

Teaching through deliberation

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## **Abstract**

Though polarization is not new, Americans seem to be living in a time of heightened volatility in the political realm (Flanagan, 2017). Many people do not want to listen to the other side, having distrust in politicians and a distaste for politics (McAvoy & Hess, 2013). In contrast to the divisive rhetoric, teachers are using deliberation in the classroom to model and teach civil discourse to students (McAvoy & Hess, 2013). In this report, deliberative pedagogy is investigated and discussed as its possibilities and limitations are considered. It offers an engaging teaching style, and it encourages growth in skills including critical thinking, decision-making, and communication abilities. It can give students a place to learn how to participate in a democracy in a productive way. But though its benefits are many, limitations should not be ignored. In this report, concerns will be addressed, such as whether equal participation is possible and how teachers can implement an additional activity among the many demands that are already placed on them. Practical application and resources for teachers and administrators will be provided in light of these benefits and challenges.

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## **Dedication**

To my parents, Mike and Judy Schaeffer, who taught me the love of reading and to never quit – both essential skills in the completion of this degree.

## **Chapter 1 - The Hope of Deliberation**

It is well-documented that we are living in a polarized political climate in the United States today (Abdel-Monem, Bingham, Marincic, & Tomkins, 2010; Flanagan, 2017; McAvoy & Hess, 2013). Political polarization describes “moments in time when political discourse and action bifurcates toward ideological extremes” (McAvoy & Hess, 2013, p. 26). The country faces many challenging problems with no clear or easy solutions. Racism and marginalization, immigration questions, and definitional debates over marriage are just a few of the topics that can divide us and often lead to either destructive communication between the two sides or no communication at all. The U.S. political climate has become

a race to the bottom, as the crudeness of the president is matched by that of “the resistance,” with all of us being judged by how well—how thoroughly and consistently and elaborately—we can hate each other. Nothing about this time is elevating. It’s just all of us—on the left and on the right—sworn to our bitterness and our anger. (Flanagan, 2017, para. 13)

This tone of conflict and polarization often characterizes traditional news sources, political comedy, social media, and communication in the civic arena (Flanagan, 2017; Pearce, 2010). The country seems to be reaching a boiling point while at the same time many citizens are disengaged, disenchanting, and disconnected from civic life. Scholars have noted and lamented the decreasing participation in civic life and political talk (Hess, 2009; McAvoy & Hess, 2013). Every U.S. citizen is supposed to have the right to participate and make a difference, yet many are choosing to not play an active role in making decisions (Molnar-Main, 2017). Though research shows that many in the 18-29 age range did vote in the 2012 election, with about 45% in this age group participating, that still leaves more than half that did not vote

(*All Together Now*, 2013). In fact, the 50% threshold has not been achieved since 1972 and many who did vote in 2012 were misinformed (*All Together Now*, 2013). Those who were disadvantaged were least likely to be adequately informed and to vote (*All Together Now*, 2013). In the 2016 presidential election, of the millions who did not vote, the most commonly cited reason for not voting was “dislike of the candidates or campaign issues” (Lopez & Flores, 2017).

The ideological gaps between the parties have grown, creating distrust in leaders for many, especially for members of the opposing party (McAvoy & Hess, 2013). In the 2018 mid-term elections, voters were less motivated by policies and more motivated by dislike of the opposing party and loyalty to their own (Dunn, LaLoggia, & Doherty, 2018). The fragmented media landscape and other social changes of the last 25 years have all contributed to the political environment in which we find ourselves, a place where the “trends of economic inequality, partisan polarization, residential sorting, and ideological news sources work together to confuse the public and undermine their ability and desire to talk to one another” (McAvoy & Hess, 2013, p. 30).

Fewer people are talking to others who hold other views and the U.S. is moving away from deliberation (Hess, 2009). But there is great value in deliberation as it is communication with a purpose and is not just about the “substance of an exchange . . . (but) also the social process of communicating together” (Gastil & Black, 2008, p. 3). It can provide resolutions when people are deeply divided (Curato, Dryzek, Ercan, Hendricks, & Niemeyer, 2017). Deliberation involves gaining information about an issue, hearing the pros and cons of alternatives, discussing all aspects, and working toward a consensus (Escobar, 2011). It is about more than solving the problem, but also about the growth that happens in the process. Sometimes consensus is elusive, but in deliberation, it has been shown that compassion,



empathy, and critical thinking skills can grow (Molnar-Main 2017; Nabatchi, 2012). Schools could be a key place for trying to turn people toward communicating together, and many teachers are using deliberative pedagogy to teach students how to share their own views, listen to others, and come together across the divide (Hess, 2009; Longo, Manosevitch, & Shaffer, 2017; Molnar-Main, 2017).

Productive communication and civic engagement are central to the field of study of dialogue and deliberation. Deliberation is a type of “discussion used by many communities to engage diverse groups of citizens in work to address community problems” (Molnar-Main, 2017, p. 12). Deliberative practices and public forums have existed in the U.S since the beginning of our country and the history of deliberation is rich (Shaffer, 2017a). At various times, forums and public discussions have been a common way for citizens to be involved in their communities (Shaffer, 2017a). Starting in the mid-1990s, organizations began to form that would devote their time to encouraging the use of deliberative practices (Nabatchi, 2012). Groups including the National Issues Forums (NIF), the Center for Deliberative Democracy, and the Institute for Civic Discourse and Democracy at Kansas State University advocate for open and honest conversation, characterized by seeking to understand the other side and to be open to the views of others (Mutz, 2006). Proponents of deliberation see the value in bringing groups of citizens together to talk about pertinent issues without relying only on experts and politicians to form opinions and make decisions (Gastil & Keith, 2005).

Deliberation has grown to be a crucial method for “democratic leadership, especially in the movement to promote more civic engagement in democracies” (Gutmann & Thompson, 2010, p. 325). It has the potential to increase citizen participation in government and encourage people to use their voice. Deliberative democracy has been found to be “essential to democracy”

and “more than discussion” (Curato et al., 2017, p. 29). It has the potential to give power to all who participate by setting norms and practicing habits such as using an independent and impartial facilitator (Curato et al., p. 2017).

The NIF has established the Teachers Network, a group of educators around the country who are teaching students “an alternative to the divisive, zero-sum politics advanced by interest groups and portrayed in the media” (Molnar-Main, 2017, p. 5). They use education models requiring active participation and discussion, because they know that citizens must adopt healthy communication styles and work through difficult community issues (Molnar-Main, 2017). These deliberative practices aim to bring people together, despite differences, and to encourage mutual understanding of others’ views.

An important factor of deliberation to consider is a point for critique for some: namely, the inclusion of all voices in the discussion. Fraser argues that deliberation processes use communication styles that favor the majority and Western countries (as cited in Abdel-Monem, et al., 2010). It is important to note that people who come from marginalized and oppressed groups such as women or ethnic minorities have been found to be less likely to participate in deliberative forums (Goidel, Freeman, Procopio, & Zewe, 2008). Institutionalized racism and other types of discrimination may limit the potential impact of deliberation.

Given deliberation’s potential to encourage productive engagement in civic life and mindful of the roadblocks to full and equal voice, this report will investigate the following research question: *What are the possibilities and limits for adopting deliberative pedagogy for K-12 education in the United States?* The political environment today does not give many opportunities to come together for discussion, but instead divisive rhetoric contributes to the polarization that already exists. Though there are concerns about deliberation, it can be a setting

for productive civic conversation (Curato et al., 2017). It has also been shown to have a positive impact on students in the classroom (Molnar-Main, 2017). Further investigation is needed to clearly discern both the possibilities and limits of deliberative pedagogy. Why do the possibilities seem obvious to some but not to others? Why do some scholars see deliberation as a limitation to democratic involvement, while others champion it as a crucial way to increase civic engagement? Deliberative pedagogy could help students learn skills and grow in ways that make them more engaged citizens. But further investigation is needed to discern an accurate picture of that claim and to answer questions about implementation if it is shown to be a viable option.

### **Preview of Report**

To address this question, I conducted a literature review. Deliberation is a growing field with published works spanning disciplines, academic and practicing authors, popular and peer-reviewed titles, and methodologies. In Chapter Two of the report I review and summarize published scholarship on deliberation and more specifically deliberative pedagogy, beginning with definitions of both concepts. Multiple benefits are discussed as well as limitations that must be acknowledged. The report is motivated by a desire to improve future civic health through educating our youngest generation. Therefore, deliberative pedagogy will be most often be considered in the context of secondary education and younger.

Chapter Three of the report will consider the implications of my findings. This synthesis of research has the potential to help educators in many ways. Though not a new concept, deliberative pedagogy is different from the instructor-centered approach that many American classrooms use (Longo et al., 2017; Shaffer 2017a). This unique teaching philosophy can help students develop a strong and supportive community for learning and growth (Brammer, 2017).

There are ways to incorporate deliberative practices in schools, whether forming an entire curriculum or integration into existing frameworks. Deliberative pedagogy is being used in some states, but there could be great benefit if this approach would be used more universally across the U.S. This report presents principles and practical steps for implementation. Chapter Three will provide specific recommendations for researchers, educators, parents, learners, and anyone else seeking to help young people engage in civic life.

