Title
Deliberative Barbarians: Reconciling the Civic and the Agonistic in Democratic Education

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The chestnut that "children should be seen and not heard" has been traced to pre-Biblical times and in the philosophy of Western moral education, the child-rearing admonition echoes the austere directives of Plato and Aristotle (Hoff Sommers, 2000). Somewhere between childhood and the possibility for active citizenship, contemporary adolescents sit silent, most of the time, in most social studies courses across the United States. In an essay on the place of values in public school curricula, Amitai Etzioni (2008) argues that schools ought to be "concerned with human and social development, ensuring graduates are able to work out differences with others verbally and nonabusively" (p. 22). Yet,

> A well-disciplined environment often is considered one in which teachers and principals "lay down the law" and brook no talking back from students, and where students show respect by rising when a teacher enters the room and speak only when spoken to. (p. 24)

Political scientist Ruth Grant put the matter this way:

> It is curious that educators seem more likely to encourage conversation among preschoolers and university students and more likely to suppress it in the years in between—precisely during those years in which people like nothing better than to spend their time talking to one another. (1996, p. 475)

We concur with Grant that the desire of teenagers to speak up, and to be heard, constitutes a resource that should be exploited in political education. Silencing of students is often not the fault of instructors, however. A teacher's decision to open up her classroom for discussions about contested issues can roust resentful parents, many of whom view such activity as indoctrination (Galston, 2004; Westheimer, 2004).[1] Many of these same parents make it clear to their offspring that political opinions are unwelcome at home (McLeod & Chaffee, 1972; Saphir & Chaffee, 2002). Disciplinarian parents tend to view the mere discussion of controversial topics as disrespectful in family interactions and a threat to their authority (Barker & Tinnick, 2006).

High school students themselves, however, seem to thrive as neophyte discussants when teachers do feel they have enough community support to allow for this type of interaction. In recent evaluations of curricular components, frequency of peer discussion stands out as a reliable predictor of gains in knowledge about public affairs, news media attention, opinion crystallization, interpersonal respect, political efficacy, and participatory motivations (Campbell, 2008; Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement, 2003; Hess & Ganzler, 2007; McDevitt, 2006, 2008; McDevitt & Kiousis, 2006a; Niemi & Junn, 1998).

The contrast between empirical documentation of substantial benefits from peer discussion and the political pitfalls for schools that allow such exchanges leaves educators with a rather peculiar stalemate: A demonstrably effective method for promoting youth political enthusiasm is off limits.

Linked to the problem of intolerance for classroom political discussion is the prevalence of conflict avoidance in adult political behavior (McDevitt & Ostrowski, 2009; Ulbig & Funk, 1999). Recent research in political communication portrays many parents and other potential role models for youth as uncomfortable with face-to-face political discussion (Conover, Searing, & Crewe, 2002), impatient with the give-and-take of deliberative processes in legislative bodies (Hibbing & Theiss-Morse, 2002), and adverse to media that challenge pre-existing beliefs (Hoffman, Glynn, Huge, Sietman, & Thomson, 2007).

We have given some thought to what a Northwest Passage out of this predicament might look like. Educators at the front lines of potential battles with parents could benefit from a theoretical rationale with practical guidance. We have in mind a conceptual framework in which youth agonistic expression is tempered by the active involvement of parents, who, after all, have a legitimate interest in the ideological identities and civic habits adopted by their children. Here we propose a *contingent model of deliberative learning,* whereby political exchanges in one developmental context depend on, and contribute to, exchanges in another context. The school and family constitute the two most important primary-group settings for interpersonal political communication (Hess, 2004; McDevitt & Chaffee, 2002; Saphir & Chaffee, 2002). In our formulation of contingent learning, we anticipate that peer discussion *in* classrooms—as well as exchanges *between* classrooms and the family—create conditions that engender both the expression of passionate viewpoints and civility in interpersonal political communication.

We begin this essay with a brief interpretation of what we see as an evolving social contract concerning the civic/political purpose of social studies instruction in the United States. Along with schools, parents represent the other major stakeholder in this implicit contract. Unresolved in this arrangement is the scope of school influence in relation to parents as agents of political socialization. Next, we explicate the contingent learning dynamic, whereby schools and families function more effectively as socializing venues to the extent that they overlap as contexts for interpersonal political communication. We demonstrate the heuristic value of the model by applying it to a program of research on Kids Voting USA curricula.

