PARENT EDUCATION IN A TIME OF POLARIZATION

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THE PROBLEM OF POLARIZATION

Rising in the U.S. for at least 30 years, through multiple Administrations. Happening in Europe too—think Brexit.

Now at levels not seen since the 1850s

Not just about issues, but about how we regard our fellow Americans who differ from us politically. They are:

- **"Other"—alien to us, strangers, incomprehensible**
- **Unlikeable and untrustworthy as people**
- **Morally compromised**

Finkel, E., et al. Political Sectarianism in America. Science 2020;370:533-536

Close to Home Polarization

In 1960 only 5% of Americans said that would be uncomfortable with their son or daughter marrying someone of the other political party.

Now that percentage had moved up 40-45%.

During that same period, attitudes towards inter-racial marriage showed the opposite trend.

Increasing family conflicts and cutoffs over politics.

MANY SOURCES OF THIS POLARIZATON

Including: media silos, social media, lack of overlap between political parties, gerrymandering, income inequality, spread of identity politics, globalization, decline in social trust

Ezra Klein (2020). Why We're Polarized. Simon & Schuster

POLARIZATION IS SHOWING UP IN EDUCATION, ESPECIALLY IN:

Racial equity initiatives

The COVID 19 pandemic

Observation 1: once an issue becomes seen as deeply "red" or "blue," we lose our ability to deal with it in traditional ways (like messages sent home and regular school board meetings).

Observation 2: this is not mainly about lack of information or knowledge, it's about relationships and trust

SOCIAL TRUST CREATES SHARED FACTS

Most individuals do not have direct, personal access to policy-relevant facts. Examples: climate change, election security, effects of welfare programs, police shootings, and <u>sources of educational disparities and coping with a pandemic.</u>

We rely on authorities, leaders, experts we trust, or who are trusted by someone close to us.

Social trust in other people and in our institutions has been in steep decline in the U.S. for over 40 years.

We lack common sources of trustworthiness, so we lack shared facts, which paralyzes policy making.

Let's Accept Three Realities

1. The current culture of distrust of experts and authorities

2. The perception in "red Minnesota" that Colleges of Education turn out educators who are thoroughly "blue"—and are likely ignorant or dismissive of "red" perspectives.

3. Language used in curriculum and programming is "blue": diversity, equity, inclusion, gender identity.

Braver Angels

We bring Americans together to bridge the partisan divide and strengthen our democratic republic.

As individuals, we try to understand the other side's point of view, even if we don't agree with it.

In our communities, we engage those we disagree with, looking for common ground and ways to work together.
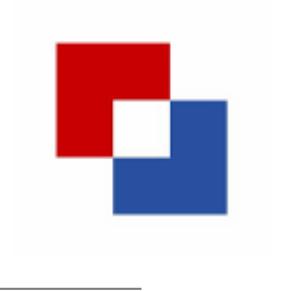
In politics, we support principles that bring us together rather than divide us.

Offerings

- **Workshops (all online and soon back to on land)**
  - Red/Blue
  - Skills for Communicating Across the Divide
  - Depolarizing Within
  - Families and Politics
  - Debates, webinars, podcasts
- **1:1 conversations (**red/blue, rural/metro, white/person of color**)**

CORE SKILLS: ACKNOWLEDGE AND AGREE BEFORE GIVING YOUR VIEW

I hear you on….
I agree with you about….
My own view is… and here's how I came to see it this way.

GETTING INVOLVED

Becoming a member ($12 per year)

All Braver Angels workshops are free.

Moderator train is free, online, and self-paced.

Lots of activity in Minnesota

COMMUNITY ENGAGED PARENT EDUCATION

Developed in the early 2000s by a team of parent educators (Jill Chisholm, Beth Cutting, Annette Gagliardi, Sue Harrington, Marietta Rice, Tood Seabury-Kolad, and Bill Doherty).

Evaluated via a McKnight Foundation grant. Doherty, W. J., Jacob, J., & Cutting, B. (2009). Community Engaged Parent Education: Strengthening civic engagement among parents and parent educators. *Family Relations, 58*, 303-315.

Main principle: Because all personal parenting concerns have public dimensions, comprehensive parent education attends to both the personal and public dimensions of parenting.

The skills: a) surfacing the public dimension, b) facilitating deliberating, and c) (sometimes) encouraging action steps.

WHAT HAPPENED?

No ECFE program picked up Community Engaged Parent Education as something to be incorporated in its curriculum.

The development team retired or moved on to other activities.

My own assessment: the public dimension of parenting and parent education was viewed as optional or elective, not core or central when resources are limited, and some Coordinators worried about getting involved in "politics."

ARE WE MORE READY NOW?

The world has changed in the past 10 years, and the public dimensions of family life are inescapable.

If we approach heighted public stress and divisions in a way that ignores political polarization and values clashes, we can make the problem worse.

Can Community Engaged Parent Education help families, communities, and our field?