### **Contributions**

This investigation into the existing research has shown not only the potential for deliberation to effectively teach content, but also has revealed a growing list of the benefits for those students who participate. This teaching paradigm has been shown to develop the skills needed for problem-solving and group decision-making, while also helping students grow in empathy and compassion (Longo et al., 2017; Molnar-Main, 2017). Students who have participated in deliberation learn how to find solutions to issues with people who are different from them (Molnar-Main, 2017). The ramifications of this growth in communication skill and character development could create communities where respect for another’s views would be the norm rather than the exception.

Another consequential benefit is that deliberative pedagogy helps students develop and use their voice. One student who experienced deliberative practices firsthand in a college course shared that “what he had learned wasn’t just about the practice of deliberating but about himself. He learned his voice had more power than he realized. He could express opinions, weigh options with others, and make better decisions for himself and for his community” (Mathews, 2017, p. xi). Along with the obvious personal benefits to this kind of growth, this should lead to civic

participation that is more balanced and inclusive. Deliberation is a crucial tool for teaching young people that everyone should have a voice and a chance to participate.

Given that political communication is often divisive today and civic involvement is anemic, there is a growing need for encouraging discussion, empathy, and understanding rather than hateful rhetoric. Providing students with opportunities to grow in these types of skills and aspects of character could influence their future participation in the civic arena. The field of deliberation holds promise for giving hope and practical tools to citizens. Deliberative pedagogy could open new doors for a stronger democracy and help our youngest citizens grow in significant ways.

## **Chapter 2 - Deliberation and Education<sup>1</sup>**

Deliberative pedagogy has both similarities and differences to the practice of deliberation in other settings. Deliberation in the classroom does not happen without intentional effort by educators. In this chapter, deliberation will be more broadly defined and its ties to democracy will be discussed, followed by a brief introduction into its benefits and limitations. Then a more extensive review of deliberative pedagogy and its benefits and limitations will be outlined and considered. Benefits to using deliberation include skill development, character growth, and the potential impact for civic involvement for students in the future. But just as the use of deliberation surfaces concerns, the potential limitations of deliberative pedagogy should not be ignored. The risk of exclusion of some voices as well as other challenges to implementation need to be acknowledged and addressed by teachers and administrators. The background and review in this chapter will build the foundation for Chapter Three, where practical tips and resources for educators, administrators and others will be provided in light of the possibilities and limits of deliberative pedagogy.

### **Deliberation Defined**

It is essential to begin with a clear understanding of deliberation and any role it may or may not have in American democracy. Deliberation happens when people investigate an issue and several possible answers “through an open, inclusive exchange that incorporates and respects diverse points of view” (Gastil, 2008, p. xi). Deliberation can be divided into four steps:

1. Participants gain enough information to assure that they understand the issue being considered.

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<sup>1</sup> Some sentences in this chapter were originally written by the author for an unpublished classroom assignment.

2. They label and consider the central values involved in the problem or issue being discussed.
3. A wide range of possible solutions is provided.
4. Through discussion, the group considers the pros, cons, and trade-offs of each solution by using the gained knowledge and values as a filter for evaluating each option (Gastil, 2008).

Public deliberation is “collaborative and focuses on solving shared problems . . . (it) assumes that many people have many pieces of the answer, and it is therefore fundamentally about listening to understand different points of view and discovering new options for addressing a problem” (Kadlec & Friedman, 2010, p. 105). Listening to understand carries ramifications for speakers as well because along with everyone having opportunities to speak, each participant also has the right to understand what is being said (Gastil, 2008). Therefore each speaker is obligated to consider how they are communicating and mutual respect is necessary for a successful deliberation (Gastil, 2008). Respect involves seeing each fellow participant as a unique individual who is also part of the larger community and whose views deserve recognition and validation by others (Gastil, 2008). During deliberation, attention is not on individuals but is given to the collective group (Atkinson, Bench-Capon, & Walton, 2013). Deliberative groups come together to decide what is best for the group (Crawford, 2009).

Habermas’ concept of the “public sphere” is the arena for discussion and discourse that is a key to a thriving democracy (Fraser, 1990, p. 56). In theory, this sphere would also be a place for criticism of the government and would be a “theater for debating and deliberating rather than for buying and selling” (Fraser, 1990, p. 57). Throughout U.S history, democracy and education have been linked (Longo & Gibson, 2017; Shaffer, 2017a). The classroom can be an avenue for

young people to learn about government, democracy, and civic responsibilities (Longo & Gibson, 2017).

Democracy requires discussion but the concept of democracy is unclear for the average American (Gastil, 2008; Hess, 2009). It can be described as having three necessary characteristics: inclusion, participation opportunities, and enlightened understanding (Gastil, 2008). Citizens should have equal opportunity to determine topics, voice their concerns and opinions, and vote (Gastil, 2008). Enlightened understanding is evident when people not only can articulate their own views but also the opinions of those who have opposing ideas (Gastil, 2008). Someone who is enlightened “incorporates relevant facts to arrive at informed judgments . . . [and] also can empathize with the emotional experiences of people on all sides of an issue, genuinely understanding the hopes and fears of others with views different from their own” (Gastil, 2008, p.7). A democracy needs communication that includes different voices and ways of speaking in order to function well (Gastil, 2008). Though not the only type of communication needed in a democracy, deliberation is a key practice that can increase the chances that the three criteria for democracy are present and it helps us be a healthier democracy (Gastil, 2008). Those less likely to participate in more familiar political activity may be the most likely to be willing to deliberate because it is something outside of the norm (Neblo, Esterling, Kennedy, Lazer, & Sokhey, 2010). In fact, deliberation could “rejuvenate citizens, and ultimately democracy” (Barabas, 2004, p. 687).

There are many benefits to deliberation according to its proponents. People work together in deliberation and engage in “civic learning” (Shaffer, 2017b, p. 256). This learning can impact opinion (Hess, 2009). Helping people learn about solutions in ways that are nonpartisan and easily understood is key to leading groups in making judgments (Kadlec &



Friedman, 2010). Compared to a group in which discussion was framed as persuasion, deliberative groups spoke more about the specific aspects of the topic while those in persuasively framed groups “spoke in sweeping, ideological generalizations about the nature of personal responsibility” (Kadlec & Friedman, 2010, p. 100). Deliberative framing led groups to talk more about the actual issue and to ask more questions about the problem being discussed, while also working harder to figure out a solution (Kadlec & Friedman, 2010). Though the conversations in deliberation can include cynical comments or expressions of distrust of government, these groups tended to talk more about the roots of the problem rather than just venting about leadership (Kadlec & Friedman, 2010). Deliberative groups tend to understand the practical options and trade-offs while those in persuasively framed groups do not have a realistic view of solutions but instead look for easy answers (Kadlec & Friedman, 2010). In summary, those participating in deliberative-framed groups were engaged in conversation that was “more dynamic and focused on problem-solving” while the groups in persuasively framed discussion tended to talk in “static terms and circular patterns” (Kadlec & Friedman, 2010, p. 104). In deliberative collaboration, individuals are working together and not just sharing unchanging opinions and thoughts in front of others (Kadlec & Friedman, 2010). In these ways, deliberation has been established to be a helpful frame for productive discussion (Kadlec & Friedman, 2010).

While benefits have been shown, many scholars see deliberation as an exclusive and detrimental process that is inaccessible to most citizens (Collingwood & Reedy, 2012; Sanders, 1997). Group deliberation is centered on cooperation, logic, and rational conversation that requires one to suspend one’s own beliefs with an open mind to other views (Fest, 1958). People may come into the conversation with this expectation, but this is not always reality (Fest, 1958). Deliberation may appear to support and endorse already existing inequalities, maybe even

leading to more inequalities as it is practiced (Siu, 2017; Siu & Stanisevski, 2012; Young, 2003). It can be used as a “mask for domination,” and the patterns of communication within the group can silence those that are already marginalized (Siu, 2017, p. 64). Some argue that deliberation is an idealistic practice and that the reality of deliberative settings does not match their ideal (Collingwood & Reedy, 2012; Karpowitz, Mendelberg, & Shaker, 2012; Mutz, 2006; Siu, 2017).

Other aspects such as the physical setup of the room, personality, power structure, group norms, social standards and other unstated characteristics can shape the discussion from the beginning (Fest, 1958). Social norms direct everything that does or does not happen, though they are most often unstated and develop as the group interacts (Fest, 1958). In the eyes of activist, deliberation can be a tool used by the elites to keep power and exclude those they want to oppress (Young, 2003). Deliberation may be an unwanted activity by most American citizens and a type of “paternalistic imposition” (Neblo et al., 2010, p. 566). Any push to engage more people in deliberation may be fruitless because most people do not have a strong interest in politics (Neblo et al., 2010). These concerns, especially those about the risks of inequality, are legitimate and should not be ignored.

