

ADULT CIVIC EDUCATION THROUGH THE NATIONAL ISSUES FORUMS: DEVELOPING DEMOCRATIC HABITS AND DISPOSITIONS THROUGH PUBLIC DELIBERATION

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Adult educators stress the importance of civic education, but few studies have theorized and measured the impact of such educational programs. This study presents a social cognitive model of political participation that posits connections among deliberative education, civic dispositions, and political conversations. The validity of this model was tested using two field studies of National Issues Forums participants, and the results provided partial support for the model. The first investigation indicated that deliberative civic education had a negative relationship with participants' group efficacy and conversation dominance and positive associations with the ideological and demographic diversity of participants' conversation networks. A second study demonstrated that civic dispositions and behaviors were positively associated with forum experiences that involved higher levels of reading, listening, observing, and enactment. These findings suggest the potential value of deliberative forums as a means of civic education, but they also demonstrate that forums vary considerably in their educational impact.

Keywords: *civic education; democracy; National Issues Forums; self-efficacy; political participation; public deliberation*

Concerns about low levels of public engagement (e.g., Putnam, 2000) have led many educators to reflect on the role of civic education in the public school curriculum (Carnegie Foundation and Center for Information and Research on Civic

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Learning and Engagement, 2003). For instance, Parker (2003) has argued that elementary and secondary schools should use democratic deliberation in the classroom to promote enlightened civic engagement. For higher education, Barber (2002) suggests that the post-September 11 curriculum place even greater emphasis on civic education, including a more global conception of citizenship. Combined with the generally salutary effects of formal education on political engagement (Nie, Junn, & Stehlik-Barry, 1996), these efforts could do much to increase the quantity and quality of public involvement.

Civic education is at least as important for adult learners. Wilson and Hayes (2002) note that "the call for a political practice of adult education echoes throughout nearly all of the past century, rising to an almost screech-like pitch over the past couple of decades" (p. 6). Boggs (1991) has argued that "adult education agencies are uniquely positioned to promote the civic-minded attitudes and skills necessary for participation and involvement in a democratic society" (pp. 46-47). Adult lives are already immersed in rich community contexts, which are replete with (often-missed) opportunities for public action.

The most popular and widely adopted means of adult civic education may be the public forum or study circle. Civic associations such as the Study Circles Resource Center and the National Issues Forums have promoted activities that bring together diverse participants to deliberate on current public issues (Ryfe, 2002). Such face-to-face deliberation entails equal opportunities for active participation, sustained attention, critical listening, and both reasoned and passionate discussion (Burkhalter, Gastil, & Kelshaw, 2002).

Despite the energy that private foundations and public agencies have devoted to promoting public deliberation, little empirical research has examined the extent to which participating in face-to-face deliberation influences participants' subsequent political beliefs and behaviors (Burkhalter et al., 2002). Most studies of deliberative programs have been qualitative reports suggesting more than testing hypotheses about program impact (Gastil & Dillard, 1999).

This study aims to advance the literature on civic education by placing it in the context of relevant writings on democratic theory, political participation, and social psychology. A broader conception of civic education stresses the development of not just knowledge but also "skills, and the disposition to use them" (Boggs, 1991, p. 53). Past research has demonstrated the capacity for deliberation to produce significant knowledge gains (e.g., Fishkin & Luskin, 1999); thus, it is appropriate to look at more subtle changes in participants' civic cognitions and habits. In this article, I introduce a social cognitive theory of civic education to explain how deliberation can produce such changes, and I examine the theory using two field studies of deliberative forums.

PUBLIC DELIBERATION AS AN EDUCATIONAL PROCESS

Deliberation has the potential to directly influence two aspects of citizens' lives—their political conversation networks and their conversation behavior. To participate fully in public life, democratic citizens need to understand important policy issues (Barber, 1984; Mathews, 1994). One way of developing articulate policy views is through engaging in political conversations with fellow citizens. Through these day-to-day interactions, citizens exchange information and enlarge their perspectives, which leads to more informed, empathic, and reflective judgments.

Fully engaged democratic citizens are distinguished not only by the density, size, and diversity of their political communication networks but also by the democratic quality of their political conversations (Gastil, 1993). Democratic conversation has an egalitarian and respectful quality, which affords each participant adequate speaking opportunities. Arguments put forward during truly deliberative democratic conversations are clear and reasoned, and artful speech is complemented by careful listening (Burkhalter et al., 2002; Pearce & Littlejohn, 1997).

Participation in deliberative forums can indirectly shape political conversation networks and habits by strengthening underlying civic beliefs. Drawing from the theory of reasoned action (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980), a person's future behavior is shaped by present outcome expectancies and outcome valuations. Outcome expectancies are the anticipated results of engaging in a behavior, and outcome valuation is the desirability of those results. Willingness to comply with perceived social norms also shapes behavioral intentions. When a person desires to follow social guidelines, the perceptions of those social rules can determine what actions a person chooses. In the political context, this can be recast as varying degrees of community identity (Barber, 1984) and perceptions of what constitutes a person's civic duty (Finkel, Muller, & Opp, 1989).

