

Engaged approaches to deliberative civic learning: Case study of a small urban middle school

by

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B.S., Lomonosov Moscow State University, 2005

M.A., Higher School of Economics, 2008

AN ABSTRACT OF A DISSERTATION

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Abstract

Given the current context of high political polarization and democratic backsliding, the importance of developing the capacity of youth to participate in civic life so they can engage respectfully with one another is crucial. This study considers deliberative civic learning as a pathway for youth capacity building for democratic citizenship and draws upon deliberative pedagogy. In addition, the search for innovative pathways to high-quality deliberative civic learning calls for collaborative programmatic efforts and community-university partnerships. This study considers a partnership between a Midwestern land-grant institution, cooperative extension, youth development program, a non-partisan organization for deliberation and dialogue, and a public middle school. In this respect, this study also draws on engaged approaches to research that have practical and ethical implications.

By utilizing a descriptive, interpretive single case study design, this exploratory multidisciplinary study aimed to describe gifted middle school students' learning experiences in visual thinking strategies (VTS) integrated with National Issues Forums (NIF). To accomplish this, the study addressed the following research questions: What do gifted middle school students learn as they engage in deliberative civic learning through participation in VTS integrated with NIF? a) How do gifted middle school students describe their experience in VTS integrated with NIF? b) What are the perceived outcomes of gifted middle school students' participation in VTS integrated with NIF? The data was collected using various methods such as non-participant observation, interview, questionnaire, focus group, curriculum and artifact analysis, field notes, and forum transcripts. The data analysis was conducted by applying an iterative approach to coding, employing thematic analysis, and using a macro-analytic approach to qualitative content analysis.

The findings suggest that the engaged efforts ensured meaningful student engagement with deliberative civic learning and led to students' development and growth across the different levels of participation. The results reveal that the gifted early adolescents were able to practice active listening skills to acquire a better understanding of their peers' viewpoints and consider options that benefit the community based on new information and reflection of a variety of perspectives. The findings also suggest that deliberative civic learning provided the gifted middle school students with an opportunity to learn about their peers' experiences and leadership development. The research participants associated their greater awareness of the various opinions of their peers and willingness to learn about others' perspectives with the learning experience in VTS integrated with NIF. The study's findings are consistent with the existing deliberative pedagogy literature. This dissertation project contributes to a larger body of scholarship regarding capacity building of gifted early adolescents for democratic citizenship. The research has practical implications for K-12 educators, school districts administration, and youth development programs.

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Approved by:

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Dedication

To my parents. No matter what journey I was about to embark on, you were there for me.

Ата-анама арналады. Олар мені әрқашан әрбір бастамаларымды қолдады және
жанымда болды.

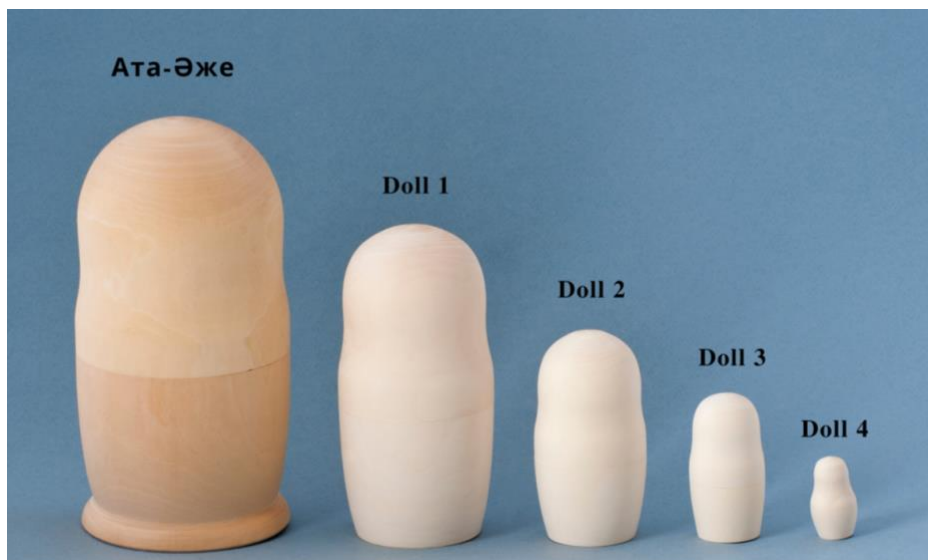
“Ата-Әже”: Engaged Research Framework

One of the first significant reading assignments in my experience in the Leadership Communication program was *Towards a New Ethnohistory: Community-Engaged Scholarship among the People of the River* by Carlson et al. (2018). The book is a product of a long-term cooperative partnership between the University of Saskatchewan, University of Victoria, and Stó:lō Research and Resource Management Centre that resulted in a collection of stories of indigenous Stó:lō community members. The content of the book made me think deeply of various aspects of community-engaged scholarship, including origins, purposes, and agents of engaged scholarship. Carlson et al. (2018) distinguish between outreach and engagement as (a) *data about or for us* versus (b) *data with or by us*. The Ethnohistory Field School is an excellent illustration of meaningful community-university partnerships driven by the *data by us* principle. This fostered reflection on how investigators can ensure that designed and implemented studies can benefit community members, advance knowledge, recognize lived experiences, and maintain rigor and integrity of the scholarship.

As I have been reflecting on an emerging engaged scholar’s identity journey, I realized that engaged approaches to research are grounded in an individual’s worldview that includes assumptions about human nature, ontological and epistemological assumptions (Holmes, 2020). More importantly, engaged work is deeply “rooted in and driven by our individual and intersecting identities, in particular, three facets of an engaged scholar’s identity – the personal, professional, and the civic” (Ward, 2010, as cited in Dostilio et al., 2016, p.117). From my observation, a broader individual’s worldview determines goals and characteristics of a partnership between an engaged researcher and a local community.

Collaborative engagement research paradigm emphasizes (a) community-driven priorities, (b) shared and equitable decision-making, and (c) co-creation of knowledge as guiding principles (Horowitz et al., 2009; Jacquez et al., 2016; Ross et al., 2010). Scholars also highlight that engaged approaches to research have implications for every stage of a research process (Horowitz et al., 2009; Ross et al., 2010). Drawing on the tenets of engaged approaches to research, I introduce the “Ата-Әже” [ata äje] engaged research framework that metaphorically reflects nested dolls (Figure 1). Although wooden figures are associated with Russian culture, I am drawing on Kazakh national culture. According to Uzakbaeva and Beisenbayeva (2015), Kazakh culture reflects transmitting from one generation to another way of life; the importance of memory of ancestors, respect for elders, and preserving a family. The crucial aspect of the “Ата-Әже” engaged research framework is ethical consideration, which reflected in nested dolls that are considered as a traditional representation of the mother carrying a child within her.

Figure 1 Nested Dolls

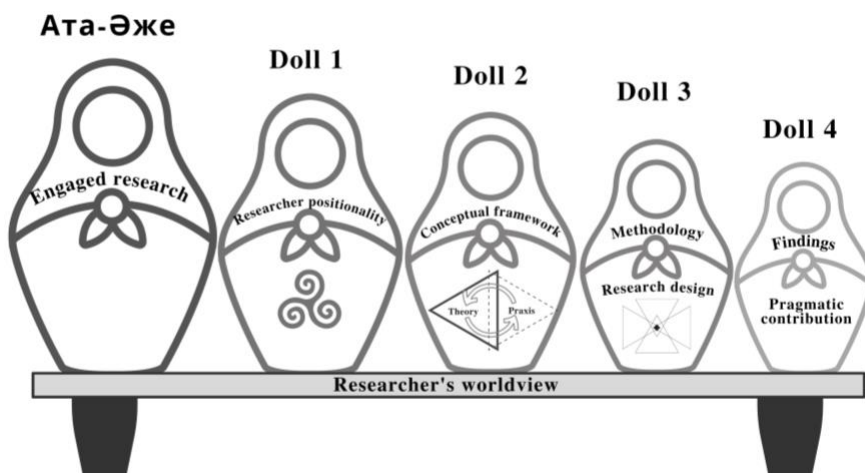


Note: Nested dolls are wooden figures nested into each other.

“Ата-Әже” means grandparents in the Kazakh language. My maternal and paternal grandparents’ lived experiences encompass the memories of losing a parent as young children

due to World War II and political repression and persecution in the 1930s; they persevered severe hunger and hard labor during their adolescent time, and they lived through the collapse of the Soviet Union. Unfortunately, they were marginalized as a Kazakh minority in Russia and as a Kazakh majority in Kazakh Soviet Socialist Republic. I hope to preserve those stories and memories of the perseverance, and inherited cultural artifacts, as a part of the family’s legacy. Moreover, it is crucial to remember the names of grandfathers and great-grandfathers up to the seventh generation for Kazakhs. Drawing on Kazakh traditions, I used a nested dolls metaphor to describe the “Ата-Әже” engaged research framework that guided my study (Figure 2).

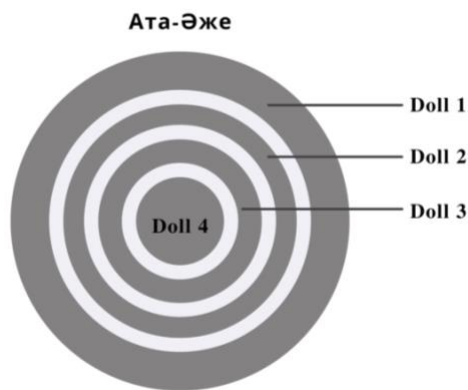
Figure 2 “Ата-Әже” Engaged Research Framework: Introduction



“Ата-Әже”, the outer doll, represents the tenets of engaged approaches to research that served as a set of guiding principles that informed my rationale and choices. A shelf upon which nested dolls sit represents a researcher’s ontological and epistemological assumptions. A researcher’s worldview encompasses the intersection of personal, professional, and civic identities that guide engaged work (Ward, 2010). In this sense, the intersection of personal, professional, and civic identities informs existing and emerging partnerships and influences choices about engaged work with the goal of positive change in a community.

