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Structured Academic Controversy: What It Can Be

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Language is one of the most potent resources each of us has for achieving our own political empowerment.

--Danielle Allen

In this chapter, I offer an appreciation of the instructional strategy called Structured Academic Controversy (SAC) and detail the revisions I have made to it. I have taught with it, using it in my own teaching. I have taught for it, teaching novice and experienced teachers to use it in their teaching. And I have studied it, inquiring into its purposes, principles, and procedures. I am delighted by the depth of thinking it often provokes and reassured by the cooperation it brings about. I am impressed by the linguistic work it gets done and buoyed by its utility. I appreciate its relative ease of implementation, even for novice teachers; its suitability to rigorous curriculum goals; and its responsiveness to the demands placed on education in a liberal democracy, especially its promotion of knowledge growth, reasoning with evidence, respect, and civil discourse. Here, I review SAC's development as a cooperative learning strategy and then detail the modifications I have made to sharpen its effect. These address three outcomes: content selection for deeper learning, literacy development, and cultivating student voice. In my judgment they are important additions to the model, and they work in concert to prepare students to take their place on the public stage.

The revised SAC aims to be effective socially, academically, and civically. In a SAC, students develop knowledge while learning to use language and information to engage with others on controversies of fact, definition, and values. To its credit, SAC goes beyond mere *exposure* to multiple views on these controversies to having students actually grapple with these views. This is because, in SAC, participants must role-play, exchange views, and determine if what others are saying requires them to adjust their own beliefs.

The chapter is informed by a ten-year research-and-development study of the high school government course[1] as well as my experience teaching SAC to secondary school and college students, and their teachers, for over thirty years. My graduate students across these years have been collaborators. As teaching assistants in social studies curriculum and instruction courses at the University of Washington and as co-presenters at inservice workshops and academic conferences, they have fueled my thinking about SAC—its strengths, and weaknesses, its nooks and crannies.[2] Still, the conclusions presented here are my own.

Cooperative Learning and SAC

Before we can make sense of the revisions, let us look at traditional SAC's legacy and structure. SAC was developed by two scholars of cooperative learning, David Johnson and Roger Johnson (1979, 1985, 1988). Cooperative learning is the broader concept, and

[1] See Parker et al., 2013 and 2018.

[2] I am referring particularly to Terry Beck, Afnan Boutrid, Steven Camicia, Mary Anne Christy, Carol Coe, Jenni Conrad, Wendy Ewbank, Sibyl Frankenburg, Tina Gourd, Diana Hess, Khodi Kaviani, Bruce Larson, Jane Lo, Natasha Merchant, Jonathan Miller-Lane, Shane Pisani, and Lisa Sibbett.

SAC is a species. SAC has elements in common with other types of cooperative learning, but it is unique, too. Let's begin with the broader concept.

Cooperative learning became a popular instructional strategy in the 1980s when a disparate group of educational psychologists and sociologists turned their attention to learning in small groups or teams. Prominent among them in addition to the Johnsons were Elliot Aronson (1978), Robert Slavin (1985), Yael Sharan and Shlomo Sharan (1976), and Elizabeth Cohen (1986). Together, they found positive outcomes: increased school attendance and motivation to learn, and greater academic and social learning by a wider range of students.

Common elements across the several types of cooperative learning are positive interdependence, individual accountability, face-to-face interaction, and teacher-assigned heterogeneous learning groups. The first speaks to the need for a group-worthy task. The task *requires* the group if the work is going to get done. The goal is to accomplish the task by way of everyone doing their job and encouraging others to do theirs. The second prohibits group grades. Individuals are to be held accountable for doing their part and learning. If formal assessments are to be done, they are for individual learning. However, group recognition and rewards are common alongside individual accountability, especially when competition between groups is included. Students encourage one another in the group to succeed so that the group can earn whatever group rewards are available. The third common element is captured by Cohen's (1986) observation that the process of group interaction is "enormously interesting" (p. 3) to young people. There's something about the group dynamic that motivates students to learn to cooperate successfully and achieve the group's goal. They become a team. Further, "students who usually do anything but what they are asked to do become actively involved with their work and are held there by the action of the group.... Face-to-face interaction with other group members demands a response or, at least, attentive behavior." (p.3)

