Democracy & Education

Empowering Young People through Conflict and Conciliation

Attending to the Political and Agonism in Democratic Education

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Abstract

Deliberative models of democratic education encourage the discussion of controversial issues in the classroom (e.g., Hess, 2009); however, they tend to curtail conflicts for the sake of consensus. Agonism, on the other hand, can help support the deliberative model by attending to antagonism in productive ways (Ruitenberg, 2009). In this paper, I present how agonistic deliberation (the infusion of agonism into deliberation) can work as an account of the political that may help empower young people. The paper presents two classic democratic classroom practices—structured academic controversy (SAC) and debate—together as examples of how agonistic deliberation can help students engage politically. This paper suggests that while deliberation can help students learn about political participation, agonistic deliberation (with its focus on conflict) has the potential to help students harness social frustrations into political action.

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At the turn of the 21st century, Francis Fukuyama (2006) proclaimed that liberal democracy was the ultimate solution to the world's most difficult questions. Democratic educators, in kind, have touted the importance of classroom discussions in support of a Habermasian liberal democracy (e.g., Allen, 2006; Hess, 2009; Parker, 2006). In recent times, political polarization, racial divides, and terrorist threats seem to overshadow the kind of consensus that may be obtained through liberal democratic dialogue (e.g.,
Is it possible for legislatures to engage in productive deliberations that yield consensus in order to avoid gridlock? Or can we find our common humanity through dialogue while extremist views propagate in the media?) As young people self-segregate through social media for solace, camaraderie, or ways to vent their frustrations, one begins to wonder if consensus building through deliberative dialogue in democratic classrooms can help them engage *politically*.[1] Put another way, might deliberative practices in

1 See Berger's (2009) distinction of *political* engagement from *civic* or

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classrooms encourage students to become more interested and involved in politics or do the conversations simply make them more cynical? Readers of this journal are accustomed to articles that engage both educational philosophy and the field of curriculum and instruction (e.g., Hyde & LaPrad, 2015; Parker, 2011; Peterson, 2014); this paper utilizes political philosophy alongside curriculum and instruction to explore these questions.

While teaching students to rationally engage in dialogue around controversial issues can help broaden their perspectives (Hess, 2009; Lo, 2015), these deliberations may subtly circumvent antagonisms that naturally fuel the political. For example, Hess (2009) suggested that as conflict arises, political tolerance, or "the willingness to extend important and significant rights (such as free speech) to people who are different from oneself," (p. 16) is an essential aspect of highly diverse democracies. Political tolerance may be an important skill for students to acquire, but its connotation suggests commonality is more important than disagreements. For students who already feel distant from the status quo, this emphasis on what we have in common may accentuate their lack of power in the current system, especially if they were not involved when the commonalities were first deduced. This sense of marginalization is evident in cases of bio-disasters, where individuals who suffered environmental accidents feel disenfranchised by the solution process because they did not have equal access to the deliberative processes that yielded the solutions (Shiva, 1999).

Drawing on the work of Mouffe and Ruitenberg, I show how agonistic deliberation may help empower students who feel marginalized by the status quo. With its emphasis on both conflict and conciliation, an agonistic deliberative model may expose students to inherent power struggles that exist in a pluralistic democracy. Before attending to how agonism and the political can help empower students, I first define agonism through a discussion of the political (via the works of Schmitt, Arendt, Rawls, and Habermas). Second, I discuss why agonism is essential to a pluralistic democracy. Third, to help educators understand how agonism can impact democratic education, I present it as a contrast to a generic deliberative model of democratic education. finally, I show how agonistic deliberation in the classroom may help empower students who feel disenfranchised by existing systems.

The Political in Two Substantiations

Before diving into how agonism is reflected in the political, let me suggest that pluralism is at the heart of agonism and the political. Pluralism, as defined by Berlin (1997), suggests a coexistence of diverse and competing ideological systems. A pluralistic democracy, therefore, is a society governed by a diverse populace, whose comprehensive ideals of what it means to "live well" is often in contention with one another. It is within this pluralistic democracy that conflict, conciliation, and the political exists.

Since "the political" is debated among political philosophers, in this paper, I draw upon the works of Schmitt, Arendt, Mouffe, Rawls, and Habermas to paint a picture of what I mean by the political. Different from politics—which are processes, practices, and discourses that seek to establish order in human existence—the political consists of natural conflicts that arise from pluralistic society (Mouffe, 1999). One can imagine that politics is the process of getting one's neighbors to compromise on a speed bump installation down the street, whereas the political is the vehement disagreements among neighbors about whether there should be a speed bump to begin with. This conflictual antagonism within human relations is at the heart of the political. However, agonism differs from conflictual antagonism in that it attempts to harness this conflict for productive ends.