Schools and Parents: An Uneasy Alliance

Textbooks and other civic study materials have been used in American schools since at least 1790, during the era in which representatives were signing the U.S. Constitution and ratifying the Bill of Rights. While historians have celebrated the intellectual achievement of Enlightenment principles coming to life in the founding documents, the signatories were also concerned about the organic conditions necessary for the support of these principles. They hoped that sectionalism could be overcome by the building of schoolhouses and an infrastructure of trade, transportation, and communication. "Thomas Jefferson envisioned a citizenry prepared to elect wise leaders, but he was willing to settle for one that could recognize selfish ambition under its various disguises and vote it out of office" (Warren, 1988, p. 244). An emergent social contract between schools and parents was structured—during the earliest days of the Union—by concerns about a popular franchise catching on before the diffusion of literacy.

The Common School movement crystallized in the 1830s, finally overcoming colonial resistance to the notion that publicly supported schools, not families and churches, should educate children. In the nineteenth century, the civic mission of public education was influenced by the reverberations of immigration, industrialization, and rising expectations for what schools should accomplish in occupational and civil sectors of American life. The civic mission encompassed the need to rapidly prepare immigrant children for participation in participatory democracy, a socializing task viewed as beyond the ability of many parents born in Europe.

As Warren puts it, "Immigrants posed a special worry that became even more acute with the influx of Irish Roman Catholics in the 1830s and 1840s. Who would relieve these people of old world loyalties and anti-republican traditions?" (p. 245). Some early signs emerge, then, of a somewhat adversarial relationship between schools and parents concerning the political identities of children. Immigrant parents represented the threat of diversity; their children became a symbol for the aspirations of civic union.

Coping with waves of immigrant families between 1880 and the First World War, schools took on the additional task of reforming parents.

> Immigrant parents, unfamiliar with American ways, were inadequate guides to what their children needed to know, and the schools were thrust into the parental role. Moreover, the children, exposed to Yankee schoolmarms in the morning, were expected to become instruments of Americanization by bringing home in the afternoon instructions in conduct and hygiene that their parents would take to heart. (Hofstadter, 1963, p. 337)

A fledging nation with egalitarian aspirations seemed to require the induction of core, binding values through public schooling. However, in the formative years of professionalized social studies instruction, an intractable tension would arise between the goal of *civic* cohesion and the value of *political* dissent and debate. In 1916, an influential report from the U.S. Board of Education advised that social studies curricula should include "Problems of Democracy" courses to emphasize topical issues (Hess, 2004). Still, by most scholars' accounting, the civic purpose of public schooling has usually taken precedence in classroom practices, with political education generally relegated to the abstract realm of advocacy and criticism (Shermis & Barth, 1982).

The early literature on political socialization—of the late 1950s and 1960s—suggests the development of a workable social contract between schools and parents, whereby schools would assume responsibility for inculcating knowledge of government institutions, a common political heritage, and civic dispositions that would ensure political regime stability and basic competence in voting (Dawson & Prewitt, 1969; Langton & Jennings, 1968). Parents were in charge of the ideological identity of children. Empirical research in the latter decades of the millennium seemed to produce results consistent with this arrangement between the two socializing agents. Student participation in civics courses predicted knowledge of political institutions (Niemi & Junn, 1998; Patrick, 1977), while parents were thought to be the dominant influence on the partisan allegiances of children and adolescents (Jennings & Niemi, 1974).

Developments in the current environment for political socialization appear to be straining the social contract. Empirical findings and theoretical advances point to a shift in prevailing influences on youth ideological identity, from parents and families to peer networks, media, and issue-based advocacy movements (McDevitt & Ostrowski, 2009). The family transmission model, whereby youth were viewed as passively inheriting the partisan allegiance of parents (Jennings & Niemi, 1974), has given way to a more active and constructivist view of youth asserting identities by integrating multiple sources of influence (McDevitt, 2006; McDevitt & Chaffee, 2002).

These dynamics imply a social contract that has taken on a guarded edge. In fact, we have seen spectacular episodes of bad behavior among parents in the post 9/11 era, with campaigns to fire offending teachers mounted in many region of the country (Westheimer, 2004).[2] A strained relationship between schools and parents suggests, in turn, a continuing emphasis on non-controversial instruction as teachers hunker down despite clear evidence for the benefits of unconstrained student expression.

American democratic education appears to have reached a dead end. The situation looms as particularly poignant against the backdrop of an

emergent sociopolitical culture. The contemporary era for citizen participation is characterized by new forms of mediated and interactive engagement, coupled with an increasingly complex public policy environment, both of which require elevated levels of deliberative competence. One would hope that a public school system would be up to the task of training youth for the realities of contemporary citizenship.