The fourth similarity across types of cooperative learning concerns equity pedagogy and group composition: Teachers aim to achieve in each small group the greatest heterogeneity possible given the student population at hand. Teachers achieve this mix in small groups of two to five, purposefully mixing whatever student differences are at hand—social status, academic ability, attendance record, interpersonal skill, gender, race, religion, learning challenge, talent, personality, skill set, first language, and so forth. In this way, small groups are as heterogeneous as the whole class. Ability grouping, along with other segregating schemes, is rare because it minimizes rather than maximizes the mix, and "there is no evidence that putting low-achieving students into a homogeneous ability group is effective" (Cohen, 1986, p. 22). Further, the teacher emphasizes to students that cooperative groupwork is work, not play. Friends are not allowed to choose one another for small-group work—friends tend to play rather than work. Random assignment may be used to assign students to small groups in a new class where the teacher has little knowledge of students' strengths, social status, identities, and background. Groups can be purposefully mixed once the teacher is more familiar with the individuals in the classroom. Roles can be assigned (e.g., Cohen's group harmonizer, group facilitator, and group timekeeper), and everyone will have a particular part to play.

SAC

SAC shares these attributes with other types of cooperative learning, but, uniquely, it joins language to cooperative learning on controversial issues. These controversies can be ethical (issues of right), conceptual (issues of definition), or empirical (issues of fact).

The selected controversy is SAC's subject matter, and students play the role of an advocate for one side of the issue.[3]

The entire procedure typically occurs in a single small group of four, divided into two pairs. Consequently, the teacher in a typical classroom is coordinating six or seven SAC groups at once and twice that number of pairs. SAC centers also on study of texts and other resources (e.g., maps, photos), student-student discussion, role playing, and advocating competing positions on a controversial issue. The controversial issue can be historical or current—from "Should the Parthenon Marbles be returned to Athens?" to "Should our state's law on police use of deadly force be changed?" While these two examples are mainly ethical, controversies that are mainly empirical are common, too—from the historical stalwart, "Which side fired the first shots at Lexington Green?" to the current issue "Is mass incarceration of African Americans the new Jim Crow?" And conceptual issues are ubiquitous. Was the American Revolution really a *revolution*? When does a military action become a *genocide*?

This is an ambitious classroom practice. The subject matter is rigorous, requiring instructional scaffolds to build the prior knowledge students lack as well as strategies to connect with the funds of knowledge they bring. The pedagogy, too, can be challenging, requiring not only small-group management but also supports for reading comprehension and productive face-to-face discussion. Furthermore, teachers must monitor their own convictions and biases, deciding whether to present as controversial an issue on which they have already reached a position (see Hess & McAvoy, 2015). Yet, SAC is worth the trouble. It is pertinent to civic learning outcomes and also to disciplinary content and skill objectives (hence "academic" in its moniker). SAC is both a discourse structure and an instructional procedure. Johnson and Johnson's starting point is that when students are put in small groups and asked to interact with other students while they learn, conflicts among their preferences and perspectives are likely. Rather than avoiding such conflict, SAC mobilizes it as a learning opportunity. The Johnsons (2009) write, "Intellectual conflict is not only highly desirable but also an essential instructional tool that energizes student efforts to learn.... Ideas in the classroom are inert without the spark of intellectual conflict" (p. 37).

First, the teacher assigns students to mixed teams of four, which are then subdivided into two pairs. Each pair is assigned to a position on the controversy and asked to role play advocates of that position. Next, each pair is told to prepare a presentation of its position and reasons to the opposite pair. The two partners work alone and together to study the information provided, and then together they plan a brief presentation to the other pair. After this preparation, the pairs take turns making their presentations, and then a general discussion unfolds, each pair still advocating its position and asking the other side for the key facts that support its position. What happens next is crucial: The pairs reverse perspectives. Each pair presents the other's argument to its satisfaction. The point here, of course, is to grasp the facts and logic used by *both* sides. Then comes the final phase of the SAC where the two pairs join together to summarize the best arguments for both points of view, and then strive to reach consensus on a position that all can support.[4]

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[3] Most controversies have more than two "sides," of course. SAC simplifies the controversy to two, making it more accessible. The controversy can always be complicated after the SAC lesson, at which point students, thanks to the SAC, will have enough background knowledge to make sense of the additional information.