Self-efficacy (Bandura, 1986a) is added to the social cognitive model as a critical belief underlying civic engagement because the self-efficacy concept is useful when one attempts to explain the presence or absence of "behaviors over which people have incomplete volitional control" (Ajzen, 1991, p. 181). Because political engagement often requires joint actions among citizens in groups, perceived group efficacy could also promote civic engagement (Klandermans, 1984).

In sum, all of these beliefs are important because they can lead to democratic engagement. Deliberative civic education, therefore, can promote future civic participation *indirectly* by strengthening these underlying beliefs.

Civic educational programs can develop civic beliefs and habits through a variety of learning processes. Bandura's (1986b) model of education distinguishes four different paths:

People's conceptions about themselves and the nature of things are developed and verified through . . . direct experience of the effects produced by their actions, vicarious experience of the effects produced by somebody else's actions, judgments voiced by others, and derivation of further knowledge from what they already know by using rules of inference. (p. 27)

In the civic educational context, participants can strengthen their political beliefs and develop democratic conversation habits by (a) reading and hearing verbal "instructions" regarding the nature of politics and democratic conversation; (b) observing clear models of democratic discussion; (c) engaging directly in democratic political deliberation; and (d) making novel inferences about politics and conversation behavior based on what they see and hear.

As summarized in Figure 1, the social cognitive model posits that four forms of education take place during deliberation—verbal instruction, modeling, enactment, and inference. When these educational processes occur, face-to-face public deliberation promotes both democratic conversation and the underlying civic dispositions.

STUDY 1

Research Setting

To test the average effect of deliberative civic education, it is necessary to justify the assumption that participants did, in fact, deliberate when taking part in the civic education program under study. For this reason, I chose to study the National Issues Forums (NIF). NIF is one of the most prominent public discussion programs. A 1993 self-study found that forums were convened by approximately 1,440 adult literacy programs, 2,600 high schools, and 1,360 civic organizations (NIF, 1993), and the program currently holds training institutes in 27 different states (NIF, 2003). Many observers have noted the degree to which NIF stimulates vigorous participant deliberation (Gastil & Dillard, 1999; Hustedde, 1996; Hyman & Clinehens, 1997; Pearce & Littlejohn, 1997).

Prior to a typical NIF discussion, organizers encourage participants to read an "issue book" published by the NIF Institute. Each book introduces readers to NIF and the concept of political deliberation, but the bulk of each book provides factual information and outlines three or four broad policy choices for addressing an issue. During the forums, moderators encourage participants to consider the nature of the issue being discussed, the pros and cons of each policy choice, and the values underlying the choices. Forum moderators are trained to maintain neutral positions but to steer participants away from digressions, logical pitfalls, indecisiveness, and disruptive arguments (NIF, 1992).

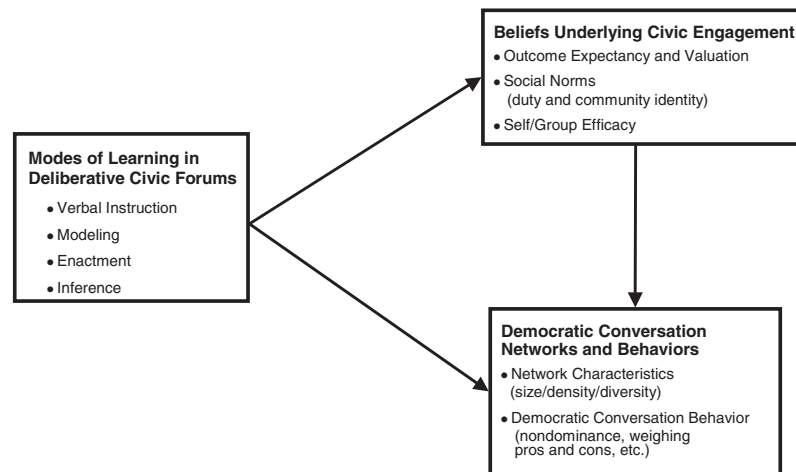


Figure 1. A Social Cognitive Model of Deliberative Civic Education

Hypotheses

Reframing NIF in relation to the social cognitive theory, a typical NIF experience includes opportunities for verbal, observational, enactive, and inferential learning of both civic beliefs and behaviors. Fruitful deliberative experiences could bolster participants' political outcome valuations because of the positive feelings participants often derive from sincere dialogue (Pearce & Littlejohn, 1997). As a result of a successful discussion experience, participants might develop more positive outcome expectancies, self-efficacy, and group efficacy regarding civic engagement. Seeing fellow citizens joining each other in public dialogue, even at the behest of an instructor, could lead to a reassessment of perceived social norms by foregrounding one's identity as part of the larger community and one's consequent civic obligations (McAfee, McKenzie, & Mathews, 1990).