The concept of agonistic instruction helps us to highlight the civic/political distinction, and to illustrate what is lost when the latter is downplayed in human development. Agonistic themes and communication in democratic education would acknowledge and reflect the intractable ideological differences in a pluralistic culture. A clear and explicit voice for agonistic learning in K-12 education is noticeably absent, which is perhaps not surprising given our historic account of U.S. democratic education. By contrast, a corpus of political theory has been structured by a civic/agonistic dialect with respect to adult citizenship, with post-deliberationists taking on the likes of John Rawls and Jürgen Habermas (e.g., Frazer, 2006; Mouffe, 2000; Young, 2000). In a somewhat parallel alignment, clashing camps in behavioral science differ as to whether disagreement in social networks promotes or hinders political participation (Mutz, 2002).

We should note, however, that the value of agnostic learning is visible at least implicitly in the work of education scholars who advocate open classroom climate (Angell, 1991; Ehman, 1980) and youth discussion about contentious issues (Boler, 1999; Hess, 2004; Hess & Ganzler, 2007). In contemplating the implications of their work for education, political scientists on occasion have argued that a certain amount of ideological conflict is desirable (e.g., Bennett, 1997; Hibbing & Theiss-Morse, 1996). Bennett, for instance, surveyed scholarship on youth disengagement in his essay, "Why Young Americans Hate Politics." By 1995, only 15% of incoming freshmen indicated that they regularly participated in political conversations, which, at the time, was an all-time low for the annual UCLA survey. Bennett blamed media but also a gutted social studies curriculum for the fact that youth possess a "visceral dislike of politics" (1997, p. 47).

In Search of Theory

While an explicit rationale for agonistic youth instruction has yet to emerge, many teachers appreciate the value of peer-to-peer discussion on topical issues. Still, a minefield of education politics awaits instructors who venture beyond conventional curricula. Parents' suspicion of school indoctrination reflects, at a broader level, a sociopolitical environment tainted by conflict-avoidance and hostility to politics itself (Hibbing & Theiss-Morse,

2002). Adults in the United States generally shun discussion about politics in face-to-face settings outside the home, perceiving such encounters as risky, unpleasant, personally intrusive, inappropriate, and unrewarding (Conover et al., 2002). Consequently, a chasm unfolds when contrasting the reality of stilted expression with the celebratory prose of deliberative theorists. Advocates of deliberative democracy imagine interpersonal exchanges not merely in instrumental terms, in support of individual and societal decision-making, but as transformative in human development (Warren, 1992). In this view, deliberation cultivates moral purpose in inter-subjective dispositions such as reciprocity, empathy, and tolerance.

Acknowledging this contradiction of deliberative theory—between the findings of behavioral science and the prescriptions of political philosophy—Conover et al. (2002) suggest that the inhibition of political expression might not be inevitable, and might be amenable to change via formal civic education. The presumption is that deliberative reticence is not entirely a manifestation of personality traits, such as conflict avoidance or need for cognitive closure (Ulbig & Funk, 1999). Instead, the hope is that deliberative dispositions are at least partially a product of learned, socialized behavior.

If this is the case, the question arises as to the processes by which deliberative learning occurs in classroom settings, and whether schools as socializing agents really can make an appreciable difference in preparing youth for confident participation in deliberative democracy. We argue that an elaboration of deliberative learning theory is crucial for widespread pedagogical reform in light of challenges to this type of instruction—challenges arising from the politics of American democratic education and the socio-political climate in which schools function. Unfortunately, extant scholarship on democratic education and youth political socialization does not provide a clear and coherent rationale for how to overcome suspicion and resistance. To be sure, the empirical assessment literature has documented the impact of classroom discussion on political knowledge and participatory motivations, as described above. However, progress in articulating a theoretical rationale for deliberative learning has lagged behind the implementation of various innovations and the documentation of discrete curricular effects (Campbell, 2008; McDevitt & Kiousis, 2006a; Murphy, 2004).

Empirical assessment of how schools fared as laboratories of democracy did not occur until the 1940s and '50s. In reviewing this literature in 1968, Langton and Jennings described curricular influence as lukewarm and subsequent research in the 1960s and '70s tended to characterize school effects as meager beyond the direct transmission of textbook knowledge. The disappointing results fostered critiques of rote instruction, whereby obedient

youth were expected to absorb knowledge of political history and government structure while internalizing democratic values (Angell, 1991; Ehman, 1980).

In their landmark study, Langton and Jennings helped to set an unfortunate precedent in the political behavior literature of relegating political expression of youth to the status of a proxy variable. The authors examined the relationship between civic curricular components and political attitudes and behavioral outcomes in a national survey of 1,669 students in 12th grade. As an independent variable, classroom discussion was interchangeably referred to as "classroom discourse" and "a factor" to be studied in association with teachers' classroom materials (p. 858). Dependent variables included political knowledge and sophistication, political interest, spectator politicization, political efficacy, cynicism, tolerance, and participative orientation. Political discussion, still another dependent variable, was measured as "the student's report of the frequency with which he discusses politics with his peers" (p. 856). While stopping short of articulating the meaning of peer discussion as a learning or developmental construct, Langton and Jennings proffered the notion that participation in discussions about contemporary issues might animate an otherwise oppressive environment for learning.