Admittedly, there can be gaps between deliberation as theorized and practiced. But rather than calling for its dismissal, these gaps between the ideal and reality offer opportunities for scholars to improve the design and look for ways to implement deliberation in a way that truly provides equal opportunity and inclusion (Sanders, 1997). Inequality is not a given (Siu, 2017). While these limitations are of real concern and need to be acknowledged, their threat does not negate the possible benefits of using deliberation, whether in society or the classroom. With intentional planning and focus, the benefits of using deliberation in schools can still have a positive impact on young people.

## **Deliberative Pedagogy**

Deliberation is becoming an important approach for educators in the classroom (Longo et al., 2017). Deliberative pedagogy brings deliberative practices into the classroom, showing students how to discuss issues, consider options, and be open to other views as they work toward action (Longo et al., 2017). A key difference between deliberation in the public realm and deliberative pedagogy is the purpose of the decision-making (Longo, 2013). As has been discussed, a key focus for deliberation in the public sector is to decide on public policy or action (Matthews, 2012, as cited in Longo, 2013; Shaffer, 2017b). Deliberative decision-making is infused in the process of “teaching and learning” (Longo, 2013, p. 2). Deliberative pedagogy connects education and democracy using a variety of methods, is learner-focused, requires participation and discussion, and allows students to be “cocreators of their own learning through deliberative conversations” (Longo et al., 2017, p. xix; Molnar-Main, 2017). Teachers might use deliberation to teach students about national policies or community issues or to help teach communication skills (Longo, 2013). The learning process of deliberation in the classroom has six main aspects:

1. The topic is one that is important to society and individuals.
2. The process involves high levels of interaction and discussion.
3. Students share the responsibility of learning with teachers.
4. Considering options and decisions is a key focus.
5. A variety of views are presented, including those that are often marginalized.
6. Students are “treated as citizens or decision makers, often engaging in follow-up activities related to these roles.” (Molnar-Main, 2017, p. 13)

Educators use deliberation to help students learn about contemporary issues as well as historical decisions as they encourage everyone to contribute, including those who may not normally join in discussion (Molnar-Main, 2017). Deliberation can help develop communication, critical thinking, and interpersonal skills, including tolerance and empathy (Molnar-Main, 2017). Ultimately, a major goal of using deliberation is to help students connect classroom knowledge with public issues in ways that enhance learning (Molnar-Main, 2017). According to some educators, it is an effective tool in helping students learn how to participate in democratic life, going beyond learning information about issues and teaching them how to discuss politics with others (McAvoy & Hess, 2013). Many see deliberation as a powerful illustration of a more civil kind of communication rather than the polarized and often negative discourse in politics that students see in the media (McAvoy & Hess, 2013; Molnar-Main, 2017).

A democratic education helps students learn “how to do democracy,” and deliberation can be a powerful tool in that process (Hess, 2009, p. 15). This type of education talks honestly about the political issues and problems of the day while also reminding students that there is room and need for change (Hess, 2009). It can inspire young people to seek out what role they want to play in building a better society (Hess, 2009). This goal of a “better society” is rooted in the Enlightenment and has multiple interpretations (Hess, 2009, p. 15). With different views on what it is, there are also varied opinions on how citizens should work to make this world better, which is one reason that discussion among others is so vital to a thriving democracy (Hess, 2009). Discussion is a central need for democracy and in its ideal format allows for all community members to be seen as equals, with each person having the same opportunity to participate and make decisions (Hess, 2009).

Escobar's (2011) description of communication patterns provides a valuable framework for understanding the need for deliberation and the advantages of this approach when used in the classroom. A vast network of communication patterns make up society, with every verbal exchange connecting to multiple others. These patterns can "create, maintain, or destroy" and most people have well-established patterns that are difficult to change and typically reoccur (Escobar, 2011, p. 11). A constructive deliberative setting aims to provide a place for open and supportive discussion. The common practices and mistakes made in public forums include monologues, pre-packaged arguments, and avoidance (Escobar, 2011). None of these typical rituals lead to productive and helpful dialogue (Escobar, 2011). Deliberation is an invaluable tool for people to move toward each other, begin conversations, and ask, "how can we create spaces where passionate engagement can be put to productive ends? How can we use tensions, conflicts, and difference as catalysts for collective inquiry and action?" (Escobar, 2011, p. 7). Political conversations can easily become argumentative, discouraging conversation and adding to polarization (Escobar, 2011).

Deliberation is a specific kind of discussion that leads students to consider the question "how should we live together?" as they share ideas and focus on understanding one another (McAvoy & Hess, 2013, p. 20). This collective focus is central to the practice of democracy (McAvoy & Hess, 2013). All are encouraged to share their different views and to respect the views with which they disagree, which is referred to as an "open classroom climate" (McAvoy & Hess, 2013, p. 20). These classrooms encourage students to prepare for conversations about political issues beforehand through planned readings or videos (McAvoy & Hess, 2013). The teacher prevents a small number of voices from dominating the conversation while students are encouraged to talk to one another and not just to the teachers (McAvoy & Hess, 2013).

A key organization in the use of deliberation in schools is the Kettering Foundation. Kettering is a nonprofit organization dedicated to making sure democracy functions in a productive and effective way, giving opportunities for individual citizens to work together to address social problems (Kingseed & LaBreck, 2017). A key problem that has surfaced in Kettering's research is that many citizens do not participate in the process of making decisions and solving problems in their communities (Kingseed & LaBreck, 2017). This may be because they do not believe their concerns and opinions matter or are being addressed, or they may make uninformed and quick decisions when trying to address a problem (Kingseed & LaBreck, 2017). Kettering introduced the National Issues Forums in 1982, and it quickly became clear that teachers were finding uses for the issue guides and for the deliberation process in general (Kingseed & LaBreck, 2017). Because the foundation believes that the education of young people could be a key to forming citizens who participate in society and play a role in how well our democracy functions, in 2006, a series of learning exchanges called "Teaching with Deliberation" began (Kingseed & LaBreck, 2017, p. 4). Teachers willing to use deliberation in their classrooms began identifying the positive impact as well as the challenges involved as they used these methods (Kingseed & LaBreck, 2017).

Of course this network does not represent the only use of deliberation by educators but the research and findings gathered from these exchanges are key to the definition and practice of deliberative pedagogy that will be discussed here. The NIF Teacher's Network grew out of a desire to impact young people who then in turn might positively impact their schools as well as society at large (Kingseed & LaBreck, 2017). This motivation is still at the center of the work that the Teacher's Network is doing. The Kettering Foundation continues to provide resources

and tools for educators for the use of deliberation in the classroom (Molnar-Main, 2017). To many educators, the benefits have been substantial (Molnar-Main, 2017).

## **Benefits in the Classroom**

### **Improving the Quality of Discussion**

The amount of research on deliberative pedagogy is growing, and positive results are reported by educators employing deliberation in the classroom (McAvoy & Hess, 2013; Molnar-Main, 2017). Benefits include enriching discussion that challenges students to engage with content in a more profound way, growth in communication and interpersonal skills, and increasing awareness in students of the need for respect and tolerance for others, as well as other positive results.

Using deliberation in the classroom can help promote more cognitively complex conversation that allows all to participate and be heard while students learn to consider a wide range of views and think critically about problems (Molnar-Main, 2017). Deliberation allows for the expression of different opinions, giving exposure to views that might otherwise be ignored. This is valuable because without this exposure, tolerance declines while polarization grows, decreasing the chance that people will come together to discuss issues (Garrett, 2009). Participating in conversation about public problems can increase political tolerance if there are others in the group holding different opinions (Hess, 2009). But deliberation goes beyond simple exposure, giving people the chance to think critically about the topic and possible solutions (Nabatchi, 2012; Pratkanis & Turner, 1996). The difference between exposure and critical engagement is important to consider because individuals need more than just exposure before they can fully understand other views (Garrett, 2009). Deliberation in the classroom allows for this type of critical engagement as it helps to form critical thinking skills early on (Molnar-Main,

2017). When students discuss ideas with those whom they disagree, they gain information, develop political tolerance and are more likely to participate in politics (McAvoy & Hess, 2013; Molnar-Main, 2017).

It has been shown that groups do not always excel at decision making, sometimes not fully hearing others or considering various arguments (Nemeth, 1986). Within discussion, opposing views can impact outcomes differently depending on the makeup of the group (Nemeth, 1986). The benefits of hearing minority views have been demonstrated (Nemeth, 1986). When there is exposure to minority dissenting views, the group tends to consider the outcome more closely and it can give a “creative contribution to problem solving and decision-making” (Nemeth, 1986, p. 30). However, if the dissenting views come from the majority it can have a negative influence, leading to blind agreement to the opinions of those with the loudest voice (Nemeth, 1986). This points to the need for diversity in the group and awareness in facilitators as they seek to include every voice in the group (see also Myers, 2018).

