
#NEVERAGAINMSD STUDENT ACTIVISM: LESSONS FOR AGONIST POLITICAL EDUCATION IN AN AGE OF DEMOCRATIC CRISIS

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ABSTRACT. In this essay, Kathleen Knight Abowitz and Dan Mamlok consider the arguments for agonist political education in light of a case study based in the events of the 2018 mass shooting at Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida, and the subsequent activism of its survivors. We use this case to examine agonist expressions of citizenship, and to present an argument for framing agonist politics through the lens of Deweyan transactional communication combined with the critical concept of articulation. A major lesson in this case is the significance of citizenship learning that prioritizes challenging the political status quo along with working to reestablish new political relations on grounds that are more just. The authors argue that the endgame of agonist-informed political education should be that which helps students, as present and future citizens, reconstruct existing political conditions. Knight Abowitz and Mamlok conclude with suggestions for four domains of knowledge and capacities that can productively shape agonist citizenship education efforts: political education, lived citizenship, critical political literacies, and critical digital literacies.

KEY WORDS. citizenship education; agonism; political emotion; transactionalism; articulation

INTRODUCTION

Philosophers of education have made good use of agonist critiques of democracy to propose reforms for school-based political and citizenship education. Agonist treatments of curriculum and pedagogy emphasize the importance of curriculum focused on the arts of disagreement and adversarial position-taking. In this essay we examine these arguments and questions in light of the student activists from Parkland, Florida, who were both terrorized and politically activated by the February 2018 mass shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School (hereafter MSDHS), in which a former student murdered seventeen people.

Agonism is not a singular theory but a set of critiques, emerging out of critical and poststructuralist traditions in political theory, against liberal and republican theory's focus on democratic forms and processes prioritizing consensus, peace keeping, and order. Democratic theory has too often tried to "fix" pluralism, to make this condition nonviolent and nonthreatening to both individuals and the security of the republic. Agonist critiques push against that sensibility: "Agonistic pluralism, or simply agonism, is a theory of democracy rooted in the ancient

Greek notion of the *agon*, a public struggle or contest between adversaries.”¹ In educational theorizing, agonism has been viewed as a critical lens for remediating the procedural and deliberative democratic theory that has been so pervasive in shaping conceptions of citizenship education. Sharon Todd explores the cosmopolitan terrain of agonism through an examination of Muslim dress in secular schools.² Claudia Ruitenberg develops a conception for “educating adversaries” as a way to reform liberal citizenship education.³ Ásgeir Tryggvason builds on the idea of educating adversaries by arguing that educators should consider what is redeemable in the concept of “the enemy” for use in democratic citizenship education.⁴ Here, we consider the arguments for agonist-informed political education in light of our interpretation of a case study created around the events of the 2018 school shooting in Parkland, Florida, and the subsequent activism of its survivors. We use this case to examine agonist expressions of citizenship, and then we present an argument for framing agonist politics through the lens of Deweyan transactional communication combined with the critical concept of articulation.⁵

A major lesson in this case is the significance of citizenship learning that prioritizes challenging the political status quo while simultaneously working to reestablish new political relations on grounds that are more just. As such, agonist theories of democratic struggle can most productively inform citizenship education as a means for learning how to engage in adversarial communication and associations aiming to reconstruct existing political conditions. We will conclude with suggestions for four domains of knowledge and capacities that can productively shape agonist-informed citizenship education efforts: political emotion, lived citizenship, critical political literacies, and critical digital literacies.

1. Robert W. Glover, “Games Without Frontiers? Democratic Engagement, Agonistic Pluralism, and the Question of Exclusion,” *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 38, no. 1 (2012): 82.

2. Sharon Todd, “Living in a Dissonant World: Toward an Agonist Cosmopolitics of Education,” *Studies in Philosophy and Education* 29, no. 2 (2010): 213–228.

3. Claudia W. Ruitenberg, “Educating Political Adversaries: Chantal Mouffe and Radical Democratic Citizenship Education,” *Studies in Philosophy and Education* 28, no. 3 (2009): 269–281.

4. Ásgeir Tryggvason, “The Political as Presence: On Agonism in Citizenship Education,” *Philosophical Inquiry in Education* 24, no. 3 (2017): 252–265.

5. John Dewey and Arthur F. Bentley, *Knowing and the Known* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1949). The concept of articulation comes originally from Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics* (New York: Verso, 1985).

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AGONIST DEMOCRATIC CRITIQUES AND ARGUMENTS
FOR ADVERSARIAL CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION

Agonist democratic critiques in educational theorizing often begin by deconstructing the liberal assumptions built into Western notions of citizenship and political education. Ruitenberg's "Educating Political Adversaries" opens with a critique on deliberative democracy, specifically on the Rawlsian theoretical frame of political liberalism.⁶ This critique joins that of Todd's "Living in a Dissonant World" by drawing heavily on Chantal Mouffe's political theorizing, positing her model as a promising alternative to the common models of democracy used in schools to teach about civic and political issues.⁷

Unlike deliberative democracy, which endeavors to overcome conflicts and build consensual frames for political stability, agonism perceives political conflicts as "a force to be channeled into political and democratic commitments."⁸ Todd suggests that agonist theorists see "politics as the project of confronting dissonant voices, affiliations, and practices and as such puts into question the cherished political aim of harmonizing diversity through dialogical models of democracy."⁹ Ruitenberg suggests that the danger in political liberalism and deliberative democracy lies in their respective aims to dwindle conflicts. Suppressing conflict and substantive disagreement may suspend the manifestation of the problem, or it may magnify conflicts by suppressing the concerns of those whose identities constitute the remainders of a majoritarian resolution.