Langton and Jennings' study motivated subsequent research that explored the nature and consequences of student interaction. In a review of research on effects of "open classroom climate," Ehman (1980) characterized interpersonal communication as a consequential activity among students and between students and teachers. Teachers in open climates encourage students to explore and to express diverse views on contentious issues. Ehman concluded that politically interested adolescents experienced an atmosphere of free discussion and felt empowered to challenge teachers and peers. Recent studies have consistently identified open climate as a correlate of political trust, efficacy, interest, and participatory dispositions (Campbell, 2008; Niemi & Junn, 1998; Torney-Purta, Lehmann, Oswald, & Schulz, 2001).

In a comparison of youth from distinct socio-demographic regions, Conover and Searing (2000) found that students in rural and suburban regions were more likely than urban and immigrant youth to participate in classroom discussion. The authors surmised that school-based discussion cultivates skills for expression in other contexts, such as peer networks and families. This interpretation resonates with the perspective taken here of schools and families as contingent socializing domain. However, the curricular assessment literature in the United States since the 1960s has generally highlighted the value of discussion as a reliable predictor of learning outcomes, or as a proxy for concepts such as political interest, involvement, or efficacy (Campbell, 2008; Niemi & Junn, 1998). The meaning of interpersonal political

communication remains opaque as a developmental construct even as it correlates with desirable outcomes (McDevitt & Kiousis, 2006a).

Meanwhile, the critical/reformist literature has extolled peer-centered curricular reform as necessary for the promotion of deliberative (Hess & Ganzler, 2007), justice-oriented (Boler, 1999; Watts & Flanagan, 2007), and critically reflective citizenship (Freire, 1974; Haste & Hogan, 2006). By contrast, conventional civic education is critiqued as a stifling pedagogy of rote instruction and sanitized textbook histories (Angell, 1991; Ehman, 1980; Shermis & Barth, 1982). Nonetheless, criticism of prevailing curricular approaches on one hand, and alternative visions of educational strategy on the other, typically fail to confront the reality of defensive school districts and parent suspicion. Thus, we contend that neither the advocacy literature nor the documentations of learning outcomes have adequately described youth deliberative experiences in ways conducive to reform.

The section that follows is in some respects a pragmatic articulation of Freire's critical pedagogy, applied to democratic education in ways that alter the power dynamics between teachers and students, and between parents and children. We will argue that a leveling of power is not necessarily an invitation to incivility, but a pedagogical strategy that deepens reciprocity by activating and integrating contributions of teachers, parents, and youth in deliberative learning.

A Contingent Model of Deliberative Learning

In proposing a contingent model of deliberative learning, we highlight a conception of the adolescent "good citizen" as someone who is confident and competent in political expression across social contexts, most notably schools and families. Ideally, a young person is also confident and competent across levels of communication formality—i.e., in deliberation, discussion, and talk.

In contingent learning, the frequency and type of political expression in one context are influenced by the frequency and type in a proximal context.[3] The level of formality of interpersonal political communication in the contexts of schools and families provides a useful starting point for comprehending how the contingency dynamics might operate. While focused on adults, Conover et al. (2002) explain that political *discussion* often involves more informal conversation than rules-based *deliberation*, and is more commonly used among ordinary citizens. In another study of adult civic involvement, Kim, Wyatt, and Katz (1999) observed that conversational *talk* darts from topic to topic, from politics, to sports, to gossip, and back to

politics. In a continuum of interpersonal formality, discussion consequently lies somewhere between deliberation and ordinary political talk.

Discussion is less formal than deliberation in terms of social setting and norms for interaction, but it is often facilitated and more purposeful than the spontaneous talk that occurs in private, fleeting conversation. Deliberation, discussion, and talk all have important functions in political socialization and in adult civic engagement. Deliberation is typically associated with normative standards for adult interaction in public venues, and is a process by which citizen-to-citizen interaction can address community problems and contribute to policymaking. Unrestrained, unstructured talk provides an important mechanism for the family and other private spheres as loci for political socialization in everyday interaction (McDevitt & Kiousis, 2006a; McLeod & Chaffee, 1972). Discussion is beneficial in democratic education precisely because of its middle ground in terms of formality and norms for interpersonal competence. Classroom discussion, guided by an attentive teacher, provides a certain amount of structure, civility, and comfort for adolescents to plunge into contentious topics with peers (Hess, 2004). But missteps and experimentation should be permissible as adolescents practice political expression and as each student seeks a unique voice in political-identity assertion.