There are numerous benefits of engaging students in controversial topics—topics that could easily be used in a deliberative discussion (Hess, 2009). In fact, “schools have not just the right, but also the obligation, to create an atmosphere of intellectual and political freedom that uses genuine public controversies to help students discuss and envision political possibilities” (Hess, 2009, p. 6). A “controversial political issue” causes disagreement and raises varied questions about the type of policy that should be established to deal with public problems (Hess, 2009, p. 5). Rather than ignoring differences that exist, encouraging conversation improves the quality of the decision-making as multiple views are heard and considered (Hess, 2009). When schools avoid discussing controversial issues, they run the risk of communicating damaging messages to students that political topics are either taboo or unimportant (Hess, 2009). This



exclusion of political topics could also demonstrate to students that “the people of the United States and the larger world fundamentally agree on the nature of the public good and how it can be fostered” (Hess, 2009, p. 6). Schools that avoid politically controversial issues are missing a key opportunity to help students learn how to talk about issues, listen to the views of others, and form their own opinions (Hess, 2009).

### **An Engaging Teaching Style**

Teaching styles vary in U.S. schools, with some being high in interaction and applied learning and some relying on the teacher to be the center of the learning process (Longo et al., 2017). Deliberative pedagogy brings together education and democracy in a way that encourages participation in learning (Longo et al., 2017; Shaffer, 2017a). This adjustment to a more interactive teaching style could create a more exciting classroom for students. Excitement is not always used to describe the average American classroom, but this is something that should be characteristic of a productive learning environment (hooks, 1994). Advocating a “radical pedagogy,” hooks (1994) argues that creating excitement comes from a sincere interest in everyone in the room (p. 8). Though many students are used to having a singular focus on the instructor, teachers can help build an interactive environment where the input of everyone is valued equally and encouraged (hooks, 1994). Instructors can serve as guides but they are not the sole source for the atmosphere because “excitement is generated through collective effort” (hooks, 1994, p. 8). Using deliberation allows for the opportunity for interaction and group discussion.

Different teaching methods should be considered to best serve students. There is a necessity for educators to move past standardized tests to go beyond the Common Core State Standards and transition to teaching and grading practices that prepare students for thriving in the

21<sup>st</sup> Century (Greenstein, 2012). The Common Core gives a “solid foundation” to students for success in school and beyond, but “it’s the bridges and buildings that are built on it that provide the pathways and scaffolds for success” (Greenstein, 2012, p. 37). The need to go beyond the basics is widely accepted among educators and expanding on teaching styles and grading systems in the classroom is one way to implement these types of changes (Greenstein, 2012).

Deliberative pedagogy could be the best opportunity for all students to have the chance to participate. Many classrooms can be described as promoting a “banking” form of education in which students are passive recipients of a professor’s agenda and the dissemination of information (Freire, 1970, p. 58). In this setup, the natural learning pattern of invention and re-invention is stifled by teachers who see their role as enlightening the ignorant with the extensive knowledge that they alone have (Freire, 1970). This “depositing” of information cheats the student out of the process that would lead to growth and knowledge, for without the practice of examination, people do not gain knowledge (Freire, 1970, 58). True knowledge accrues “through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry men pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other” (Freire, 1970, p. 58). In contrast, the banking format in which the teacher speaks and the students are expected to only retain and reiterate information encourages passive involvement in the classroom (Freire, 1970). The banking system of education also encourages oppressive dynamics of society (Freire, 1970).

Instead, hooks (1994) advocates for what she calls a “transformative pedagogy” that involves “making the classroom a democratic setting where everyone feels a responsibility to contribute” (hooks, 1994, p. 39). Teachers are performers but their job is to connect, engage, and encourage participation of all (hooks, 1994). Deliberative pedagogy allows for a different kind of classroom that can lead to “a more equitable society” (Longo et al., 2017, p. xix). Important

aspects including gender equality are possible in deliberation if structure and rules are set well (Karpowitz et al., 2012). If there are more men in the group then unanimous rule can help women to share more, but if there are more women then majority rule is most fair to the female participants (Karpowitz et al., 2012). This is just one example of how giving attention to these dynamics can lead to a more equitable setting.

### **Growth in Critical Thinking and Decisions**

Using deliberation in the classroom helps to develop critical thinking and decision-making skills in students (Molnar-Main, 2017). Fishkin wrote that after deliberation, people would have a stronger knowledge base that would lead to more informed decisions and to forming opinions that fit well within the person's entire belief system (as cited in Denver, Hands, & Jones, 1995). As previously mentioned, deliberation offers critical engagement and not just exposure, giving participants the chance to think through the issues and apply their own opinions and experience to the discussion (Garrett, 2009). A democracy requires participation and all citizens should be able to evaluate, contribute, and be a part of addressing issues that are relevant to society (Lim, 2011). Because of some of the concerns raised about misinformation, institutionalized discrimination, and unequal opportunities in American society, we live in a time that calls for even more attentiveness to messages being shared (Lim, 2011). Development in critical thinking is an essential skill to democratic participation (Lim, 2011). In fact,

individuals need to be able to discern the rhetoric from the real, the infotainment from the issues, and ultimately exercise rigor in evaluating what may eventually affect their own and their neighbors' lives. To the extent that the democratic citizen is not a critical thinker, he/she is significantly hampered in his/her ability to contribute to the public good. (Lim, 2011, pp. 785-786)

Costa and Kallick (2008) write that a view of intelligence is needed that goes beyond the 18<sup>th</sup> century idea that intelligence can be measured by a single test and assigned an unchangeable number for each individual. Varied forms of intelligence have been presented by scholars, including verbal, musical, logical, spatial, experiential, emotional, social, and moral (Costa & Kallick, 2008). Intelligence is being seen more and more as behaviors that can be taught and enhanced as people grow (Costa & Kallick, 2008). Therefore, “we must help students think powerfully about ideas, learn to critique as well as support others’ thinking, and become thoughtful problem solvers and decision makers” (Costa & Kallick, 2008, p. 12).

The characteristics of what intelligent people do when they are addressing problems are “Habits of Mind” that could be a key to developing intelligence (Costa & Kallick, 2008, p. 15). If a person believes their intelligence can grow through activity and engagement, they are more likely to choose to make an effort even when things are difficult (Costa & Kallick, 2008). A Habit of Mind is “a pattern of intellectual behaviors that leads to productive actions” (Costa & Kallick, 2008, p. 16). When someone can reflect and think through issues, ask questions and apply previous knowledge to the situation, they can behave intelligently (Costa & Kallick, 2008; Molnar-Main, 2017). As these habits are used and reused in the practice of deliberation, students are learning how to think, communicate, empathize, and solve problems with others (Molnar-Main, 2017). Intelligence is multi-faceted and deliberation provides an avenue for young people to grow in many of its aspects.

Recently, researchers have called for the use of teaching styles other than lecture for science classes so that students engage with the content more (Weasel & Finkel, 2016). One example involves the use of new structure in a large introductory biology class designed for nonmajors. Lecture content was reduced by one-third and students participated in various

activities that encouraged critical analysis of science articles, both from the media and peer-reviewed journals (Weasel & Finkel, 2016). Over the course of several weeks, students also were a part of group deliberative activities (Weasel & Finkel, 2016). A larger increase in self-reported understanding was seen in those who were a part of the deliberative groups compared to those who did not deliberate (Weasel & Finkel, 2016). They gained confidence in their understanding of not only the topics directly discussed but also other scientific topics (Weasel & Finkel, 2016). Another interesting finding showed that even though the goal of the class was not simply gaining knowledge and memorizing facts, this deliberative process still helped increase the knowledge base of the students (Weasel & Finkel, 2016). Using this approach taught the students to engage critically with the topics as they carefully considered their own views, thought about how to support their ideas, and analyzed the arguments used by others to support their opinions (Weasel & Finkel, 2016). This style, centered on collaboration geared toward consensus, increased student knowledge, taught skills in critical thinking, and helped students grow in confidence in their understanding of difficult topics (Weasel & Finkel, 2016). This study gives a clear illustration of deliberation in practice and the possible benefits even in a subject area that is not a civics classroom.

Though many express concerns about the exclusivity of deliberation, it could be the very tool to help change societal patterns that are detrimental to the marginalized and oppressed. Through deliberative activities, students learn how to evaluate information and surface biases of their own and others (Molnar-Main, 2017). They learn how to think about the voices not in the room, hopefully taking that with them as they engage in society (Molnar-Main, 2017).

Adolescent decision-making is complicated and impacted by a variety of factors (Albert & Steinberg, 2011). During adolescence, two types of cognition develop that are the foundation

of making decisions: the “reasoned pathway” and the “social reaction pathway” (Albert & Steinberg, 2011, p. 215-216; Molnar-Main, 2017). These two types, one “deliberate and reasoned” and the other “intuitive and reactive,” develop as children grow and lead to the formation of patterns that help people make decisions (Albert & Steinberg, 2011, p. 215; Molnar-Main, 2017). Before adulthood, youth are more likely to use social content without thinking which “can limit the range of actions considered in decision making” (Molnar-Main, 2017, p. 23). Both types of cognition are used during deliberation so it is likely that young adults might be helped even more than others by participating in deliberative events (Molnar-Main, 2017).