Using a nested dolls metaphor, the tenets of engaged approaches to research (“Ата-Әже”, the outer doll) have informed all aspects of this study, including Doll 1, Doll 2, Doll 3, and Doll 4. In other words, each of the dolls is situated within the context of engaged research (Figure 3). Doll 1 represents the researcher’s positionality, which reflects in a subjectivity statement. It is important to distinguish a researcher’s worldview (shelf) and positionality (Doll 1). In this framework, positionality “reflects the position that the researcher has chosen to adopt within a given research study” (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013 p. 71). In this regard, Doll 1 informs Doll 2, Doll 3, and Doll 4 accordingly.

Figure 3 Nested Dolls Principle



Informed by engaged approaches to research, Doll 2 is a conceptual framework that includes theoretical perspectives and practical solutions (Post et al., 2016). According to the “Ата-Әже” engaged research framework, a conceptual framework (Doll 2) informs Doll 3 and Doll 4. Next, guided by engaged scholarship, Doll 3 represents the choice of methodology and research design that ensure collaborative research process and shared decision-making (Jacquez et al., 2016; Ross et al., 2010).

Finally, Doll 4 represents the dissemination of findings. According to engaged approaches to research, Doll 4 (the dissemination of findings) is informed by Doll 1 (a

researcher’s positionality), Doll 2 (a conceptual framework, Doll 3 (methodology and research design) inform the choices and rationale for the dissemination of the findings.

The application of the “Ата-Әже” engaged research framework is presented throughout the dissertation in Chapters 1, 2, 3, and 4. The structure of the framework guides the structure of the dissertation. In particular, for each doll, I provided a discussion in mini-chapters to demonstrate how the elements of the “Ата-Әже” engaged research framework align with the broader framing of engaged scholarship and situated in this doctoral study research.

Chapter 1 - Introduction

The current political context is characterized by heightened polarization, decreased citizens' trust both in institutions and each other, and the spread of misinformation (Barker & Suhay, 2021; Gurri, 2018; Kumagai & Iorio, 2020; Mettler & Lieberman, 2020; Vallier, 2021; Zuckerman, 2021). Scholars also emphasize the concerns about the erosion of the practices, norms, and commitments that essential for a democratic society (Carey et al., 2019; Mickey et al., 2017). In this respect, it is crucial to develop young people's understandings of and commitments to democratic norms and their capacity to collaboratively engage in a respectful and civic manner (Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement [CIRCLE], 2013; Educating for American Democracy, 2021; Levine, 2013; Kahne et al., 2021).

Literature suggests six best practices in civic education: (a) curriculum linked to the social sciences, (b) discussion of controversial issues, (c) service learning, (d) simulations of governmental processes, (e) engagement in school governance, and (f) extracurricular activities related to leadership skills (Gould et al., 2011). Discussion of controversial societal issues can promote commitments to engage in democratic life (Gould et al., 2011; Kahne et al., 2013; Torney-Purta, 2002). In this sense, to address the challenges of democracy, it is essential to create opportunities and conditions for young people to engage in productive exchange and reasoning through deliberations of current societal issues (Lee et al., 2021; Educating for American Democracy, 2021). There is also a call for a *participatory, action-oriented and connected to the real-world way* to teach civics (Levine et al., 2018). Accordingly, civic education that draws upon deliberative pedagogy and highlights deliberative values can foster the development of critical thinking, collaborative problem solving, and perspective-taking (Levine & Kawashima-Ginsberg, 2017; Molnar-Main, 2017).

Given the civic mission of public schools and its capacity to impact a significant number of young individuals, developing high-quality civic education in K-12 that emphasizes deliberative values is essential for preparing youth to be engaged citizens (Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement [CIRCLE], 2003, 2013; Levine & Kawashima-Ginsberg, 2017). The search for innovative pathways to high-quality deliberative civic learning calls for a collaborative effort and community-university partnerships. Guided by Boyer's (1996) *scholarship of engagement*, this study considered the partnership between Kansas State University (K-State), K-State Institute for Civic Discourse and Democracy (ICDD), the Marianna Kistler Beach Museum of Art (Beach Museum), K-State Research and Extension (KSRE), and the Kansas 4-H program (4-H), and Hillview School¹, a public middle school. Through the collaborative efforts of ICDD, Beach Museum, KSRE, and 4-H, deliberative civic learning curriculum was delivered to middle school students (Boyer, 1996; McDowell, 2004; Sandman & Weerts, 2008; Smith, 2004).

Statement of the Problem

The deliberative civic learning curriculum was delivered to middle school students in a unique context. First, the current political context in the United States has been characterized by high political polarization and incivility (Boatright, 2019; Mettler & Lieberman, 2020). Second, school districts across the United States have been navigating national and local issues concerning COVID vaccinations, mask wearing, and current competing visions for education. Third, while Kansas remained strongly red-leaning during the last several presidential elections, Hillview School is located in a blue-leaning county as Democrats received urban and suburban

¹ A pseudonym.

populations' support. Moreover, schools in liberal contexts are more likely to provide support for the discussion of controversial issues before to the 2018 midterm elections (Kahne et al., 2021). Fourth, considering that the body of scholarship regarding gifted education has not addressed the gifted middle school students' experience of deliberation in the classroom, offers a unique educational context for the study.

Given the current political context in the United States, it is critical to gain a better understanding of humility as well as create conditions for cultivation of intellectual humility (Lynch, 2021; Pritchard, 2020). Drawing upon Shaffer et al. (2017), I claim that deliberative pedagogy can serve as an educational model for the cultivation of intellectual humility and democratic leadership development of youth. In particular, the National Issues Forums (NIF) framework (Molnar-Main, 2017) and visual thinking strategies (VTS) (Housen, 1983, 1987; Yenawine, 1998) have potential for cultivating democratic citizenship when utilized together as part of a larger learning experience.

Considering that adolescent years are a critical period in human development, civic knowledge and skills development should occur during adolescence and start in middle school (Levine et al., 2018). However, the existing body of empirical literature concerns experiences of high school and college students (Gastil, 2004; Harriger & McMillan, 2007; Hess, 2009; Hess & McAvoy, 2015; Molnar-Main, 2017). Furthermore, the body of scholarship on gifted education in K-12 has not considered deliberative pedagogy as an educational model. Accordingly, conducting an exploratory study that examines learning experiences of gifted middle school students' participation in NIF and VTS can develop a more nuanced description of deliberative pedagogy, generate insights, and provide an opportunity to understand the phenomenon better.

Brief Description of the Study

The purpose of this doctoral study was to describe gifted middle school students' learning experiences in VTS integrated with NIF. Using multiple methods, this exploratory study aimed to consider contextual and situational factors to examine the learning experiences of youth. To accomplish this, I addressed the following research questions:

1. What do gifted middle school students learn as they engage in deliberative civic learning through participation in VTS integrated with NIF?
 - a. How do gifted middle school students describe their experience in VTS integrated with NIF?
 - b. What are the perceived outcomes of gifted middle school students' participation in VTS integrated with NIF?

The research project employed a descriptive, interpretive single case study design using various methods such as non-participant observation, interview, questionnaire, focus group, curriculum and artifact analysis, field notes, and forum transcripts. I conducted data analysis by applying an iterative coding approach, employing thematic analysis and thematic content analysis, and using a macro-analytic approach to qualitative content analysis. For data analysis, I utilized NVivo 12. The unit of analysis in this study was gifted eighth-grade students' experiences and their perceptions regarding their participation in the VTS integrated with NIF during their time in middle school in the 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 academic years.

Engaged Scholarship

Boyer (1996) highlights that higher education institutions fulfill their civic missions by pursuing a scholarship of engagement. Alter (2003) argues that the goal of scholarship is to generate, synthesize, and apply knowledge to address real-world challenges. In this sense,

exploring the learning experiences of gifted middle school students, who participated in programmatic efforts emphasizing deliberative values, presented an opportunity to produce findings that would be academically meaningful and practically significant (Post et al., 2016).

Drawing on Jacquez et al. (2016), Horowitz et al. (2009), and Ross et al. (2010), I introduced the “Ата-Әже” engaged research framework. Guided by this framework, the tenets of engaged approaches to research served as a set of guiding principles that informed my rationale and choices. In this sense, I connected the theoretical perspectives and practical solutions for deliberative civic learning, linked the agenda of the research project to the interests and priorities of the partners, and disseminated the findings to benefit the local community. I elaborated on the “Ата-Әже” engaged research framework throughout the dissertation.

Researcher’s Role and Assumptions

Qualitative inquiry and engaged scholarship require the active role of an investigator to develop relationships, build rapport, and maintain partnerships with the involved organizations and units, the community, and research participants. Given the involvement of multiple partners (ICDD, KSRE, 4-H, the Beach Museum, and a public middle school), the agenda of the research project connected to the interests and priorities of these multiple organizations.

My role with the Kansas 4-H Community Vitality Leadership Team was instrumental in understanding the programmatic efforts, building connections with multiple local communities. Additionally, having established personal relationships played a significant role as the global pandemic started in March 2020, leading to following interactions and collaboration moving online.

I also brought three salient perspectives and experiences to this doctoral study: my experience of growing up in an authoritarian political system with limited access to civic

education and learning; my socialization in a collectivist and high-context culture; and my appreciation for visual storytelling. As I started data collection and analysis, I kept reflecting on how my perceptions and beliefs were colored by my understanding of civic education, citizenship, democracy, and an art-based discussion. This study also challenged me to cultivate a deeper self-reflexivity, cultural sensitivity, and awareness of power dynamics in interacting with youth.

Definition of Terms

Throughout this dissertation, I utilize several key terms and concepts.

Community Conversation series is an extra-curriculum program delivered through the partnership between ICDD, KSRE, 4-H, and the Beach Museum. This program included a series of training such as communication boot camp, NIF and VTS facilitator training, facilitation opportunities, and participation in community conversations. For the purpose of this study, the Community Conversation series included both in-person events and conducted via Zoom activities in which middle school students took part during the 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 academic years.

Community conversation is a forum guided by NIF model of deliberation in which youth had opportunities to gather, discuss choices concerning complex societal issues, and work toward creating reasoned judgment.