The Political as Conflict

Pushing the antagonistic envelope to extremes, Schmitt (2007) offers a criterion and expression of the political through a distinction: that of friend and enemy. Schmitt claimed that this distinction offers a way through which "all action with a specific political meaning can be traced" (p. 26). All things political, then, will include the ultimate tension between friend and enemy. Three ideas are crucial to Schmitt's friend-and-enemy distinction. First, the friend-and-enemy distinction must be serious and severe, resulting always in the possibility (not necessarily the reality) of war and death of one's enemy. "The friend, enemy, and combat concepts receive their real meaning precisely because they refer to the real possibility of physical killing" (p. 33). This leads directly to Schmitt's second idea, where "the political entity is by its very nature the decisive entity" (p. 43). This means that the political is not associational or cohesive; it exists only where the decisive, and therefore divisive, resides. The third idea, by nature of the first, is that the enemy is "solely the public enemy, because everything that has a relationship to such a collectivity of men, particularly to a whole nation, becomes public by virtue of such a relationship" (p. 28). All things political are in the realms of the public, affecting a collectivity of people, which means that the enemy Schmitt alluded to can never just be the private adversary of one individual.

Schmitt (2007) contended not only that the political deals with the public but also that conflict is an essential aspect of the political existence. "As long as a state exists, there will thus always be in the world more than just one state. A world state which embraces the entire globe and all of humanity cannot exist" (p. 53). Schmitt argued that the existence of such a globalized world would negate the political. "What remains is neither politics nor state, but culture, civilization, economics, morality, law, art, entertainment, etc." (p. 53). While he has admitted that "in a good world among good people, only peace, security, and harmony prevail" (p. 65), Schmitt does not believe this is possible, because humans are inherently divisive. Therefore, the political (or the friend-and-enemy distinction) exists as a part of humanity. In this interpretation of the political, Schmitt provided a very realistic account of the antagonism that exists in the world, without providing any lofty notions of peace or harmony. While Schmitt presented the political as a conflict-ridden entity, with no possible resolutions, Arendt focused on the unpredictable, yet creative, consequences of political conflict and action.

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social engagement.

In *The Human Condition*, Arendt (1998) outlined the fundamental aspects of the human condition from the perspectives of *vita activa* in three forms: labor, work, and action—of which action is explored in this paper. Arendt suggested, "Plurality is the condition of human action because we are all the same, that is, human, in such a way that nobody is ever the same as anyone else who ever lived, lives, or will live" (p. 8). This sameness in our differences drives us and conditions us in such a way that our actions are what make us human. At the same time, "though the common world is the common meeting ground of all, those who are present have different locations in it, and the location of one can no more coincide with the location of another than the location of two objects" (p. 57). This means that even though there may be some similarities among us (e.g., some of us live in the same cities), our distinct experiences make even these shared similarities uniquely individual. Put another way, even the things we have in common will never be exactly the same. These varying positionalities in the world complicate and enrich our human experiences—and it is this complication that ultimately makes us human.

Like Schmitt, Arendt recognized the world is pluralistic by nature. This means conflict is inescapable. Also like Schmitt, Arendt believed that the political belongs in the public realm, because political actions impact all who are involved. However, unlike Schmitt, who has seen conflict as a never-ending reality of the political that should be preserved, Arendt saw conflict as an opportunity for human action. Arendt (1998) suggested that "an element of action, and therefore of natality, is inherent in all human activities" (p. 9). This means that humans are bound by actions through *vita activa*—our actions upon things and people are a part of the human condition and continuously determine the trajectory of human existence. Our actions are ever present, but they become problematic because they are inherently unpredictable and often irreversible. These actions can result in more unforeseeable conflicts, which propel the existence of the political.

Since we cannot always understand or guarantee the potentialities of our actions, the consequences of these actions can result in conflicts that cripple or impede the possibility of future actions. So how might we get past these conflicts? Arendt suggested that forgiveness is the only way forward. She argued that a "possible redemption from the predicament of irreversibility—of being unable to undo what one has done though one did not, and could not, have known what he was doing—is the faculty of forgiving" (Arendt, 1998, p. 237). Forgiveness becomes the linchpin upon which human existence can continue and progress. "Without being forgiven, released from the consequences of what we have done, our capacity to act would, as it were, be confined to one single deed from which we could never recover; we could remain the victims of its consequences forever" (Arendt, 1998, p. 237). The power of forgiveness creates hope for impending renegotiations and provides future generations the freedom to act in courageous ways for the betterment of human existence.

