinions Not driven by public opinion	Open sessions Community input necessary Decisions not always in common good	More than protecting individual rights Process <i>Does NOT require equal treatment</i> In interest of broader community
Common Good/ Equal Trtmnt	Understand responsibilities as citizens Unique development	Exercise voice Common good				Open sessions Community input necessary Decisions not always in common good	<i>DOES require equal treatment</i>
School Board– Neutral	Understand responsibilities as citizens Unique development	Exercise voice Common good Responsibilities to communities	Should provide opportunities	More than elites Beyond senior administration	Explore differences for commonalities Form own opinions Invite diverse opinions Power comes from more than sheer numbers		More than protecting individual rights Process
Common Good–Focused	Understand responsibilities as citizens	Common good	Should provide opportunities			Open sessions Community input necessary	More than protecting individual rights In interest of broader community
Broadly Distributed Participation	Understand responsibilities as citizens <i>Economically productive</i>	Exercise voice	Should provide opportunities <i>Have legitimate role in district-level decision making</i>	All who have a stake Broad participation across the community More than elites Beyond senior administration	Explore differences for commonalities Invite diverse opinions	Open sessions Community input necessary Decisions not always in common good	In interest of broader community

Note. Bold phrases indicate agreement across four or more clusters. Italicized phrases indicate disagreement or uniqueness across clusters.

Table 3 Individual and Cluster Scores

Questions	Statistics for Individuals		Means for Each Cluster						
	Range Is 5 or Less	Range Is 9 or 10	Mean Is +2.5 or Greater				Mean Is -2.5 or Less		
	Mean	Range	Middle-of-the-Road	Process-Focused	Common Good/Equal Trmmt	School Board-Neutral	Common Good-Focused	Broadly Distributed Participation	
Civic Mission of Schools	3.33	4	3.33	3.60	3.00	3.67	3.00	3.57	
Mission of Education	3.04	8	3.75	0.60	3.50	3.67	1.50	4.14	
	-1.02	9	-1.25	1.00	-1.50	-2.00	-0.67	-0.14	
	1.7	9	2.33	1.6	2.17	0.67	0.83	2.71	
What Does Civic Education Entail	2.85	5	3.33	2.80	2.67	2.67	1.83	3.57	
	2.25	9	1.50	2.40	2.83	3.00	3.17	2.43	
	-2.08	7	-1.58	-3.20	-1.17	-4.33	-2.33	-2.29	
	0.35	9	-0.75	0.80	0.67	0.67	0.67	1.57	
	1.10	8	1.25	0.60	1.67	-1.00	1.17	2.00	
Student Opportunities to Participate	2.10	7	2.17	2.20	1.17	3.00	2.67	2.86	
	1.40	7	1.92	1.40	0.83	1.33	0.50	2.71	
	-1.25	9	-1.17	-2.20	0.50	-0.67	-2.33	-2.14	

Inclusion — Breadth	36. Individuals who believe they have a stake in the outcomes of a decision should be allowed to participate in making the decision.	1.96	7	2.58	2.00	0.67	2.33	1.83	2.57
	32. Decision-making power should be distributed broadly throughout the community.	1.10	9	1.33	2.00	-0.67	2.33	0.83	2.57
Inclusion — Role of Elites	35. Only those leaders who are highly educated and well-informed should make decisions regarding district policy.	-2.10	9	-2.08	-2.60	-1.00	-3.33	-1.33	-3.43
	31. Power in the decision-making process should begin and end in the hands of senior administration.	-2.79	7	-2.33	-2.80	-1.83	-4.00	-2.50	-3.29
	9. Democracy correctly allows those with more knowledge, skills, and means to have greater influence on decisions.	-0.90	9	-2.00	-0.80	0.17	-2.33	0.17	0.14
	21. As leaders, senior district administrators should set standards and rules for managing schools.	-0.17	7	0.50	-0.60	-0.67	-0.67	0.67	-0.43
Decision Making — Process	20. In contentious situations, differences of opinion should be explored to find common understandings.	2.46	5	1.92	4.20	1.83	2.67	1.50	3.14
	17. In contentious situations, students should support leaders and rely on them to inform their views.	-1.58	6	-1.42	-2.40	-1.17	-3.33	-1.67	-1.43
	18. In contentious situations, students should invite opinions different from their own.	2.13	5	2.00	1.80	1.67	2.67	1.67	3.29
	19. In contentious situations, the market of public opinion should determine the proper outcome.	-1.96	6	-1.83	-3.40	-1.50	-0.33	-1.83	-2.43
	33. Power comes from having more people on your side.	-1.42	9	-1.00	-0.60	-1.17	-2.67	-2.50	-2.00