In addition, public deliberation is predicted to alter participants' political conversation habits. NIF draws participants into a conversation on current public issues, and this may stimulate participants to cultivate their own political conversation networks. Effective NIF forums also model democratic conversation behavior and provide participants with opportunities to practice those behaviors; thus, the deliberative experience may alter the character of participants' subsequent conversations.

Method

Participants. A diverse sample of 149 students in adult basic literacy courses in counties scattered across the United States participated in this study. The median

participant age range was 31-35 years, and two thirds of the sample were women. Fifty-five percent were White, non-Hispanic, 18% African American, 7% Hispanic, and 5% Asian American. Even when missing values (due to incomplete questionnaires) reduced the sample size to 120, the sample provided sufficient statistical power to detect moderate effect sizes ($r \geq .25$).

Research design. This study employed a quasi-experimental design: Students enrolled themselves in different sections of an adult literacy course without foreknowledge of which teacher or instructional method they would receive. The students placing themselves in the treatment group enrolled in a section that would have one or more class sessions devoted to NIF-style deliberation on a current public policy issue ($n = 76$), whereas the control group engaged in regular class activities with no political deliberation ($n = 73$).

Survey measures. After completing their adult literacy courses, participants (with the assistance of professional English tutors) completed a written survey for a \$10 stipend. Tables 1 and 2 provide full item wording, descriptive statistics, and reliabilities for all variables. Though some variables operationalized in the survey had many items and conventional reliabilities, others had fewer items and lower alphas. Cohen and Cohen (1983) explain that “reliabilities of .60 are by no means uncommon” and “may even be considered reasonably good” (p. 70) in some contexts, such as opinion surveys. Nevertheless, nonsignificant findings for the variables with lower alphas in Table 2 must be interpreted with caution. After all, their low reliability is one of the possible explanations of any nonfindings.

Through pretesting with a convenience sample of undergraduate students, questionnaire items were created to measure each civic belief listed in Table 1 and Figure 1. Study participants used 5-point scales to indicate their level of agreement with items measuring valuation of political outcomes, political outcome expectancy, political self-efficacy, political group efficacy, community identity, and civic duty.

To measure participants’ political conversation habits, questions were developed by drawing on previous conceptual and operational work in democratic theory and interpersonal communication (for a review, see Gastil, 1994). These items were pretested in the same manner as the cognitive variables. Direct questions assessed the frequency with which participants engaged in political conversations, the number of conversants with whom they discussed politics, and the diversity of their political conversation network in terms of gender, ethnicity and socioeconomic status, and ideology.

A more intensive measure was used to elicit recollections of behavior during political conversations. Participants were asked to “recall a recent conversation about a political issue that you have had with a friend or family member.” To enhance recall of the details of the conversation, participants were then instructed to “try to remember the topic of the conversation, what you said, what the other

(text continues on page 320)

TABLE 1
Conceptual and Operational Definitions of Variables in Studies 1 and 2

<i>Category</i>	<i>Variable</i>	<i>Definition</i>	<i>Survey Item</i>
Civic beliefs	Valuation of political outcomes	Importance one places on any impact one might have on politics and government	It is very important to me that I help shape the political process, through my own actions and the actions of groups that I belong to.
	Political outcome expectancy	Expected impact of one's political actions on government or the political process	I greatly value my direct and indirect influence on the political world. Group discussions about politics can affect both the group and society as a whole. Political action by people like me and the groups that I belong to has no impact whatsoever on society. (REVERSED) The development of people's political opinions can affect the larger society.
Duty		One's sense of obligation to participate in politics and civic life	As citizens, we have a duty to ensure good government. Citizens have a responsibility to be involved in politics. Citizens should NOT feel responsible for being politically aware and involved. (REVERSED)
	Community identity	One's sense of shared identity with fellow citizens and community members	I share a common identity with other members of my community and my country. I feel a bond between myself and other citizens in my community and nation.
Self-efficacy		Perception that one can perform political actions competently	I am capable of participating effectively in group discussions about important political issues.
			As an individual citizen, I am able to engage in political action. I can't think straight about politics, regardless of how much I read or talk about the issues. (REVERSED)
Group efficacy		Perception that a civic or political group one might belong to can perform political actions competently	With a little effort, groups of citizens can think intelligently about politics. Typical groups of people just aren't capable of having intelligent, productive group discussions about important political issues. (REVERSED)
			Groups of average citizens are capable of effectively organizing and taking action.

