

Co-Designing Circumpolar Civic Education: Workshop 1 Report, June 2022

Elaine Alvey, Elena Bell, Mia Bennett, Victoria Qutuuq Buschman, Elena Campbell, Nadine Fabbi, Michael Hawes, Bree Kessler, Michelle Koutnik, Jodie Lane, Andy Meyer, Petter Naess, Andrew Nestingen, Heather Nicol, Timothy Pasch, Chase Puentes, Anthony Speca, Kayla Stevenson, Gary Wilson, and Jason Young

This report describes the results of the first workshop of *Co-Designing Civic Education for the Circumpolar North*, a two-year planning grant funded by the National Science Foundation's (NSF) Navigating the New Arctic Program. The purpose of this project is to build an international and interdisciplinary team capable of developing and implementing an actionable, convergence research agenda on circumpolar civic education. Grant funding is being used to carry out a series of five workshops that engage a range of Arctic researchers and practitioners around the concept of civic education. The focus of this first workshop was both to introduce collaborators to one another and to begin exploring the team's vision for what civic education is and should accomplish in the context of the Arctic. Future workshops will explore how to design anti-colonial approaches to civic education; how to leverage study abroad and distance learning to bring Northern and Southern students together; and how to synthesize and operationalize workshop discussions to build out a concrete research agenda.

The first workshop was held virtually, via Zoom, over a two-hour period in March 2022. Participants include the authors of this report. The workshop organizers (Young, Fabbi, Koutnik, Stevenson, and Puentes) kicked off the workshop with a brief introduction to the grant, and then the workshop participants were invited to introduce themselves. Participants were then shifted into small groups within breakout rooms for most of the remainder of the workshop. They were first asked to respond in writing to three prompts:

- How should we define 'Arctic civic education'? What should Arctic civic education attempt to accomplish and/or why does it matter?
- What unique aspects of the Arctic need to be accounted for when designing civic education?
- Is 'Arctic civic education' the right term for describing educational programs that support collaboration and leadership in addressing Arctic challenges? What better terms might you suggest?

The small groups of 3-4 participants then used these writing responses as a launching point for deeper discussion about how the project should conceptualize civic education. At the conclusion of this discussion, participants were returned to the main Zoom room to share out the major points of their discussion with the entire group. The UW research team then wrapped up the workshop by sharing next steps in the project.

At the conclusion of the workshop, the UW research team transcribed audio recordings from workshop discussions, and they then performed a quick thematic analysis of both the transcripts and the participants' writing responses. The goal of that analysis was to answer the following questions:

1. What term should we use to describe the focus of this project?
2. What are (or should be) the defining aspects of Arctic civic education?
3. What other interesting ideas or questions emerged from discussions that merit further exploration?

The remainder of this report discusses the themes that emerged through the analysis process. Our hope is that this report will support the development of core ideas across the workshops, and also provide a record of key questions and ideas that could form the basis of future research efforts.

1. Selecting a Suitable Term

While the NSF proposal that originated this project adopted the term 'Arctic civic education', the research team has remained uncomfortable with the Western and colonial history of this phrase. Workshop discussions were quick to highlight how both the terms 'Arctic' and 'civic education' needed to be problematized. We felt that the singular nature of the word Arctic risks representing the region as a

homogenous space, thereby playing into false and reductive imaginaries¹ of diverse Northern communities. The word also produces exclusions, in that many communities implicated in Northern politics are located in the sub-Arctic. Qualifying civic education as being exclusively ‘Arctic’ therefore introduces an arbitrary political division that obscures the common challenges faced by Northern communities scattered above and below the 60th parallel. The most commonly suggested alternatives were ‘Northern’ or ‘circumpolar’. Ultimately, we suggest the adoption of the term circumpolar. We feel that the term Northern can lead to confusion, since the word north is often associated with geographies other than the Arctic (e.g., North Dakota, North Africa, Global North). We also believe that the word circumpolar is less likely to represent the region as homogenous, since it inherently describes multiple places arranged around the pole.

The term ‘civic education’ was simultaneously more problematic and more difficult to replace. We widely agreed that the term has a deeply Western history, and is grounded in colonial models of citizenship that tie individuals to Westphalian nation-states. Inclusion of this term therefore risks inflecting curriculum with Western and colonial political biases related to this model of citizenship. Despite this, few of us were able to offer useful alternatives. The most commonly suggested alternative was ‘leadership education’, but this loses some of the connotations of a political community that make the term ‘civic education’ attractive. We also agreed that civic education has advantages, including that it is a familiar term for many teachers and funders. There may also be some power in using the term civic education alongside critiques of that very term. Participants suggested, for instance, that civic education initiatives could explicitly critique these Western models of citizenship, and then reframe what circumpolar citizenship looks like - or can look like - based on Indigenous ways of knowing. Such a critically reflexive usage of the term may help to highlight and subvert its colonial nature, to make room for the anti-colonial and Indigenous pedagogies that the project wishes to center. Based on these perspectives, the project will (cautiously, and somewhat uneasily) continue to use the term civic education. We will therefore adopt the term *circumpolar civic education* to describe the focus of our research.