[4] Variation in the procedure is common and accepted. See Avery et al., 2013.

The Revised Model

I have made three revisions to traditional SAC. Each is an addition. I call the result SAC+. These additions address content selection, reading comprehension, and political autonomy. They are needed because they address problems that arise in the course of a SAC: They help teachers select the most powerful (educative, generative) controversies for study, deepen students' understanding of the selected controversies, and develop students' capacity to make uncoerced (independent) judgments. The third modification emphasizes political autonomy over consensus, as we shall see. Altogether, and this is key, the revisions mobilize schools' unique character as mediating institutions where young people encounter the broader public. According to developmental psychologist Connie Flanagan (2013), schools are "mini-polities" where young people "work out what it means to be a citizen of the larger polity" (p. 229). Schools have the necessary assets for this work, as I have shown elsewhere (Parker, 2005, 2010). They have diverse schoolmates (more or less), problems (academic, social, and civic), "strangers" (schoolmates who aren't friends or family[5]), and curriculum and instruction (schools are educative places). For even the youngest students, school is a public place, not to be confused with a home, temple, workplace, or market. "The children I teach," wrote kindergarten teacher Vivian Paley (1992), "are just emerging from life's deep wells of private perspective: babyhood and family. Then, along comes school. It is the first real exposure to the public arena." (p. 21)

Publics come in all sizes and shapes: the classroom and school, the town and nation, the neighborhood, the peer group, bowling alley, pub. These are social spaces—beyond the family—where a "we" is deciding what to do about a shared problem. Language is joined with cooperation. This is Habermas's "communicative action" (1984, p. 1) and Dewey's "conjoint communicated experience" (1985, p. 93). The essence of discussion, as Bridges (1979) wrote, is "to set alongside one perception of the matter under discussion the several perceptions of other participants, challenging our own view of things with those of others" (p. 50).

1. Content Selection

Happily, SAC is not too difficult to pull off, even for a beginning teacher. The structured groupwork is not hard to manage, and it is more or less the same procedure each time. What is difficult is *planning* a SAC, and content selection is at the center of this work. Known also as curriculum decision making, content selection is the practice in education whereby declarative and procedural knowledge are selected for instruction. It entails choosing from a universe of possibilities a small sample of subject matter suitable for teaching and learning in a particular course and context, with students of a particular age, culture, and history. The process is problematic because class time is limited while the subject matter possibilities are vast and the students diverse.

The Johnsons paid scant attention to the matter. Yet, choosing the controversy and the ideas it features is a crucial undertaking for teachers, especially if the SAC is to be a course workhorse. Accordingly, this first revision suggests that a SAC should not be marginal to a course's central purposes or done simply to engage students. SACs *are* engaging (the Johnsons' "spark"), but this spark should be mobilized to help students achieve a course's core subject matter.

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[5] See Parker, 2010, on the distinction between friends and kin, on the one hand, and acquaintances and strangers—the "public"—on the other.

Two principles can steer this work. One involves identifying a course's most important concepts and skills, the other deepens learning through quasi-repetitive learning cycles.

a. Identifying central concepts and skills. While content selection can mean that one topic is selected instead of another (e.g., *migration* over *region* in geography), or one perspective over another (e.g., centering the U. S. founding on 1619 rather than 1776), it more subtly refers to a *relationship* among subject matters: Some subject matter is prioritized over others, and instruction is orchestrated for both. As Bruner (1960) said in an earlier era, "to learn (a discipline's) structure, in short, is to learn how things are related" (p. 7). This means that a course's subject matters need to be orchestrated to achieve deeper learning of prioritized material and somewhat superficial learning of needed but peripheral material. In this way, depth and breadth are treated not as opposites but as partners. Let me explain, and to do this I will introduce concept development.