Deliberative pedagogy is a “democratic educational process and a way of thinking that encourages students to encounter and consider multiple perspectives, weigh trade-offs and tensions, and move toward action through informed judgment. It is simultaneously a way of teaching that is itself deliberative and a process for developing the skills, behaviors, and values that support deliberative practice.” (Shaffer et al., 2017, xxi)

High-context culture is a culture that emphasizes the preferences for indirect, implicit messages over direct, explicit messages (Hall, 1976, 1983). In high-context cultures, people use implicit messages and cues from the context to decode the message (Hall, 1976; Jos Hornikx & Rob le Pair, 2017).

Intellectual humility is an awareness of “that others might have something to teach you, that there may be something to gain from the experience of other people,” and concurrently being “confident enough to realize what you know, and what you don’t.” (Lynch, 2021, pp. 141-142).

National Issues Forums is a structured discussion that “offers citizens the opportunity to join together to deliberate, to make choices with others about ways to approach difficult issues, and to work toward creating reasoned public judgment” (Johnson & Melville, 2019, as cited in Longo & Shaffer, 2019, p. 6).

Visual Thinking Strategies is a student-centered art-based pedagogical model that incorporates a facilitated discussion about diverse art objects (Hailey et al., 2015; Yenawine, 1998). For the purpose of this study, VTS included VTS sessions guided by a trained adult and/or peer-to-peer VTS sessions during the 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 academic years.

Organization of the Dissertation

I begin by introducing a deliberative civic learning framework, which included theoretical perspectives and practical solutions, and drawing the connection among the key elements of the conceptual framework in Chapter 2. By considering various existing designs for deliberation, I argue that the NIF model is suitable for youth capacity building in educational settings. I also suggest that the VTS model aligns with deliberative pedagogy, increasing the potential for capacity building for intellectual humility. In Chapter 2, I propose a

multidisciplinary conceptual framework that integrated deliberative pedagogy, the constitutive role of communication, collective leadership, and social cognitive theory, along with practical solutions for youth capacity building.

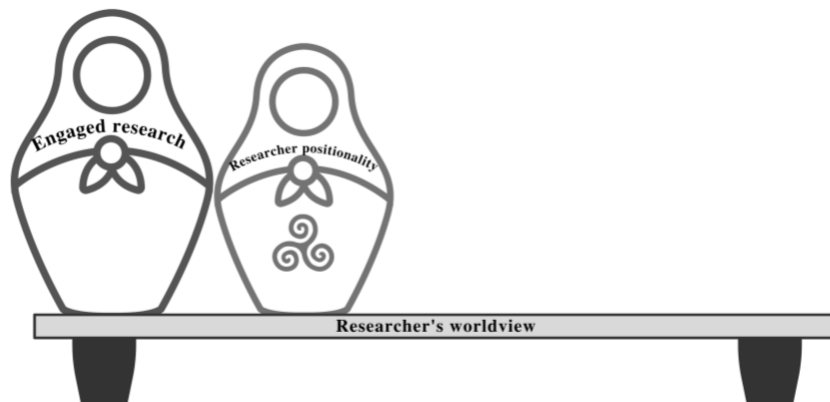
I offer a detailed description of the research design and methodology guided by the research purpose and questions in Chapter 3. Next, I describe the research site, participant selection criteria, data collection methods, and the data collection timeline and alignment with the research questions. I also consider ethics as a crucial component of the study, and I review the criteria of quality in qualitative research and discussed the limitations of the study. In Chapter 4, I present the description of research participants and context; I identified three main themes. I conclude this dissertation by offering a discussion of findings and highlighting potential implications and contributions of the study, as well as its limitations, in Chapter 5.

The application of the “Ата-Өже” engaged research framework is presented throughout the dissertation in Chapters 1, 2, 3, and 4. For each doll, I provide a discussion in mini-chapters to demonstrate how the elements of the “Ата-Өже” engaged research framework align with the broader framing of engaged scholarship and situated in this doctoral study research.

Doll 1: Subjectivity Statement

Due to the nature of the qualitative inquiry, a researcher's experiences and assumptions are understood to influence the research process and how the researcher makes sense of the data (Bhattacharya, 2017; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Stake, 1995). In other words, the researcher becomes the *instrument* (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005). According to the “Ата-Өже” engaged research framework, the intersecting personal, professional, and civic identities (a shelf) informs the engaged work. Since each of the dolls is situated within the context of engaged research, positionality (Doll 1, Figure 1.1) informs the choices regarding conceptual framework and research design. In this framework, positionality is identified regarding (a) the subject under investigation, (b) the research participants, and (c) the research context (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). Accordingly, it is essential to articulate the researcher's positionality and be transparent about the researcher's subjectivities related to the project (Bhattacharya, 2017).

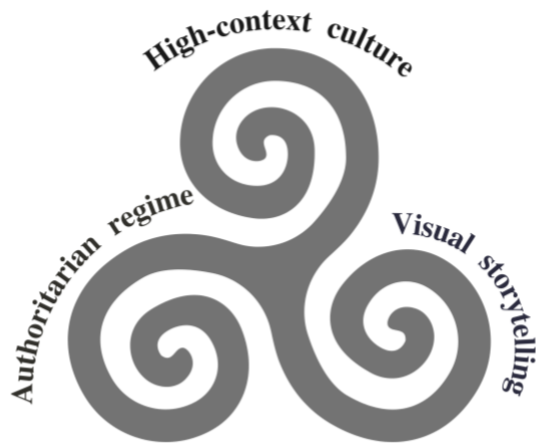
Figure 1.1. “Ата-Өже” Engaged Research Framework: Positionality



Guided by Maxwell (2005), I kept a reflective journal that included thoughts and insights regarding my assumptions, beliefs, and past experiences. This helped me become acutely aware of my own biases regarding the practices that I investigated and my perceptions of the

interactions with the research participants. In this section, I reflect on three salient perspectives and experiences that I brought to this doctoral study: my experience of growing up in an authoritarian political system with limited access to civic education and learning; my socialization in a collectivist and high-context culture; and my appreciation for visual storytelling (Figure 1.2).

Figure 1.2. Researcher's Subjectivity



At the beginning of second grade, I was very much looking forward to becoming a *Little Octobrist*, a member of the organization for children between seven and nine years old in the former Soviet Union. Afterward, I was hoping to join *Young Pioneers*, a communist youth organization for children and adolescents aged nine to fifteen years old. I remember experiencing the anticipating sense of pride and joy because my parents, older cousins, aunts, and uncles were Young Pioneers and enjoyed privileges associated with it. To be accepted into this program and launch a career as a member of the Communist Party of the USSR was considered an illustration of excellent grades and good character. As history depicts, my aspirations did not get realized as the Soviet Union collapsed before I had a chance to be initiated into Young Pioneers. Throughout my elementary and middle school time, my family, as with most of the population in

Kazakhstan, experienced the transition from communism to capitalism. It was a period characterized by uncertainty and the shortage of resources, including food, running water, and electricity. When I was in middle school, I had to fill up the apartment's bathtub every morning because we anticipated that we would not have tap water at some point throughout the day. I tried to finish my homework assignments during daylight hours since I knew that the whole neighborhood could experience power outages in the evenings.

Despite the challenges, it was a promising time when Kazakhstan, a newly independent country, established its new Constitution. Along with high school students across the country, I was enrolled in a mandatory civic education course to learn about the Constitution and the three branches of government: legislative, executive, and judicial. It was a time filled with hope that the new system would ensure basic human rights, freedom, and economic opportunities. Unfortunately, after the Soviet Union's totalitarianism, Kazakhstan's reality reflected an authoritarian regime for the next thirty years, which resulted in inequality and lack of social mobility. The first twenty years were characterized by unsustainable economic development, corruption, and the oppression of opposition, while the last ten years have been marked with alarming political persecution, violation of human rights, and economic recession coupled with increasing inequality and discrimination against native Kazakhs who could not speak Russian. The majority of civil protests were suppressed by military forces.

As long as I remember, I did not engage in political discussions, except random *kitchen table* types of conversations with close family members and friends whom I trusted. For the most part, politics was considered something given or not safe to engage in. In this sense, civic education was underappreciated and unrecognized by youth as a crucial avenue to develop a better understanding of the political system and their role as citizens. Moreover, political

engagement was limited to volunteerism and grassroots movements (i.e., civic and community engagement). When I became involved with a grassroots movement to support orphans and foster children in rural areas in 2011, it was one of the few ways in which citizens could engage and make a difference. Unfortunately, the political system did not allow individuals to engage safely and successfully; it only encouraged individuals to channel their energy and commitment through community organizing. This experience shaped my nuanced understanding of complexity and sense of urgency regarding building the capacity of youth to engage in civic life. Unfortunately, these experiences also encouraged me to become attuned to power distribution and subtle signs of authority in social interactions.

After living most of my life in Kazakhstan and Russia, where the long-standing role of authority is common across various private and public organizations, government institutions, educational settings, and even interpersonal communication, I moved to the United States to pursue a graduate degree. The short period of time devoted to the graduate program was filled with the reflection on intercultural experiences and communication, along with comparisons of differences in terms of the political landscape, culture, language, and, more importantly, understanding of *self* and *others*.

As I grew up in a collectivistic culture, I was socialized to see myself through others, and being in relation to others seemed organic and essential. In a high-context culture, meanings are collectively assigned and shared through indirect communication with the use of metaphors and attention to nonverbal cues. As an illustration, trust would be common and expected for social interactions in Kazakhstan and Asian countries that I traveled to and lived in from 2013 to 2015. By paying close attention to communication, I observed that when people engaged in social interactions, they connected by drawing on mutual trust unless that trust was intentionally broken

in the past. In contrast, social interactions that I experienced in the United States required building trust, which tended to take time and mutual efforts from both parties. Trust was not given as it needs to be *deserved* through explicit vulnerability, mutual interests, and a history of previous successful interactions.