2. Defining Aspects of Circumpolar Civic Education

Based on workshop discussions, this report defines circumpolar civic education to be curricula and pedagogies that build an understanding of common experience within and across Northern communities, with the goal of generating collective power to overcome the colonial injustices and promote harmony amongst people, lands, and nature. It involves learning about the systems and models of governance and socio-political organization being developed and used by Northerners. Core tenets of circumpolar civic education include the need to center Northern (especially Indigenous) perspectives, to foster conversations and build relationships between the North and the South, and to prepare learners to engage with pressing social and political issues (including climate change). It further has the impact of promoting awareness of the unique strengths and struggles of the North, encouraging people to be good and active Northern community members, challenging dubious Arctic imaginaries, and teaching Southerners about their responsibilities to the North.

Workshop conversations also highlighted possible curricular topics and pedagogical models for delivering circumpolar civic education. Curricular topics of interest included Indigenous local knowledge and traditional ways of knowing; place-based information; language and culture; social and environmental injustices (including community health issues); descriptions of the uniqueness of circumpolar communities; and more. Teaching approaches and content should be culturally grounded, and they should blend both classroom and experiential learning outside of the classroom. We are interested in exploring both formal and informal educational formats, in addition to online education. Online educational approaches, however, must account for digital divides, to ensure that they do not produce new

¹ In sociological terms, an *imaginary* refers to the set of values and symbols that individuals draw upon to conceptualize the social world. Here, *false and reductive imaginaries* refer to a simplified and incorrect vision of the reality of Northern communities.

inequities. Civic educational approaches must be both interdisciplinary and interepistemological, and showcase a multiplicity of knowledge systems, languages, and cultures. We note that drawing on these different knowledge systems is not only valuable for learners, but is a way to foreground respect for communities.

3. Emerging Research Ideas and Questions

Finally, because this is a planning grant, we intend to track interesting ideas or questions that might be further developed in future workshops and/or as part of a future grant proposal. We identified the following for further thought:

- ***How might informal and community-based educational spaces be leveraged to support circumpolar civic education?*** This could range from land-based, community-centered education unassociated with formal institutions to informal educational programming offered by public libraries.
- ***How should the term community be defined within the context of circumpolar civic education?*** The term could be used in a somewhat traditional manner to describe geographic places (e.g., the community of Makkovik), but it can also be used to refer to communities of practice (e.g., biologists or educators) or groups of people that impact one another (e.g., the global community implicated in climate change). The social organization of Northern communities may also be quite different than Southern communities. How can these differences be highlighted within civic education curricula? The type of community will shape the types of social and political skills one might need to be a ‘good’ community member.
- ***What keywords might a ‘civic education lexicon’ include?*** Such a lexicon could be used to dig deeper (and critically) into concepts that need to be incorporated into circumpolar civic education.
- ***How can storytelling be incorporated effectively into circumpolar civic education?*** Stories could include oral histories, intergenerational knowledge exchange, Arctic literature, and more.
- ***How can we effectively teach circumpolar civic education within the context of power dynamics that are opposed to this work?*** Examples of power dynamics that might need to be navigated include geopolitical tensions associated with Russia, territorial tension between different educational districts, and corporate or political pressure to censor certain topics.
- ***How can we effectively reframe Arctic education in general?*** There are needs to raise general public awareness about the Arctic, and to incorporate more holistic teaching within existing educational programs.
- ***What processes can we develop to tailor civic education curricula to different communities and geographies?*** An example of this translational model is provided by the work Nunatsiavut Government is doing to adapt Nunavut-based Inuit Education Framework to their own context.
- ***How can we develop ‘everyday life skills’ courses for Northern students, to enhance their lifelong learning and success?*** The Nunatsiavut Government is working on this, but methods should be developed to make their work replicable in other communities.
- ***How can we create effective models for building relationships between Southern institutions and Northern communities?*** The goal of these relationships would be to leverage university resources in respectful and useful ways to the North. Are there also ways to build capacity for Northern organizations to have a better chance to be awarded and administer grant funds? These questions are quite important, as Northern communities want real growth and change - and not just name changes and photo ops that tick boxes, or inclusion of token individuals with no real sense of ownership over projects.
- ***How do we make opportunities for Northern and Southern students to come together and build common understandings?*** This will be explored explicitly in Workshop 3. Foreshadowing that discussion, one collaborator suggested that the project explore the use of video to encourage exchange of ideas between the North and the South. A possible future project could, for example, build a model of ‘community journalism’ that supported students to share the realities of their lives. Circumpolar and non-circumpolar students could create videos in a social reporting style,

covering everyday life or exploring specific topics. The videos could then be shared, to facilitate discussions about the differences in social and political life between the North and the South.

- ***What is the relationship between circumpolar civic education developed for Northern students and circumpolar civic education developed for Southern students?*** One proposed overlap is teaching Southern students their responsibilities to the North and problematizing dubious imaginaries of the North.