Agonist political theorists in education delineate several major differences between agonist-informed and prominent liberal and aggregate forms of democratic political education taught in state-sponsored schooling. A primary difference is that agonism renounces the focus of liberal and deliberative democracy on the individual. Centering political life around the individual has glossed over the desire of people to feel a sense of belonging and to be a part of "(articulated) collectivities."¹⁰ The second distinction focuses on the exclusion of emotions from the political discourses of deliberation. Deliberative models posit that reason is at the heart of the political action and minimize the importance of social emotions as an immanent component of political life. Agonists emphasize that "political emotions are unavoidably elements of citizenship education."¹¹

The third point of difference, as highlighted earlier, refers to the desirable qualities and goals of political discourse. According to agonist critics, conflicts

6. Ruitenberg, "Educating Political Adversaries."

7. Todd, "Living in a Dissonant World."

8. Ruitenberg, "Educating Political Adversaries," 272.

9. Todd, "Living in a Dissonant World," 216.

10. Ruitenberg, "Educating Political Adversaries," 273.

11. Michalinos Zembylas, "Political Emotions in the Classroom: How Affective Citizenship Education Illuminates the Debate between Agonists and Deliberators," *Democracy and Education* 26, no. 1 (2018): 3.

and disagreements are crucial for a thriving democracy and for the advancement of a healthy society that confronts (though never entirely resolves) its sociopolitical tensions through reason and dialogue. The problem is that many current political discourses treat political competitors as enemies rather than adversaries. Thus, Ruitenberg's call to "educate political adversaries," drawing upon Mouffe's important distinction between *antagonistically* versus *agonistically* engaging political collectivities or persons with whom we disagree. While there are philosophers of education who would have us consider the value of "enemy" in citizenship education theorizing, more common are calls for political education in schools that can foster the development of political relations highlighted by difference, disagreement, and power as found in structures of historic and contemporary hegemonic relations.¹²

Mouffe's distinction between politics and the political explains the foundational concept of adversary found in agonist political education scholarship. The success of a democratic society rests upon its ability to help transform antagonistic confrontations into agonistic relations. Tryggvason explains:

One of the main tasks of democracy is to enable a confrontation between "friendly enemies" who "share a common symbolic space" (Mouffe, 2000, p. 13); to enable an agonistic confrontation between political adversaries. Mouffe thus highlights the need to facilitate collective identities and confrontations that are formulated in political terms, as identities and confrontations that revolve around competing visions of what a just society is.¹³

Drawing on Mouffe's conception of the political, educational philosophers have urged new forms of political education that address political emotions, enabling students to consider more adversarial, though nonviolent, forms of engagement, and advance conceptions of critical political literacy.¹⁴

Political emotions are an important common denominator in agonist conceptions of citizenship education. Traditionally, emotions have not been conceived as part of civic education and their role for advancing vibrant democracy has been underestimated; the political liberalism that has so powerfully shaped citizenship education models in the social studies has viewed political emotion with suspicion, in part because emotions can be used by the state for forms of political indoctrination of young people. Emotions, therefore, have been actively suppressed as barriers to reason and consensus in much citizenship education literature and practice. Agonist theorists in education contend that it is essential to recognize political emotions as part of citizenship education in liberal democracies.¹⁵ Ruitenberg,

12. For a careful argument regarding the potential value of enmity and the enemy in political education, see Tryggvason, "The Political as Presence."

13. Tryggvason, "The Political as Presence," 254, citing Chantal Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox* (London: Verso, 2009).

14. Ruitenberg, "Educating Political Adversaries."

15. For example, Kathleen Knight Abowitz and Dan Mamlok, "The Case of #NeverAgainMSD: When Proceduralist Civics Becomes Public Work by Way of Political Emotion," *Theory & Research in Social Education* 47, no. 2 (2019): 155–175.

following Megan Boler's work in this area, rightly warns against the common mistakes made around pedagogies of emotion: dangers of trivializing, individualizing, or instrumentalizing emotions.¹⁶

Accounts of political emotions that would "educate adversaries" typically feature the emotion of anger as advancing a key element in a vibrant democratic society. Ruitenberg defines political anger as "the anger or indignation one feels when decisions are made and actions are taken that violate the interpretation and implementation of the ethico-political values of equality and liberty that, one believes, would support a just society."¹⁷ Ruitenberg differentiates political from moral anger: the latter refers to one's reaction to events based on one's personal values (notions of "the good"); political anger, in contrast, is evoked as a reaction to conditions of hegemonic power relations (notions of "the just" in the context of the social-political order).

Agonist-informed political education emphasizes not simply the cultivation of political emotion, but also the enhancement of critical political literacy. Political literacy refers to, among other things, the ability to read and interpret political disputes, and to recognize how the social order has been constructed. In Ruitenberg's words, it is

the ability to read the political landscape both in its contemporary configuration and its historical genesis. Another way of putting this is to say that students must learn to read the social order in political terms, that is, in terms of disputes about the interpretation of liberty and equality and the hegemonic social relations that should shape them.¹⁸

Ruitenberg specifically discusses the tendency in school-based political education to refrain from the historical ideological dichotomy of left and right, and to consider this ideological difference as obsolete. She speaks for many agonist citizenship advocates when she encourages educators not to blindly follow the path of deliberative reasonableness, and to make more visible the traditional ideological left-right political spectrum that has organized and continues to shape our political controversies.

Agonist critiques of liberal and deliberative democracy have, in recent years, posed a compelling challenge to political and citizenship education as practiced in schools. As we will see through examining the #NeverAgain rupture that followed the mass school shooting in Parkland, Florida, the import of political emotion and the construct of the political adversary provide fertile ground for young people engaging lived citizenship. Before discussing that case, however, we provide an overview of a key tension within agonist theorizing for schooling application that will become relevant as we present and analyze the case.