At the same time, action (along with speech) requires a togetherness of people, where "[people] show who they are, reveal actively their unique personal identities and thus make their appearance in the human world" (Arendt, 1998, p. 179). And these dialogues should occur specifically in the public realm because the "revelatory quality of speech and action comes to the fore where people are *with* others and neither for nor against them—that is, in sheer human togetherness" (Arendt, 1998, p. 180). For Arendt, the political exists in this pluralistic negotiation and renegotiation of actions and speech. She was not promoting a harmonious existence where conflict is absolved, nor is she arguing for a world where conflict is preserved; instead, Arendt was suggesting that the public should be restored and preserved so that agonism and its outcomes can exist. As Arendt (1998) pointed out, an "emergence of society . . . from the shadowy interior of the household into the light of the public sphere, has not only blurred the old borderline between private and political, it has also changed almost beyond recognition the meaning of the two terms and their significance for the life of the individual and the citizen" (p. 38).

For Arendt (1998), this disappearance of the public also means an eradication of the political. When the public loses its true purpose, as a place where individuals can "leave the household and enter the political realm, where all [are] equals" (p. 32), the political and the conflicts of pluralism lose an arena to exist. Arendt noted that people "have become entirely private, that is, they have been deprived of seeing and hearing others, of being seen and being heard by them" (p. 58). And given that "a [person] who [lives] only a private life, who like the slave was not permitted to enter the public realm, or like the barbarian had chosen not to establish such a realm, [is] not fully human" (p. 38), the overwhelming social nature of the modern world means that not only are people leading more private lives, they are becoming less human. Even as the private overtakes the public, it is important to note that the basis of the public and the political rests in the pluralistic nature of existence.

Like Schmitt, Arendt has taken an agonistic view of this pluralism. She suggested that "only where things can be seen by many in a variety of aspects without changing their identity, so that those who are gathered around them know they see sameness in utter diversity, can worldly reality truly and reliably appear" (Arendt, 1998, p. 57). Thus, conflict should never be cast aside or dismissed, because differences in ideology provide us an opportunity to experience reality, as different views come into discussion in the public sphere. For both Schmitt and Arendt, conflict begets the political. More important, conflict is not destructive; instead, it is an unavoidable necessity that provides opportunities for actionable solutions in a pluralistic society.

The Political as Conciliation

In contrast to an conflictual approach to the political, Rawls (2005) has offered a more conciliatory interpretation of the political. In *Political Liberalism*, Rawls set out to answer whether it is "possible for there to exist over time a just and stable society of free and equal citizens, who remain profoundly divided by reasonable religious, philosophical, and moral doctrines" (p. 4). Similar to Schmitt and Arendt, Rawls recognizes the pluralistic nature of existence and its ensuing conflicts. But instead of articulating the political in terms of conflict, Rawls sees the political as a process of creating an overlapping consensus among reasonable and rational, but

incompatible, comprehensive doctrines. "In such a consensus, the reasonable doctrines endorse the political conception, each from its own points of view" (p. 134).

To achieve this overlapping consensus, Rawls (2005) suggested that individuals must be in "a fair system of cooperation between free and equal citizens" (p. 22). This is achieved through the original position behind a veil of ignorance. Under this veil, citizens would be ignorant of any social or natural positioning that may give them advantages or disadvantages when bargaining with one another in the original position. The purpose of this original position is to "eliminate the bargaining advantages that inevitably arise within the background institutions of any society from cumulative social, historical, and natural tendencies" (p. 23). By creating an overlapping consensus in this egalitarian position, a well-ordered society can be unified as each comprehensive doctrine accepts the overlapping consensus in its own way. For Rawls, the political is not found in the conflict of pluralism; instead, it is a process of conciliation that is created through the rational reasoning between pluralistic ideals.

