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Teaching of Social Sciences in Higher Education the Influence of Family Political Discussion on Youth Civic Development

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I. INTRODUCTORY BACKGROUND

The social sciences encompass diverse concerns of society and include a wide range of content drawn from the disciplines of history, geography, political science, economics, and sociology. The selection and organization of approaches of social sciences particularly political science should convert into a meaningful discipline. It is important to reinstate the significance of the social sciences by not only highlighting its increasing relevance for a job in the rapidly expanding service sector, but by pointing to its indispensability in laying the foundations for an analytical and creative mind set. Social sciences carry a normative responsibility to create and widen the popular base for human values, namely freedom, trust, mutual respect, respect for diversity, etc. thus social science teaching basically should be aimed at investing in a student a moral and mental energy so as to provide them with the ability to think independently and deal with

the social forces that threaten these values, without losing their individuality.

Social science teaching can achieve this by promoting students ability to take initiative to positive critical reflection on social issues that have a bearing on the creative coexistence between individual good and collective good. A Draft National Curriculum Framework, Review (2005, 158, 162. NCERT) As a student of political science this is priority to reinstate the subject it in teaching and learning resources? By teachers and parents.

The discipline of political science is "ill-defined, amorphous and heterogeneous". With these diagnosis editors Fred I. Greenstein and Nelson W. Polsby of the first Handbook of Political Science (1975: 1). The relations between political science and the other social sciences are in reality relations between sectors of different disciplines, and not between whole disciplines. It is not an "interdisciplinary" endeavour. Since there is no progress without specialisation, the creative interchanges occur between specialised subfields, most of the time at the margins of the formal disciplines. The current advancement of the social sciences can be explained in large part by the hybridisation of segments of sciences. It would be impossible to conceive of a history of political science and of its current trends without reference to the other social sciences.

II. INTERDISCIPLINARY RESEARCH OR RECOMBINATION OF FRAGMENTS OF SCIENCES?

Some scholars praise "interdisciplinarity". Such a recommendation often comes from the most creative scientists because they are the first to see the problems caused by gaps between disciplines. But this recommendation is not realistic. At the present time, it is no longer possible for anyone to have a thorough knowledge of more than one discipline. It is utopian to want to master two or more whole disciplines. Given that it implies the ability to be familiar with and combine entire disciplines, the idea of interdisciplinary research is illusory. Because it is so difficult for a single scholar to be truly multidisciplinary, some methodologists are led to advocate teamwork. This is what is proposed by Pierre de Bie in the monumental work published by

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UNESCO (1970). Teamwork is productive in the big science laboratories, but where the social sciences are concerned it is difficult to achieve in practice. The only examples of successful teamwork concern data production or collection, and very seldom interpretation or synthesis - with the exception of archaeology. The multidisciplinary approach is illusory because it advocates the slicing up of reality. Some researchers precede piecemeal, with philological, anthropological, historical, ethnological, psychological and sociological approaches. This alternation of approaches, that almost never allows disciplines to meet, results at best in a useful parallelism, but not in a synthesis. In fact, research enlisting several disciplines involves a combination of segments of disciplines, of specialties and not whole disciplines. The fruitful point of contact is established between sectors, and not along disciplinary boundaries. Considering the current trends in the social sciences, the word "interdisciplinarity" appears inadequate. It carries a hint of superficiality and dilettantism, and consequently should be avoided and replaced by hybridisation of fragments of sciences.

III. SPECIALISATION AND FRAGMENTATION

In Cartesian thought, analysis means breaking things into parts. All sciences from astronomy to zoology have made progress, from the sixteenth century on, by internal differentiation and cross-stimulation among emergent specialties. Each specialty developed a patrimony of knowledge as its understanding of the world advanced. With the growth of these patrimonies specialisation became less a choice and more a necessity. Increasingly focused specialisation has led to the creation of sub disciplines, many of which have gone on to become autonomous. There are in the literature dozens of lamentations and jeremiads about the fragmentation of political science. "Today there is no longer a single, dominant point of view... the discipline is fragmented in its methodological conception... students are no longer certain what politics is all about" (Easton and Schelling 1991: 49). In the Nordic countries, "political science showed tendencies to disintegrate into subfields, but these were still subfields of political science. However, the disintegration has continued and has lately taken on different forms which renounce the identity of political science" (Anckar 1987: 72).

In reality, fragmentation results from specialisation. The division of the discipline into subfields tends to be institutionalised, as can be seen in the organisation of large departments of political science in many American and European universities.