The distinct function of schools in deliberative socialization is to provide opportunities for discussion, although highly structured experiences such as legislative simulations could reasonably be described as deliberative. The purpose of families is to allow for a level of intimacy, encouragement, and trust so that children and adolescents feel comfortable with political talk. In both school-based deliberation/discussion and family-centered talk, an adolescent can build a knowledge base of political institutions, issues, and actors while weighing options for ideological allegiance. The developmental contexts of school and family overlap by way of *inter-sphere interaction*, whereby a student acts as an interpersonal conduit between the classroom and the living room. Just as transitional zones in a natural landscape (i.e., ecotones) provide distinct functions in an ecosystem, inter-sphere interaction suggests distinct socializing processes that are not possible when primary groups operate in isolation from each other.

Surprisingly little theorizing has addressed how schools and families might interact as domains for political socialization. While schools and families are occasionally described as competitive or redundant (Jennings & Niemi, 1974), this perspective has not been considered in relation to political expression. Empirical assessments of school effects usually incorporate demographic controls, including measures such as family ethnicity and religious identity, parent income and occupation, and parent level of political

interest. However, controlling for parent and family influences statistically precludes an examination of how families and schools interact in socialization. By revealing some of the intricacies of school/family overlap, our intent is to demonstrate how parents and schools could be viewed as symbiotic, rather than competitive, influences on youth political development. With that in mind, we consider next the specific functions of school, family, and school/family interaction in political communication.

The School Context

Even as deliberative theory sets benchmarks for the rational exchange of ideas in non-coercive interaction, political theorists and social scientists disagree as to whether ideal-speech dynamics are realistic in evaluating the "good citizen." Certainly such standards are unrealistic for youth. Leaving aside for a moment the cognitive development of adolescents, they arrive at school with internalized attitudes about politics and political expression, orientations largely influenced by parents. In light of the sociopolitical environment previously described, many children will harbor the conflict-avoidant dispositions of parents. Thus, while scholars have begun to apply deliberative theory to youth education (McDevitt & Kiousis, 2006a; Murphy, 2004), several critical theorists offer perhaps a more useful perspective on how youth must grapple with affective dimensions of peer interaction as a precursor to deliberative skills.

In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire (1974) advocated learning environments that would engender *conscientizacao*, or the cultivation of critical consciousness through dialogue. Through the leveling of power in discussion between teachers and learners, and subsequent critical thinking, Freire posed that students "search for self-affirmation" (p. 20), and thereby gain confidence for active citizenship. Freire suggested that once learners resolve issues of risk and fear, they move on to emancipatory discussion in an inclusive, tolerant climate. Applied to deliberative education, Freire's perspective suggests that students must perceive and *feel* that they are equal participants in dialogue before they will be willing to engage in the kinds of value-laden discussions that deliberation requires.

Pushing this perspective further, Boler (1999) promoted a "pedagogy of discomfort," which refers to conditions for discussing sometimes painful but important issues through "mutual exploration" (p. 199). This approach requires elements of an open classroom climate, such as a safe learning space, but simultaneously a challenging environment where young people can disagree. A pedagogy of discomfort describes a re-circulating process in which both teachers and students are called to action through "feeling power" (p. 3) and "witnessing" (p. 18). Applying political knowledge to social action,

for example, may involve a process of gaining the confidence to express this knowledge via discussion. This process echoes back to John Dewey: "Through speech a person dramatically identifies himself with potential acts and deeds; he plays many roles, not in successive stages of life but in a contemporaneously enacted drama. Thus mind emerges" (as cited in Boydston, 1981, p. 135).

The Family Context

Socialization to deliberative democracy requires that youth express themselves in public settings of much greater ideological diversity than what they can experience at home. And yet the family can be viewed as a domestic sphere, as a training ground for the more challenging environments for discussion in the public sphere (McDevitt, 2008). Indeed, the family possesses advantage over the school as a setting for the political expression of children and adolescents. Newspapers, magazines, television, and Internet news sites are themselves consequential sources of political stimulation, and they are most often used by youth at home (Atkin, 1981; McDevitt & Chaffee, 2002). In the classic sequence of deliberative behavior—news-talk-opinion-behavior—the family provides a convenient and comfortable setting from which one phase leads to the next (Kim et al., 1999). Parents and children often share newspapers and view network and cable news jointly, for example, creating opportunities for spontaneous conversations about news of the day. Adolescents can exchange knowledge and try out opinions at the dining room table, take in feedback from parents and siblings, and thereby refine their positions on issues. Family media use and habitual conversations about politics, in turn, are reliable predictors of youth political interest, crystallization of ideological identity, and regular voting in the adult years (Kiousis & McDevitt, 2008; Saphir & Chaffee, 2002).