Table 3 Individual and Cluster Scores (*continued*)

Decision Making— School Boards	25. School boards should make decisions concerning their K-12 system in closed sessions.	-3.85	4	-4.33	-3.60	-3.83	-1.67	-3.17	-4.71
	26. School boards do not require input from the community to make good decisions.	-3.02	10	-4.08	-2.60	-3.00	-2.00	-2.67	-4.00
	28. School boards always make decisions for the common good.	-2.83	5	-2.42	-2.80	-3.17	-2.33	-2.33	-3.86
	27. School boards are too removed from the daily practices of schools to understand what policy is best for a particular school.	-0.08	9	-0.25	-0.60	-0.33	1.67	-0.83	0.71
	23. School-based management is the ideal form of governance for educational institutions.	-0.17	9	-0.42	0.40	0.83	-1.00	-0.83	-0.14
	11. Democracy should be more than a means of protecting individual rights.	2.46	5	2.17	3.00	2.00	3.00	2.83	2.29
	10. Democracy is not about getting what you want; it is a process of decision making.	2.10	9	1.17	3.40	1.50	5.00	2.00	2.29
	12. Democracy requires that people be treated equally when making decisions for the greater good.	0.02	10	-0.83	-3.40	2.67	1.00	1.83	0.43
Beliefs about Democracy	24. Any decision-making structure should make decisions in the interest of the broader community.	2.21	8	1.50	3.00	1.33	2.33	4.17	3.29
	34. Power should be used to ensure the fewest people are hurt by a decision.	0.52	9	0.75	1.40	-0.50	0.67	-0.83	0.57

ensuring that democracy and decision-making processes treat individuals equally [12].

This cluster believed that schools should facilitate the unique development of students [2] and should prepare students to exercise their voices [14] to help make decisions for the common good [8]. Part of this preparation includes a belief that people ought to be treated equally when making decisions for the common good [12]. This cluster also appeared to distrust school boards—they should make decisions in open sessions [25] and seek out community and parental [26] input in the hopes of improving decision quality [28].

While the Common Good/Equal Treatment Cluster and the Process-Focused Cluster appear to have much in common, the former seems to be in direct conflict with the latter in terms of whether or not democracy requires equal treatment of people when making decisions [12]. Further, while both clusters believed in the importance of the “common good,” they emphasized it differently. The Common Good/Equal Treatment Cluster believed strongly that public education has an important role to play in preparing students to make decisions in the common good [8], whereas the Process-Focused Cluster was more neutral about this responsibility.

School Board–Neutral Cluster

In comparison to the other clusters, this cluster was most defined by their neutrality on school boards. Every other cluster believed, at the very least, that school boards ought to make decisions in open session [25] and seek input from community members and parents [26]. Several clusters held even stronger beliefs about school boards. This cluster was relatively neutral about them. Interestingly, this cluster also believed in fairly broad inclusion in decision-making processes.

This cluster believed schools should facilitate the unique development of each student [2]. Part of that development includes preparing students to make decisions in the common good [8] and a belief that students have responsibilities to their communities upon graduation [16], including the exercise of their own voices [14]. This belief in preparing students for civic practice also includes the belief that schools should provide opportunities to participate in decision making while in school [6].

This cluster also believed that democracy is a process of decision making that does more than protect individual rights [11] and produce their desired outcome [10]. Along with this belief in process, they believed that power does not always come from having more people on your side [33] and that inclusion in the decision-making process is good [35]. In a decision-making process, conflict requires students to seek out opinions different from their own [18], explore those differences in an effort to develop their own opinions [20], and not rely on leaders and elites to form their views [17].

Common Good–Focused Cluster

The individuals in this cluster believed that public education has a responsibility to prepare students to make decisions in the common good [8], even if that process may not be focused on

protecting individual rights [11]. For this cluster, the common good is a driving factor that surpasses individual needs or rights.