16. Megan Boler, *Feeling Power: Emotions and Education* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 5; cited in Ruitenberg, "Educating Political Adversaries," 276.

17. Ruitenberg, "Educating Political Adversaries," 277.

18. *Ibid.*, 278.

"WHAT IS TO BE DONE?" THE ENDGAME OF
AGONIST-INFORMED POLITICAL EDUCATION

Agonist theory does not represent a unified project, a set of goals, or even "internal assumptions about the nature of the political."¹⁹ Our exploration of agonist citizenship through the aftermath of the MSDHS shooting incident demonstrates, as we will show, that consideration of end goals for civic and political engagement is crucial. Are agonist citizenship practices merely attempting to push against the status quo, or are they understood as part of a larger project of rebuilding political conditions and structures? The endgame of "reestablishing new political relations" must be part of an agonist reappraisal of citizenship education.²⁰ Reading agonist thinking through the lens of Deweyan transnationalism helps explain our reasoning here.

Mouffe delineates two distinct agonist types. In "Agonistic Politics between Ethics and Politics," she labels her variant of agonist theory "dissociative" and labels other types as "associative."²¹ Associative agonists include Hannah Arendt, Bonnie Honig, and William Connolly. Mouffe says associative agonists share many assumptions with dissociative agonists. Both camps seek to move politics beyond aggregate, prepolitical interests; both deny the existence of a "higher, unchallenged plane beyond the ebb and flow of a contentious and contingent realm of political articulation"; both seek to "move beyond a deliberative politics which appeals to notions of communicative consensus, public reason, or reciprocity in order to soften deep moral disagreement."²² Yet, despite this shared conceptual ground, Mouffe finds associative agonists insufficiently radicalized in their politics. Honig, Connolly, and Arendt share her goal of preventing the closure of political debate, practices, and identity formation open to disruption. But for thinkers like Mouffe, these agonist theorists do not address the key question: "What is to be done?"²³ The realm of "the political," for Mouffe, involves making a determination between conflicting choices that are (at times) irreconcilable through rational processes. Moreover, "the political" is comprised of a hegemonic social order and unequal, unjust power relations. Politics isn't just a game of identities or contests; it's about what we should do in the face of difficult choices. This means imagining our political opponents as adversaries who share the same political association, but who live within a conflictual consensus and who experience wins and losses in their attempts to reconstruct (aspects of) the political order toward more radically egalitarian, just forms. For Mouffe, associative agonists stay locked in the freedom

19. Glover, "Games without Frontiers," 89.

20. Ruitenberg, "Educating Political Adversaries," 280.

21. Chantal Mouffe, "Agonistic Politics between Ethics and Politics," *Critique & Humanism* 35, special issue (2010): 13–22; <https://www.cceol.com/search/article-detail?id=74092>.

22. Glover, "Games without Frontiers," 89–90.

23. *Ibid.*, 90.

of unending contests and identities rather than pushing on a praxis.²⁴ Politics is not just about deconstruction alone; it's about what we should do and how we, as citizens, can rebuild new institutions, norms, and practices.

The question of "what is to be done?" is useful as we consider agonist-informed political education. What are its overall aims, *beyond* bringing contestation and disagreement to the fore of political life? We will suggest, through our interpretation of the #NeverAgain case study, that a productive answer to this question can be found in the critical conception of articulation, as read through the lens of Deweyan transactionalism.

The *transactional* concept first articulated by Dewey in his 1896 "The Reflex Arc Concept in Psychology" paper was later expanded in his book *Knowing and the Known*, coauthored with Arthur Bentley in the last part of Dewey's life.²⁵ Contrasted with self-action (self-propelled activity of objects or organisms) and inter-action (action of causal interconnection between two objects or organisms), trans-action refers to a holistic framing of action, with divisions of labor or systems functioning within a concrete whole; in other words, trans-action refers to the entirety of the reflex *arc* rather than simply to the reflex itself. With this theory, Dewey sought to mend the ways that psychology and other scientific disciplines tend to segment the world and human existence into categories that would then harden over time. Inquiry in psychology was focused narrowly on stimulus and behavior, action and reaction, but Dewey knew the meaning of any one behavior cannot be reduced to one stimulus, any reaction cannot be reduced to a response to a single action. He pushed against inquiry models that prevent a holistic framing of organisms in their environmental, cultural, temporal, and spatial contexts. "The state of the whole organism," Dewey asserted, "is one of *action* which is continuous, so that reference to the organism as a whole merely puts before us the situation just described: that environmental change *becomes* a stimulus in virtue of a continuous course of behavior."²⁶ We use the transactionalist frame to focus agonists on the end game of political education: producing action and change, which is the product of a sometimes contentious yet always continuous chain of human communications that shape thinking and practice over time.

These communications are, for critical theorists, understood as part of the practice of *articulation* in politics. Articulation, so named for its fundamental function of naming a political platform or position, is used by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe to signal the way that, amid the plurality and ongoing contingency of discourse within hegemonic political conditions, discourses can change and shift.²⁷

24. Mouffe, "Agonistic Politics between Ethics and Politics," 20.

25. John Dewey, "The Reflex Arc Concept in Psychology," *Psychological Review* 3, no. 4 (1896): 357–370; and Dewey and Bentley, *Knowing and the Known*.

26. John Dewey, "Conduct and Experience," in *Psychologies of 1930*, ed. Carl Murchison (Worcester, MA: Clark University Press, 1930), 430; quoted in N. H. Pronko and D. T. Herman, "From Dewey's Reflex Arc Concept to Transactionalism and Beyond," *Behaviorism* 10, no. 2 (1982): 236.

27. Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*.