Furthermore, Rawls's conception of the political is separate from moral and social conceptions. Rawls (2005) saw the political as a standalone concept that "can be endorsed by widely different and opposing though reasonable comprehensive doctrines" (p. 38). Since many reasonable religious, philosophical, and moral doctrines can still oppose one another, Rawls proposed a political domain where individuals' "overall views have two parts: one part can be seen to be, or to coincide with, the publicly recognized political conception of justice; the other part is a (fully or partially) comprehensive doctrine to which the political conception is in some manner related" (p. 38). This articulation of the political is a deliberative public space where varying perspectives can come to agree on a conception of justice. But this means that irreconcilable aspects of comprehensive doctrines are left out of the political. Rawls's notion of the political is removed from cultural, moral, and social backgrounds, and it requires individuals to be "part of a political ideal of democratic citizenship that includes the idea of public reason" (p. 62). When individuals practice public reason, they create the political "from shared fundamental ideas implicit in the public political culture in the hope of developing from them a political conception that can gain free and reasoned agreement in judgment, this agreement being stable in virtue of its gaining the support of an overlapping consensus of reasonable comprehensive doctrines" (p. 101). In sum, this articulation of the political consists of reasonable, free, and equal individuals cooperating together in reciprocity to formulate a conception of justice as fairness—working together cooperatively in hopes of reaching consensus or at least narrowing differences. Whereas Rawls depended on an original position, removed from moral and social doctrines, to reconcile conflicts that arise from pluralistic existence, Habermas conceived of a conciliatory approach to the political that focuses on open discussion and deliberation.

While Habermas also saw the political as a process of determining principles of justice that all might agree on, his approach does not require the political domain to be separate from moral, philosophical, and social doctrines. Habermas's articulation of the political focuses on political participation that can be realized in moral and cultural realms as well as the political domain (Benhabib, 1993). Once again, pluralism and conflicts of differences are at the basis of the political; however, the Habermasian process relies on practical discourses and deliberations as procedures to encourage reconciliation, instead of the original position. Like Arendt, Habermas suggested that practical discourse must occur in the public sphere. But unlike Arendt's notion of the public, this "public sphere comes into existence whenever and wherever all affected by general social and political norms of action engage in a practical discourse, evaluating their validity" (Benhabib, 1993, p. 87). To put it in dialogic terms, the public sphere is "a theater in modern societies in which political participation is enacted through the medium of talk. It is the space in which citizens deliberate about their common affairs, and hence an institutionalized arena of discursive interaction" (Fraser, 1993, p. 110).

Since this deliberative model no longer separates an overlapping consensus from comprehensive doctrines, conflicts between these pluralistic views can threaten the political process of determining principles of justice that all can agree on. Even though Rawls and Habermas conceived of different procedures to reconcile conflicts of differences, both saw the political as a process of reaching an agreement or mutual understanding. Meanwhile, Schmitt and Arendt embraced unresolved conflicts as an essential part of the political.

Attending to Agonism and the Political in Democratic Education

Deliberation by Contrast

In order to show how agonism and the political may contribute to democratic education, let me first present, by contrast, a generic deliberative model for democratic education. In his *Educational Researcher* article, Parker (2006) suggested that purposeful classroom discussions may help students develop what Allen (2004) called "a citizenship of political friendship" (p. 140), where students learn to view each other as political friends. Working with Aristotle's (1999) conception of political friendship, Allen (2004) argued that students do not need to develop emotional affinity toward one another; however, being political friends does require students to respect one another as equals in order to obtain "rational consensus" (Habermas, 1990) through deliberation. Parker (2010) contended that classroom seminars and deliberations can function as miniature versions of democratic deliberations, where students are given opportunities to speak and listen to "strangers" (i.e., fellow citizens and peers) with reciprocity, humility, and caution. The ultimate goal is to help students develop a better sense of "others" so that there might be a greater degree of equity or commonality among them.

This deliberative model has aspects of a Rawlsian process—creating an overlapping consensus among reasonable and rational, but incompatible, comprehensive doctrines behind a veil Students are asked to view each other as reasonable and rational beings, whose opinions and views deserve to be heard. It also leans on Habermas's (1984) notion that preconditions of the communicative process must be in place to ensure the rationality of arguments in deliberative discourses, especially since discourse only occurs when

one supposes "that a rationally motivated argument could in principle be achieved" (p. 42). Communicative rationality and reason[2] are bound to the "internal relations between the semantic context of [people's] expressions, their conditions of validities, and the reasons to (which could be provided of necessary) for the truth of statements or for the effectiveness of actions" [*sic*] (p. 9). In other words, students must all learn to communicate in a reasonable and logical manner.