It is important to note that the needs and goals of the family or community as a whole (*others*) in any collectivistic culture are privileged over the needs and desires of each individual (*self*). This experience made me attuned to and appreciative of rhetoric and storytelling and allowed me to be deeply aware of dimensions of self and others in social interactions when I moved to the United States. Although I greatly appreciated the freedom, privacy, and rule of law provided by the political system in the United States and its individualistic orientation, I am also deeply concerned that the current context of high individualistic orientation exacerbated by neoliberalism results in lower willingness of people to cooperate and engage with one another. Individuals tend to prioritize private over public matters. Indeed, I came to realize that I am both appreciative and critical of the ideals of American citizenship.

To navigate my intercultural experience and reconcile tensions that I observed, I sought ways to build connections and relate to the experiences of people whose worldview and orientation were different from mine. In other words, I have been wondering about the following questions: *How do we develop empathy, trust, and perspective-taking while respecting differences? How can we design a process to foster being in relation to one another? How can we engage meaningfully with one another and learn from each other while appreciating multiplicity?*

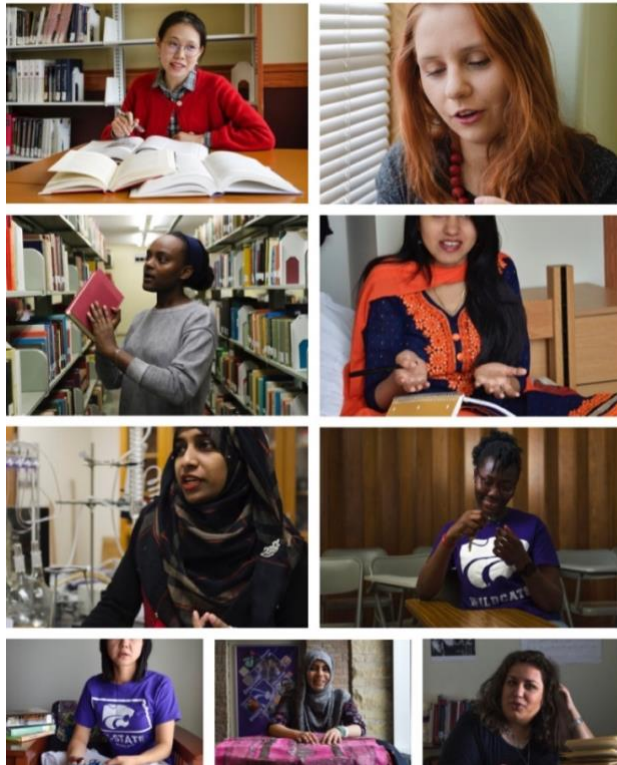
Initially, I thought of intercultural experiences as a way of *dealing with differences*. In my experimental photography, I compared two different co-existing and emerging orientations that I

navigated in spring 2018 (see Figure 1.3). To represent Northern American dominant culture, I depicted *Water with Ice* as a regular way that Midwesterners consume water. This image also represented my understanding of white culture: *cold*, individualistic orientation of self over others. I contrasted *Water with Ice* with *Hot Tea*, which is a common drink for many Asian cultures. It also represented color, warmth, and the collective self. Additionally, I created a series of situational portraits of international female students from India, Greece, Ethiopia, Paraguay, Czech Republic, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Ghana, and China by taking photos and interviewing them about their personal experiences of adjusting to the U.S. culture (see Figure 1.4). From my experience, such framing as *dealing with differences* and *comparison* does not lead to willingness to cooperate and remain open to one another.

Figure 1.3. Researcher’s Experimental Photography: Intercultural Experience



Figure 1.4. Researcher's Situational Portrait Project: Intercultural Experience



Later, I turned to the multilayered nature of artwork as a meaningful medium to explore various dimensions of human life, including historical and political events that affect people's perceptions. From my perspective, visual arts can serve as a universal language that allows individuals from various cultures and orientations to relate to one another. When I first observed VTS in January – February 2020, I noticed brief moments in which the participants were examining and making sense of the piece of art both individually and yet collectively at the same time. There was a shared space to slow down, listen, and reflect on what others shared and what they saw, as well as to feel welcomed to share. It was a powerful experience to be able to connect and learn about each other's perspectives without feeling defensiveness or aversion. I came to think of that experience as co-construction of meaning and open exploration on both individual and collective levels as the participants reviewed their own observations. More importantly, the experience of participating and observing VTS sessions in 2020 made me think

of the notion that I understand what I see and know, and yet it is worth it to share and learn what others see and perceive based on their experiences and background.

It is interesting that my experience with VTS reminded me of a time when I was actively traveling in India, Malaysia, Nepal, and Vietnam. Overall, I spent fifteen months living in ten countries across the Asian continent. Drawing on my multilayered transnational experiences, I came to realize that we only know what we know, and we do not know what we do not know, and it is worth it to keep exploring and learning by staying open. In this sense, along with logical argumentation, it is crucial to tap into a deeper understanding of human experiences through the use of visual arts for meaningful and productive engagement of diverse viewpoints (see Figure 1.5).

Figure 1.5. Researcher’s Journey: International Experience



Considering my perception of the role of visual arts and images, I may want to be particularly cautious when collecting and interpreting data in order to present balanced evidence (Merriam, 2009). As I started data analysis, I kept reflecting that my perceptions and beliefs were colored by my understanding of civic education, citizenship, democracy, and visual storytelling, but I also knew that I cared about youth and their engagement due to my previous experience working with adolescents in Kazakhstan. This study also challenged me to cultivate a deeper

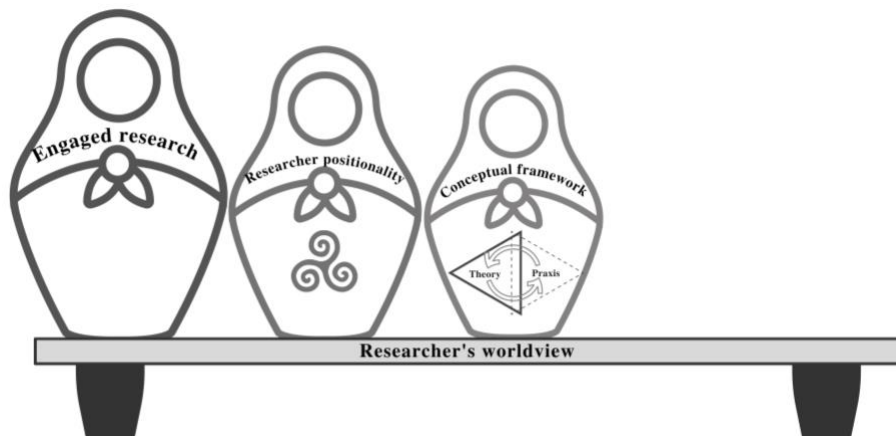
self-reflexivity, cultural sensitivity, and awareness of power dynamics in terms of interacting with youth.

Doll 2: Situating the Conceptual Framework

The commitment of higher education institutions in the United States to serving the public good has been emphasized by scholars (Boyer, 1996; Chambers, 2005; Jacoby, 2009). Community-engaged research involves partnerships between academics and communities to address community priorities and problems through the use of university resources generated from teaching, research, and service (Boyer, 1996; Ward & Moore, 2010; Zhang et al., 2020).

Scholars also point out the reflexive relationship between theory and practice has the potential to make a difference in communities by enhancing community members' capacities for action (Barge, 2001; Craig & Tracy, 2014). Consequently, community-engaged scholarship includes theoretical questions and practical problems (Post et al., 2016). In this sense, guided by engaged approaches to research, the literature review focuses on (a) the theoretical perspectives that inform deliberative civic learning and (b) practical solutions for youth capacity building (Figure 1.6).

Figure 1.6. “Ата-Әже” Engaged Research Framework: Conceptual Framework



Chapter 2 - Literature Review

Kahne et al. (2021) emphasize the important role of civic education is to develop “young people’s understandings of and commitments to democratic norms and their abilities to practice them” (p. 2). The literature suggests six best practices in civic education: (a) curriculum linked to the social sciences, (b) discussion of controversial issues, (c) service learning, (d) simulations of governmental processes, (e) engagement in school governance, and (f) extracurricular activities related to leadership skills (Gould et al., 2011). I considered deliberative civic learning that draws upon deliberative democracy theory and practice as a pathway to youth capacity building for democratic citizenship.

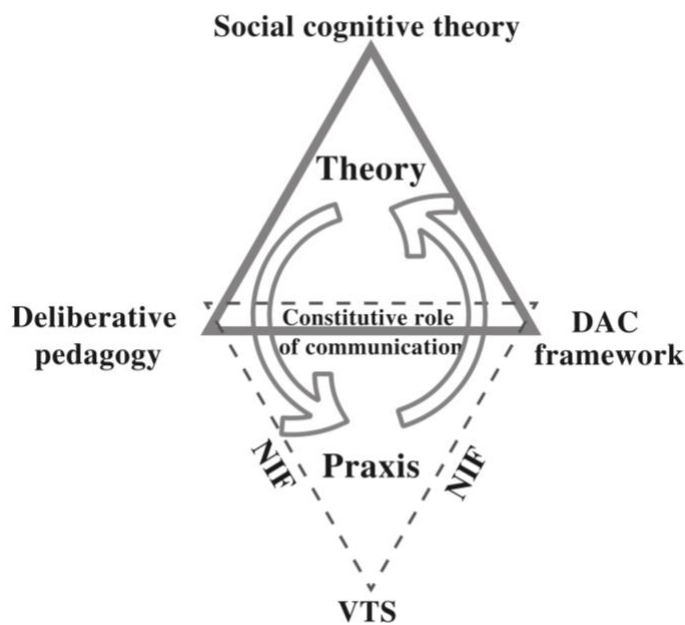
In this chapter, I begin by reviewing literature related to deliberative pedagogy, the constitutive role of communication, contemporary approaches to leadership, and social cognitive theory. Then, I review the National Issues Forums (NIF) and visual thinking strategies (VTS) models as practical solutions for youth development. I introduce integrated praxis by connecting NIF and VTS with theoretical perspectives. In addition, I claim that the NIF and VTS models can function as educational efforts for cultivating intellectual humility. Finally, I present a summary of specific gaps in the literature that the study aims to address.