A good indication of the fragmentation of the discipline is the increasing number of specialised journals. In the last twelve years one hundred specialised journals in English relevant to political science have been launched. Most of these journals

cross the borders of two or three disciplines, and many of them are located in Europe. Some others new hybrid journals have appeared in French and in German. European unification has had an impact on the development of cross-national journals focusing on special fields. Increasing specialisation may have consequences for the role of national professional associations and of the general journals. "As political scientists have become more specialised, some members (of APSA) have concluded that their interests are better served by other organisations. A comparative government area specialist, for instance, may find that he/she has more in common with economists, sociologists and anthropologists working in the same area than with other political scientists. This may also decrease the value of the American Political Science Review... Specialisation has devalued the reasons for joining APSA" (Lynn 1983: 114-115). The same phenomenon can be observed in Europe. The national professional associations are losing ground in favour of cross-national organisations that represent topical specialisations across disciplines.

IV. SPECIALISATION INTO HYBRIDISATION

It is necessary to stress both parts of the process: fragmentation into special fields and specialisation by hybridisation. It is the interaction of these two processes, and not each one in isolation, that has led to the remarkable advance of the natural as well as the social sciences. The continuous restructuring of political science, like that of the other social sciences, has been the result of these two contending processes. However, both fragmentation - and its correlate - hybridisation have developed much more recently in political science than elsewhere. In the far past, hybrid fields were the result of gaps between full disciplines. Today the gaps appear between specialised subfields among neighbouring sub disciplines. As a result, in the last few decades the fragmentation of disciplines into specialised subfields has led to the development of hybrid specialties.

The hybrid specialties do not necessarily stand midway between two Sovereign disciplines. They may be enclaves of a section of political science into a sector of another discipline. They combine two delimited domains, not entire disciplines. These domains do not need to be adjacent.

Hybridisation appears in the list of research committees sponsored by the International Political Science Association. Among the forty recognised groups in 1995 a majority are related to specialties of others disciplines, and are therefore hybrid: Political Sociology, Political Philosophy, Political Geography, Psycho politics, Religion and Politics, Political and Social Elites, Armed Forces and Politics, Political Alienation, Politics and Ethnicity, Political Education,

International Political Economy, International Economic Order, Comparative Judicial Studies, Biology and Politics, Business and Politics, Science and Politics, Socio-political Pluralism, Health Policy, Sex Roles and Politics, Global Environmental Change, Conceptual and Terminological Analysis, etc. Each of these groups is in contact with specialists belonging formally to other disciplines.

Sociometric studies show that many specialists are more in touch with colleagues who belong officially to other disciplines than with colleagues in their own discipline. The "invisible college" described by Robert Merton, Diana Crane and other sociologists of science is an eminently interdisciplinary institution because it ensures communication not only from one university to another and across all national borders, but also and above all between specialists attached administratively to different disciplines. The networks of cross-disciplinary influence are such that they are obliterating the old classification of the social sciences.¹ (note)

Political science is in one sense an ancient discipline and in another sense one of the most recently developed social sciences. The origin of the study of politics reach back to the beginnings of human society for men has always made observations about the nature of their government the personalities of their leaders and the consequences of their government's actions. Indeed the Greeks argued that personal virtue required knowledge of and participation in the life of the polis.

It is also true however that political science as it is taught today is a very new discipline one that has been developed primarily in the United States the past fifty years. During this period scholars have attempted to move from observations about politics to scientific observations about politics. This movement has been marked by a widespread effort to collect data about politics and governments utilising relatively new techniques developed by all the social sciences. Its goal has been to describe and explain political phenomena with greater accuracy. In short political sciences today is constantly seeking to make itself rigorous in its standards of scholarship more demanding in its standards of proof and less ethnocentric in its perspective of world politics. (Modified from apsa 1985)

Grounded firmly in the liberal arts tradition the political science program informs students about the place of politics in an ever-changing world. Student's exposure to the purposes organisation and operation of domestic and international political systems will translate into better informed citizens and consumers of political information.

"Evidence suggesting that might influence civic roots in adolescence may be crucial to the long term development of citizenship".² (note) (As early as the 1920s, Mannheim, 1952. In the 1960s, Erikson, 1968. Beane et al. 1981; Hanks and Eckland 1978 Ladewing and Thomas 1987; Otto 1976; Verba et al. 1995; for a

review, see Youniss, McLellan, and Yates 1997). Has stimulated research into factors that might influence civic development during this time. One interesting finding to emerge from that exploration is the apparent importance of discussion to the development of civic competence. Adolescence and students in higher education who discuss politics and current events with parents, peers, or teachers tend to score higher than other youth³ (note) on measures of civic behaviours, attitudes, and skills. They develop higher levels of political knowledge, show greater intention to vote in the future, and do better on a range of civic outcomes from petitioning and boycotting to raising money for charities and participating in community meetings. (Torney-Purta 1992; 1995; Haste and Torney-Purta 1992). And a body of literature which employs scientific standards to identify the best methods for presenting various kinds of knowledge to students / wards (Leonard J. Fein 1969: Teaching Political Science, 303). (PS, Vol. 2, No. 3 (Summer, 1969), pp. 303-307). The effects of such discussions may be particularly beneficial for youth when the discussion involve their parents.