Habermas (1993) pointed out that a discourse-centered "approach has the advantage of being able to specify the preconditions for communication that have to be fulfilled in the various forms of rational debate and in negotiations if the results of such discourses are to be presumed to be rational" (p. 448). By participating in this deliberative process, students with different backgrounds can help determine principles of justice and courses of action for the community without compromising their belief systems, as long as they are rational. Even in situations where conciliation does not seem possible, Habermas suggested that some compromise or consensus can be reached through deliberation, especially if it is "the rationally motivated but fallible result of a discussion . . . that has come temporarily to a close because coming to a decision could no longer be postponed" (p. 450). This means that if students learn to respect one another's rational motivations, compromises achieved through a deliberative process have a better chance of being honored. However, this process can only be successful if students participate rationally or accept that being rational within the system is the only way forward.

Many civic education scholars share a deliberative view of the political. Abowitz and Harnish's (2006) review found that the deliberative model was a key category for contemporary discourses of citizenship. Civic scholars often view deliberative discourses as a way to promote liberal ideals in the classroom, because they provide an avenue for differing views to coexist within a public space (e.g., Callan, 2004; Gutmann, 1999; Hess and McAvoy, 2014; Parker, 2003; Youniss and Levine, 2009). While scholars may disagree on the philosophical basis for deliberation (e.g., Benhabib, 1996), they believe deliberation is an important process of legitimizing any decision-making. In order to help students understand how decisions are made rationally, schools can provide students opportunities to participate in this public process of exchanging ideas and making decisions (e.g., through the discussion of controversial issues [Hess, 2009]).

By presenting the political as a process of conciliation, democratic educators can help students learn to create a stable and rational democratic atmosphere through deliberation. Furthermore, practicing this political process requires students to have "an account of certain political virtues—the virtues of fair social cooperation such as the virtues of civility and tolerance, of reasonableness and the sense of fairness" (Rawls, 2005, p. 194). In other words, practicing and learning to deliberate (i.e., talking and listening to strangers) in the classroom might help students become more rational and reasonable.

However, these conciliatory processes often overlook strong emotive structures that may be at the root of conflicts, which may be detrimental to eventual political engagement.[3] Deliberative models also assume existing systems are rational, even if some students find them oppressive. While it is important for students to learn how to discuss controversial issues in a civil manner, the rational deliberative process may suppress antagonistic feelings that gave rise to the original conflict and leave students feeling demoralized or disenfranchised. In other words, students may feel like strangers are only willing to listen and talk about the issues that are rational, rather than to listen to and validate their feelings on difficult issues that are incommensurable with societal norms. These students may be discouraged due to their past negative experiences with a system that teachers hope they might engage with (Rubin, 2006). If marginalized groups do not feel like they have a seat at the Habermasian table, even when invited to the conversation, they may perceive the structure to be oppressive or unsympathetic to their views. Worse, feelings of disempowerment may be entrenched further by a deliberative framework that hopes to leave students with a "feel good" or "everyone is a winner" perception. This push toward consensus building or rational compromise may circumvent the very power structures that students should confront or challenge.

An example of this can be seen when students bring up issues around the #blacklivesmatter movement in the United States, only to be met with counter arguments about how #alllivesmatter. Even though the narrative of #alllivesmatter points to the democratic virtues of fair social cooperation, civility, and tolerance, it has the effect of belittling the call to shed light on specific systematic injustices met by Black Americans.[4] Groups of individuals who feel oppressed by the system may view generic, all-encompassing movements as patronizing to their original cause. This is not to say that deliberation is not important; on the contrary, deliberation offers a way for students to see the importance of pluralism firsthand. However, a model of democratic education that seemingly proclaims #allperspectivesmatter may not be very empowering. An infusion of agonism into deliberations, on the other hand, may be able to capitalize on students' differing perspectives for eventual political involvement.

Agonism Explored

Mouffe (2000) saw democracy as a system that allows for competition between interests, rather than a system of rational consensus building. Given the oppositional (or agonistic) nature of Mouffe's conception of democracy, students could learn how to deal with these competing interests as a way to fully understand and participate in a democracy. By agonism, I draw on Ruitenberg's (2009) work to mean an approach to the political that accepts the pervasiveness of political conflict and seeks to channel that conflict positively, as opposed to minimizing or eliminating the conflict

2 See volume 1 of Habermas's (1984) *Theory of Communicative Action* for a detailed discussion on communicative rationality and reason.

3 Studies have shown that open deliberation may actually depress political engagement (Delli Carpini, Cook, & Jacobs, 2004; Mutz, 2006).

4 See the interview with Judith Butler on "What's Wrong with 'All Lives Matter'?" (2015).

rationally. Rather than ignoring emotive and irrational aspects of comprehensive doctrines, agonism in democratic education attempts to help students understand the conflicts behind incommensurable beliefs and channel these conflicts for productive ends. Ruitenberg (2009) referred to this process as learning about "political emotions," which can help guide or fuel students' political thoughts and actions.