Political conversation network	Network size	Number of people with which one discusses politics regularly	How many family members, friends, neighbors, and coworkers do you regularly discuss politics with?
	Conversation frequency	Frequency of political conversations	On average, how often do you talk about political topics with your family, friends, neighbors, and coworkers? (7 = less than once every four months, 6 = once every four months, 5 = once every two months, 4 = once a month, 3 = once a week, 2 = once a day, 1 = more than once a day)
Knowledge	Demographic network diversity	Diversity of political conversation network in terms of conversant demographics	I usually discuss politics with people of the same ethnic, social, and economic background as myself. (REVERSED)
	Ideological network diversity	Diversity of political conversation network in terms of conversant ideology	I typically discuss politics with people who have essentially the same political viewpoint as myself. (REVERSED)
	Gender network diversity	Diversity of political conversation network in terms of conversant sex	I typically discuss politics with people of the same gender as myself. (REVERSED)
	Political expertise	Familiarity with current public affairs and issues	Which of the following names, terms or phrases do you recognize from things you have heard or read in the news or in political conversations? (see text for list of items)
Democratic political conversation	Conversation dominance	During a recent political conversation, one recalls being domineering	I dominated the other person. I was a bit overbearing.
	Clarity of statements	During a recent political conversation, one recalls speaking clearly	I beat around the bush a little when expressing my opinions. (REVERSED) I was very explicit about my opinions. I expressed my positions clearly and directly.
Logic/reasonableness		During a recent political conversation, one recalls being logical and reasonable	I presented sensible arguments in support of my views. I backed up my arguments with evidence. I was unreasonable and illogical when stating my point of view. (REVERSED)

(continued)

TABLE 1 (continued)

Category	Variable	Definition	Survey Item
	Recognizing opposing values	During a recent political conversation, one recalls recognizing the values underlying the other's views	I recognized the values underlying the other person's point of view.
	Seeing opposing reasons	During a recent political conversation, one recalls understanding the reasons underlying the other's views	I understood the reasons behind the other person's views.
	Weighing pros and cons	During a recent political conversation, one recalls weighing the pros and cons of the issue under discussion	I had difficulty weighing the pros and cons of different choices. (REVERSED)
Spoken instructions	Outcome valuation	During the forum, one was told that one should value political outcomes	We should value the role we can play in the political process. It is important that citizens discuss political issues with one another. It is very important that citizens play a role in shaping the future of their communities and the country as a whole. We really can make a difference in the world through political action. Political discussions and actions can have powerful effects. As citizens, we are responsible for taking action to improve our community and nation.
	Outcome expectancy	During the forum, one was told that citizen actions can have substantial impact	
	Duty	During the forum, one was told that citizens should take responsibility for their community and nation	
	Community identity	During the forum, one was told that citizens share a common identity	All people within a community or a nation are politically related and share a common identity.
	Self-efficacy	During the forum, one was told that one can be a competent political actor	Individuals like ourselves can be competent participants in political deliberation and action.
	Group efficacy	During the forum, one was told that groups of citizens are capable of acting together	When working together, groups of citizens are capable of engaging in joint political discussion and action.
	Dominance	During the forum, one was instructed not to dominate political conversations	Individuals should NOT try to dominate political discussions.
	Clarity	During the forum, one was instructed to state one's views clearly in political conversations	When discussing politics with others, we should be explicit about our views.
	Logic	During the forum, one was instructed to use evidence and logic in political conversations	We should back up our opinions with evidence and sound logic.
	Opposing reasons	During the forum, one was instructed to listen to others' views during political conversations	When forming opinions, we should listen to others and carefully consider their views.

Read the issue book	Read book	Participant read the National Issues Forums (NIF) issue book	Did you get a chance to read the NIF issue book pertaining to the forum topics you discussed?
Participant enactment	Dominance	The participant appeared to be domineering	I dominated the discussion. When I spoke during the forums, I was a bit overbearing.
	Clarity	The participant spoke clearly	I expressed my positions clearly and directly. I was very explicit about my opinions. I was somewhat vague about my views. (REVERSED) I beat around the bush a little when expressing my opinions. (REVERSED)
	Logic	The participant was logical and reasonable	When I spoke during the forums, I backed up my arguments with evidence. I presented sensible arguments in support of my views. I was unreasonable and illogical when stating my point of view. (REVERSED)
	Values	The participant considered the values underlying views different from his/her own	I recognized the values underlying other points of view.
	Reasons	The participant understood the reasons behind views different from his or her own	I understood the reasons behind other views.
	Pros and cons	The participant weighed the pros and cons of the issue	I had difficulty weighing the pros and cons of different choices. (REVERSED)

(continued)

TABLE 1 (continued)

<i>Category</i>	<i>Variable</i>	<i>Definition</i>	<i>Survey Item</i>
Group modeling	Dominance	The other group members appeared to be domineering	(Same items as above for enactment, reworded to refer to "group members"; instead of oneself.)
	Clarity	The other group members spoke clearly	(as above)
	Logic	The other group members were logical and reasonable	(as above)
	Values	The other group members considered the values underlying views different from their own	(as above)
	Reasons	The other group members understood the reasons behind views different from their own	(as above)
Moderator modeling	Pros and cons	The other group members weighed the pros and cons of the issue	(as above)
	Dominance	The moderator appeared to be domineering	(Same items as above for enactment, reworded to refer to "the moderator" instead of oneself.)
	Clarity	The moderator spoke clearly	(as above)