This cluster had a strong belief in decisions serving the common good [24], recognizing that sometimes these decisions are more than protecting individual rights [11]. They believed schools should prepare students to participate in decision making for the common good [8], in part by providing opportunities for students to participate while in school [6]. This cluster believed school boards should be open bodies by making decisions in open sessions [25] and by seeking input from community members and parents [26].

Broadly Distributed Participation Cluster

This cluster was unique in several respects. They expanded the to the greatest degree of all the clusters the right and responsibility to participate in district-level decision making, to the point that they believed that district-level decision making should involve students [30]. They were also the only cluster of individuals who believed that schools have a primary responsibility to prepare students to be economically productive [3].

This cluster believed that decisions should be made in the common interest. However, they were more interested in to whom power and participation is extended. They believed it should be distributed broadly [32]—to non-elites [35], past senior administration [31], to anyone who believes they have a stake in the decision [36], including students [30]. It is important to note that this was the only cluster that believed students have a legitimate role to play in district-level decision making [30]. This was supported by their belief in providing opportunities to participate in decision making [6] and their belief in the importance of students developing and exercising their own voices [14]. The development of students’ voices and participation includes the idea that conflicting opinions should be explored to find common ground [20] and that students should befriend differences in opinions [18].

This cluster’s broad distribution of power may have stemmed from their distrust of school boards. This cluster believed that school boards should make decisions in the open [25] and should seek input [26]—in part because they do not always make decisions in the common good [28]. This cluster believed that schools should facilitate the unique development of students [2], importantly; for this cluster that includes the idea that schools should prepare students to be economically productive [3].

Discussion

All clusters believed that public education has an important role in civic education. Further, each cluster believed civic education includes understanding of their responsibilities as citizens. This finding was supported by past surveys of the general populace; Gallup/Phi Delta Kappa polls over the last 33 years indicate strong support for the civic mission of schools (Campaign for the Civic Mission of Schools, 2012). Despite the apparent similarity in more traditional demographic or political variables as indicated by our limited sample, participants held a wide range of beliefs about power, democracy, and decision making. Thus, it appears as though the Q-Sort tool was able to detect and elucidated differences in patterns

of beliefs within even a fairly homogenous and limited sample, as indicated by traditional demographic and geographic variables.

Interestingly, no clusters were homogenous by role. Teachers, or those with experience as teachers, were in every cluster. Administrators, or those with experience as administrators, were in every cluster. Policymakers, or those with experience as policymakers, were in all but one cluster.⁵ This indicates that there is very little predictability of democratic and civic beliefs based on roles. Further, no cluster comprised members from one school, school district, or policymaker organization, nor was any one organization unified in one of the clusters. Despite intense working relationships, individuals hold varied and potentially conflicting beliefs about democracy and civic practice in K–12 systems. This indicates that students could be exposed to a wide variety of beliefs about power, democracy, and decision making. Given the nature of our sample, we believe it is likely that the beliefs of American educators, as a set, would likely differ by as much, if not more than, those of our participants. If we expanded our sample, then, the Q-sort tool may detect more or slightly different patterns of belief than those we found in our pilot sample.

While there are a few beliefs shared among the clusters, there are critical differences with regards to who holds power, how decisions are made, and who participates (see Table 2). Only one cluster (Broadly Distributed Participation) believed that students have a legitimate role to play in district policy, and two additional clusters believed that students should have the opportunity to participate as members of a decision-making body (Broadly Distributed Participation and, School Board–Neutral). These three clusters represented one-third of the individuals in our sample. We certainly are not claiming representativeness or generalizability, but we feel that it is important to note the wide dispersion of beliefs about participation, even within one organization. There are also areas of substantial disagreement. In particular, we noted the differences between the Process-Focused and Common Good/Equal Treatment Clusters in their beliefs about whether or not democracy requires the equal treatment of people. While educators view enculturation of youth into a democracy as important, they do not have standards or widely held common beliefs for such enculturation. As such, it is highly probable that there are wide variations in what is provided to students both through the civics classroom and through school operations to prepare with the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to become fully engaged participants in our democratic society. This variation exists even within one school district or organization.