### **Growth in Character and Empathy**

Empathy is a complicated concept and has been defined in numerous ways (Morrell, 2010). Sometimes it is understood as experiencing the same emotions that another person is feeling, relating to a situation they are in, or simply trying to imagine what they are experiencing (Morrell, 2010). But when discussing empathy with deliberation, a process model definition is helpful. This perspective argues that empathy is “a multidimensional process . . . not a feeling, but rather a process through which others’ emotional states or situations affect us” (Morrell, 2010, pp. 40-41). Empathy has ties to democracy and a study found that empathy was one of the strongest predictors of “support for democratic values” among adolescent participants (Miklikowska, 2012, p. 606).

Students who deliberate learn how to connect with others despite differences, to respect and better understand other views, and to show more empathy (Molnar-Main, 2017). They begin to see how they can look for common ground and points of agreement even if the group does not come to a consensus (Molnar-Main, 2017). In the case of a Wisconsin school, the empathy

change was illustrated in a powerful way in the midst of a community tragedy (Molnar-Main, 2017). When an altercation between students at an area school turned violent, one student was killed and most high schools in the town had a connection to the loss (Molnar-Main, 2017). In a more traditional school in the area, students did not seem to handle the death as well as those at the Enrich, Excel, Achieve Learning Academy (EEA), where deliberation was common place (Molnar-Main, 2017). Teachers at EEA observed how sensitive students were to one another, compared to another school where “rumors circulated, and students were emotional and distracted from their schoolwork” (Molnar-Main, 2017, p. 94). At EEA, the collective student body “had developed the capacity, as a community, to face an unspeakable tragedy together . . . they wanted to support each other and they wanted to talk about what they and their community could do to address a public problem” (Molnar-Main, 2017, p. 95). Deliberation had helped them become people who could talk about this difficulty and look for solutions together (Molnar-Main, 2017). As they tried to handle this tragedy and grieved together, “they were acting as citizens – citizens who have a stake in their community, and who are committed to working together to claim a better future” (Molnar-Main, 2017, p. 95). The staff and faculty at EEA believed that the practice of deliberation had helped these students learn how to better communicate and care about others (Molnar-Main, 2017).

### **Growth in Communication Skills**

As apparent in the EEA example, deliberation practices can help students develop in communication skills (Cole, 2013). Students in a university class on deliberation utilized deliberative practices throughout the course and saw benefits in their communication skills as a result (Brammer, 2017). Using deliberation to set the course syllabus and within discussions in class, they gained practice for a community forum that they hosted near the end of the semester

(Brammer, 2017). Students gave positive feedback on their experience in the class and also reported that they were seeing improvements in relationships in their lives as they used the skills they were learning in conversations with family and roommates (Brammer, 2017).

Young people need examples of healthy and supportive communication, including discussion where every person has the chance to share their views (Molnar-Main, 2017). A valid concern for opponents of deliberation is that social inequalities persist even if all voices are allowed in the conversation (Siu, 2017). These deeply entrenched societal norms will continue to dominate communication patterns unless we begin to teach young people different ways to communicate. If children and young adults are frequently exposed to group conversation in which teachers guide them and model a different way of talking, this could begin to change destructive norms in the future.

Some claim that the distinction between “good” and “bad” democratic listening is a simple categorization between different types of listening that may not be comprehensive enough (Hendriks, Ercan, & Duus, 2018). One framework proposes four types of listening that are used in a polarized setting: enclave, alliance, adversarial, and transformative (Hendriks et al., 2018). Enclave listening works to connect those with similar views while alliance listening helps people to look for connections with those having a different view (Hendriks et al., 2018). Adversarial listening could be traditionally seen as negative listening behaviors for those advocating for democratic dialogue because instead of bringing sides together, people would be looking for information that can help them to build strategy against an opponent. Transformative listening can be seen in a similar negative light as this involves someone listening to discern how to best correct, persuade, and inform the general public (Hendriks et al., 2018). All four types of listening can have use in democratic settings and even those that could be seen as detrimental can



lead to positive results like strengthening arguments, moving people toward action, or empowering people to participate (Hendriks et al., 2018). Listening to the views of others can help individuals form and clarify their own views as well (Hendriks et al., 2018). The practice of deliberating can give young people the chance to practice listening and a well-guided discussion can help them grow in productive communication behaviors.

When strategic listening habits are leading to increased polarization, the introduction of varied communication activities might help to mitigate the obstacles to a more open conversation and listening that is not only hearing (Hendriks et al., 2018). Scholars suggest using varied means to engage participants, such as visual arts or other means to encourage people to talk to those who they do not already agree with (Hendriks et al., 2018). If students were introduced to deliberative practices in primary and secondary classrooms, how might this change the type of listening in political conversations?

### **Increasing Civic Involvement**

Deliberative pedagogy has the potential to help increase current and future student civic involvement (Longo & Gibson, 2017). In a study involving college students, Latimer and Hempson (2012) found that there was an increase in knowledge and engagement after deliberation and that participants were more likely to change their views. It may be that people will “shift from a position of ignorance and disengagement to a position of measured opinion and engagement” (Latimer & Hempson, 2012, p. 373). It gives opportunities for connection to service organizations, community initiatives, and across disciplines (Longo & Gibson, 2017). As students are involved in deliberation, they learn how to have conversations with others of different backgrounds about what their roles can and should be in building a more just society (Longo et al., 2017). This connection between education and social action has been observed by

many (Harbour, 2012; Longo & Gibson, 2017). John Dewey (1899) saw schools as both a location for knowledge gain and a “social center” (Harbour, 2012, p. 3). These institutions have the unique role of connecting education to social action, teaching students how to be citizens in a democracy and helping to create interest in civic life (Harbour, 2012; Molnar-Main & Kingseed, 2013).

One example of how this might work is the “Public Achievement organizing model” established by the Center for Democracy and Citizenship at the University of Minnesota’s Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs in 1990 gives us insight into the important collective work that students can accomplish (“History,” n.d., para. 1). More than 200 young people were consulted about what problems they saw in their communities but most did not see any way that they could be part of a solution (“History,” n.d.). Public Achievement grew out of these focus groups as it “gave young people the opportunity to be producers and creators of their communities, not simply customers or clients” (“History,” n.d., para. 3). This was the start of what is now used in the U.S. and globally to help students see that they have the opportunity and a responsibility to help with issues in public life (“History,” n.d. ). This hands-on program is focused on action after students engage critically with the issue and consider solutions together. This kind of activity has overlapping core tenets with deliberation as it includes groups working together to address a public problem. It offers further evidence of both the interest and capabilities of young people to engage politically (Boyte, 2005). According to Dzur (2017), “democracy means sharing power to shape a common public life with others who are not the same as us. This is more demanding than rule-following, obedience, and voting” (p. 1). These activities we share in allow us to build our community together and schools can be a key place for that group learning and action (Dzur, 2017).

We can see that social action in a series of deliberative forums held in Long Island schools, where students were grateful for a chance to participate in discussion and problem-solving process surrounding the 2012 presidential election (Molnar-Main & Kingseed, 2013). As part of this “Deepening Democracy Project,” some 100 forums were held with about half in local schools (Molnar-Main & Kingseed, 2013, p. 30). This gave students a voice but even more than that it showed everyone that young people have the ability to engage in discussion around political issues (Molnar-Main & Kingseed, 2013). Following a forum about the national debt, one student commented that “this was the first time I got to hear this is actually an open issue looking for a solution. The only times we’ve talked about it, I’ve been talked at and not spoken with” (Molnar-Main & Kingseed, 2013, p. 30). The media covered these events in a way that showcased how students can be citizens that contribute to society, thereby encouraging more opportunities for civic involvement in the future (Molnar-Main & Kingseed, 2013).

In sharp contrast, according to a longitudinal study conducted over more than 40 years at UCLA, every measurement of civic engagement in college freshman decreased to about half of what it was in the 1960s (Galston, 2004). Though many young people are still engaging in volunteer activity, at the time of this research, they saw less value in political involvement than in the previous decades (Galston, 2004). Perhaps most familiar to American readers, in the mid-1960s, students were a key force in activist movements in the U.S. (Galston, 2004; Roberts, 2015). This is not a phenomenon unique to America as young people have played key roles in upsetting governments and creating movements globally that are set on changing the status quo (Roberts, 2015). And yet, the millennial generation has been shown to be disproportionately active in service work while avoiding overt political action (Matto & Vercellotti, 2012).

Recent findings indicate increased voting participation in the 2018 mid-term elections, with 31% of youth voting compared to just 21% in 2014 (*All Together Now*, 2013). This encouraging finding stems partially from an increase in voter engagement activities by social media platforms such as Instagram and Snapchat (*All Together Now*, 2013). Researchers found that social media outlets are reaching young people who are not gathering information from traditional sources (*All Together Now*, 2013). Though it is encouraging to see this uptick, these findings also reveal the gaps in civic education that may be leading young people to only find information online (*All Together Now*, 2013). The risk for misinformation is high and youth may not yet have the skills to critically analyze information and its sources (*All Together Now*, 2013). Thus, while social media outlets can play a productive and helpful role in helping youth engage politically, schools still need to both inform students and equip them with the critical thinking and analysis skills necessary for an engaged political life (*All Together Now*, 2013).