TABLE 2
Scale Distribution and Reliability for All Variables in Studies 1 and 2

<i>Category</i>	<i>Variable</i>	<i>No. of Items</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Standard Deviation</i>	<i>α</i>
Civic beliefs	Valuation of political outcomes	2	2.79	0.74	.65
	Political outcome expectancy	3	2.91	0.65	.61
	Duty	3	3.12	0.68	.68
	Community identity	2	2.70	0.77	.57
	Self-efficacy	3	2.94	0.66	.68
	Group efficacy	3	2.93	0.64	.52
Political conversation network	Network size	1	3.99	2.96	—
	Conversation frequency	1	3.42	2.13	—
	Demographic network diversity	1	1.86	1.38	—
	Ideological network diversity	1	2.48	1.11	—
	Gender network diversity	1	1.74	1.47	—
Knowledge	Political expertise	8	2.13	1.32	.88
	Democratic political conversation	2	1.20	0.86	.57
	Conversation dominance	4	2.75	0.61	.69
	Clarity of statements	3	2.76	0.66	.58
	Recognition of opposing values	1	2.87	0.59	—
	Seeing opposing reasons	1	2.84	0.65	—
Spoken instructions	Weighing pros and cons	1	2.50	0.94	—
	Outcome valuation	3	2.11	0.97	.74
	Outcome expectancy	2	1.87	1.09	.76
	Duty	1	2.25	1.26	—
	Community identity	1	1.27	1.17	—
	Self-efficacy	1	1.80	1.26	—
	Group efficacy	1	1.86	1.28	—
	Dominance	1	3.10	1.19	—
	Clarity	1	1.44	1.27	—
	Logic	1	1.66	1.25	—
	Opposing reasons	1	2.27	1.26	—
	Read the issue book	1	0.77	0.41	—
	Enacted behavior	Read book	2	1.03	0.79
Dominance		4	2.64	0.65	.68
Clarity		3	2.64	0.80	.30
Logic		1	2.86	0.67	—
Values		1	2.85	0.74	—
Reasons		1	2.22	1.12	—
Group modeling	Weighing pros and cons	1	2.22	1.12	—
	Dominance	2	2.08	0.89	.62
	Clarity	4	2.58	0.60	.58
	Logic	3	2.79	0.75	.41
	Values	1	2.57	0.88	—
	Reasons	1	2.55	0.87	—
Moderator modeling	Weighing pros and cons	1	2.13	1.02	—
	Dominance	2	0.86	0.89	.61
	Clarity	4	3.00	0.64	.61

NOTE: All figures presented above are calculated from the sample described in Study 2.

person said, and what you thought and felt. Take a few seconds now to reflect on the conversation.” Participants were then asked to agree or disagree with a series of statements about their own behavior during that conversation to measure the following behaviors: conversation dominance, clarity, logic/reasonableness, recognizing opposing values, seeing opposing reasons, and weighing pros and cons (see Table 1).

Finally, the survey instrument measured political expertise, a variable that is strongly associated with a wide range of political beliefs and behaviors (Krosnick, 1990). A knowledge-based measure of expertise was created by asking participants, “Which of the following names, terms or phrases do you recognize from things you have heard or read in the news or in political conversations?” Response options were “I recognize the term, but I do not know its political context,” “I don’t think I recognize the term,” and “I definitely recognize the name, term, or phrase and know its political context,” scored as 0, 1, and 2, respectively. Based on pretesting, the items included William Rehnquist, Operation Rescue, the spotted owl, Carol Mosley Braun, Branch Davidians, United We Stand America, Jesse Helms, and single payer health care system.

Results

To contrast the two student groups, a dichotomous variable was created: Participants who did not take part in NIF deliberation received a score of 0, and participants who took part in an NIF discussion received a score of 1. The dichotomous NIF variable was then correlated with the cognitive and behavioral measures to determine the size and significance of their associations with NIF participation.

Participation in NIF was significantly correlated with only one political belief, and the correlation was negative: Adult literacy students who participated in NIF reported lower levels of group efficacy than did nonparticipants ($r = -.18, p = .048$).

NIF participation did, however, have some of the predicted effects on conversation behavior. NIF correlated significantly with ideological network diversity ($r = .22, p = .012$) and demographic diversity ($r = .23, p = .008$), though it was not related to the size, density, or gender diversity of participants’ political conversation networks. NIF negatively correlated with political conversation dominance ($r = -.17, p = .049$): Those who participated in an NIF forum were less likely to report that they dominated fellow political conversants. NIF was not significantly correlated with the other conversation measures.

Discussion

This first study tested the hypotheses that NIF-style deliberation would be associated with stronger civic dispositions and conversation behaviors. Results showed only one cognitive association: Deliberation made some participants more skeptical about the effectiveness of group-based political decision making and action.