Conceptual Framework: Deliberative Civic Learning

To describe the conceptual framework, I highlighted the current body of conceptual and empirical literature related to deliberative pedagogy. Then, I pointed out early adolescence as an empirical gap. I drew attention to social cognitive theory and the active role of communication as the premise of deliberative democracy. Based on the constitutive role of communication, I proposed a connection between deliberative pedagogy and the direction-alignment-commitment (DAC) collective leadership framework, which has implications for democratic leadership

education. Next, I highlighted intellectual humility as a conceptual gap for deliberative pedagogy. Finally, drawing on deliberative pedagogy’s premises and social cognitive theory, I argue that intellectual humility is a potential learning outcome of deliberative pedagogy. This chapter proposes a multidisciplinary conceptual framework that integrates deliberative pedagogy, the constitutive role of communication, collective leadership, and social cognitive theory, along with practical solutions for youth capacity building (Figure 2.1).

Figure 2.1. Deliberative Civic Learning: Conceptual Framework



Deliberative Pedagogy

Developing students’ capacities and commitments for democratic citizenship is essential (Kahne & Sporte, 2008; Westheimer & Kahne, 2004a; Kahne et al., 2021). However, education for democracy is determined by a particular conception of democracy and how citizens should participate in democratic processes (Samuelsson & Bøyum, 2015; Westheimer & Kahne, 2004b). For example, Levine et al. (2018) highlight that civic education should be *participatory, action-oriented and connected to the real world way*. Kahne and Sporte (2008) argue that it is crucial to

develop students' capacity to work collectively toward community problem-solving and advance young people's commitment to be concerned *for the well-being of others*.

Considering differences in values, beliefs, and interests that are fundamental for a diverse society, Hanson and Howe (2011) argue that deliberative democratic theory addresses the need for "citizens' autonomy to participate in civic life" and accommodate diverse experiences and viewpoints of citizens (p.1). Likewise, deliberative democracy claims to respond to growing pluralism and encourage citizens' involvement in public problem-solving in modern societies through reasoning (Maurissen et al., 2018; Samuelsson & Bøyum, 2015).

Moreover, deliberative democracy recognizes the *wicked* nature of complex problems in a diverse and divided society (Carcasson & Sprain, 2012). According to Rittel and Webber (1973), most complex social and public policy issues are wicked problems, characterized by (a) lack of clarity of framing around the problem itself, (b) lack of definitive and ultimate solutions, (c) uniqueness of every problem, and (d) wicked problems are interconnected and can be a sign of another problem. Furthermore, wicked problems "inherently involve competing underlying values, paradoxes, and trade-offs that cannot be resolved by science" (Carcasson & Sprain, 2016, p.16). To deal with wicked problems, citizens need to be able to (a) engage with one another for collaborative action through high-quality communication, (b) develop a shared understanding across perspectives, and (c) negotiate the underlying competing core values (Carcasson, 2017; Carcasson & Sprain, 2016).

Accordingly, building civic capacity for productive collaborative problem-solving requires that "civic education programs at all levels – K-12, higher education, and adult education – should be tapping into the resources and activities tied to the deliberative democracy movement" (Carcasson & Sprain, 2012, p. 16). Considering that characteristics of deliberative

democracy can be taught and learned in educational settings (skills, knowledge, attitudes), deliberative democracy is conceptualized in educational settings and contexts as deliberative pedagogy (Shaffer et al., 2017). Longo, Manosevitch, & Shaffer (2017, p. xxi) define deliberative pedagogy as

“a democratic educational process and a way of thinking that encourages students to encounter and consider multiple perspectives, weigh trade-offs and tensions, and move toward action through informed judgment. It is simultaneously a way of teaching that is itself deliberative and a process for developing the skills, behaviors, and values that support deliberative practice. Perhaps most important, the work of deliberative pedagogy is about space-making: creating and holding space for authentic and productive dialogue, conversations that can ultimately be not only educational but also transformative” (xxi).

In this sense, developing reflective judgment by considering multiple viewpoints and navigating tensions, young people can acquire new knowledge, skills, and attitudes for democratic citizenship. Longo, Manosevitch, & Shaffer (2017, p. xxvi) argue, “Deliberative pedagogy is...[a] practice that enables us to look for opportunities to acknowledge the complexity of our positions and views alongside those we teach and work with every day.” In this sense, deliberative pedagogy is a teaching philosophy that focuses on equipping students “with the mind-sets and skill sets necessary for high-quality participatory decision-making in the face of ‘wicked’ problems” (Carcasson, 2017, p. 3). Consequently, engaging youth in deliberative pedagogy offers an opportunity to develop young people’s capacity to deal with contemporary challenges of democracy. More importantly, deliberative pedagogy offers innovative approaches for teaching and learning for civic learning (Longo & Gibson, 2017). Likewise, current literature

suggests that civic knowledge, skills, and values are learned through the practice of deliberation (Hanson & Howe, 2011; Samuelsson & Bøyum, 2015).

Several studies suggest a positive impact of deliberation on youth' skills, knowledge, and attitudes (Hess, 2009; Hess & McAvoy, 2015; Longo & Gibson, 2017; Parker, 2003). Drury et al. (2017) claim that dialogue and deliberation provide an avenue for teaching productive communication habits, empathetic listening, and critical thinking. Additionally, Longo and Gibson (2017) suggest that public skills are developed through learning by practicing in deliberation. Scholars such as Hess (2009) and Parker (2003) emphasize that classroom discussions *on controversial political issues* develop capacity building among adolescents for democratic work.

According to Hess and McAvoy's (2015) longitudinal study of high school classrooms, through participation in deliberative discussions about political issues, students demonstrated increased political knowledge and commitment to civic engagement, became more confident and interested in listening to opinions different from their own. Harriger and McMillan (2007) conducted a longitudinal multiple-methods assessment of the impact of the democracy fellow program on college students. Their findings suggest that the four-year exposure to deliberative discussions impacted participants' civic engagement (Harriger & McMillan, 2007). In particular, the study confirmed that the democracy fellows developed political knowledge and critical thinking, increased political involvement, were more imaginative in recognizing possibilities for deliberation and applying deliberative knowledge and skills to a broad range of situations (Harriger & McMillan, 2007).

Due to variation in process models of deliberation, it is challenging to synthesize and provide a comparative analysis of empirical literature regarding the impact of deliberation on

individuals' skills (Samuelsson & Bøyum, 2015). These studies have primarily utilized quantitative methods, which does not allow researchers to explore a learning experience in-depth and consider contextual and situational factors that may significantly impact the learning process. This calls for a contextualized study that examines the learning experiences of participants in order to develop a description of deliberative pedagogy that includes contextual and situational factors potentially overlooked in previous studies. In this way, conducting a study that employs multiple methods can generate insights regarding learning outcomes and a more detailed description of the process.

Adolescents

The existing body of empirical literature concerns the experiences of high school and college students (Gastil, 2004; Harriger & McMillan, 2007; Hess, 2009; Hess & McAvoy, 2015; Molnar-Main, 2017). Molnar-Main's (2017) study demonstrate that adolescents can benefit from participation in deliberation. However, limited studies have documented the experience of deliberation in the classroom of early adolescents (13-14 years old).

According to Levine et al. (2018), civic knowledge and skills development should occur during adolescence, beginning in middle school. Moreover, adolescent years are a critical period in human development. During adolescence, youth engage in a search for identity, integrating learning and experiences resulting in a set of values and beliefs (Armstrong, 2006; Keating, 2004; Zaff et al., 2008). In particular, between the ages of 12 to 19 years, youth development focuses on self and identity, including identifying one's own values and beliefs (Hanks et al., 2015). Furthermore, as adolescents want to "understand who they are and how they will relate to the broader society" (Kahne & Sporte, 2008, p. 742), late adolescence is a critical period for the development of sociopolitical orientations (Erikson, 1968, as cited in Kahne & Sporte, 2008).

Even though late adolescence is a critical period for development, it seems promising to explore factors that may influence the development of qualities for democratic citizenship during early adolescence. Given that contextualization is important when considering research that involves children and young people (Greig et al., 2013), this calls for a contextualized study that examines learning experiences of early adolescents.

Gifted students

Among early adolescents' learning experience, cognitively advanced youth's experience of deliberation in the classroom has not been reported. I conducted a review of four peer-reviewed journals² on gifted children and gifted education for K-12 students in the United States published between 2010 and 2022. The key words such as "deliberative pedagogy," "discussion of controversial issues," and "deliberation in the classroom" have not been identified in literature.

According to Dabrowski's theory (1964), gifted individuals demonstrate higher levels of empathy, moral responsibility, and self-reflection (Nelson, 1989). High-achieving students are also "highly reactive to social or emotional stimuli" (Wiley, 2019, p. 1534). Considering three important characteristics of gifted students such as *complexity, precocity, and intensity* (VanTassell-Baska, 2011), it is crucial to design curriculum that offers a meaningful way to channel the characteristics of gifted students (Stephens & Karnes, 2016).

According to Housand (2016), gifted students characteristic includes (a) connected, (b) curious, (c) creative, (d) capable, and (e) conscientious leaders. Consequently, Housand (2016) suggests the following elements of gifted education curriculum that can response to the gifted

² Gifted Child Quarterly, Gifted Child Today, Gifted Education International, and Journal for the Education of the Gifted.

students' characteristics such as (a) connects to students' lives, allows for meaningful collaboration, and provides opportunities for connecting with intellectual peers, (b) promotes inquiry-based learning, requires effort, (c) utilizes divergent thought as a problem-solving strategy, (d) provides cognitive challenge, (e) requires self-reflection and requires students to be respectful of others' needs and contributions (p. 6). In this sense, the deliberation in the classroom has the potential to respond to students' abilities and interests. Therefore, conducting a study to generate insights regarding learning experience of gifted middle school students may address the existing gap in the literature.

Social Cognitive Theory

Greig et al. (2013) emphasize the importance of including theoretical perspectives related to emotion and cognition when research involves children and adolescents. In this fashion, I focus on social cognitive theory that highlights personal growth through enabling experiences (Bandura, 2006.) Social cognitive theory claims that children learn through observing, modeling, and cognitively processing the behavior of others, in which social and cognitive factors are crucial for promoting personal change (Bandura, 1986, 1997, 2004). In order to connect early adolescents' learning experiences with social cognitive theory, I consider learning and teaching strategies associated with deliberative pedagogy.