Articulation refers to the political expressions that, either as singular utterances or, more typically, as part of networks of expressed positions, place demands on leaders, government, institutions, and the like. As elaborated by Itay Snir, the critical concept of articulation has three dimensions: performance, connection, and transformation.²⁸ We *perform* articulations as discourse — as utterances or expressions of our positions and identities that are not fixed, but relational. These articulations are not stand-alone but exist as part of a web of interacting performances among human actors and collectivities. Thus, articulation is a *connective* practice; as Snir says, “to articulate is to articulate *with*.”²⁹ These articulations do not have predetermined meanings but act upon the world to create and help stabilize or fix new meanings, thus *transforming* current discursive conditions and realities. The concept of articulation, therefore, does not simply refer to the performance of political demands for greater equality or justice; rather, it refers to the process by which diverse articulations combine and transact to form chains and networks of transformative political conditions.

The end game of agonist-informed political education is not about honing our sense of political enmity or improving the effectiveness of nonviolent attacks against our interlocutors per se. It also does not lie in the dualistic framing of *either* agonist strategies *or* deliberative dialogue. It is, rather, about generating transactionalist articulations, particularly on the part of students as current and future citizens. Transactionalism envisions political changes as the product of continuous linkages in systems of action and ongoing social movements. These linkages are the work of articulation, specifically, those expressions and practices that are performative, connective, and transformational. Transactional articulation represents the broad outlines of the agonist end game for political education. The #NeverAgain case study explains how and why this perspective on agonism matters. We walk through the case study and unpack this argument in the subsequent sections.

#NEVERAGAINMSD: ANGER AND INDIGNATION AGAINST GUN VIOLENCE

David Hogg describes his motivation for writing a book, with fellow survivor and sister Lauren, about the events surrounding February 14, 2018:

Lauren and I are telling our story to show you how we grew up into people who felt like we had to do something and could do something. We definitely think that’s valuable information, and we hope that seeing things through our eyes will give you ideas of your own. Because none of us can do this alone and we need you, basically. But we’re all really different people. We don’t even have the same opinions on gun control. The only thing we share completely is what Lauren said when she was getting started — we were all born after Columbine, we all grew up with Sandy Hook and terrorism and code-red active-shooter drills. We have all grown up conditioned to be afraid. *And we’re all sick and tired of being afraid.*³⁰

28. Itay Snir, “Education and Articulation: Laclau and Mouffe’s Radical Democracy in School,” *Ethics and Education* 12, no. 3 (2017): 351–363.

29. *Ibid.*, 354.

30. David Hogg and Lauren Hogg, *#NeverAgain: A New Generation Draws the Line* (New York: Random House, 2018), 19 (emphasis in original).

The Hogs are among a group of Parkland activists who have become well-known in the aftermath of the school shooting. “We *had* to do something,” David writes, referring to the students’ motivation. These students were changed by the horrific experience of a mass murder event at their high school, enacted by a nineteen-year old former student named Nicholas Cruz. They experienced an emotional whirlwind of violence, terror, and grief. In the wake of processing this trauma, anger became a key motivational response for these leaders. Conscious of being a generation of students who call “active shooter drills” the norm, these students turned their terror into a political message: “we’re all sick and tired of being afraid.” The fear of terror is connected to the anger toward adults who had created a society in which their fear was normalized and turned into another school routine: a drill.

The assertion “[we] *could* do something” refers to the Hogg siblings’ sense that they had agency to act. The students gathering at Cameron Kasky’s house days after the MSDHS shooting had grown up in homes and schools that had prepared them for this moment. Their agency was shaped and informed by the formal curriculum and the cocurricular opportunities offered at their suburban school. MSDHS is a well-resourced public school with high graduation rates; it has exceptional cocurricular programs, challenging courses, and committed teachers. It is also located in a state that, in 2010, passed the Sandra Day O’Connor Civics Education Act, which mandated a state assessment in civics.³¹

At a historic moment brimming with organized resistance in the United States, the Parkland students worked quickly in alliance with many other groups to take specific actions and to build their presence on the national stage.³² Their organizing progress was stunning in scale. Only one week after the massacre, student leaders were visiting government and legislative officials in Tallahassee and Washington, DC, to protest “the National Rifle Association’s influence on legislators and demand a ban on assault weapons”³³ Six days later, a group of student leaders met with Paul Ryan, Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives. Less than a week later, they were in a Twitter war with the National Rifle Association (a powerful U.S. pro-gun lobbying organization) and its supporters; in that context, they created high-quality web-based content critiquing the powerful role of the organization in shaping gun laws. On March 7, 2018, the Florida legislature passed

31. CIRCLE, “Reforming Civics Education: Three Case Studies,” *Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement*, March 17, 2014; <https://circle.tufts.edu/latest-research/reforming-civic-education-three-case-studies>.

32. Amanda Holpuch, “‘Onslaught of outrage’: Resistance and Activism Reawakened in Trump Era,” *The Guardian*, January 23, 2019; <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2019/jan/22/onslaught-of-outrage-resistance-and-activism-reawaken-in-trump-era>.

33. Andrea Torres, “Timeline: How the Never Again Movement Gained Momentum after Tragedy,” *Local 10 News*, March 23–24, 2018; <https://www.local10.com/news/2018/03/24/timeline-how-the-never-again-movement-gained-momentum-after-tragedy/>.

a gun control bill — the first in the state in twenty years — three weeks to the day after the shooting at Parkland, due in no small part to MSDHS students' activist work. Later events included organizing both a national high school walk out and the National March for Our Lives in Washington.³⁴ Some of these students, now alumni, continue to be very visibly active on behalf of causes related to gun control and candidates who support gun control policy, with particular emphasis on increasing turnout among young voters in U.S. state and national elections.