When this result was discussed with adult literacy educators using NIF, they offered this post hoc explanation: For many participants, NIF is their first experience of political group discussion, and political deliberation appears extremely difficult until one understands it better. Participants may learn some of the lessons of NIF, but they also develop a more realistic (or even pessimistic) view of the prospects of reaching agreement and taking coordinated action in political groups.

More consistent with predictions, NIF participants reported more ideologically and demographically diverse political conversation networks than did their counterparts. In addition, the NIF participants reported less dominant behavior during subsequent political conversations, which is consistent with the democratic model of discussion presented earlier. Because this effect relies on self-report data, this effect could also be interpreted as participants learning (and then reporting) what NIF educators consider to be appropriate behavior during political conversation.

STUDY 2

These findings suggest the general effect of an adult civic education program such as NIF, but the central theoretical questions raised herein require comparison among varied experiences. Thus, the second study examines the effects of NIF on participants who had different educational experiences—participants who reported reading, hearing, seeing, and doing different things during forums. The social cognitive model posits that deliberation's impact varies according to the amount of verbal instruction, observational learning, enactive learning, and inferential learning (Bandura, 1986b). Thus, it is hypothesized that participants will change their beliefs and behaviors if they use relevant written materials, hear and recall clear spoken instructions, observe models of democratic deliberation, and engage in deliberation themselves during the group discussion.

It is necessary to acknowledge two limitations of this second study. First, one form of learning in the social cognitive model—inferential learning—could not be studied directly because of the limitations of this study's design. It would be unrealistic to expect survey respondents to accurately recall the cognitive inferences they made while participating in forums that occurred weeks earlier. Second, the data presented below are cross sectional—not longitudinal. They can test associations but not establish causation. The focus of this study is on the relationship between experiences and dependent variables, but it is not possible to rule out the possibility of an individual's beliefs and behaviors shaping what they saw and heard.

Whereas the first study looked at NIF in the context of adult basic literacy education, Study 2 was designed to create a diverse convenience sample of NIF participants with a variety of experiences. Participants in this second study included the Study 1 literacy students who participated in an NIF discussion as well as participants from other NIF programs, including roundtables in Minnesota, discussions within Catholic churches, and a variety of other study circles and community forums (for details, see Gastil, 1994).

Hypotheses

This broad sample was used to test three general hypotheses. First, it was hypothesized that participants in face-to-face deliberative forums on public policy issues will be likely to experience greater cognitive and behavioral changes if they receive *verbal instruction* before and during the forums. More precisely, forum participants will develop more positive civic beliefs and more democratic political conversation habits if they read the preforum issue books and hear relevant, reinforcing statements during forums.

Second, participants in deliberative forums are more likely to alter their conversation behavior if the moderator and other forum participants repeatedly *model democratic conversation*. Increases in the democratic quality of participants' subsequent political conversations will be positively associated with the frequency with which trained forum moderators and other forum participants model democratic discussion.

Third, participants can learn to refine their political conversation habits through *direct enactment* during forums. The more frequent such enactment, the more likely it is that forum participants will alter the character of their future political conversations.

Method

Participants. The 177 participants in Study 2 came from a variety of counties across the United States, with 76 coming from adult basic literacy classes, 59 taking part in the Minnesota Roundtables, 29 from NIF programs within the Catholic community, and 13 coming from other community forums. The median age range for participants was 36-40 years, and 63% were women. Over three quarters (76%) of participants were White, non-Hispanic, 6% were African American, 6% were Hispanic, 3% were Asian American, with the remainder declining to state their ethnicity or identifying themselves as "other".

Survey measures. Participants who only took part in Study 2 were recruited by contacting NIF forum moderators. The moderators distributed questionnaires to participants, who then mailed them back to the study supervisor. These participants received no compensation other than brief summaries of the study's results, which were mailed to them later.

Most sections of the questionnaire used in this study were identical to those used in Study 1. Additional survey items were included to measure variations in participants' self-reported deliberative experience during NIF forums. (Tables 1 and 2 provide details on all measures.)

To measure the influence of written instruction, participants were asked whether they had read the issue books pertaining to the forum topics they discussed. Seventy-seven percent had done so. (Even the literacy forum participants had preforum

readings assigned because NIF prepares special versions of its issue books for adult basic literacy classes.)

Another set of items measured the amount of formal and informal spoken instruction participants received during the forums they attended. They were asked if the “moderator or other group members” said any of a series of statements. A response scale for each item ranged from 0 (*not said at all*) to 4 (*said very often and emphasized*). For example, one statement read, “We should value the role we can play in the political process.” If participants reported that such statements were said during a forum, this was construed as spoken instructions for participants to increase their valuations of political outcomes.

To measure modeling behaviors, participants were asked to say how well statements about moderator and group member behavior represented the forums they attended. For example, participants were asked if “the moderator spoke clearly and directly” during the forums. Because NIF training materials specify that moderators not take positions on issues and become embroiled in the discussion, moderator items included neither the logic/reasonableness nor the various listening dimensions.