Deliberative pedagogy includes strategies that encourage students to (a) develop habits of weighing trade-offs of every choice, (b) keep an open mind and be willing to "stand in someone else shoes," (c) believe in the opportunity to create change, and (d) work with others "to make decisions for the common good" (Alfaro, 2008, p. 147). Hanson and Howe (2011) claim that by participating in deliberation, students are prompted to gain a better understanding of the reasons underlying their views and beliefs regarding complex issues, develop their own reasoning, and

understanding of their moral convictions. In addition, the exposure to deliberation results in an improved ability to articulate opinions, listen respectfully, and engage with those with whom they might disagree (Avery et al., 2013). In this regard, given considered empirical studies and strategies associated with deliberative pedagogy, I include social cognitive theory in the deliberative civic learning conceptual framework for early adolescents.

Constitutive Role of Communication

Deliberative pedagogy draws upon the norms of deliberative theory (Shaffer et al., 2017). Given that deliberative democracy emphasizes communicative activities, including reasoning, listening, and reflection (Dryzek, 2000; Mansbridge, 2003), this study also considers the role of communication and language in small group interactions such as deliberation and dialogue.

Longo and Shaffer (2019) highlight that “together dialogue and deliberation have the potential for transformative work through relational engagement and robust discussion” (p. 22). In addition, infusing dialogue into deliberation can foster a space for a deeper reflection and open exchange for effective public problem-solving (Bingham & McNamara, 2008; Makau & Marty, 2001, as cited in Abdel-Monem et al., 2010). In this regard, the exploration of dichotomies such as task/social, deliberation/dialogue, problem-solving/relationship building is important for productive democratic work (Carcasson et al., 2010).

Because of the nature of my research, it is important to distinguish deliberation and dialogue as communicative processes. Deliberation involves “weighing tradeoffs and tensions, recognizing competing values and interests, and coming to what has been termed public judgment.” (Yankelovich & Friedman, 2010, as cited in Longo & Shaffer, 2019, p. 22). Scholars offer various definitions of dialogue. For example, dialogue is “collaborative and relational process to engage with others and cocreate meaning” (Longo & Shaffer, 2019, p. 22); dialogue is

“communication that involves a moment of full mutuality between people” (Black, 2015, p. 365); dialogic moments include deep listening, perspective taking, respect, and a sense of genuineness or honesty (Sprain & Black, 2018). In addition, dialogue is grounded in “a collective and collaborative communication process whereby people explore together their individual and collective assumptions and predispositions” (Barge, 2002, p. 13). In this sense, dialogic communication fosters mutual understanding and relationship building.

According to Frey and Sunwolf (2005), communication is the medium through which information in groups is delivered and processed. In this regard, construction of meaning, building relationships, and coming to reflective judgement occur through communication, which emphasizes the constitutive role of communication. Thus, it is essential to acknowledge that language constitutes reality and influences the decision-making and meaning-making processes. The constitutive role of communication emphasizes that reality is intersubjective and that meanings, actions, and relationships are products of communication (Barge, 2001; Pearce & Pearce, 2004).

Drawing upon the constitutive role of communication, the study’s conceptual framework perceives leadership through a relational and collective lens. From a constructionist perspective, the nature of human interactions is inherently constitutive and dialogical (Cunliffe & Eriksen, 2011), in which language and communication play the central role (Barge, 2001; Pearce & Cronen, 1980). In line with the literature, leadership happens when community members “create a shared understanding of their mutual and moral obligations so that their common cause is realized” (Drath et al., 2001, as cited in Ospina & Schall, 2001, p. 11). This perspective on leadership privileges processes, practices, and interactions, and context (Ospina et al., 2020; Ospina & Schall, 2001).

Democratic Leadership Education

From the collective leadership perspective, discursive practices, including sense-making, are essential for the performance of leadership (Barge & Fairhurst, 2008). Drawing upon the constitutive role of communication, Fairhurst (2009) argues that leadership actors can co-create contexts and shape social realities in and through discourse and, in turn, are shaped by them. Consequently, contemporary approaches to the conceptualization of leadership through a relational and collective lens call for innovative teaching, learning, and curriculum development of leadership education, including examining and seeking to develop discursive strategies used to construct meanings of leadership (Kakim & Priest, 2020).

There are new approaches that have been discussed in the field of leadership education, such as learning “modern leadership” through the use of Socratic circles in middle and high school (Copeland, 2005; North, 2009, as cited in Friesen & Stephens, 2016) and deliberative dialogue as leadership practice (Priest et al., 2018). According to Priest et al. (2018), the deliberative civic engagement process aligns with leadership practices. More importantly, young people need to learn how to deal with wicked problems (Camillus, 2008, as cited in Stover & Seemiller, 2017). In this fashion, deliberative pedagogy offers an avenue for democratic leadership development by engaging students in guided discussions around contemporary complex public issues, developing a shared understanding of an issue and collaborative action plan for change. Moreover, this approach to leadership development aligns with new approaches to conceptualizing leadership through a relational and collective lens (Cunliffe & Eriksen, 2011; Uhl-Bien, 2006; Uhl-Bien & Ospina, 2012).

Drath et al. (2008) propose the DAC framework in which focus shifts on how groups produce collective outcomes through collaborative efforts. According to the DAC framework, (a)

direction refers to the group's goals, (b) *alignment* is the coordination of actions within the group members, and (c) *commitment* refers to the willingness of group members to consider collective goals over individual benefits (Drath et al., 2008). In this respect, leadership is about “mutual adjustment, shared sense-making, collective learning, or mutual transformation” (Drath et al., 2008, p. 650). In addition, Uhl-Bien (2006) views leadership as a collective activity in which “emergent coordination (i.e., involving social order) and change (e.g., new values, attitudes, approaches, behaviors, and ideologies) are constructed and produced” (p. 654). Drawing on Uhl-Bien (2006), this study views leadership “as an ongoing process signifying the pursuit of direction in the production of a space for co-action” (Sklaveniti, 2020, p. 548). “Leadership is a formulation of individual acts in organized relationships which aim to drive members of a working collective towards desired mutual ends” (Drath et al., 2008, as cited in Sklaveniti, 2020, p. 546). In this regard, I claim that when participants engage in dialogue and deliberation, they reason, listen, and reflect. It can lead to mutual adjustment, shared sense-making, collaborative learning, and result in *pragmatic collective outcomes* (Drath et al., 2008). Likewise, Quick (2017) claims collective leadership conception resonates with the body of scholarship on public deliberation.

Carroll (2015) suggests that “leadership is in fact a highly variable, relational, and contextual phenomenon that people construct differently depending on who they are and how they interact in their context” (p. 99). Moreover, Saunders (2005) suggest that civil society is defined “by the way citizens conduct their relationships—the principles by which they interact” (p. 58). Carroll's interpretive leadership development discourse focuses on process and leadership learning by emphasizing meaning, language, symbols, artifacts, and interaction as central in how leadership is constructed (or not) by a group of people (2005). Drawing upon

Carroll's (2015) framework, individuals can learn by doing with regard to how they deal with wicked problems by engaging in the deliberation process. Therefore, a communication design that includes deliberation can serve as a model for leadership practice and learning for youth.

Moreover, national and state standards for gifted education highlight leadership talent development as an important component of gifted education (Meyer & Rinn, 2021). However, many school districts leave leadership development to athletics, fine arts, clubs, and student organizations due to limited resources (Meyer & Rinn, 2021). Meyer and Rinn (2021) note social, developmental, and contextual components of the youth leadership talent development framework. In this sense, students can learn how they deal with wicked problems by engaging in the deliberative discussion in the classroom and thus participate in the leadership development curriculum. In this fashion, conducting an exploratory study to capture interactions in deliberation in educational settings provides an opportunity to investigate meanings of post-heroic leadership through the process and participants' understanding.

Intellectual Humility

Along with communication skills, critical thinking, and collaborative problem solving, it is important to advance individuals' capacity to engage with and respond to diverse perspectives civilly (Laden, 2019). This can include the ability to see things from another person's perspective (empathy) and/or recognize that individuals can benefit from hearing different insights from each other (humility) (National Institute for Civic Discourse, 2022). Humility is essential for engaging differences more constructively in a diverse and divided society (National Institute for Civic Discourse, 2022). Neblo and Israelson (2021) draw attention to the role of intellectual humility as a bi-valent concept in deliberative democracy, both conceptually and practically. The scholars draw upon Greek philosophers' description of characteristics of *sophrosyne*, which is essential

for democratic citizenship. Sophrosyne includes “quietness, modesty, minding one’s own business, and knowledge of what one knows and does not know” (Neblo & Israelson, 2021, p. 135). Furthermore, Neblo and Israelson (2021) argue that second-order knowledge, or “knowledge of what one knows and does not know,” is crucial for good deliberative citizenship (p. 135). Consequently, given heightened political polarization, mistrust, and the spread of misinformation on social media, it is critical to cultivate intellectual humility. Interestingly, the research to date has not focused on the connection between deliberative pedagogy and intellectual humility.

Conceptualization of Intellectual Humility

There is a limited body of literature related to intellectual humility, which is still being developed (Lynch, 2021; Neblo & Israelson, 2021). Intellectual humility is considered a complex psychological phenomenon that has been discussed in philosophy (Lynch, 2021; Tanesini, 2018). In many fields, intellectual humility is viewed as a virtue, trait, or attitude (Lynch, 2021; Porter & Schumann, 2018; Pritchard, 2020; Tanesini, 2018). Several other conceptualizations of intellectual humility have recently emerged in the literature. Pritchard (2020) defines intellectual humility as an other-regarding virtue that is “rooted in a genuine intellectual concern for others” (p. 404). Intellectual humility has been described as “having (a) insight about the limits of one’s knowledge, marked by openness to new ideas; and (b) regulating arrogance, marked by the ability to present one’s ideas in a nonoffensive manner and receive contrary ideas without taking offense, even when confronted with alternative viewpoints” (McElroy et al., 2014, p.20). In addition, Krumrei-Mancuso and Rouse (2016) define intellectual humility as “a nonthreatening awareness of one’s intellectual fallibility” (p. 2); Porter and Schumann (2018) conceptualize intellectual humility as an “awareness of one’s intellectual fallibility awareness and... a

willingness to appreciate others' intellectual strengths" and "an acknowledgment of one's partial understanding and an appreciation for the knowledge that others can possess" (p.140). Tanesini (2018, p. 410) argues that intellectual humility is a complex psycho-social attitude characterized by "a concern toward one's own epistemic successes and limitations," while Leary et al. (2017, p. 1) refer intellectual humility as "the degree to which people recognize their beliefs might be wrong." Intellectual humility is a multifaceted phenomenon that includes awareness of own's limitations and openness to learn from others.