Often underestimated, young people are sometimes those with the most drive and hope that change is possible. In the U.S. in recent years, it seems that that passion has shifted to a focus more on direct service opportunities where they can see the difference that they are making (Galston, 2004; Matto & Vercellotti, 2012). There is a difference in their minds between “personalized acts with consequences they can see for themselves” and “they have less confidence in collective actions (especially those under-taken through public institutions), whose consequences they see as remote, opaque, and impossible to control” (Galston, 2004, p. 263). If it is the job of schools to teach students “how to be effective problem solvers and how to live in a democracy,” then teachers have a responsibility to employ a variety of techniques to help that growth (Harbour 2012, p. 4).

Toward that end, a study of 90,000 14 year-olds conducted globally in 1999 showed strong connections between civic education and future civic involvement (Torney-Purta, 2002). Results provided valuable findings on attitudes toward voting and political parties as students were shown to see the importance of voting but also had a high distrust of political parties and did not intend to join a political party later (Torney-Purta, 2002). In all countries, students who reported that they were likely to vote in the future experienced classrooms where elections and the importance of voting were stressed and there were opportunities for their views to be shared and respected (Torney-Purta, Lehman, Oswald, & Schulz, 2001; Torney-Purta, 2002). But the responsibility of cultivating civic knowledge and encouraging political participation should not fall only on teachers of civic education, because teachers of other subjects, administrators and curriculum creators can also play a role in developing students in this way (Torney-Purta, 2002). This important study confirmed that schools play an important role in forming young people and helping them to be citizens who contribute to society (Torney-Purta, 2002). Deliberative pedagogy could be a valuable tool in this developmental area.

### **Benefits, and Potential Problems, for Teachers**

Thus far, only the benefits for the use of deliberative pedagogy for students have been discussed, but this process can also serve as a growth opportunity for teachers (Molnar-Main, 2017). One example involves the Birmingham Teachers Institute in Birmingham, Alabama (Molnar-Main, 2017). This organization was founded by retired educator and administrator Peggy Sparks with a partnership between Birmingham City Schools, Miles College, and the David Mathews Center for Civic Live in Montevallo, Alabama (Molnar-Main, 2017). They host professional development opportunities for teachers in the summer and offer follow-up coaching and support as teachers begin using deliberative teaching in the classroom. This partnership has

been crucial for the success of deliberative pedagogy in Birmingham and it thrives because of Sparks' focus on helping teachers who are on the ground level, seeing real and positive differences in students (Molnar-Main, 2017).

Using deliberation in the classroom also can provide educators the chance to work together with others in their field as well as across other disciplines. In fact, deliberation in schools has been most successful when a community of teachers employs it together (Molnar-Main & Kingseed, 2013). With time, changes happen because of “intentional relationships among educators and citizens committed to exploring potential uses of deliberative practices in classrooms and communities” (Molnar-Main & Kingseed, 2013, p. 29). When a classroom uses a “holistic model of learning” of any kind, teachers will also see growth and empowerment in themselves (Brammer, 2017; hooks, 1994, p. 21). Educators may feel more confident in trying different methods in other classes and sharing their philosophical approaches with students (Brammer, 2017).

Despite these and other benefits, there are legitimate concerns and obstacles to overcome for teachers who wish to employ deliberation in the classroom. Many, if not all, of the same concerns about deliberation can also be applied to potential limitations of deliberative pedagogy. It can be difficult to reach the ideal for deliberation in the classroom, just as in other settings, and the actual practice may not match the intended goal (Collingwood & Reedy, 2012; Karpowitz et al., 2012; Mutz, 2006). Because group discussion can lead to polarization in deliberation, this is a possibility when used in the classroom. The risk of exclusion for minorities is a major concern and societal oppression can be carried into the classroom (Sanders, 1997; Strachan, 2017). The deliberation design often caters to those in majority culture, potentially excluding those who are marginalized through its setup (Sanders, 1997). Teachers must be aware of these issues and be

diligent to make sure all voices have the opportunity to be heard. As previously discussed, if a dissenting view in the discussion comes from the majority, it can lead to blind acceptance and the ignoring of other views (Nemeth, 1986). It is crucial that everyone is given a platform to speak, even in the midst of the momentum that a majority view could have. However, it is essential that teachers remember that they have a responsibility to protect students from derogatory comments. These deliberative discussions are not the place for racism, bigotry, discrimination, or disrespect of any kind. Everyone should speak, but not everything can or should be said.

Teachers are coaches and guides, helping to shape the ethics and guide the management of emotions of the young. The balance between encouraging all to speak and limiting negative talk will never be easy to navigate. Young people have not had the time to fully develop their morals or interpersonal and communication skills. Unfortunately some will have been shaped negatively by parents and others who may not embody civility and respect. Teachers have the unique role of correcting, redirecting, and instructing in the failures and mistakes of students. Students, like adults, need to be able to expression their “passion for the things they value and care about” as part of a democracy (Peters, Alter, & Shaffer, 2010, p. 16). If not exposed to other views, there are no opportunities to develop understanding and respect. But that development takes time and patience from educators.

Another very real challenge for educators is that it is difficult to adopt new strategies or educational goals in the midst of all that is already required of them (Molnar-Main, 2017). To make deliberation a reality, they need backing from administration. The pressure to achieve ever-higher scores on standardized tests and fulfill core standard requirements means that a significant portion of teachers’ energies are already committed to other activities and content

(Molnar-Main, 2017). Deliberation may also be a greater challenge for certain subjects, making it extra work for educators who may not be familiar with its process (Molnar-Main, 2017). These hurdles will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Three, along with practical suggestions for implementing deliberative pedagogy and overcoming its inherent challenges.

### **Needed Future Research**

The body of research on deliberative pedagogy for K-12 students provides us with helpful insights and recommendations, but there is a need for scholars to further investigate its function and effectiveness. More quantitative and qualitative work in the schools where it is being used would provide additional valuable information. Harriger, McMillan, Buchanan and Gusler (2017) used both qualitative and quantitative research with a longitudinal mixed-methods approach that revealed the positive impact of deliberation among college students. Academia and K-12 educators would benefit from future similar research in primary and secondary classrooms. Additionally, it is crucial that scholars and practitioners continue to wrestle with the obstacles and limitations such as the risk of exclusion to marginalized voices. Besides a few who are engaging deliberation in science classes, the bulk of research points to its use in the civics classroom. This makes sense given its roots in democracy and community work. However, the potential to use these methods in other classrooms is great and should be considered. Finally, as has been mentioned above, emotions are an important aspect to keep addressing in this research. Scholars need to “learn not only how to relate emotion and reason, but also how to understand their respective value and importance” (Peters, Alter, & Shaffer, 2010, p. 15). Especially when working with the youngest generations, more attention should be given to the role of emotion and what might help in teaching the processing and management of emotions.



## **Chapter 3 - Deliberative Pedagogy in Action**

Having reviewed deliberation, deliberative pedagogy, and the possible benefits and limitations of using deliberation in the classroom, in this chapter I now turn my attention to practical recommendations for teachers, administrators, and others. With an understanding of the potential positive impact and the obstacles to overcome, it is important to consider the practical side of how to implement deliberative pedagogy in the K-12 classroom. Suggestions for incorporating these practices will be offered along with resources to equip teachers and administrators that will provide a starting point. Because there are significant challenges to using a deliberative pedagogical approach in the classroom, limitations and possible solutions will be discussed.

### **Bringing Deliberation Into the Classroom**

Deliberative pedagogy is an approach to teaching that offers an alternative to a paradigm that is so focused on knowledge gain that it is “failing to prepare students for a complex, uncertain, and interdependent world” (Molnar-Main, 2017, p. 10). Some teachers are looking for other options to help students learn about issues that are important to them and to the community (Molnar-Main, 2017). Given the ideological differences among young people, educators should help students engage in deliberation to be exposed to other views and opinions (McAvoy & Hess, 2013). One middle school social studies teacher noticed that her students were not dealing well with uncertainty, saying, “if there’s not an obvious answer, my students freeze or freak out. They say the assignment isn’t fair. They don’t persevere . . . They definitely don’t look to each other. They want me to give them the answer” (Molnar-Main, 2017, p. 9).

Teacher Jim Gilmartin of the West Islip School District on Long Island is part of a school district that has used deliberation in the K-12 classroom for ten years (Molnar-Main, 2017).

Most students in the district are college-bound so the staff spend significant time getting students ready for state and college entrance tests (Molnar-Main, 2017). Even in a setting where it is hard to justify any teaching approach that is not directly tied to testing preparation, the West Islip District continues to value deliberation because it impacts students in profound ways and helps them to see the part they can play in society (Molnar-Main, 2017). The teachers and administrators see that deliberation has taught young people skills that will help them succeed in the future (Molnar-Main, 2017). But this approach is not only helpful for college-preparatory programs but also for a school like EEA, a public charter school in Wausau, Wisconsin (Molnar-Main, 2017). Students here come from varied backgrounds and face challenges such as low socio-economic status or teen parenthood (Molnar-Main, 2017). Like all young people, they vary in personality, talent, drive, and aptitude, and EEA teacher Sarah Schneck sees deliberation as a key part of “teaching students how to think *with* others, especially those who have different views and experiences than they do” (Molnar-Main, 2017, p. 12). Gilmartin, Schneck, and many others see the difference deliberation can make and are advocates for using it in the classroom.