Not every family is created equally, of course, when it comes to the nurturing of political expression. In research on family communication patterns (FCP), socio-oriented families are characterized by disciplinarian parenting; social harmony is sustained by avoidance of expression that might challenge adult authority (McLeod & Chaffee, 1972; Saphir & Chaffee, 2002). In the language of education scholarship, socio-oriented parents insist on closed climates when interacting with children. In concept-oriented families, parents encourage children to bring up politics and to express opinions. Social cohesion in the family is structured by compatibility of communication competence rather than children deferring to parents.

Figure 1 illustrates the dynamics of school/family interaction in contingent learning. The two-by-two heuristic crosses closed and open school climates with socio- and concept-oriented families.[4] Each configuration of the school/family interaction implies a distinct triadic structure for relationships among talk, discussion, and deliberation as socializing experiences. While the family is the primary context for talk, and school the primary setting for discussion and deliberation, we presume that experiences with family talk can provide youth with confidence to speak up during classroom discussion. Participation in school-based discussion should provide practice for the more challenging discourse required in deliberative curricula. Finally, political communication at school can motivate students to bring up politics at home in more informal exchanges (McDevitt & Chaffee, 2002; McDevitt & Kiousis, 2006a).
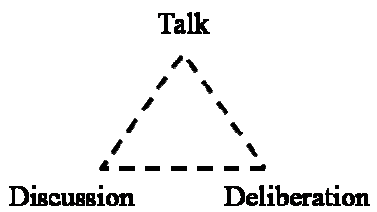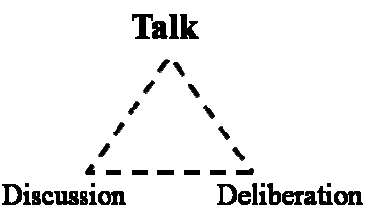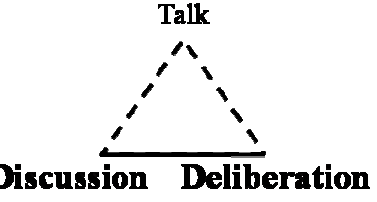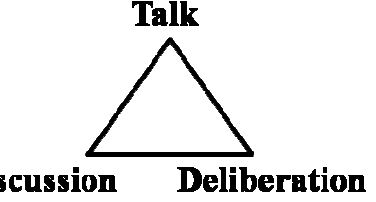
		Family Communication Patterns	
		Socio-orientation	*Concept-orientation*
School Climate	*Closed*	• Dysfunction/ Conflict avoidance Talk Discussion Deliberation	• Family Compensation **Talk** Discussion Deliberation
	Open	• School Compensation Talk **Discussion Deliberation**	• School/Family Symbiosis **Talk** **Discussion Deliberation**

Figure 1. **Interaction of School Climate and Family Communication Patterns in Deliberative Learning**

In the top-left quadrant, adolescents experience closed climates at home and in school. There are no possibilities for family interaction to enrich classroom discussion, via the student as conduit, and no parallel mechanism for the school to energize the family as a domestic sphere. Youth are likely to

internalize conflict-avoidance in this scenario of *school/family dysfunction*. The top-right cell represents the potential for *family compensation*, with concept-oriented parents acting as good role models for political expression. However, the notion that a politically confident teenager could significantly alter a classroom's climate seems farfetched. More realistic would be a gradual process in which teachers pick up on the willingness of their students to engage with topical issues during the rare circumstances when such issues are breached. Over time, teachers might perceive that the school community includes a critical mass of progressive parents, allowing for some risk-taking in social studies courses.

The lower left quadrant describes the situation in which youth experience a closed climate at home but an open environment in school, creating a possibility for schools to make up for family communication deficits. Insights from a series of empirical evaluations of Kids Voting USA help us to illustrate the outcomes that flow from *school compensation*. The non-partisan, K-12 program has a foothold in 42 states, operating as a network of community-based affiliates that partner with election officials and schools. The program is taught during the final weeks of election cycles, allowing students to develop deliberative skills in activities such as classroom debates and deconstruction of candidate advertisements. The family is recruited as a context for political conversation as when, for example, students role-play as reporters to interview parents about their voting histories.