To achieve the vaunted 'curriculum of ideas' rather than the pilloried curriculum of 'names and dates', concepts need to be the mainspring of a course. Concepts are ideas, and ideas are abstractions that apply to several or many concrete instances (cases, examples). In a conceptual curriculum, the abstract and the concrete work together. To learn a concept is to learn its critical attributes *and* to see how they operate in an array of examples. Examples will differ from one another, but each has the concept's critical attributes along with many facts. There are different kinds of music, each with lots of factual detail, yet they are all music; many kinds of government, but all are governments.)

Consider *federalism*, the organizing concept of U. S. government and, by extension, the high school government course. To learn the concept superficially is to learn its definition, that is, to learn that the concept's name "federalism" refers to (1) a way of organizing a nation, (2) in which power is distributed or shared between national and subnational units of government (states, provinces). In other words, there are numerous ways to organize a nation, and federalism is the one where two or more levels of government have formal authority over the same land and people. Notice how abstract this definition is; no examples yet. To learn this (or any) concept deeply requires multiple examples. *The examples are also part of the curriculum*. Without them, the concept is only a definition to be memorized, an abstraction without legs. A deeper understanding of "federalism" will include knowledge of a diverse set of on-the-ground examples that display the definition in an array of concrete circumstances (federalism in the U. S., India, Mexico, etc.).

Reader, please try this yourself. Take a concept that you regard as central to a course of study (e.g., *tribal sovereignty, racism,* or *freedom* in U. S. History; *migration* in Human Geography; *revolution* in World History) and imagine the set of examples you would select to instantiate the idea in diverse settings. When students learn the differences across these but grasp the essential similarities, too, they will have formed the concept.

A course can contain meaningfully only a handful of central concepts, of course, because each of them has to be exemplified if it is to be understood. The identification of these concepts and their examples becomes a primary focus for content selection. Only then, to return to SAC, does SAC become meaningful, for SAC can be deployed to teach these examples. It is put to work teaching the core ideas of the subject. Examples of federalism take us quickly to both contemporary and historical policy controversies, from state-by-state marijuana legislation back to the famed Jefferson-Hamilton conflict over the legitimacy of a national bank, and many in between: Obamacare, same-sex marriage, and abortion policy.

Skills, too, need to be selected. They need to be reduced in number from the universe of possibilities, and they need to be related to the focal concepts. *Deliberation* is the critical thinking skill that SAC teaches along with the broader social skills of cooperation. Skills, like concepts, develop iteratively across multiple trials. To learn to deliberate (to weigh alternatives in discussion with others) requires modeling, practice, and feedback. This takes us to the second principle for content selection.

b. Deeper learning through looping. Meaningful learning requires that a limited set of powerful ideas and skills is selected for study, and that these are studied and applied in multiple examples and scenarios. This emphasis on multiplicity is not a matter of repetition but complexity. Bransford and colleagues (2000) call it cyclical learning. Bruner (1960) had a similar idea and called it a "spiral" curriculum (p. 52). High school teachers I work with call it "looping." It entails revisiting ideas and skills in different contexts, cyclically, in order to know them differently and comparatively, and therefore deeply. Learning is deepened—made more complex and applicable—thanks to revisiting the same idea or practicing the same skill, but in multiple, novel problem spaces (examples, cases). Each cycle is different. Students see the differences, but they aren't derailed by them because they see the similarities, too, which are the critical attributes of the concept.

Returning to our illustration, teachers of the US government course might plan three SAC cycles on *federalism*. Further, they could select law-related controversies that center on the delicate balance of power between the national government and state governments. In this way, federalism would be developed across three examples. Their similarities and differences will deepen students' understanding of the concept's critical attributes; meanwhile, myriad peripheral knowledge will be gleaned from the human and institutional dramas of each case, the branches of government involved, and the relevant clauses from the Constitution. Examples can be selected that are spread across the centuries.

1. 1829. In *McCulloch v. Maryland* the Supreme Court decides that a national bank is legal under the Constitution's "necessary and proper" clause, and that the national government is supreme over the states.
2. 1995. In *United States v. Lopez*, set in Texas, the Supreme Court strikes down Congress's Gun-Free School Zone Act of 1990 on the grounds that the federal government violates reserved powers of the states with this legislation.
3. 2005. In *Gonzales v. Raich,* set in California, the Supreme Court decides that under the Constitution's Commerce Clause, Congress can criminalize the production of cannabis and its use even if states have legalized it.