Given that "the political can be understood only in the context of the very present possibility of the friend-and-enemy grouping" (Schmitt, 2007, p. 35), teaching students to be unified citizens in a pluralistic society through an agonistic framework can seem counterintuitive. However, it is important to point out that *agonism* is different from *antagonism*. While antagonism seeks to avoid or conquer a hostile enemy, agonism anticipates to face and struggle *with* a dissimilar adversary. This distinction is important because "an adversary is a legitimate enemy, an enemy with whom we have in common a shared adhesion to the ethico-political principles of democracy" (Mouffe, 1999, p. 755). Instead of following deliberative ideals of seeing a common humanity in the other, agonism suggests that even if students do not see others the same way they see themselves, they can still struggle with them as worthy adversaries. If educators can help students see people who are different from them as valuable adversaries instead of enemies, "conflict in and of itself is not a problem to be overcome, but rather a force to be channeled into political and democratic commitments" (Ruitenberg, 2009, p. 272). Any conflicts that arise with one's adversaries can be channeled into negotiations and action—the *vita activa* that is required for human existence—instead of sidestepped in favor of rationality.

A key to understanding this approach to democratic education is that in agonism, "the prime task of democratic politics is not to eliminate passions nor to relegate them to the private sphere in order to render rational consensus possible, but to [mobilize] those passions towards the promotion of democratic designs" (Mouffe, 1999, pp. 755–756). This means students would not have to give up their comprehensive doctrines, set aside their emotive passions, or abide by rational preconditions in order to participate in the political. Unlike other deliberative models that require students to set aside their emotions in order to logically consider the rights of others, an agonistic deliberative model allows students to hold onto their passions.

Since students may not necessarily be rational in their negotiations (unlike in a generic deliberative model of democratic education), it becomes necessary for students to recognize people who are different from them as adversaries. "To come to accept the position of the adversary is to undergo a radical change in political identity, it has more of a quality of a conversion than of rational persuasion" (Mouffe, 1999, p. 755). While this type of conversion may occur through conversations or discussions, the end goal is not simply to be rationally persuaded but to undergo a deeper transformative understanding of the situation or the adversary. Instead of having students engage in political tolerance, which sets aside differences temporarily to logically consider the rights available to everyone, agonism asks students to transform their ideas about the world. Instead of just putting their difference on hold for the sake of human rights, the agonistic process encourages students to challenge their own positionalities (as well as one another's positions) in the conflict. Through this process, students may learn that compromises are possible, but they are only "temporary respites in an ongoing confrontation" (Mouffe, 1999, p. 755). In other words, public deliberation does not reconcile differences as it does in Rawls's view or create a logical haven as it does in Habermas's views; instead, it is an arena through which ongoing conflicts are continuously renegotiated as people come to understand one another's existences in deeper ways.

Agonism can help students learn how to negotiate and develop the capacity for renegotiation, rather than just skills of logical deliberation for compromise or consensus. For emphasis, negotiation is not the same as consensus and compromise. Consensus and compromise mean something like finding a point on which all can agree or agreeing that an agreement cannot be reached, whereas negotiations means coming to an actionable next step even if all are not satisfied with the results. For Habermas, compromise occurs when the conversation ends, because deliberations naturally have endings. Negotiation is more than just a compromise, because negotiations allude to practical implications, with inferences of potential iterations of the current negotiated terms—a future time when the terms might lead to different practical implications. In a sense, all negotiations are temporary and strategic—temporary because, like Habermas suggested, conversations end, but strategic because the negotiable terms are not bounded by rationality. In a political process of constant negotiation and renegotiation, students might learn to practice Arendt's notion of forgiveness, because action "needs forgiving, dismissing, in order to make it possible for life to go on by constantly releasing [people] from what they have done unknowingly. Only through this constant mutual release from what they do can [people] remain free agents, only by constant willingness to change their minds and start again can they be trusted with so great a power as that to begin something new" (Arendt, 1998, p. 240). By actively facing and struggling with conflicts that exists in a pluralistic society, students can explore the underlining power relationships within those conflicts, and perhaps become empowered in the process to take action, since negotiations yield actionable plans.