Their widespread efforts began immediately. Literally hours after the shooting, students were talking with national news media and elected officials about their criticisms of gun laws, political inaction, and school safety protocols. One hour after the shooting, in response to a "thoughts and prayers" tweet by President Donald Trump directed to victims and families, student survivor Sarah Chadwick tweeted:

I don't want your condolences, you fucking piece of shit, my friends and teachers were shot. Multiple of my fellow classmates are dead. Do something instead of sending prayers. Prayers won't fix this. But gun control will prevent it from happening again.

The immediacy of their response was facilitated by the students' use of social media as a primary communication and organizing tool. Twitter — a deft medium for expressions of rage, disgust, judgment, and indignation — allowed the students to direct their reactions to government and elected officials at the very highest levels. Students lost no time in using this tool to their organizing advantage, and in due course, they created memes and video content which they circulated to great effect, using these expressions of grief and anger to fuel their movement. To take one example, Parkland student leaders created a #Whatif series of video interviews in which student survivors narrate their experiences of losing best friends or teachers.

Parkland activists moved from trauma, to anger, to indignation, to strategy. An important part of their work was the resounding rejection of those offering them mere pity. As Leah Bradshaw argues, "those who are the objects of compassion may respond with indignation, by pronouncing, 'No, you do not know my predicament, no, I am not just like you; I want justice and recognition, not sentiment,'" but "to become indignant is to assert oneself, to demand justice, and this requires agency, or at least the possibility of it."³⁵ The Parkland activists used indignation against the adults who offered them platitudes to fuel creative civic actions: from lobbying efforts, demonstrations, and solidarity-building with like-minded groups and diverse allies. The National School Walkout they helped to organize on March

34. Dana R. Fisher, "Here's Who Actually Attended the March for Our Lives (No, It Wasn't Mostly Young People)," *Washington Post*, March 28, 2018; https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2018/03/28/heres-who-actually-attended-the-march-for-our-lives-no-it-wasnt-mostly-young-people/?utm_term=.506fb7a9310a.

35. Leah Bradshaw, "Emotions, Reasons and Judgments," in *Bringing the Passions Back In: The Emotions in Political Philosophy*, eds. Rebecca Kingston and Leonard Ferry (Vancouver, BC: University of British Columbia Press, 2008), 183.

14, 2018, was cosponsored by a number of groups, including the Women's March organization, formed just after the election of Donald Trump and which organized a worldwide protest march in conjunction with Trump's January 2017 inauguration. In the March for Our Lives, held on March 24 (ten days after the school walkout), there were more than 800 demonstrations registered in all fifty states and on six continents.³⁶ They connected with established organizations, both large and small, to develop their positions and advocacy strategies, working with organizations ranging from Everytown for Gun Safety, a powerful national group, to the Peace Warriors, a youth-led Chicago antiviolence group.³⁷

Parkland activists were seemingly well prepared by their public school experiences for these endeavors. A diverse array of knowledge and training — including numerous options for developing their performance and communication competencies — helped these students to hone their skills of articulation, which they in turn used to become effective political actors. Their school boasted rich opportunities in journalism, theater arts, and debate. “Nearly all of the #NeverAgain organizers are active in the school's drama club, school newspaper, or TV station, WMSD-TV, where David Hogg serves as news director and Emma González is active in TV production.”³⁸ In fact, some MSDHS students had been preparing for debates on the issue of gun control, which explains in part why they could speak clearly to these issues.³⁹ Moreover, MSDHS boasts a challenging curriculum made available to many students. “About 327 students take AP government — that's about 40 percent of the senior class. ... In the 2013 school year they had 19 AP college-level courses.”⁴⁰ The AP Government teacher has nearly twenty years under his belt in that role, and he helped create that curriculum for the district. Several of the #NeverAgainMSD leaders were enrolled in AP Government during the February 14 mass shooting and had been learning about the power of interest groups like the NRA in their curriculum.⁴¹

The Parkland students took a powerful stance that used political emotion to feed political action. The question of how they were prepared for this work

36. Charlotte Alter, “The School Shooting Generation Has Had Enough,” *Time*, March 22, 2018; <https://time.com/longform/never-again-movement/>.

37. *Ibid.*

38. Dave Cullen, “Inside the Secret Meme Lab Designed to Propel #Neveragain Beyond the March,” *Vanity Fair*, March 22, 2018; <https://www.vanityfair.com/news/2018/03/inside-the-secret-meme-lab-designed-to-propel-neveragain-beyond-the-march>.

39. Dahlia Lithwick, “They Were Trained for This Moment,” *Slate*, February 28, 2018; <https://slate.com/news-and-politics/2018/02/the-student-activists-of-marjory-stoneman-douglas-high-demonstrate-the-power-of-a-full-education.html>.

40. Jorge Rivas, “The Teacher Who Taught His Students to Challenge the NRA on the Day They Lost 17 of Their Own,” *Splinter*, February 27, 2018; https://splinternews.com/the-teacher-who-taught-his-students-to-challenge-the-nr-182335501?utm_campaign=socialflow_splinter_facebook&utm_source=splinter_facebook&utm_medium=socialflow.

41. *Ibid.*

is an empirical one, and we can only speculate about that here. Their responses after the shooting cannot be characterized by a singular position or set of positions, a singular stance or policy recommendation, or a unified adversarial stance or identity per se. Their work has been characterized by both adversarial and collaborative transactional articulations in the civic, cultural, and political realms.