Teachers likely would re-mix the SAC groups in each cycle—the four-person teams and their constituent pairs—thereby looping the cooperative learning experience, the skill of deliberation, and the peer context for each student's political autonomy moment (more on this below). These quasi-repetitive learning cycles build transfer of knowledge (application) into the bones of instruction as the concept is applied to one novel scenario after another.

Looping multiple SACs on a perennial controversy, as in this illustration, is not a requirement of SAC pedagogy, but we can see how this kind of course design would contribute to a more complex understanding of the subject matter. Furthermore, perennial issues recur—students will face them in the future. Meanwhile, multiple SACs on unrelated controversies, which is more common, still has the advantage of sharpening students' skill of deliberation, since that (the skill as opposed to the content) is what is looped.

2. Learning from Text

We turn now to literacy development and zero in on reading comprehension. There are two reasons to do this. First, a SAC is a language- and text-dependent learning activity. A SAC cannot be pulled off successfully without students completing its reading tasks with decent comprehension. Middle and high school teachers (college professors, too) know that many reading assignments are given but few are completed, and fewer still are comprehended. Without comprehension what we get in SAC is, at best, naïve opinion formation. Second, reading comprehension is not easy for adolescents—including students admitted to advanced courses (Parker et al., 2018). We know that adolescents generally are not gaining adequate levels of literacy skill, and this directly impinges on SAC. Greenleaf and Valencia (2017) summarize the stark reality: "Few students reach literacy levels that enable them to develop interpretations, think critically about texts, make evidence-based arguments, or assemble information from multiple texts into a coherent understanding of a topic" (p. 235). Few adolescents can do it, yet it is precisely what SAC requires.

Many secondary school teachers do support their students' reading, actually requiring it and bringing it to the center of instruction. What this second addition does is build this support into the structure of SAC rather than leaving it to chance. At stake is access to the learning outcomes of a SAC—its academic, social, and civic goals. SAC requires the reading *and* comprehension of informational texts so that students' opinion-formation is flush with facts—juicy facts about the historical context of the controversy, the participants and their perspectives, the alternatives being considered, the interest groups behind these alternatives, and so forth. This addition to SAC attends both to text selection and comprehension.

a. Text selection and modification. A SAC is a deliberation—this is its central skill. This means that teachers must select texts that present two sides of the selected controversy. These are the positions on the controversy that students will read and discuss within the pair, and present to the other pair, and then weigh as they form their own opinions on the matter. Background information on the controversy is also needed. This is typically presented in a third text that both pairs read first. Often, it is a section from the course textbook or a story from a reputable news source. Or teachers can present it orally or by other means. Students do need background information on the controversy in order to make sense of the position (the "side") they have been asked to present.

Before selecting this background text or the texts presenting the two sides, teachers need first to hone the SAC question, for this focuses the reading activity: Students read to answer this question. Returning to *federalism* and the second SAC example, the Court case about guns in schools, a teacher might frame the controversy like this: "Is the 1990 Gun-Free School Zones Act, forbidding individuals from knowingly carrying a gun in a school zone, unconstitutional because it exceeds the power of Congress to legislate under the Commerce Clause?" (Oyez, 1995). But a simpler question could focus more tightly on the two levels of government: "Does the national government have the power to regulate school gun policies in the state of Texas?"

Once the question is honed, texts can be selected. For Supreme Court cases, the two sides are likely to be abridged versions of the decision and the dissent. Streetlaw.org and Landmarkcases.org are deservedly popular sources for such adaptations. But most SACs are not dealing with controversies that come before the highest court in the land, and so texts must be found elsewhere. Consider these four SAC controversies:

- Was Lincoln a racist?
- Why did the U.S. drop the atomic bombs on Japan?

- Should our state's law governing police use of lethal force be changed?
- Should human consumption of Chinook salmon be outlawed, reserving the fish for Orca whales who otherwise face starvation?