V. IMPORTANT PARENT QUALITIES

Results from the initial regressions support earlier findings that youth-parent political discussion has a strong and broad influence on a range of youth civic outcomes. Family political discussion weakly to strongly predicts all four of the outcome variables and is the strongest parental predictor for all but one of them. Youth who discuss politics more, versus less, frequently with their parents report higher levels of national news monitoring, political knowledge, public communication skill, and community service. The findings also indicate that youth-parent political discussion may be particularly important for youth news monitoring. For this outcome, the effect size of this youth-parent discussion variable is three times larger than any other parent or youth predictor. (PS Political Science & Politics; Vol. XL, July 2007).

The findings that family political discussion is broadly linked to youth civic development conforms to cognitive developmental theory, which argues that young persons construct meaning and knowledge about the political world through social interaction in this Instance with their parents. (Andolina, Molly W., Krista Jenkins, Cliffzudin and Scott Keeter, 2003).

(Verba, Schlozman and Brady (1995), for instance demonstrated that individuals who grow up in homes where they discussed current events with their parents and saw their parents participating in civic activities become on average more involved in political activities in adulthood than do other persons. (Lake Snell Perry and Associates (2002) found in a study of young persons (age 15-25 years) that having parents who discussed politics with them during adolescence

was the strongest parent-related predictor of several important civic measures including volunteering (33% versus 22% among other young persons) and registering to vote (75% versus 57% among other young persons age 18-24). In addition, Andolina et al, (2003) reported that young persons (age 18-25 years) who grew up in families where they regularly heard political discussion voted, volunteered and were otherwise civically involved at higher rates than youth who did not experience this type of home environment.

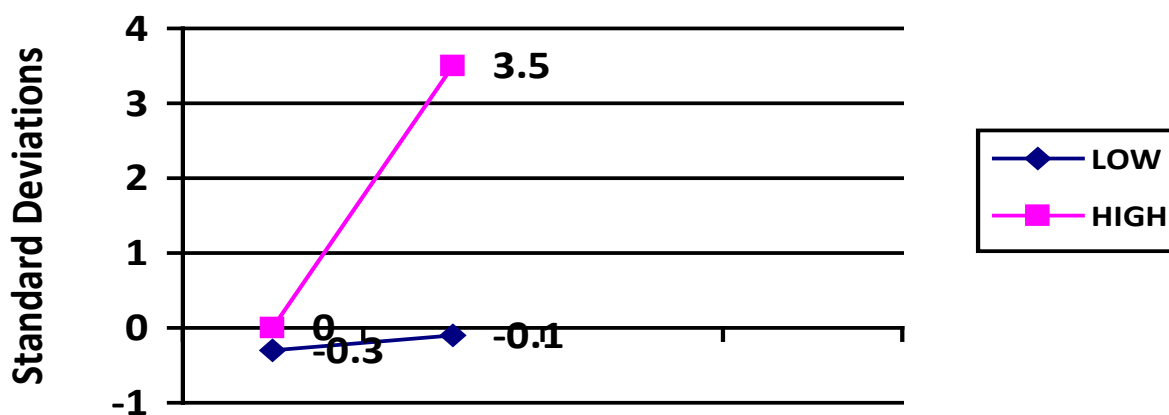
These findings raise an interesting question: Which qualities if any make some parents more effective than others at discussing current events in ways that lead to better civic outcomes for their adolescent children? Do the personal characteristics parents bring to these discussions matter? Or is the act of discussion by itself the key element underlying the positive connection between family political discussion and civic outcomes in youth?

Research with high school students indicates that having some prior knowledge about the issue of interest is necessary to have high-quality discussions about current events in social studies classes (Hess

2004). In extending this logic to the family they asked whether youth-parent discussion of current events may be more effective at enhancing youth civic development then parents have higher versus lower levels of knowledge about politics and government. However researchers also report that the act of discussion creates new knowledge which can promote the decision-making that leads to civic action (Barber 2003). Thus it may be that the act of discussion is the more important link in the chain of events connecting family political discussion to youth civic development.

The parent study explores these issues by taking advantage of the rich citizenship data gathered from adolescents and their parents by the U.S. Department of Education's National Household Education Survey (NHES) in 1996. 4 (note) In addition to background school community and civic-skill measures of adolescents the NHES data set includes similar item for parents as well as measures of parent's civic behaviour such as voting, doing community service and participating in community organisations (Collins et al. 1997).