Bringing deliberation into the K-12 classroom first requires careful thinking and planning about the topic and content. When talking about controversial issues in schools, topics should be ones that address “fundamental values (such as security vs. freedom)” (McAvoy & Hess, 2013, p. 36). Some issues and topics fit better than others within deliberation (Molnar-Main, 2017). A topic such as pollution can be set up for deliberation if it is framed as our best collective response to it (Molnar-Main, 2017). The types of issues that work best are “complex and entangled with other issues . . . (and) cannot be resolved by individuals or legislators alone” (Molnar-Main, 2017, p. 35). It could be beneficial to engage students in a topic directly related to a recent difficult event, such as a discussion about gun violence after a school shooting. It is tempting to

think that it is best to let time pass before putting students in a place where discussion is encouraged. But talking about their fears and other feelings, along with conversation about moving forward, could be empowering and lead to fruitful discussion.

Topics should also center on open-ended policy questions as students are taught the difference between open and closed empirical and policy questions (McAvoy & Hess, 2013). Teachers should strive to present the issue in a non-binary and objective way (Molnar-Main, 2017). Controversial issues can surface strong opinions in teachers and they should be cautious about what they share and how they communicate their thoughts (McAvoy & Hess, 2013). Although there are times when it is appropriate for teachers to talk about personal views, they should never force opinions on the classroom or limit the deliberation with statements that strongly favor one side (McAvoy & Hess, 2013). The topic chosen and teacher's input are central to the success of any deliberative activity.

After a topic is selected, a wide range of strategies and assignments can help prepare students prior to the discussion (Molnar-Main, 2017). This is important for all students because pupils of all backgrounds and capacities can struggle with deliberation (Molnar-Main, 2017). If they are at a lower reading level they may not understand some of the writing or vocabulary used in the issues guides, while the more advanced learners can struggle because they are used to finding "the one correct answer" and do not handle uncertainty very well (Molnar-Main, 2017, p. 44). It is appropriate to seek consultation from specialists, including special education and gifted teachers and ELL specialists (Molnar-Main, 2017). These professionals use their expertise and experience to help educators learn how to help all students succeed in deliberation (Molnar-Main, 2017). Various strategies and activities include "partner reading, annotation, and summarization" for elementary students and text supplements such as NIF introduction videos or

other reading on the issue for high-school students (Molnar-Main, 2017, p. 45). If additional staff can assist during deliberative discussion that is also helpful, especially for elementary classrooms that have more than 25 students (Molnar-Main, 2017). The classroom setup should be designed to encourage group learning, with chairs arranged in one large or several smaller circles (Molnar-Main, 2017). As has been discussed, classroom design can hinder participation (Fest, 1958). Giving attention to adequate preparation beforehand can help deliberations go much more smoothly.

### **Deliberation Activities**

Once a topic is chosen and pre-deliberation assignments are completed, focus shifts to the implementation of the activity. Deliberative pedagogy can involve a variety of activities (Molnar-Main, 2017). It can be integrated into a curriculum already being used or be used in a more structured conversation like a deliberative forum (Molnar-Main, 2017). These forums can be held both inside and outside the class itself as sometimes students may host a forum that is open to others (Brammer, 2017; Molnar-Main, 2017). A class can be designed as deliberative, with students asked to collectively determine elements of the course syllabus or other content (Brammer, 2017). McGowan and Kaiser (2014) designed an activity for college students to analyze online public forums, learning about the difference between civil and uncivil discourse as they investigated what deliberation online looks like. Another professor created a “Deliberative Democracy Activity” that required students to investigate a ballot measure for the upcoming election (Cole, 2013). They created a guide for voters talking about the strengths and weaknesses of the issue and presenting an agreed-upon stance (Cole, 2013). They used deliberation as they researched and discussed the issue and they presented information among themselves, becoming “student experts” as they also heard from “professional experts” regarding

the issue (Cole, 2013, p. 4). Though these examples involved higher education classrooms, similar activities could be used in the K-12 classroom.

Many teachers have found that the NIF Issues Guides, or other similar guides, are an easy way to bring deliberation into their classrooms (Molnar-Main, 2017). NIF guides cover topics such as the national debt, climate change, health care, and violence and could be used within units in various classes. These guides are available for download or physical copies can be ordered on the NIF website, including discussion guides for the facilitator (<https://www.nifi.org>). There are also guides on historical events and local or community issues that are helpful in leading discussion about various topics. Many of the topics covered could fit with a civics education class or discussion on current or historical events in any classroom. These guides can be used to introduce a topic or to guide a deliberative forum conversation.

## **Forums**

Forums are used frequently in deliberation and this format can be applied to a classroom setting (Molnar-Main, 2017). Whether in a classroom or other situation, deliberative forums have a similar format (Molnar-Main, 2017). An issue is presented and explained often through a NIF Issues Guide or similar tool, including framing guides from Public Agenda, Interactivity Foundation, or similar groups (Drury, 2017; Molnar-Main, 2017; <https://www.publicagenda.org/>; <https://www.interactivityfoundation.org/>). These resources present the issue with three possible solutions to the problem, with each one listing pros and cons to each approach (Molnar-Main, 2017).

In the classroom setting, the teacher begins with an introduction into deliberation and its goals before a brief introduction of the topic (Molnar-Main, 2017). Ground rules are shared so

the group knows the expectations, and these can be referenced later if the conversation gets off-track or become dominated by one individual. The NIF has a list of six rules:

Everyone is encouraged to participate.

No one or two individuals dominate.

The discussion will focus on the choices.

All the major choices or positions on the issue are considered.

An atmosphere for discussion and analysis of the alternatives is maintained.

We listen to each other. (Molnar-Main, 2017, p. 39)

Then students would be asked a question to prompt more personal sharing about the issue, such as “why does this issue matter to you and to people you know” (Molnar-Main, 2017, p. 38). The teacher then acts as facilitator, leading the group through each possible solution and the trade-offs to each one (Molnar-Main, 2017). Often it is in discussing trade-offs that students are able to see that it is reasonable to hold another view and they can see the other side as more human (Molnar-Main, 2017). It is also possible to have a large group split into smaller groups but in this case it is important to make sure other facilitators are trained well to lead the deliberation (Drury, 2017). Teachers should use their own discretion when considering whether to bring in other adults or to trust well-trained students to guide discussions.

Educators can design their own format for using deliberation over a semester, adapting guides to fit into content (Drury, 2017). The techniques of deliberation can be adapted to whatever works best for the classroom and is most beneficial for student learning. A final resource to recommend has a wealth of information for teachers and administrators. The Teaching Channel website provides input on a variety of teaching methods, including student and teacher testimonials and description of deliberation in, “Student Centered Civic Discussion

and Deliberation” and “Structured Academic Controversy” (<https://www.teachingchannel.org/>). Though the focus of this website is broader than deliberation, teachers will find input from other educators on its implementation and benefits.

### **Addressing the Challenges**

As has been discussed, many argue that the systematic racism and discrimination in society will always carry over into any deliberation. This is always possible, and teachers need to be aware of ways that norms or even their own behavior might be limiting the voices of some in the room. Deliberation should give everyone the chance to share their thoughts and to understand what others are saying (Gastil & Black, 2008). Each person should have the same opportunity to join in the conversation and every speaker should convey their views in a way that is accessible (Gastil & Black, 2008). This process also should include the open consideration of others’ words as well as respect for all who are involved (Gastil & Black, 2008). When minorities were a part of a forum in Omaha, Nebraska in 2007, participants of all backgrounds talked favorably about the diversity in the group (Abdel-Monem et al., 2010). The benefits of having a varied and inclusive group are obvious and for the sake of equity and a richer discussion, a diverse group should be the goal (Abdel-Monem et al., 2010).

It will take work to overcome the institutionalized racism that can impact those who may want to participate. Even when progress is made, “citizens rarely remain color-blind, objective, or impartial” so questions of race and other differences should be encouraged (Siu & Stanisevski, 2012, p. 83). The answer is not to ignore the issue or assume that underlying racism can be eradicated (Siu & Stanisevski, 2012). Facilitators should help “participants recognize and deal with difference, rather than expecting them to be blind to it . . . (this) may be essential for the broader social inclusion of marginalized voices and tolerance of diverse views in intercultural

deliberative civic engagement” (Siu & Stanisevski, 2012, p. 84). In a review of findings from five projects including 1,474 participants and 99 small groups, Siu (2017) discovered implications that are key for equality in any deliberation. This investigation used both quantitative and qualitative correlational evidence gathered from five Deliberative Polls, one in person and four that were online (Siu, 2017). This extensive analysis concluded that with the right design, “the expected forms of privilege have little effect on participation and no effect on influence” (Siu, 2017, p. 126).