The first two are historical, and abridged texts for them are freely available from the Stanford History Education Group (SHEG) at sheg.stanford.edu. For many historical controversies, however, a well-chosen section from the course textbook may have to suffice for the background information because it is readily available; meanwhile, the alternative positions will come from primary and secondary texts. The latter two controversies refer to current events—one across the nation and one specific to the Pacific Northwest. The needed texts for the current controversies will be found in various media—alternative positions in editorials, op-eds, blogs, and interest group websites; background information in news reports.

Text selection is complicated by the need to modify texts so that struggling readers, along with their more accomplished classmates, actually attempt the reading and then comprehend it. Organizations like Streetlaw and SHEG often do the modifying, saving teachers the trouble. One of their most important adaptations is to shorten the text to a reasonable length, and then surrounding the print on a page with calming white space. This builds compliance (students will be more likely to do the reading) and comprehension, too. A reading specialist at the first school where I taught called it "reducing" the text. "If you want them to read it closely, reduce it" was her gentle command. Whether the course textbook or a primary document, reduction of the amount of print and simplification of the prose will be needed. Wineburg and Martin (2009) write,

> The real question for teachers is not whether to use or not to use primary sources. The crisis in adolescent literacy is too grave and the stakes too high for such neat choices. Rather, the question for teachers must be: How can I adapt primary sources so that all students benefit?" (p. 212).

To summarize, when we select texts for SAC, we align them to one or more of the course's central concepts. In this way, we get the SAC to do the basic work of the course, serving its main learning goals. Second, we frame a pertinent SAC question. It presents the controversy as an open question, and it focuses the reading and groupwork plus the follow-up activities (writing, oral presentations). Third we choose a text for each of the two positions—one for each pair—and, typically, we choose also a third, impartial text that is read by both pairs and gives needed background information. Fourth, we modify the texts as needed to increase the likelihood that struggling as well as proficient students will read and comprehend them. Overall, the point is to use texts to teach students about the controversy, and then to elicit students' own positions on the controversy. All this matters because middle and high school students have surprisingly few opportunities and little support to *use texts for purposeful learning in the subject areas* (Greenleaf & Valencia, 2017). Happily, SAC is a near-ideal activity for it: The purpose for reading is clear, the amount of text is limited, and the information in the text is needed for the tasks that follow—the pair presentations, the discussion, and students' decision about how to decide the controversy.

b. Text comprehension. For some, text selection is the essence of content selection, but experienced teachers of middle and high school students know that their students' reading comprehension must be supported explicitly. It cannot be assumed that students will do the assigned reading, let alone comprehend it. Fortunately, SAC paves the way for teachers to scaffold reading comprehension because key supports are built into SAC's structure. Once teachers enter the structure, they find themselves engaging three

practices that facilitate better comprehension. These three distill a good deal of reading research :

1. Before reading begins, teacher provides a purpose for reading the selected text.
2. Teacher specifies ways of interacting with the text during reading.
3. Teacher makes clear how the information taken from the text will be used after reading.

The needed support occurs in three phases. The crucial *before*-reading support occurs when teachers present an unambiguous statement as to why students need to read the text: "Read this to learn the side of the controversy you will present to the other pair and the arguments you and your partner will make." *During* reading, the teacher supports comprehension by having students work with their partner to mark up the text, talk about its position, facts, and arguments, and anticipate the arguments the opposing pair will make. This is similar to the annotation strategies students may learn, but it is active and conversational rather than passive and silent. *After* reading, the partners plan their presentation, sequencing and prioritizing the points they will make and dividing the speaking time. Then, they proceed to the presentations and the reversal of perspectives, and then the pairs join together to evaluate the arguments. This takes us to the third revision.

3. Student Voice – Political Autonomy

Danielle Allen (2014) focuses on the role of language in political maturation, calling it "one of the most potent resources each of us has for achieving our own political empowerment" (p. 21).

> When we think about how to achieve political equality, we have to attend to things like voting rights and the right to hold office. We have to foster economic opportunity and understand when excessive material inequality undermines broad democratic political participation. But we also have to cultivate the capacity of citizens to use language effectively enough to influence the choices we make together. The achievement of political equality requires, among other things, the empowerment of human beings as language-using creatures.