Finally, a parallel set of items asked participants to describe the nature of their own behavior during the forums in relation to the same conversation behaviors. These items were designed to measure enactive learning, but this proved to be both conceptually and operationally problematic. The deliberative enactment scales could be viewed as simply another measure of participants’ general conversation behavior, which is operationalized more directly by the dependent measures of conversation behavior. In other words, how participants behave in forums would correlate with how they behave in political conversations generally regardless of whether enactment influenced their subsequent behavior. Controlling for political expertise removed some of this spurious correlation by taking out its shared variance with enactment, but the correlations between enactment and the dependent variables remained difficult to interpret due to their conceptual overlap.

Results

To test the association of verbal instruction with civic beliefs, a three-step linear regression analysis was conducted on each belief measure. Recollections of spoken instruction during forums were entered first, followed by political expertise and reading the NIF issue book. This ordering was designed to remove the indirect effect of political expertise through its influence on reading the issue book.

With regard to political beliefs, spoken instruction positively correlated with all of participants’ subsequent civic beliefs, though the only statistically significant association was with political outcome valuation (standardized regression coefficient, $\beta = .22$). After controlling for political expertise, the written instruction provided by the NIF issue book had a positive association with political outcome valuation ($\beta = .27$), political outcome expectancy ($\beta = .18$), civic duty ($\beta = .29$),

community identity ($\beta = .25$), self-efficacy ($\beta = .13$), and group efficacy ($\beta = .27$), with all but the self-efficacy coefficient statistically significant ($p < .05$).

A more complex regression equation was constructed to measure the associations of verbal instruction, modeling, and enactive learning with the democratic character of participants' political conversations. The coefficients shown in Table 3 resulted from a six-step linear regression equation, entering one variable on each step in the order shown (from left to right). Because modeling was considered the primary potential influence, group and moderator modeling variables were entered on the first two steps. Group modeling was entered first because it was plausible that moderator behavior would influence the behavior of other group members. Entering moderator modeling on the second step made its coefficient represent its direct modeling effect after controlling for its indirect influence through its modeling effects on *other* participants. Spoken instruction was entered next, followed by political expertise, then reading the NIF issue book. Enactment was entered separately, on a final step, because of its more problematic interpretation (see above). In this equation, this ordering permits the statistical removal of prior associations with expertise from both reading and enactment measures.

As shown in Table 3, all of the group modeling coefficients were in the predicted direction, and four of the six coefficients reached statistical significance (average $\beta = .22$). Moderator modeling was only measured for two behaviors, and the direct effect of moderator modeling was significant on both conversation dominance ($\beta = .20$) and clarity ($\beta = .19$).

Spoken instructions had a significant impact only on participants' conversation dominance ($\beta = -.16$). This regression coefficient suggests that participants who heard the moderator speak "clearly and directly" about the importance of non-dominance during deliberation were less likely to exhibit dominant behavior during their subsequent conversations after the forum. After controlling for political expertise, reading the NIF issue book had a similar effect on participants' conversation dominance ($\beta = -.30$). Reading the book also made them more likely to recognize the values underlying opposite views during political conversations ($\beta = .30$).

As discussed earlier, the enactment variable was entered after controlling for political expertise to aid its interpretation. It correlated significantly with five of the six conversation behaviors, and its regression coefficients were larger, on average, than for any other variable (average $\beta = .32$). The size of these associations suggests that enactment may indeed influence subsequent conversation behavior. On the other hand, the conceptual overlap of deliberative enactment during forums and general deliberative behavior during political conversations might lead one to view these coefficients only as indicators of the stability of the political conversation behavior variable over time and across contexts.

To measure the potential relationship between variations in learning processes and the size, density, and diversity of participants' subsequent conversation net-

TABLE 3
Standardized Regression Coefficients for the Effects of Modeling, Spoken and
Written Instruction, and Enactment on Political Conversation Behavior

<i>Political Conversation Behavior</i>	<i>Group Modeling</i>	<i>Moderator Modeling</i>	<i>Spoken Instruction</i>	<i>Read the Issue Book</i>	<i>Enacted Behavior</i>	<i>Overall R (SE)</i>
Conversation dominance	.13	.20*	-.16*	-.30*	.48*	.59* (.66)
Clarity of statements	.26*	.19*	-.12	.15	.38*	.55* (.53)
Logic/reasonableness	.27*	—	.06	.03	.29*	.46* (.57)
Recognition of opposing values	.19*	—	.07	.30*	.27*	.44* (.52)
Seeing opposing reasons	.29*	—	.07	.03	.13	.32* (.60)
Weighing pros and cons	.15	—	—	.16	.34*	.42* (.84)

NOTE: Minimum $n = 145$. The coefficients shown above resulted from a linear regression equation, entering one variable on each step in the order shown (from left to right), with political expertise entered as a control variable after spoken instruction to control for its association with reading the National Issues Forums issue book and enacted behavior. Moderator modeling variables were measured only for the first two dependent variables; spoken instruction was not measured for weighing pros/cons.