The main characteristics that helped encourage equality could be intentionally included in any deliberation and especially can be easily implemented in a classroom setting. First, participants were randomly assigned to groups, providing a more diverse group than often would choose to attend a forum or similar event (Siu, 2017). Second, because they were specifically chosen, most read at least some of the information before the deliberation that was a fair representation of both sides of the issue (agreed upon by both sides), allowing them to be exposed to views other than their own before the deliberation (Siu, 2017). Third, during the deliberation they had interaction with experts with different views in large groups, gaining not only a large amount of information regarding the issue but also having an opportunity to hear from another side (Siu, 2017). Finally, the design of the small group deliberation helped increase the likelihood of inclusion (Siu, 2017). Small group discussions were used to decide what questions would be asked of the experts in the larger groups. They were exposed to other’s opinions during a time while focused on a group task, thereby decreasing confrontation because of the goal at hand (Siu, 2017). But what is probably the most important aspect is that facilitators were “trained explicitly to solicit opinions from everyone in the group, encourage all



participants to speak, and maintain a tone of courtesy and non confrontation in pursuit of mutual understanding” (Siu, 2017, p. 119).

Except for bringing in experts, all of these characteristics could be replicated in the classroom. Even inviting outside experts would be possible, though requiring more effort and coordination. When deliberation is designed and implemented in these ways, it is quite possible that “inequalities in skill and status do not translate into inequalities of influence” (Siu, 2017, p. 126). Teaching deliberative practices to young people could help make inclusion and acceptance the norm as they engage in civic activities both now and when they are adults.

The potential can be seen at Adams High, in a suburb of a Midwestern city, where seniors are required to take a class on American Government that is designed around an “extensive legislative simulation” (McAvoy & Hess, 2013, p. 22). Through the course, students are introduced to deliberative conversation and issues are discussed both inside and outside the classroom as students are deeply engaged in the process (McAvoy & Hess, 2013). But when racist posters were put up in response to discussions on immigration, teachers removed the posters and addressed the behavior (McAvoy & Hess, 2013). Teachers have to recognize that their classrooms are not “‘pure’ deliberative spaces in which any position, no matter how offensive or wrong it may be, should be allowed” (McAvoy & Hess, 2013, p. 24). In these “regulated deliberative spaces” appropriate behavior is supported and the only type of behavior that is allowed (McAvoy & Hess, 2013, p. 24). As has been mentioned, respect is a key to deliberation and teachers bear the responsibility for establishing and encouraging that norm.

### **A Note to Administrators**

Civic education is not a major focus for policymakers and the question of whether to talk about politics in the classroom is a controversial one (*All Together Now*, 2013). It will take

concerted effort by educators, administrators, and others in the community to help the next generation of citizens to productively engage in our democracy (*All Together Now*, 2013). It is difficult for teachers to take on more requirements in light of what is already expected of them. Therefore, for deliberation to work in the long-term, administrative support is necessary (Molnar-Main, 2017). Teacher and educator-of-teachers Cristina Alfaro (2008) describes for administrators the power of adopting deliberative pedagogy:

The deliberative process of teaching and learning, as I see it, introduces students to a diversity of perspectives in explaining and understanding events and experiences. Thus, it develops in students the habits of listening and carefully weighing the trade-offs that accompany every choice, the discipline to keep an open mind, the willingness to stand in someone else's shoes, the capacity to change, and the ability to work with others to make decisions for the common good. The deliberative pedagogy process acknowledges but does not accentuate differences and creates bridges between opposing positions. (p. 147)

As a minority with over 30 years of teaching experience, Alfaro (2008) eloquently writes about wanting to equip teachers in more effective ways to reach students. After eight years of teaching a methods course to would-be history and social science teachers, she was frustrated by what she saw as a "one-size-fits-all" approach to content in California, one of the most diverse places on the planet (Alfaro, 2008, p. 143). Deliberative pedagogy can be part of the solution to dealing with the disadvantages to the top-down approach (Alfaro, 2008).

The Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE) and Carnegie Corporation of New York gathered scholars and practitioners in civic education in 2002 to define the best and most appropriate aspects of civic education ("*Guardian of Democracy*," 2011; <https://www.carnegie.org/>). They concluded that civic education "should

help young people acquire and learn to use the skills, knowledge, and attitudes that will prepare them to be competent and responsible citizens throughout their lives” (Levinson, 2010, p. 317). It is this definition that is behind the call for schools to help address the “civic empowerment gap” that exists in in the U.S. (Levinson, 2010, p. 316). Schools can and should play a role in addressing this inequality in power (Levinson, 2010). Education plays a significant role in shaping future citizens, teaching them to use their voice, to participate politically, and to care about others in the community – all a part of being “competent and responsible citizens” (Levinson, 2010, p. 317). Schools remain a vital place for teaching young people the skills needed to participate in democracy and be healthy citizens. As has been discussed throughout this report, deliberation provides a framework for helping students to grow in these areas.

Because of the many benefits of deliberative pedagogy, administrators should consider adopting deliberation in various ways. It is important to remember that deliberation can be used to meet Common Core State Standards or other standards like the “College, Career, and Citizenship (C3) Standards of the National Council for Social Studies” (Molnar-Main, 2017, p. 87). Discussing ideas and listening to others can help meet goals for student growth so deliberation can be seen as a path to achieve aims already in place (Molnar-Main, 2017). Deliberation can be connected to service requirements as it makes connections to organizations in the community (Longo & Gibson, 2017; Molnar-Main & Kingseed, 2013). Administrators could encourage classrooms to host a community forum on a relevant issue, encouraging community involvement and service. A deliberative format could be used for a parent-teacher meeting to inform about the process, include them in decision-making, and model how it could be used. For example, an issue guide on how to prevent bullying could be used to engage parents and teachers together in deliberation (see Molnar-Main, 2017). In addition to issue

guides and other online resources, the NIF also has information on upcoming events both locally and nationally that teachers and administrators could attend, as well as a grant funding available for teachers new to deliberation. Finally, all are encouraged to connect with any local organization, like the Institute for Civic Discourse and Democracy at Kansas State, for more information on community events and for potential future partnership. With intentionality and a concerted group effort, deliberation practices can be implemented and sustained in the long-term (Molnar-Main, 2017; Molnar-Main & Kingseed, 2013).

### **Deliberative Pedagogy – Why Should We Bother?**

Some do not see the value in using deliberation because of the polarization that is currently characteristic of political communication in the U.S. (McAvoy & Hess, 2013). If most of our world is not willing to engage in deliberation, then why go to the trouble of teaching it to young people (McAvoy & Hess, 2013)? Polarization is best seen as a “feature of modern democracies that will surface and resurface when conditions allow” (McAvoy & Hess, 2013, p. 25). Because of this, teachers need to be aware of how polarization can be present and inhibit healthy deliberation (McAvoy & Hess, 2013). Polarization hinders discussion by decreasing trust in others and reducing the chances for compromise (McAvoy & Hess, 2013). Research shows that distrust and polarization create a vicious cycle, building off one another (McAvoy & Hess, 2013).

Polarization may impact schools because as distrust increases, people may see schools as “yet another dysfunctional public institution” (McAvoy & Hess, 2013, p. 31). Some teachers are hesitant to include controversial topics in their content because of different views on what should be taught in civic education and accusations from some that they are using their classrooms as “soapboxes for their own views” (McAvoy & Hess, 2013, p. 34). But even with these

challenges, it is important for teachers to consider deliberation over controversial issues to help develop students' ability to think about their views, articulate their reasons for holding that view, and hearing out the other side (McAvoy & Hess, 2013).

Deliberation offers more cognitively complex discussion that helps students grow in critical thinking and decision-making skills, character and empathy, and communication ability. It gives the chance for all to use their voice and be heard while teachers use an engaging teaching style that keeps students interested in the content. Deliberative pedagogy has the potential to increase civic involvement in young people both now and in their future, proving to be an invaluable resource for improving the political climate or at the very least building citizens who can be informed and have the skills to productively engage in society. Dzur (2017) reminds us that “participatory democracy is no utopian dream, but rather a lot of small, imperfect, fluid, sometimes time-consuming efforts” (p. 7). Deliberative pedagogy gives opportunities for students to be a part of those efforts but now and in the future.

Schools that do not take advantage of the unique opportunities afforded by deliberation are missing out on the chance to educate the next generation of citizens (McAvoy & Hess, 2013). Talking about political issues “is not only more educative than quashing or ignoring differences but also more likely to enhance the quality of decision making by ensuring that multiple and competing views about controversial political issues are aired, fairly considered, and critically evaluated” (McAvoy & Hess, 2013, p. 35). The classroom can be a place where students learn not only civic knowledge but also gain practice in the basic democratic skills needed to talk and listen to others. While not easy or magical, deliberation offers future generations a way out of our current “race to the bottom” in civic life (Flanagan, 2017, para. 13).

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