Frequency of youth - parent political discussion



Low parent political knowledge
High parent political knowledge

There is a widespread belief that social science merely transmits information and is too centered on the text, which requires being memorised for examinations. The content of the syllabus/books is considered to be unconnected to daily realities even though it is supposed to be constituted very much by the world in which we live. In addition to this, social science is viewed as providing unnecessary details about the past. It also felt that the examination paper rewards the memorisation of these superfluous 'facts' with the

students conceptual understanding being largely ignored but on the ground of above study of political science we can make a spectrum about the factual realities of discipline in social sciences.

VI. CONCLUSION

Different disciplines may proceed from different foci to examine the same phenomenon. This implies a division of territories between disciplines. Innovation in the various sectors of political science depends largely

of exchanges with other fields belonging to other disciplines. At the highest levels of the pyramid of political science, most researchers belong to a hybrid sub discipline: political sociology, political economy, political psychology, political philosophy, political geography, public administration, area studies and so on. Alternatively, they may belong to a hybrid field or subfield: mass behaviour (related to social psychology), elite recruitment (related to sociology and history), urban politics (related to social geography), welfare states (related to social economy and social history), values (related to philosophy, ethics, and social psychology), governmental capabilities (related to law and economics), poverty in tropical countries (related to agronomy, climatology and economic geography), development (related to all social sciences and to several natural sciences).

There is probably as much communication with outsiders as between internal subfields. The political psychologist, for instance, who studies protest movements and alienation interacts only a little with the colleague who uses game theory to study the same topic. He may find intellectual common ground with the social historian who studies the phenomenon in previous times, or with the sociologist who studies the impact of unemployment or immigration on violence and deligitimation in some European countries. All major issues are crossing the formal borders of disciplines: breakdown of Democracy, anarchy, war and peace, generational change, the nexus freedomequality, individualism in advanced societies, fundamentalism in traditional societies, ruling class, and public opinion.

The number of "general" political scientists is rapidly decreasing. Everyone tends to specialise in one or several domains. When two political scientists meet for the first time, the spontaneous question they ask each other is: "What is your field?" This is true also for other disciplines. At congresses, scholars meet according to specialities. Congresses that bring together crowds of people who have little in common consume a lot of energy which could be better invested in the organisation of meetings by fields bringing together specialists from various disciplines.

Suppose it were possible to select from all political scientists in the various countries the four or five thousands scholars who are doing the most creative research, those who advance knowledge, the most renowned of them. Suppose further that we accept, from this upper-stratum of eminence, the scholars who specialise in the study of constitutional matters and the governmental process of their own country, some of whom are famous in their own field. After making this double delimitation, we would discover that among this body of scholars, the majority are not "pure" political scientists. They are specialists of a research domain which is not exclusively political.

Those who shut themselves within the traditional frontiers of political science are narrowing

their perspective and reducing their chances to innovate - except in constitutional matters and the organisation of the state apparatus.

Political science lives in symbiosis with the other social sciences, and will continue to be a creative science only if remains extrovert. In fact, this science has no choice, because it is genetically programmed to generate grandchildren who will talk different tongues and who will sit, as Almond says, "at distant tables". These tables are distant because they are placed at the interstices of disciplines in the enormous hinterland of political science.

In earlier time in the United States, political science "had no distinctive methodology. It had no clearly-defined subject matter that could not be encompassed within one or more of its sister disciplines. Its various parts could have survived simply as political history, political sociology, political geography, political philosophy, and political psychology - subfields in the other disciplines. Other parts could have remained constitutional law, public law and international law. Indeed, they have done so. Each of the other social science disciplines claims a piece of political science" (Andrews 1988: 2).

The interdisciplinarity can be adopted to study the disciplines individually, since from five decades social scientists have been debating how and to what extent parents influence the civic development of their children. The results presented here suggest that parents who take the time to talk with their wards about the public affairs of the day can have a positive influence on the civic development of those youth even the discipline.

Notes

1. As early as the 1920s, Mannheim (1952) suggested that around the age of 17 years individuals enter a crucial period of experimentation that leads to the creation of a new political generation. In the 1960s, Erikson (1968) describe adolescence as the time when individuals develop an identity that helps guide their interactions with society later in life. Such ideas about a critical period for the development of civic roots are supported by research showing, for example, that involvement in organised youth activities during adolescence leads to participations in religious, community and political organisation in adulthood (Beane et al. 1981; Hanks and Eckland 1978; Ladewing and Thomas 1987; Otto 1976; Verba et al. 1995; for a review, see Youniss, McLellan and Yates 1997).
2. The term "youth" in this study is used interchangeably with "adolescence", which occurs during approximately the second decade of life (age 11-20 years).
3. NHES is a random digit-dial computer assisted telephone survey. NHES (National Household Education Surveys) of 1991, 1993, 1995, 1996 and 1999.

4. The content of Swedish political science research before 1945 dominated by three main currents: each of these currents was oriented toward another academic discipline: constitutional law, history, philosophy (O. Ruin 1982: 299).
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7. Collins et al. (1997)
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