Rather than to suggest that agonism is somehow better than deliberation, I wish to suggest that agonism can be coupled with deliberation to help make discussions in the classroom more meaningful for marginalized students. One way to incorporate agonism into the classroom is by implementing curricula that are centered on deliberation. But instead of focusing only on the consensus-making powers of logical deliberation, teachers can guide students into conversations for negotiation and transformation. "There is evidence that participating in controversial issues discussions can build pro-democratic values (such as tolerance), enhance content understanding, and cause students to engage more in the political world" (Hess, 2009, p. 32). At the same time, students might learn to practice agonistic deliberation with one another, where they are asked to bring forth their emotions and their sense of fairness and justice (or injustice) rather than to simply look for

logical commonalities between themselves and their peers. Agonistic deliberation might help create spaces where students can express their underlining ideas, emotions, and perspectives on controversial issues more openly.

An agonistic-deliberative classroom may provide students with opportunities to recognize, understand, and evaluate different belief systems, not just logically in order to develop political tolerance, but emotively in order to be fundamentally changed. It is possible that deliberation may achieve this goal without agonism, since perspective-broadening dialogue is at the heart of deliberation and discussion. However, a generic deliberative model may further ostracize students who already feel like the system is against them. Agonistic deliberation, on the other hand, would take great care to validate students' perspectives no matter how bizarre, jarring, or irrational they may seem. All perspectives would need to be taken into account when students begin to discuss actionable solutions to issues, not just the ones sanctioned by existing norms (e.g., anthropocentric ideas established by Western philosophy).

Through strategically crafted conversations, teachers may prompt students to consider the emotions that one may feel when they are oppressed by systemic injustices or come up with creative processes to negotiate and renegotiate norms to help transform one another's ideas about an issue. For students who are marginalized by the status quo, these poignant conversations may help validate their feelings, realities, and ideas—even when they differ from the majority point of view. The ultimate goal of agonism is not just political tolerance but for future transformation—transformation of how everyone in the class perceives their realities. Even though students may see that transformation does not happen quickly, nor can it be accomplished without renegotiations, they may begin to understand the importance of forgiveness—of oneself and of others—for the injustices that will likely occur during (re)negotiations. Agonism, when combined with deliberation, offers a more practical and realistic look at politics and democratic processes, rather than to cover the political in a veil of ignorance or expect everyone to behave as angels.[5]

Debate and Structured Academic Controversy: Agonistic Deliberation

The pluralistic nature of our society is nowhere more evident than in public schools, where students often interact with individuals who are different from them. Two classroom practices that can provide students with opportunities to engage in agonistic deliberation are debate and Structured Academic Controversy (SAC). Traditionally, both debates and SAC (but SAC especially) are seen as instructional strategies for deliberative models of education (see Parker, 2006). In the paragraphs below, I show how both strategies can be modified to become agonistic deliberation tools. While the two differ in their approaches to controversial issues, the examples show how agonistic deliberation might help empower students.

Debates are often used in classrooms as engaging activities that get students to discuss contentious issues (Bonwell & Eison, 1991; Chiodo & Byford, 2004; Levstik, 2008). They tend to elicit a competitive spirit among students that can trigger deeper political emotions. Even the procedural process of the debate mirrors constant conflict and dissonance as students offer arguments and rebuttals on a resolution. At the same time, the process of formulating logical arguments for a formal debate can minimize the emotive (and subsequently the agonistic) aspects of students' positions. A well-crafted debate that seeks to infuse agonism into the conversation could ask students to draw up negotiations at the end of the debate, instead of ending on a definitive winner or loser. Understandably, by doing so, the activity may deviate from formal debate formats, but this alternative negotiations ending can help students draw on their political emotions and to consider not only the (sometimes combative) disagreements between the two sides, but also how to best move forward for both sides in the meantime. In this way, a stereotypically conflict-oriented activity like a debate can be transformed into an agonistic deliberation activity that may inspire students to further engage on the issue.

Another classroom practice that has potential to help students practice agonistic deliberation is a Structured Academic Controversy (SAC). In its original form, a SAC introduces students to controversial issues that have been dichotomized by a yes or no question (e.g., Should our country accept Syrian refugees?); assigns students to one side of the issue; and asks them to present their arguments to the other side after some time of preparation (Johnson & Johnson, 1985). SAC is different from a debate because students do not prepare rebuttals to directly refute each other's claims (and therefore, no direct conflict occurs). Instead, after both sides present their arguments, they come together to try and reach a consensus on the issue. Unlike debate (which is a good example of antagonism and conflict), SAC is a good example of the deliberative process, where students are asked to logically deliberate an issue, mostly without their own opinions (remember that students are assigned to a side regardless of their actual feelings on the matter), and come to a consensus at the end. Students could also be asked to drop their assigned positions after the consensus step in order to discuss their actual opinions and feelings about the topic (Parker, 2011). However, as mentioned above, logical deliberative processes may leave students dissatisfied or disgruntled because they had to leave their feelings aside for the sake of coming to a consensus or compromise.