Language development was explicitly the concern of the second revision, learning from text. Now, the third revision goes further, using language to express one's own claims and preferences. This revision promotes political autonomy, which is the capacity to make an uncoerced decision. This is required if students are to take their place on the public stage, giving voice to their own thinking about public affairs.

But this is a debatable revision. Educators argue, as they should, about whether in a liberal democracy it is more important to teach the young to make independent decisions or to work with others to reach decisions acceptable to all (consensus and compromise). Liberal democracies[6] value both, but in SAC+ I emphasize the cultivation of students' autonomy. The Johnsons, recall, opted for consensus. The main reason for my decision is that, especially in middle and high school classrooms, which is to say especially with teens, responsible individuation from peers and parents is a developmental imperative. Adolescents need opportunities to clarify their own values and take responsibility for their own convictions, not rejecting peers or family but growing their own wings, finding their own voice.[7] Language is essential: articulating one's own thinking and listening to others'

[6] Liberal democracies have elections and representative governments (this is democracy) that protect civil rights and liberties (this is liberalism).

[7] See Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

thinking. As Flanagan (2013) shows in *Teenage Citizens*, this is the critical period of life when political ideas are born. Nurturing independent judgement during this period will embolden adolescents to follow neither the crowd nor the demagogue, but to think for themselves.

Consequently, this revision adds another step to the SAC procedure, and it skips over the consensus prompt that ends the Johnsons' model.

Figure 1

SAC+

1. Students are assigned to teams.
2. Teams are divided into pairs, and each pair is assigned a position and directed to study their text(s) in order to prepare a presentation on the pair's position, reasons, and supporting facts.
3. Pairs study their text(s) and prepare a presentation. Comprehension is not assumed but encouraged and facilitated by the teacher.
4. Pairs present to one another, listening carefully to the arguments given.
5. Pairs reverse perspectives, feeding back what they have heard to the satisfaction of the other pair.
6. Discussion still in roles: the two pairs join together to summarize the best arguments for both points of view.
7. Genuine discussion. Students are invited to drop the assigned positions and see if the team can reach a decision on the question or, if not, then clarify the points of disagreement. Each student clarifies and expresses his/her/their own position and argument.

In SAC+, students are led quickly into the issue's contested space. This occurs at steps 1 and 2. Before they have studied the controversy, they are placed in a team and divided into pairs representing competing positions on the issue. They are told they will be presenting their position and argument to the other pair, and then are given time to study the issue and prepare an argument. This enacts what I call the "engagement first" principle (Parker et al., 2018): Steps 1 and 2 engage students and create a need-to-know the background of the controversy and the position-specific information and reasoning that they will read at step 3. There is a kind of productive anxiety (Cohen's "the action of the group"). During the paired presentations and what follows, steps 4-6, students are responsible for articulating and listening to one another's reasons.

Then comes the final step where students are given the opportunity to drop the position to which they were assigned. At this point, students search for their "own" position and reasons. They decide whether to stick to the assigned position they had been presenting and defending or abandon it in favor of the one argued by the opposing pair, or a hybrid or something altogether different. They may have developed some investment in the assigned position by now (this is common); or, if they had a pre-SAC position on the issue, they may seize the opportunity to assert it now if they still favor it. Either way, students might switch from a defensive stance (in role) to an inquisitive one (free of role). They might become curious about what position to adopt as their own now that they know something about the controversy, enough to be a reasonably informed participant in that space—a legitimate player. This is an accomplishment. With the pairs now having studied the texts, presented, and listened to one another, the discussion can be an intelligent one, and individuals' opinion-formation can take off from there. "Do we need to agree?", someone

asks, just to be sure. "No, you don't," is the reply.

The prompt "Feel free to drop your assigned position. What do you really think?" creates a moment where students may abandon the assigned position and reasons. They are not asked to do so; they are provided the opportunity to do so. Consequently, the opportunity is fresh, a sort of reset moment. Following the structured role-playing of preparing, sharing, and listening to positions, there is an opening. Why? The listening-and-feedback process at steps 4 and 5 matters. This is what Waks (2010) calls "giving ear to" the other argument and "waiting in suspense… with attentive expectation or anticipation" (p. 2744). Having prepared, presented, and defended a position, and then having given ear to the "other" position, not one's "own"; and then, on top of this, being liberated from the assigned position—all this may leave the student wondering just where his or her "own" mind is on the issue. This is the political autonomy moment.