* $p < .05$.

works, a similar regression approach was employed. For these dependent measures, there were not corresponding, specific items pertaining to the instruction, modeling, or enactment of conversation networks, so aggregate measures were created by combining items within process measures. For instance, an average moderator modeling index was created by averaging the clarity and dominance (reversed) indicators. The same was done for group modeling, spoken instruction, and enactment. The previously detailed six-step regression approach was then used to test for the independent relationships of these variables on network characteristics, and only one significant effect emerged: The frequency of moderator modeling behaviors was positively associated with the size of participants' political conversation networks ($\beta = .19$). Taken together, the absence of associations suggests no clear relationship between the measured variation in NIF experience and subsequent network features.

CONCLUSION

The results of these two studies suggest that adult participation in civic education programs can promote broader conversation networks and more deliberative political conversation. The results also show, however, that deliberative education may not have the full range of effects its proponents imagine. Study 1 revealed that NIF, one such public discussion program, resulted in more diverse political conversation networks and less dominant behavior in political conversations, but the program also appeared to decrease participants' sense of group political efficacy. In other words, taking part in deliberative forums may make adult learners more likely

to engage in democratic discussions with diverse peers but more skeptical about the effectiveness of group-based political discussion and action.

Beyond these average outcomes, Study 2 showed that deliberative civic education's effects are associated with the nature of participants' perceptions of their forum experiences. The cross-sectional self-report data presented herein do not permit strong causal interpretations of this study's findings, but this study does show a pattern of association generally consistent with the social cognitive model. It was hypothesized and demonstrated that face-to-face deliberation is most effective as a social learning process when it includes written and spoken instruction, behavioral modeling, and participant enactment. Participants' postdiscussion political beliefs were associated with their use of a preforum booklet on deliberation and the political issue to be discussed. Self-reported postforum conversation behavior was also correlated with written and spoken instructions regarding democratic conversation, but behavioral changes were even more clearly linked to moderator and group behavioral modeling (and possibly participant enactment of democratic discussion).

These results neither challenge nor buttress the general value of the social cognitive theoretical framework, though they do show its applicability to a context beyond those Bandura (1986b) originally investigated. A stronger test of the social cognitive model of deliberation could be provided by a longitudinal study. It would be optimal to study participants before, during, and after taking part in political deliberation. Conducting such a study over a period of several months or even years would provide a more reliable estimate of the long-term impact of deliberation, such as in Gastil, Deess, and Weiser's (2002) study of the impact of jury deliberation on voting. In addition, a longitudinal study would facilitate the measurement of key political learning variables, such as the cognitive moderators of observational learning (e.g., attention and memory), inferential learning, and deliberative enactment, which was measured imperfectly in this investigation. A thorough study could also include direct measurement of democratic conversation behavior through observation and coding of actual or laboratory conversations. A rigorous observational coding framework could also overcome the lower reliabilities obtained for many of the self-report measures of political conversation in this study.

A longitudinal, observational study would greatly enhance our understanding of public deliberation, but the findings reported above already offer some insight into important philosophical and practical questions. Some theorists attribute the public's shortcomings to inevitable qualities of human nature (e.g., Mueller, 1992; Zaller, 1992). Were this assumption valid, the preceding studies should have shown political deliberation to be a futile exercise, doomed to failure regardless of the quality of instruction or the unique characteristics of individual forums. Instead, the findings reported herein suggest that adult civic education can influence political beliefs and conversations, though its effectiveness appears to vary according to the quality of the verbal instruction, modeling, and enactive learning that takes place. These results, together with past studies showing deliberation's impact on political

knowledge and opinions (e.g., Fishkin & Luskin, 1999), suggest that the existing reservoir of civic competence can and will rise through well-designed and widely adopted adult education programs. NIF and similar efforts will probably improve the average person's political outlook and create modest, positive behavioral changes. On a mass scale, deliberative civic education has the potential to change the way the public thinks and talks about politics, public policy, and community.

It is true that democratic theorists (Barber, 1984; Gastil, 2000) and adult education researchers (Boggs, 1991; Miller, 1995) often presume that people and political systems can always do better. At some point, the public may reach the limits of human potential; however, it appears that the contemporary adult citizen is capable of becoming more deliberative and engaged, and public discussion programs are one means for developing that potential.

The findings of this study suggest that the effectiveness of these educational efforts depends on precisely how they are conducted and experienced by adult learners. The application of Bandura's (1986b) social cognitive theory was useful in that it highlighted the different learning processes that can occur during a deliberative civic education program. But the limited impact of the NIF experience in Study 1 and the pattern of associations between process and outcome in Study 2 suggest that not all public forums have the same educational benefit. There is considerable variation in the depth and texture of the educational experience across different educational settings. Thus, it would be a mistake to increase the quantity of NIF and similar programs without simultaneously devoting sustained attention to improving their quality.

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