This initial pilot study laid out at least two avenues for future research. First, as the Q-sort tool used in this study was able to detect meaningful differences between patterns of belief even in a sample marked by geographical and demographical limitations, there is substantial opportunity to expand and replicate the study using a less limited sample. While Q-sorts do not, by nature, require a large or random sample, we believe that there is value in expanding the sample to cover more districts, states, and perspectives. We would expect to find similar patterns as well as the elucidation of new patterns not necessarily present in this sample. Second, we believe it would be fruitful to examine whether and how these belief patterns

manifest themselves in behavior or modeling for students within these systems. That is, the first step in turning these patterns of belief into explicit teachable moments is to understand when, where, and how these beliefs are modeled for students. This link between democratic beliefs and behavior must be more fully explored at the classroom, school, district, and stakeholder levels.

Conclusion

The purpose of this pilot study was two-pronged. First, we wanted to investigate the democratic beliefs of K–12 educators and stakeholders, with a particular focus on the complexities of those subjective belief patterns. We contended that there were important differences in these beliefs that had been previously unexplored. Second, we wanted to field-test an innovative tool for assessing these nuanced beliefs about democracy among K–12 stakeholders. Our Q-sort tool and methodology revealed meaningful differences in beliefs, even within the limited sample of our pilot study. While the variation in civic beliefs was expected, given the weakened core civic culture in a post-1960s America (Walling, 2007), we believe it is important to acknowledge that the behaviors and beliefs that faculty, staff, and administration may hold probably vary from the behaviors and knowledge students learn in civics courses. This variation may be further complicated by the increase in political participation and activity that may be divisive and prevents people from engaging in their communities (Walling, 2007). Certainly, we are not arguing that consistency in these beliefs is desirable, or that such consistency is possible. These beliefs, we contend, represent real differences in how people understand and perceive power, democracy, and decision making. We believe it is likely very important that students are exposed to a variety of these belief structures. We believe that such exposure is more beneficial if participants know and understand how those beliefs differ, turning those differences into teachable moments.

Thus, students exist between two sets of tensions regarding civic education. The first tension is between the different beliefs about power, authority, and governance as held by the people who populate schools and school districts. Students may be exposed to a series of mixed messages about who should be involved in their daily “politics.” Some people believe that students do not have any place in the decision-making process; others believe that they do; and still others say perhaps students should not be involved in the decision, but they should be consulted. The beliefs of power, authority, and governance are full of mixed messages that hold potential power for engaging students in discussions about civic and participation in important and meaningful ways.

The second tension is between the curriculum and practice. In a civics classroom, students are expected to learn abstract concepts of power and authority; they are expected to learn pros and cons of particular forms of governance; and they may even learn about their civic responsibilities when they become eligible for participation. Yet the school and the beliefs that surround their daily lives shape students’ perceptions of and reactions to the practice of power and authority. The dissonance between civic knowledge taught in the civics classroom and the civics as practiced in schools is not resolved by more knowledge (Nyhan & Reifler, 2010).

Schools are one of the first organizations outside of the home in which many children function. They become enculturated to the school both through modeling and through instruction. When the professed and the practiced differ, the first held is the strongest held and rarely changed by knowledge (Nyhan & Reifler, 2010).

We are not arguing that these tensions should be resolved by the imposition of standard beliefs. As we scale out of schools and school districts and into the practice of civics in a whole system, we expect to find conflicting opinions about power, authority, and governance. This is particularly true in regards to the tension between people's different beliefs about democracies. However, we feel that it is important to understand the nature of differences in these beliefs. Since there is significant variation amongst students in terms of their exposure to civic education in the classroom (Kahne, 2005), beliefs of participants in school districts become potentially one of the important influences on the development of civic character. Schools and policy makers must become more aware of the effect of the beliefs of adults, the result of modeling and the importance of understanding the interaction between standards and operation of a school.

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Notes

1. At the time of the Q-sort, the CLT was known as the Collaborative Leadership Trust. The group changed its name in 2012.
2. There is some overlap between participants in NCSD#1 and the CLT. There were four employees of NCSD #1 who attended the CLT annual conference.
3. While the choice of clustering algorithm and distance measure can make an important difference in which individuals cluster together and how particular clusters form, the researchers elected to utilize the complete linkage algorithm and squared Euclidean distance measure. This combination of algorithm and distance measure maximized the differences in belief structures.
4. For reference, statement numbers are in brackets.
5. There were no policymakers in the Broadly Distributed Participation Cluster.