In an initial evaluation of the curricula, 5th- through 12th-grade students in San Jose, CA, varied in their exposure to KVUSA (McDevitt & Chaffee, 1998). Students who participated extensively in KVUSA activities were more likely to pay attention to news media and to converse with parents about politics as measured six months after Election Day (when the curricula had ended). In fact, KVUSA impacts were more pronounced in families of low socioeconomic status (SES), where parents were more likely to be politically disengaged. In a sequence of "trickle-up influence," students initiated political conversations with parents, prompting parents to pay more attention to news media as they anticipated future conversations. The interaction of family SES with curricula exposure was replicated in a subsequent study of KVUSA as taught in Arizona, Colorado, and Florida during the 2002 election cycle. Classroom discussion and deliberation in the KVUSA schools also compensated for family political deficits associated with ethnicity. Through trickle-up influence, Hispanic parents in Colorado were more likely than Anglo counterparts to increase their attention to news about politics in response to their children bringing up politics at home (McDevitt & Kiousis, 2006b).

A theme of school compensation also emerged in a panel study of middle school students interviewed before and after the 2000 election campaign (McDevitt, 2006). Respondents came from the mostly low-income Hispanic and Anglo families that make up the demographic profile of Lubbock, located in the high-desert plains of west Texas. The results conformed to a pattern of "developmental provocation," whereby adolescents cajoled parents into conversations about candidates and campaign issues, prompting concept-oriented encouragement but also socio-oriented admonitions. Even as parents joined children in political conversations, they also warned them about arguing with adults. Youth benefited regardless of the type of response. Their provocations at home prompted feedback that allowed them to compare their opinions with those of parents. This back-and-forth with parents contributed to a crystallization of youth ideological allegiance.

Saphir and Chaffee (2002) arrived at a similar conclusion in a previous study of KVUSA influence. Looking beyond the dyadic level of student/parent interaction, they documented effects on the family system, with families becoming more concept-oriented and less socio-oriented in response to student-initiated conversations about politics.

In the final category, *school/family symbiosis*, family political talk provides confidence for participation in classroom discussion and deliberation; in reciprocal fashion, classroom political communication prompts conversations in the family. In the study of families in Arizona, Colorado, and Florida, conversations initiated by KVUSA students activated the latent civic parenting dispositions of mothers and fathers (McDevitt & Kiousis, 2007). That is, parents became more overt and purposeful in efforts to encourage the political interests of adolescent children. The immediate effects on civic parenting held up when assessed two years later, following the 2004 election season. A similar pattern of school/family symbiosis was observed in a more recent analysis that used the same data set. KVUSA prompted students to openly disagree with peers and parents over partisan issues (McDevitt & Ostrowski, 2009). Youth propensity to disagree, in turn, interacted with parents' ideological identity, such that moderate and liberal parents were more likely to promote students' affinity for confrontational activism and civil disobedience.

Discussion

Suspicion about the innate capacity of youth for responsible citizenship has endured for millennia. Parents and teachers must civilize "the invading hordes of child barbarians" in the Aristotelian tradition of political education (Hoff Sommers, 2000, p. 33). Indeed, while the Greeks used the

term *barbarian* to describe non-Greeks and slaves, Hellenic children themselves were compared to barbarians, incapable of reason and unable to speak clearly.

William Golding's allegory, *Lord of the Flies* (1954), represents perhaps the twentieth century's most memorable evocation of what might happen when adolescents are allowed to govern themselves. Currently, the imagery of adolescent political discussion as undisciplined and irresponsible seems to resonate implicitly with the "gateway drug" analogy. Just as marijuana is acknowledged as relatively benign, adolescent opinion expression is not in itself immediately harmful. The concern is that it could lead to anti-civic dispositions such as political narcissism, divisive identity politics, moral relativism, and disrespect for authority and tradition (Westheimer, 2004).

With suspicion about youth political discussion apparently ingrained in the culture, any rationale for reshaping curricula into a peer-centered, deliberative mold will likely face the skepticism of policymakers, school officials, parents, and taxpayers. We suspect that apprehension of youth political impulses is in some respects a projection of adult fears, a desire to externalize agonistic instincts so that they can be controlled (through schooling) as opposed to acknowledged. We believe that fear of youth political passion is analogous to cultural ambivalence toward democracy itself, as in the phenomenon of stealth democracy described by Hibbing and Theiss-Morse (2002). A complete suppression of agonistic instincts is dysfunctional for adult political orientations, becoming manifest in aversion to political discussion and impatience with legislative deliberation. It is reasonable to assume that this suppression has also resulted, historically, in dysfunctional political education in the United States.

Instead of externalizing political passion and trying to control it through repressed civic education, we should acknowledge agonistic instincts in ourselves and in our children. In this respect, a rationale to reform education reflects Dewey's insistence that youth must be allowed freedom to explore identities in peer-centered curricula (1916, 1956). Unfortunately, aversion to expression of ideological conflict in the sociopolitical environment is reflected in stifling instruction that, ironically, takes politics out of democratic education. As Hibbing and Theiss-Morse observe, K-12 students "are taught the civics but not the barbarics of democratic processes" (1996, p. 58). Conflict-avoidant pedagogy thereby ensures conflict-avoidant citizenry in future generations.