It is important to see that respect is implicated along with language. Both come with the territory of exchanging reasons. Listening to one another is initially structured (steps 4-6), and then loosened when the role requirement is dropped. Listening continues at step 7 as students gather material from one another to form their own opinions. Free now to believe what they will, participants must determine if what others are saying requires them to adjust their own opinion. They sort through what others are thinking-saying as they shape their own thinking-saying. Laden (2012) shows that this kind of responsiveness is inherent in reasoning. This is why exchanging reasons (deliberating) promotes mutual respect. When I give you my reasons and ask you for yours, I acknowledge that you, too, are a thinker, a reasoner, an actor, not a cardboard character. Sharing reasons implicitly recognizes the inner life, the dignity, of our interlocutors.

Using SAC+ to cultivate voice *rather than* consensus-building skills is debatable, as noted. Learning to speak one's mind, expressing one's preferences and objections, is crucial to young people's maturation as individuals and citizens. Voice is *the* elemental form of civic engagement and empowerment. But both independence and cooperation are necessary, and they operate in tandem. After all, we think better about problems when our partners are capable of thinking for themselves. Schools should cultivate both as part of their civic mission. As we loop students through a number of SACs, we can alternate at step 7 so that students one time are directed to reach a consensus (per the Johnsons) and, next time, to express to one another (the "public stage") their own view. Or we could do both in the same lesson: press for consensus during the discussion, and press students to argue for their own position during follow-up writing and presentations. At any rate, the combined effect of teaching for consensus *and* autonomy is sure to make for more robust deliberations as the course progresses.

Conclusion

As our democratic experiment falters, strong civic pedagogies are needed in schools. SAC+ is one such pedagogy. It aims to teach cooperation (its social goal), a course's central concepts and controversies (its academic goal), and deliberative skill along with political autonomy (its civic goal).

Time for teachers' instructional planning and collaboration is the key resource here. Ideally, teachers will talk with one another about the handful of concepts that could effectively anchor a course, the handful of related controversies and texts that will be targeted for study, and the learning cycles that will deepen learning. All this is too difficult *and too interesting* to be done alone. Argument is needed to get it right.

SAC+ is not a value-free pedagogy. It promotes five goods especially: knowledge, critical thinking, literacy, multiple perspectives, and student voice. More generally, SAC+ values liberal democracy and the principles that define it—popular sovereignty, equality, liberty, pluralism, evidence-based reasoning (science), and respect. The latter, respect, underpins the listening, speaking, and argument—the language and relationship—that constitute deliberation. This same cluster of values rejects indoctrination and coercion, for these negate critical thinking and liberty, and they are fundamentally disrespectful. Accordingly, SAC+ is centrist in the manner of Dewey's (1902) middle way. It is a pragmatic path between the extremes of traditional and progressive pedagogies. Students are encouraged to make up their own minds rather than toe a line. This makes a deliberative pedagogy like SAC+ too radical for some conservatives (e.g., Kurtz, 2021) and too conservative for some radicals (e.g., Gibson, 2020). On one side are those concerned that students will be drawn away from their parents' values or that social studies education will be politicized; on the other are those concerned that so-called impartial deliberations perpetuate inequities by concealing them. This is a juicy controversy, worthy of looped SACs in a teacher education course.

Let me return, finally, to the appreciation I began with. Incisive research by early cooperative learning researchers was consequential. A sustained school reform movement was launched, instruction was reimagined along the lines of social interdependence theory and equity pedagogy, and educators were shown that they could have their cake and eat it too: School attendance and academic achievement were strengthened thanks to the dynamic social interaction of diverse students, not sacrificed to it. In this chapter, I presented principled modifications to sharpen the effect of the earlier model. These address problems that will surely confront teachers who want to implement it: choosing and then framing the right controversy, getting students to understand it by reading and talking about it, and helping them form and express their own views.

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