This study draws on Lynch's (2021) perspective on intellectual humility. In his opinion, the core elements of intellectual humility are connected to Socratic lessons: (a) "the wise person recognizes what they don't know," and (b) "wisdom can be gained by listening to others and engaging in dialogue with them" (Lynch, 2021, p. 141). In this sense, there are two aspects of intellectual humility: self-directed and other-directed (Priest, 2017, as cited in Lynch, 2021). Other-directed includes "a willingness to learn from others through our interactions with them" (Lynch, 2021, p. 141). Lynch (2021) claim that having intellectual humility includes "the realization that others might have something to teach you, that there may be something to gain from the experience of other people," which is crucial for democratic citizenship (p. 141). In this regard, for the purpose of this study, I refer to intellectual humility as awareness of "that others might have something to teach you, that there may be something to gain from the experience of other people," and concurrently being "confident enough to realize what you know, and what you don't" (Lynch, 2021, pp. 141-142). This will allow to focus on two aspects of intellectual humility such as openness to learn from others and confidence in own knowledge.

Empirical Studies

Although current empirical research on intellectual humility is limited, recent studies indicate intellectual humility is considered a component of open-mindedness (Taylor, 2016) and is connected to constructs like religious tolerance, empathy, gratitude, and prosocial values (Hook et al., 2017, as cited in Richmond, 2020; Krumrei-Mancuso, 2017). Intellectual humility is associated with knowledge acquisition, including reflective thinking, need for cognition, intellectual engagement, curiosity, intellectual openness, and open-minded thinking (Alfano et al., 2017; Deffler et al., 2016; Krumrei-Mancuso et al., 2019; Krumrei-Mancuso et al., 2020; Leary et al., 2017). Intellectual humility is also linked with greater open-mindedness and tolerance toward diverse people and ideas (Kross & Grossmann, 2012; Krumrei-Mancuso & Rouse, 2016; McElroy et al., 2014, as cited in Krumrei-Mancuso, 2017). Scholars argue that adults with higher intellectual humility are associated with greater cognitive flexibility, greater openness during disagreements, and reduced defensiveness (Deffler et al., 2016; Meagher et al., 2015; Porter & Schumann, 2018; Van Tongeren et al., 2014; Zmigrod et al., 2019, as cited in Richmond, 2020). Moreover, Krumrei-Mancuso and Newman (2021) suggest that “people can both be humble about and care about social and political topics” (p. 53). In particular, individuals higher in sociopolitical intellectual humility “may have more positive experiences when discussing politics, and therefore may be more interested in engaging in political discussions” (Krumrei-Mancuso & Newman, 2021, p. 55).

The current body of literature focuses on the conceptualization of intellectual humility and empirical evidence regarding adults. It is also essential to discuss and consider ways to develop the capacity of youth to engage with one another (Pritchard, 2020). Few studies examine factors contributing to the development of intellectual humility in childhood and adolescence (Richmond, 2020). Given that intellectual humility develops throughout childhood and

adolescence (Danovitch et al., 2019; Hagá & Olson, 2017; Lockhart et al., 2017), it is important to design an intervention for intellectual humility development among adolescents.

Cultivation of Intellectual Humility

Intellectual humility is a complex phenomenon with various implications for learning, reasoning, and engaging in discussion about social and political topics. Drawing on Neblo and Israelson (2021), experience in deliberation is connected to intellectual humility conceptually and empirically. As previously mentioned, Neblo and Israelson (2021) claim that intellectual humility is a concept that implies “how citizens in a deliberative model ought to behave” (p.137). Pritchard (2020) suggests that it is crucial for citizens to have “both the courage of their convictions, when epistemically appropriate, while also exhibiting the intellectual respect for others that we have seen to be characteristic of intellectual humility” (p. 406). Considering that both scientific evidence and practical wisdom are required for the development of sound judgment during deliberation (Mathews, 2004), having intellectual humility, in other words, staying open to the evidence supplied by the experiences and testimonies of others (Lynch, 2021), may support developing reflective judgment. In this fashion, intellectual humility is integral for citizens to engage in a productive conversation about complex public issues and develop reflective judgment.

Pritchard (2020) stresses that intellectual humility needs to be cultivated, which suggests that the role of educators is essential. However, educators need to navigate the tension between cultivating intellectual humility as an intellectual virtue and fostering self-confidence and conviction (Pritchard, 2020). Pritchard (2020) argues that educators can reconcile two goals of education if they are guided by the correct and complete understanding of intellectual humility . Lynch (2021) explains that it is crucial to pay attention to the core meaning of intellectual

humility, suggesting that “it means, in part, being open to the evidence supplied by the experience and testimony of others. But ‘evidence’ here is key” (Lynch, 2021, p. 145). To navigate these two tensions, educators should create safe and fair environments where students can engage with one another and meaningfully exchange their views and beliefs on a given topic. Given that this study does not focus on any specific operationalization or conceptualization of intellectual humility, I aim to contribute to current literature and identify practical implications by analyzing communication practices and designs that can cultivate intellectual humility in adolescents.

According to Hanson and Howe (2011), a deliberative discussion encourages students, through a variety of experiences and levels of information, to come together, understand their own reasoning, and arrive at a reasoned understanding of their own moral convictions about controversial and complex issues. Moreover, throughout the experience, students gain a better understanding of the reasons underlying their views and beliefs regarding controversial topics, and they listen and learn how to share their opinions (Hanson & Howe, 2011). As such, “deliberation becomes a common framework for reasoning” (Hanson & Howe, 2011, p. 4). In sum, by coming together and deliberating with another, youth can develop their own reasoning and understanding of their moral convictions (Hanson & Howe, 2011).

Given Lynch’s (2021) conceptualization of intellectual humility, Bandura’s (1986, 1997, 2004) social cognitive theory, and the constitutive role of communication, I argue that exposure to deliberation and dialogue can promote the cultivation of intellectual humility among adolescents. To this end, I claim that deliberative pedagogy can serve as an educational model for the cultivation of intellectual humility. In this fashion, one can bring new insights regarding deliberative civic learning and intellectual humility among early adolescents by examining the

learning experience of middle school students in activities framed by deliberative pedagogy. Consequently, exploring individuals' experiences in deliberation and dialogue may present a promising opportunity to shed light on intellectual humility. Given that empirical psychological research predominately involves quantitative designs with survey and experimental methods, exploring intellectual humility through qualitative methods may present a unique opportunity.

The research questions concerning the description of learning experiences and outcomes of middle school students related to their participation in deliberative civic learning may provide an opportunity to pay attention to situational and contextual factors and generate insights for intellectual humility. By capturing experiences, perceptions, and students' understanding of experiences, one may gain a better understanding of the potential of deliberative pedagogy for cultivating intellectual humility in early adolescence. By emphasizing the constitutive role of communication, this study appreciates the multiplicity of identities and complexity of reality and employs qualitative data collection methods. Moreover, the research question regarding how middle school students describe their understanding of self and others in relation to intellectual humility as they participate in design that incorporates deliberation can generate insights. To this end, conducting an exploratory study to examine youth learning experiences in a deliberative pedagogy might shed light on intellectual humility as a learning outcome of deliberative pedagogy.

Practical Solutions: Deliberative Civic Learning

Granted that the engaged scholarship framework focuses on both theory and praxis, I draw attention to the practical solutions as an intervention. To conduct an exploratory study to examine early adolescents' learning experiences, I consider particular communication designs that align with deliberative pedagogy. Given the active role of communication in deliberation, I

begin by exploring different models of deliberation and their practical implications for further capacity building. By considering various existing designs for deliberation, I argue that the NIF model is suitable for youth capacity building in educational settings. Next, I draw attention to the VTS model as a pedagogical model for youth leadership development (Figure 2.1).

National Issues Forums

There are four main engagement streams based on purpose (exploration, conflict transformation, decision making, and collaborative action) and about 22 dialogue and deliberation methods included in the popular National Coalition for Dialogue and Deliberation stream of practice resource (NCDD, 2005). While not exhaustive, it gives a thorough introduction to the breadth of the field and various communication processes. Table 2.1. presents four main engagement streams that includes Longo and Shaffer (2019) and NCDD’s (2005) engagement streams framework, Table 2.1 presents four main engagement streams.

Table 2.1. Engagement Streams Framework³

Stream	Description	Examples
Exploration	To encourage citizens to learn more about their community or an issue and generate understanding and ideas	World Cafe, Open Space, Socrate Café
Conflict transformation	To resolve conflict, foster healing, and improve group relations	Intergroup Dialogue, Sustained Dialogue, Compassionate Listening
Collaborative action	To foster collaborative action	Study Circles, Appreciative Inquiry, Future Search
Decision-making	To influence the decision-making process and improve public knowledge	Citizens Jury, NIF, Deliberative Polling

³ Engagement Streams Framework includes four streams such as “Exploration,” “Conflict transformation,” “Decision making,” “Collaborative action,” and offers a brief descriptions of models that include dialogue and deliberation (Longo & Shaffer, p, 28-29)

In line with Gastil and Levine (2005), there are various designs for public problem-solving such as deliberative polling, planning cells, citizens juries, collaborative learning, study circles, and NIF. In addition, Longo and Shaffer (2019) indicate that models like Everyday Democracy's dialogue to change approach, sustained dialogue, intergroup dialogue, and story circles can be utilized for advancing college students' capacity for democracy work. In this section, I review existing literature to determine what model can serve as an educational opportunity for youth.