ANALYSIS: AGONISM, POLITICAL EMOTION, AND AGENCY

In "Learning to Articulate," Ruitenberg argues that present-day political life suffers two deficits: an ethical lack of motivation (the fault mostly of nihilism), and a political lack, what she calls an "articulatory deficit."⁴² Drawing on the work of Simon Critchley, she argues that for a political project to take shape, a citizen must feel an ethical demand, "leading to the understanding 'I should act.'"⁴³ The potent political-emotional combination of fear, anger, and indignation fed this ethical demand for the #NeverAgainMSD leaders. A second condition is "a sense of agency ('I can act')" that is required for citizens "to reach the resolve 'I will act.'"⁴⁴ In the case of the Hogg siblings, the relative privilege of their white middle-class identity, combined with a powerful schooling experience in relevant bodies of knowledge and competencies, likely fed this resolve. The third condition is "an articulation of an individual resolve to act with others' resolve to act, leading to some form of a collective 'we will act.'"⁴⁵

In the memoir of their #NeverAgainMSD activism, David and Lauren Hogg walk readers through their process of feeling the ethical motivation for political change after surviving a traumatic mass shooting at their school, and then recognizing their own agency for activism. The case of the #NeverAgainMSD response shows us a combination of events and responses that illustrate what can happen when "articulatory deficits" are replaced with meaningful ethical motivation combined with strategic political action.

What made the #NeverAgainMSD case a study of transactional articulation is not just the ethical motivational power of political emotion, so potently felt and used throughout the political responses that came after. It was also the fact that the response was not one enacted by lone individuals, but one that entailed forging a "we" by and through the creation of articulation networks. Initially, of course, that "we" was forged by the MSDHS students' common experience as targets of random violence in their school, but this circle of "we" grew wider as the responses to the shooting grew louder, as more people joined their ranks, as they reached out to build broader coalitions for greater impact. What made

42. Claudia W. Ruitenberg, "Learning to Articulate: From Ethical Motivation to Political Demands," in *Philosophy of Education 2010*, ed. Gert Biesta (Urbana, IL: Philosophy of Education Society, 2011), 373.

43. Ibid. Ruitenberg's essay draws heavily on Simon Critchley's *Infinitely Demanding: Ethics of Commitment, Politics of Resistance* (New York: Verso, 2007).

44. Ibid.

45. Ibid.

the #NeverAgainMSD leaders agentic was their ongoing communicative engagement across individuals, constituencies, and demographics through a range of media and means. Their diverse engagements with others triggered learning about different positions, perspectives, and policy critiques, and also the evolution of their own. In *Glimmer of Hope*, a collection of stories by the MSD activists, these diverse engagements and evolutions are visible.⁴⁶ Accounts of their meetings with Florida legislators, of their CNN appearance with Republican Senator Ted Cruz, and of their social media campaigns show their tenacity and skill in talking with and listening to others around topics of gun violence and school safety. They experienced the power of having a political voice, as well as the frustration of being dismissed by politicians and lobbying groups due to their age. The political positions of those in the movement were not monolithic or static, but they were broadly based in what they eventually came to call commonsense gun legislation and focused on electing people responsive to that position. In addition, their “we” was formed across all these interactions, tweets, meetings, and media appearances: the “we” of a group of young voters and young adults who feel disenfranchised from politics in the United States. Their motivations and their “we” did not emerge ready-made from the trauma of the mass shooting or from their civic education in school, but developed and evolved through the public work that they and others created after the event.

This transactionalist view of their political action can also be applied to the “we” they created around the thorny American political problem of guns. Some forms of agonist political education aim to help students understand the development of left-versus-right political positions over time so that students will have a better historical sense of politics to inform their future engagements; other forms promote the importance of conflict articulation based on a developed sense of enmity toward opponents.⁴⁷ The gun issue in U.S. culture defies easy left–right identification. Two-thirds of Americans have lived in a household with guns at some point; three in ten adults now own a firearm, and there is great diversity among gun owners.⁴⁸ Robert Spitzer writes, “for the first 300 years of America’s existence, gun laws and gun rights went hand-in-hand. It is only in recent decades, as the gun debate has become more politicized and more ideological that this relationship has been reframed as a zero-sum struggle.”⁴⁹ A dissociative agonism,

46. Founders of March for Our Lives, *Glimmer of Hope: How Tragedy Sparked a Movement* (New York: Razorbill and Dutton, 2018).

47. See, for example, Ruitenbergh, “Educating Political Adversaries”; and Tryggvason, “The Political as Presence.”

48. Ruth Igielnik and Anna Brown, “Key Takeaways on Americans’ Views on Guns and Gun Ownership,” *Pew Research Center*, June 22, 2017; <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/06/22/key-takeaways-on-americans-views-of-guns-and-gun-ownership/>.

49. Robert J. Spitzer, “Gun Law History in the United States and Second Amendment Rights,” *Law and Contemporary Problems* 80, no. 2 (2017): 56.

oriented to understanding leftist/rightist politics in simple binary terms, would miss a lot of the complexity in the debates over gun rights. The #NeverAgainMSD student leaders came to moderate and sometimes diverse stances about gun laws as they engaged in exchanges with supporters, opponents, and the multitudes in between.

AGONIST-INFORMED CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION FOR DEMOCRACIES IN CRISIS

Agonist forms of political and citizenship education represent the increasing interest in how education can develop citizens who are more prepared to contribute to democracies in crisis. How can we develop forms of education that convey to young people that democracy's work is constituted both by moments of consensus-building toward rule of law and by moments of active disruption in which totalitarian, fascist, and other antidemocratic trends must be actively and strategically challenged? This case study contributes to the agonist-informed political and citizenship education scholarship in philosophy of education, social studies education, and related fields. Through a reading of the #NeverAgainMSD events, we provide an interpretation of agonist political work that is associational and that uses political emotions of anger and indignation to build political articulations in communication with a diverse web of political supporters and detractors, allies and opponents. The #NeverAgainMSD example points to U.S. gun laws, which multiple surveys show are much more reflective of the wishes of the powerful gun lobby than of the preferences of the majority of Americans.⁵⁰ This case epitomizes the conditions under which the "will of the people," a central concept in democratic governance, requires further political engagements to assert itself and shift political will around policies on contested issues, such as gun control. Our essay, by developing a transactionalist approach to the articulation project of critical political engagement, argues that agonist-informed citizenship education must continually focus on the endgame of reimagining and transforming political structures.