Even though the "drop your role" step broaches the political emotions that students may feel, agonism can be further infused into SAC by asking students to drop their roles *prior* to the consensus step. And instead of consensus, students can be asked to negotiate an actionable solution (rather than a consensus, since the goal is to highlight differences) to the current issue—a plan that everyone can get behind and participate in for the *moment*. This way, students have an opportunity to discuss the issue with not only the logical arguments that they have prepared but also their actual feelings on the topic—to engage with the issue as them-

5 Refer to James Madison's famous Federalist #51 quote "If men were angels, no government would be necessary. If angels were to govern men, neither external nor internal controls on government would be necessary" (Hamilton, Madison, Jay, & Kessler, 2000, p. 344).

selves. It may be helpful for the teacher to remind students that all negotiations are temporary and that as situations change, the negotiated terms will inevitably shift. This process of negotiations, rather than consensus, may help transform students' ideas and thinking about the issue, the factors surrounding the issue, or at least how they perceive possible solutions to the issue. By changing these steps in SAC, the deliberation becomes more practical, action-oriented, agonistic, and rooted in political emotions and can help students grapple with how to engage with political conflicts.

In agonistic deliberations (either through debates or SAC), teachers should allow students to convey their ideas and feelings in authentic ways and then challenge students to come up with negotiated action steps that address the issue. Rather than providing only rational evidence to logically back up their assertions, students can provide anecdotal stories or experiences that give rise to their thinking. Alternative narratives to ways of thinking about an issue could also be incorporated into agonistic deliberations. For example, when discussing how best to curb climate change, students may be allowed to present not only scientific data but also cultural narratives that provide insights into the issue. Or on issues of abortion, religious texts and ideology might be presented as part of the discussion. In both cases, it is valuable for students to voice their own perceptions and ideas—even at the risk of conflict—rather than to silence their perspectives. And all of this, on the way to negotiated action steps, since the end goal is empowerment and action.

Conclusion: Agonistic Deliberation in the Public Sphere

Besides providing students with a space for transformation through negotiations, agonistic deliberations offer educators one important lesson—a need to bolster the public arena. For all the disagreements about the political, one thing is constant: It can only exist in the public, because pluralism and its conflicts are manifested through the gathering of different ideologies in a public space. Even though the public is where pluralism and the political come into being, Arendt (1998) lamented that "society always demands that its members act as though they [are] members of one enormous family which has only one opinion and one interest" (p. 39). This socialization creates normalized behavior, which "excludes the possibility of action" (p. 40) because pluralism is absolved. In becoming more socialized, people become less political. As Arendt warned, the "enlargement of the private, the enchantment, as it were, of a whole people, does not make it public . . . on the contrary, [it] means only that the public realm has almost completely receded" (p. 53).

Given that a goal of democratic education is to create future citizens who are enlightened and engaging, the waning of the public is a cause for concern. Students need opportunities to learn how to interact with one another for public good and not be isolated in an increasingly individualized world or socialized into their own segregated communities. The privatization of schools, universities, and political processes means that public spaces for the political need to be reclaimed. If these spaces vanish, where might future citizens face pluralism, deliberate contentious issues, and resolve to act? Democratic educators can help preserve the public arena by helping students practice agonism through the political so as to better understand its importance for our pluralistic democracy.

The future of a democracy will always rest in the hands of its citizens and how its citizens handle and navigate the conflicts that inevitably arise from pluralism. For young people to become more invested in politics, they need opportunities to engage with public interests that are inevitably inundated with differing viewpoints and conflicts. Even though agonism can seem to champion differences and dissent,[6] at its heart, agonism hopes for the transformation of a future that will be better for everyone. By teaching students to harness their political emotions, navigate political conflicts, and negotiate actionable solutions, agonistic deliberation has the potential to empower students to engage with the conflict of differences that exist in a pluralistic society. If agonistic deliberation can help students learn to negotiate, forgive, and harness their political emotions for renegotiation, they may feel more empowered to enter into a political system that seem to have left them behind. Through this process, students may learn that while power may never be defused, the struggle is always worthwhile.

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6 Stitzlein (2012) argued that dissent is an important aspect of democratic participation and that students should be taught the importance of dissent and how to leverage it for change.

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