The pedagogical value of critical thinking must be recognized as something other than argument for argument's sake, but rather an approach that is realistically uncensored in youth expression directed at problem solving.

Problems are rarely solved without passion; authentic exchanges rarely occur without emotion. Teachers should be prepared to facilitate possibly volatile interactions to arrive at a consensus of understanding, or at least an acceptance of differences.

Against a historic backdrop of resistance to youth political expression, we have sought to articulate a realistic rationale for reform. We are convinced that advocacy of youth political expression in public schools must somehow incorporate the active contributions of parents. Our contingent model of deliberative learning highlights the potential overlapping of schools and families as settings for interpersonal political communication. With students as conduits, exchanges between schools and families create opportunities for the channeling of raw political instincts into responsible expression. From this perspective, a provocative lesson plan is not something imposed upon students, as in ideological indoctrination, and is not necessarily a threat to parent authority. Instead, deliberative dispositions and opinion expression take root organically, in everyday interactions that bridge schools and families as venues for political communication.

Notice that in all of the *school compensation* scenarios reviewed in the KVUSA literature, parents became active participants in the political growth of children (Figure 1). An adolescent's assertion of ideological identity is occurring within the contexts of primary groups, where teachers and parents can contribute to norms of civility and respect even as heartfelt opinions are expressed. By joining with schools in the encouragement of youth political maturation—rather than competing with them—parents are less likely to act out defensively when teachers encourage discussions about topical issues. Parents, after all, can have their say at home. If the implicit social contract is evolving as we describe, with socializing influence shifting from parents to schools and media, teachers should become more proactive in finding ways to enlist parents as partners in democratic education. Otherwise, we would expect more animosity, not less, in the politics of American education.

The KVUSA studies suggest that the induction of parent political interest is often inadvertent—we do not imagine that children are setting out to reform parents. But the spontaneous nature of these family exchanges implies that families are porous to the flow of political communication as it flows from schools. As we have argued elsewhere, habitual political communication serves a useful purpose for the family system (McDevitt & Chaffee, 2002). Expression of political confidence and expertise allows an adolescent to assert autonomy in the family, while a parent's effort to further encourage a child's political growth allows the parent to retain a leadership role, preserving family cohesion. Both autonomy and cohesion (or connectedness) are characteristics of healthy family systems (Olson, 1995),

suggesting that the school compensation scenario entails benefits beyond the socialization of youth for political participation.

Thus, while the history of American civic education suggests a somewhat adversarial relationship between schools and parents, scholarship on human development offers an alternative narrative. Schools and families function synergistically, but also in compensatory ways. They enrich each other as contexts for human development generally, and political maturation more specifically. Notice that this perspective opens up the possibility for documenting *substantial* effects of schools, and to thereby realize a goal that has eluded most empirical research since the 1960s. A more ambitious agenda for demonstrating influence requires that theorists re-imagine schools—they are not self-contained laboratories for democracy. The school as staging ground is the more useful heuristic. Schools are effective by virtue of deliberative activities that motivate youth to explore and to express political identities outside classrooms. The agonistic quality of political expression is crucial because it compels a response from parents.

A viable democracy needs institutions such as schools, libraries, and media to provide opportunities for citizens to access political information. However, an authentically participatory citizenry also requires an educational system that promotes *demand* for information. While conflict-avoidant parents and youth possess meager motivation for seeking out diverse viewpoints, schools that cultivate deliberative dispositions engender demand for the kinds of educational and informational resources that sustain democratic culture across generations.

Notes

[1] Children and adolescents appear to be quite sensitive to situations in which the political messages they hear at school conflict with the ideological sensibilities of parents. Jennings (1975) described youth as attuned to these differences and eager to report back to parents when teachers delve into controversial subjects.

[2] The lack of cultural consensus on the value of political discussion in classrooms is also reflected in the attitudes of students themselves. Connolly and Smith (2002) observed that youth enjoyed dialogic interaction but that teacher invitations to discuss issues were not always accepted by all students. What students regarded as comfortable topics for discussion were not necessarily the same as those deemed appropriate by teachers. Student perceptions about suitable topics varied from classroom to classroom. Beyond the appropriateness of topics, teachers and students might disagree about the

proper structure and tone of political discussion, depending on classroom dynamics and regional culture (Hess, 2004).

[3] We are adapting the contingent model explicated by Barber and Olsen (1997), who used this framework to explore how the family, school, neighborhood, and peers operate jointly with regard to three dimensions of youth socialization (psychological autonomy, connection with significant others, and regulation of behavior).

[4] To our knowledge, prior scholarship on school and family influence in political socialization has yet to integrate school climate and family communication patterns.

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