We conclude in this section by extending the educational applications of this argument for schools and related institutions of education. We continue to draw upon agonist scholars in education who have produced both empirical and conceptual studies of agonist political education, but we do not limit our focus to schools and do not organize our recommendations by disciplines (the social studies, as a prime example) because doing so tends to direct our thinking back to schools as the sole institutions responsible for citizen development. Because much schooling reflects the ideologies and directives of the state, political education for democracies in crisis will be conceptualized through a web of institutions (families, community organizations, digital networks, youth collectives) assembling a

50. Gallup, "In Depth Topics A to Z: Guns," <https://news.gallup.com/poll/1645/guns.aspx>; and John Gramlich and Katheryn Schaeffer, "7 Facts about Guns in the U.S.," *Pew Research Center*, October 22, 2019, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/10/22/facts-about-guns-in-united-states/>.

vibrant diversity of perspectives with which to push against hegemonic forms of political power.

We identify four domains of knowledge, skills, and capacities to address how agonism can inform political and citizenship education: political emotion, lived experience, critical political literacy, and critical media literacy. We broadly discuss how each of these domains might be addressed to prepare students for transactional, transformative articulation.

THE DOMAIN OF POLITICAL EMOTION. It is clear from the #NeverAgainMSD case that political emotions of anger and indignation provided the ethical motivation that translated into political agency for the student leaders. Here, we join numerous other agonist-informed studies in citizenship education in stressing that inclusion of affective forms of education and political expression is necessary.⁵¹ In the social studies, Michalinos Zembylas has developed helpful conceptions of affective citizenship education. “Educators in citizenship education,” he emphasizes, “need to cultivate pedagogical skills with which they can navigate the ethical, political, and emotional challenges of affective citizenship.”⁵² Educational sites that enable the exploration and the performance of political emotion also can include arts and humanities courses in middle and high schools, as well as experiential education that explicitly taps into the affective, motivational components of civic work. The performance of political emotion in educational spaces must include emotion’s connective components — where emotions are expressed, shared, refined, and explored through interactions with others, rather than individually “felt” only. These connective components can help students use emotion to inform and motivate political agency for transformational practices of political work.

THE DOMAIN OF LIVED EXPERIENCE. “Lived citizenship” is a perspective on citizenship that seeks to recast the notion of “citizen” — a formal, idealized archetype — as embodied by the concrete actions of individuals confronting social and political challenges or problems. Citizenship, in this perspective, is not understood as an abstract category that derives from supposedly universal rights, but rather as a state that “emerges from the multiple everyday interactions between people in which they perform, learn and experience citizenship as a self–other relationship.”⁵³ Forms of political and citizenship education that begin with experiences of the actually felt problems of young people within their communities can gain traction in schools, in classrooms, or in community organizations and

51. See, for example, Bronwyn E. Wood, Rowena Taylor, Rose Atkins, and Michael Johnson, “Pedagogies for Active Citizenship: Learning through Affective and Cognitive Domains for Deeper Democratic Engagement,” *Teaching and Teacher Education* 75 (October 2018): 259–267.

52. Michalinos Zembylas, “Political Emotions in the Classroom: How Affective Citizenship Education Illuminates the Debate between Agonists and Deliberators,” *Democracy and Education* 26, no. 1 (2018): 4.

53. Hanne Warming and Kristian Fahnøe, “Social Work and Lived Citizenship,” in *Lived Citizenship on the Edge of Society: Rights, Belonging, Intimate Life, and Spatiality*, ed. Hanne Warming and Kristian Fahnøe (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 5.

digital networks. The performance of lived citizenship entails investigating political issues or problems in one's own community, experienced by those who share relevant social identities, and expressing one's felt conditions (including emotional responses) in the process of confronting those issues and problems. The connection of lived citizenship is felt and understood through the networks of shared experience and collaborations — sometimes place-based, sometimes not — that young people communicate and develop through their political work. The transformational power of lived citizenship lies in its potential to combine potent ethical motivation with cognitively and affectively informed inquiry into the structures, histories, and political realities of the challenge or problem. #NeverAgainMSD is a prime example of lived citizenship in action — where young people who have been trained in political and digital literacies survived a life-changing experience of gun violence and then sought to do the political work of understanding, confronting, and rebuilding public policy in light of their proposed remedies around that issue.

THE DOMAIN OF CRITICAL POLITICAL LITERACIES. Ruitenbergh has a clear conception of political literacy as “the ability to read the political landscape both in its contemporary configuration and its historical genesis Students must learn to read the social order in political terms.”⁵⁴ The challenge of providing a rich critical political literacy curriculum in state-directed and locally governed U.S. schools has a long, well documented history.⁵⁵ Yet interestingly, some of the #NeverAgainMSD student leaders had, in the weeks before the school shooting, worked through curriculum on gun rights and gun control controversies in their AP government class. In the well-funded public schools that offer such classes as well as offering crucial cocurricular forums like the debate society, students can be challenged to work through historical and political research on particular issues and learn habits of inquiry. The performance of critical political literacy is taught most effectively, as it was for the #NeverAgainMSD students, through issue- and inquiry-based approaches rather than standards-based drill-and-kill memorization of political histories and facts about government. Moreover, critical political literacy, importantly, does not focus simply on individuals *knowing* the political and historical facts; rather, it concentrates on developing individuals' ability to communicate with others about the meaning, applications, and significance of those facts. The potential for deliberative dialogical classroom lessons and activities to increase critical political literacy while still engaging political emotion and conflict has been a rich source of development for agonist educational practice.⁵⁶ Deliberative

54. Ruitenbergh, “Educating Political Adversaries,” 278.

55. Henry Giroux, “Critical Theory and Rationality in Citizenship Education,” *Curriculum Inquiry* 10, no. 4 (1980): 329–366.

56. See, for example, Martin Samuelsson, “Education for Deliberative Democracy: A Typology of Classroom Discussions,” *Democracy and Education* 24, no. 1 (2016): Article 5; David I. Backer, “The Critique of Deliberative Discussion: A Response to ‘Education for Deliberative Democracy: A Typology of Classroom Discussions,’” *Democracy and Education* 25, no. 1 (2017): Article 9; John Ambrosio, “Restoring the Political: Exploring the Complexities of Agonistic Deliberation in Classrooms: A Response to ‘Empowering Young People through Conflict and Conciliation: Attending to the Political

practices can help students practice and perform articulation as well as develop connections across individuals and groups. Arts-based practices and activities, through opportunities both inside and outside of schools, can help students build performance abilities in communication arts. Leaders of the #NeverAgainMSD had taken full advantage of their school's rich theater and television performance opportunities, the likes of which are unavailable at too many public schools in less wealthy zip codes than Parkland, Florida. There is much work for schools, communities, and youth political networks to do in creating more and more diverse avenues for the development of critical political literacies among young people.

THE DOMAIN OF CRITICAL DIGITAL LITERACIES. #NeverAgainMSD used social media and digital tools to build a diverse and powerful array of messages that gave shape and visibility to the student activists' political work and helped them to pursue their goals. Their schooling helped facilitate some of this learning through rich cocurricular opportunities (TV and radio stations) and elective courses offered at their school related to these topics. If performance trains students to recognize and understand the complex relations among bodies, then engaging in digital worlds hones students' ability to reflect upon their identities by engaging in various discursive spaces and also to develop their social identities with others. The case study of #NeverAgainMSD demonstrates the potential of citizens to reclaim their rights and to question hitherto accepted conventions, as Engin Isin and Evelyn Ruppert claim: "[T]he citizen as subject of power comes into being through acts of making rights claims... By making rights claims, citizen subjects govern their relations with themselves, with others, and with conventions."⁵⁷ Such an understanding goes against predetermined forms of citizenship, allowing people to digitally engage in agonistic spaces and to bequeath "us a figure of politics that not only is capable of being obedient but can also be simultaneously a submissive (to authority) and a subversive (of authority) figure."⁵⁸

#NeverAgainMSD leaders were able to harness digital formats to make claims and to build broad coalitions of like-minded and diverse partners in their work, including multiracial youth organizations, and more established advocacy groups fighting gun violence. Akin to previous social movements that were promoted through social media (such as the Arab Spring, the Occupy Movement, and Black Lives Matter), #NeverAgain exhibits how leaders of such movements can engage in a public debate and deconstruct the hegemonic discourse, which too often falls into stifled discursive forms that suppress political emotions. The #NeverAgain case — and the ways in which these students helped push against

and Agonism in Democratic Education," *Democracy and Education* 27, no. 1 (2019): Article 8; and Jennifer C. Lo, "Empowering Young People through Conflict and Conciliation: Attending to the Political and Agonism in Democratic Education," *Democracy and Education* 25, no. 1 (2017): Article 2.

57. Engin Isin and Evelyn Ruppert, *Being Digital Citizens* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015), 44.

58. *Ibid.*, 23.

“gun rights” logics firmly entrenched in U.S. politics — exemplifies what Akwugo Emejulu and Callum McGregor describe as “the capacity to deconstruct seductive grand narratives that erase or deprioritise the situated and complex politics of redistribution and recognition in particular struggles.”⁵⁹ What is important in this case study is how young social activists were able to move beyond a neutral, consumerist, and passive approach to digital tools, and to instead strategically deploy social media (such as Facebook and Twitter) to induce a public debate regarding a controversial issue pertaining to guns laws. Indeed, the capacity of #NeverAgain’s leaders to connect their genuine indignation with the public is part of the lesson educators can learn from this case study. But this case also renders an important lesson regarding citizenship education: David Hogg and his peers recognized their engagement as a political act that would evoke strong emotions and arduous debate.

We noted earlier how #NeverAgain members’ activism was driven by their sense that something must be done urgently. Their agency was not demonstrated only by reacting to a situation and protesting against injustice. Rather, they were able, through their political work, to envision a transformative reality, one in which people will not have to suffer the experience of gun violence that they and their deceased classmates and teachers had endured. The articulations that emerged in their political work were transformative in two senses: (1) they used digital media to challenge political inaction on the gun violence issue in the United States, particularly for young adults; and (2) they developed new visions of political reality, working toward policies and political actions that would reflect those visions.

Our call for the development of agonist-informed citizenship education is driven by the evidence that some modern democracies are in existential crisis. Schools, families, youth collaboratives, and organizations might contribute to the efforts of galvanizing vibrant engagements of the public in controversial issues. The analysis here of the #NeverAgain case study can be applied to other continuous public debates that too often brush away arduous arguments; the effect of this sort of dismissive response is to perpetuate the status quo, to maintain different forms of social injustice, and, in so doing, to place the democratic arrangement itself in danger. We argue that advancing the aforementioned domains of knowledge (political emotion, lived experience, political literacy, and digital literacy) through transactionalist approaches is crucial for helping students develop a critical understanding of political life and for supporting their capacities to effectively engage in the public sphere for the purposes of securing more just political structures and conditions.

59. Akwugo Emejulu and Callum C. McGregor, “Towards a Radical Digital Citizenship in Digital Education,” *Critical Studies in Education* 60, no. 1 (2019): 138.