The design of deliberative polling involves randomly selected lay citizens deliberating in-depth about a selected issue in small groups (Fishkin & Farrar, 2005). Given that deliberative polling (a) is focused on public problem solving and public opinion, (b) has a highly planned nature, (c) requires a significant time commitment, and (d) involves high costs of convening, this design is less likely to be used in educational settings for youth capacity building. Citizens jury includes five-day events in which 20-25 people engage in small groups (Crosby & Nethercut, 2005). Collaborative learning involves integrating conflict management, system thinking, adult learning, and deliberation about an issue from multiple perspectives with a focus on pragmatic and feasible changes (Cheng & Fiero, 2005). This design also requires a specific set of skills, training, and high planning nature of convening (Cheng & Fiero, 2005).

Study circles can serve as a routine practice for meaningful engagement in small groups that take several sessions lasting two to four hours (Scully & McCoy, 2005). Study circles incorporate deliberative dialogue and provide a baseline about an issue for participants. This design has been employed to explore topics like race in middle and high school settings and in communities (Scully & McCoy, 2005). The exploratory discussion offered by Interactivity Foundation provides a space for people to engage with one another in an open democratic

discussion about public policy issues and possible ideas and solutions (Prudhomme & Hartman, 2019).

The next set of designs is aimed at developing relationships between individuals so they can discuss problems and collaborate productively. For example, sustained dialogue is designed to build and transform relationships among members of deeply conflicted groups (Wuerz et al., 2019). Focusing on the relationship between in-group and out-group members and within the community, the sustained dialogue model encourages people to deal collaboratively and effectively with pragmatic problems (Wuerz et al., 2019). Another example is the story circles model, which incorporates storytelling and community building within a group for a specific and pragmatic reason (Longo & Shaffer, 2019). Guided by family therapy strategies, the reflective structured dialogue mode is designed to help individuals with strong disagreements about difficult topics to foster trust and develop shared understanding first, so that they can move forward in ‘stuck’ public conversations” (Sarrouf & Hyten, 2019). Given that time commitment, a structured model with a variety of accessible materials on various topics is important criteria for educational settings. The NIF discussion process model, which includes 90-minute discussions in small groups, provides an opportunity for adults and youth to engage in deliberation and develop deliberative thinking.

NIF Deliberation Model

The NIF discussion process model provides an intentional space for diverse citizens to (a) engage in reasoning and talking about public problems together, (b) make choices on how to approach complex public issues in the United States, and (c) develop *public judgment* (Johnson & Melville, 2019; Melville & Kingston, 2010; Melville et al., 2005). In addition, the NIF model offers “both a place for effective public problem-solving and a space in which citizens learn a

key civic skill – the skill of choice work” (Johnson & Melville, 2019, p. 142). In this sense, the NIF model employs deliberation to model a more reflective form of public conversation that citizens can learn and use in their future conversations outside of NIF (Gastil & Dillard, 1999).

Typically, NIF issue guides provide a framework for a public discussion by presenting an overview of the public problems, three or four distinctive *choices*, or approaches to public problem solving, and information regarding costs, consequences, and tradeoffs associated with each option (Johnson & Melville, 2019). The goal of NIF discussion guides is to provide accessible and reliable background materials and descriptions of an array of options regarding a specific challenge (Johnson & Melville, 2019). During a NIF discussion, a moderator establishes ground rules and explains a deliberative process to participants (Gastil & Dillard, 1999). In this fashion, during a NIF discussion, citizens *work through* and develop a shared understanding of the complex problem and common ground (Johnson & Melville, 2019; Melville & Kingston, 2010).

According to Gastil and Dillard (1999), the NIF model includes (a) the analysis of the nature of an issue in which *values* serve as evaluative criteria, (b) the consideration of alternative solutions by weighing the pros and cons of policy alternatives (*choice work*) and (c) arriving at the best solution possible (*harvesting*). During a NIF discussion, as “people face difficult choices in public life, resisting and struggling in various ways with the implications,” citizens develop a shared understanding of the complex problem and common ground (Melville & Kingston, 2010, p. 61). In other words, by facing difficult choices, participants recognize the complexity of given options, which can sometimes result in conflicting positive and negative consequences. Gastil and Dillard (1999) argue that the NIF model is designed to assist participants with developing sound public judgments through advancing individuals’ cognitive and deliberative skills. In other

words, experiences in a NIF deliberation model encourage participants to develop a better understanding of public issues and arrive at a reasoned *public judgment* (Johnson & Melville, 2019; Melville & Kingston, 2010). In line with Yankelovich (1991 as cited in Johnson & Melville, 2019), public judgment is “a more stable, thoughtful, and realistic kind of public thinking, which contrasts with the often uninformed, top-of-the-head responses captured in polls” (p. 142).

There are a great number of public issues covered by NIF issues guides, including community-police relationships, immigration, health care, free speech on campus, climate choices, mental health, and bullying (The National Issues Forums Institute, 2020a). They also provide guides exploring more recent issues, such as COVID-19 and vaccines, teaching in a pandemic, elections, rebuilding the economy, and youth and opportunity (The National Issues Forums Institute, 2020a). National Issues Forums Institute (NIFI) is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization that promotes public deliberation. Through the NIFI network of nonpartisan community-based organizations, NIF discussions are locally organized and sponsored in community colleges, universities, libraries, K-12 schools, community centers, and religious organizations (Johnson & Melville, 2019). NIF has been one of the extensive and oldest networks for public deliberation since 1981 (Gastil & Levine, 2005). In this regard, thanks to the availability and accessibility of NIF issue guides, along with a considerably accessible and structured process for convening, the NIF model has great potential for youth to learn by practicing skills. To summarize, the NIF model can serve as an educational tool for youth and adults to engage in deliberative thinking and reasoning; arrive at sound judgment, and develop a set of skills, knowledge, and attitudes.

Empirical Studies

Empirical literature claims that exposure to deliberation positively impacts college students and youth (Gastil, 1994a; Gastil, 2004; Gastil & Dillard, 1999; Harriger & McMillan, 2007; Molnar-Main, 2017). For example, college students' participation in NIF is associated with stronger individual political self-efficacy and a negative effect on *group efficacy* (Gastil, 1994a). In addition, Gastil and Dillard's (1999) study provides evidence that experience in NIF can "bolster participants' political self-efficacy, refine their political judgments, broaden their political conversation networks, and reduce their conversational dominance" (p. 179). Through a quasi-experimental design study with college students, Gastil (2004) explained that "the potential value of deliberative forums as a means of civic education, but they also demonstrate that forums vary considerably in their educational impact." (p. 308) as well as "deliberation has the potential to directly influence two aspects of citizens' lives—their political conversation networks and their conversation behavior" (p. 310). According to Gastil's (2004) findings, "public deliberation seen as an educational process during which citizens exchange information and enlarge their perspectives, which leads to more informed, empathic, and reflective judgments" (p. 310). In this sense, exposure to NIF deliberation model has positive impact on participants.

Additionally, Gastil (1994b) suggests that the NIF model serves as an example of democratic leadership in small groups. Moreover, the ground rules for a NIF forum promote respectful interactions, active listening, and participation and result in both a deliberative discussion and democratic relationship among forum participants (Gastil, 1993). In NIF programs, the role of a facilitator is crucial (Gastil & Dillard, 1999). The moderator fosters participants' leadership and deliberation skills by guiding a deliberative discussion neutrally and respectfully and promoting shared decision-making among participants (Gastil & Dillard, 1999). In this fashion, I suggest that the role of moderator in a NIF forum offers a unique opportunity

for youth facilitated interactions to develop leadership capacity. I claim that by deliberating in a NIF forum, participants engage in shared sense-making, collaborative learning, collective decision-making for pragmatic outcomes that can lead to participants' commitment toward an action plan. Youth can engage in leadership practice and learning by practicing deliberation. The importance of experiential learning for leadership development has been recognized by leadership educators (Chung & Personette, 2019; Cutchens & Jenkins, 2011; Guthrie & Bertrand Jones, 2012; McCall, 2004).

To sum, the literature review suggests that the NIF model can serve as an education model of deliberation in the classroom for youth. In this regard, youth engage in active learning by practicing communication skills, reasoning together, and collaborative problem solving. Overall, the conceptual and empirical literature suggests that participation in deliberation encourages the development of a set of civic skills, knowledge, and dispositions. More importantly, deliberative pedagogy that employs a NIF model recognizes the civic mission of the public school and provides an opportunity for students to learn 21st-century skills, knowledge, and attitude for democratic citizenship.

NIF in the Classroom

Molnar-Main (2017) offers a comprehensive empirical overview regarding employing NIF in the classroom. The goal of deliberation in the classroom is to “promote improved understanding of the issue, awareness of the consequences of various responses, and recognition of commonly held values that can inform future action” (Molnar-Main, 2017, p.13). With the great number of public issues covered by NIF issue guides, deliberation in the classroom guided by NIF offers multiple topics for discussion (Molnar-Main, 2017). According to Molnar-Main (2017), deliberation in the classroom is a learning process that has six key characteristics:

(a) the focus or topic of learning is an issue of significance to individuals and society; (b) the learning is highly interactive and discussion based; (c) teachers and students share responsibility for learning; (d) the process emphasizes weighing options or deciding; (e) multiple perspectives, including marginalized views, are given balanced consideration; (f) students are treated as citizens or decision makers, often engaging in follow-up activities related to these roles. (Molnar-Main, 2017, p. 13).

In this sense, deliberation framed by the NIF model in the classroom is a practical solution that aligns with deliberative pedagogy.

According to Molnar-Main (2017), participation in the NIF model promotes active citizenship by (a) fostering habits of mind and accountable talk, (b) social and noncognitive skills, (c) capacity for listening, speaking, and disagreeing respectfully; and (d) ability to search for common ground. The engagement with NIF model encourages young people to learn “how to move beyond individual mind-sets to engage in collective reasoning, and about nurturing important civic skills in all classrooms” (Molnar-Main, 2017, p. 28). Deliberation in the classroom also promotes common ground for action (Mathews, 2002). In particular, deliberation in the classroom creates a safe environment for young people to express their views and enables “diverse students to learn together, identify common ground, and connect their learning to civic action” (Molnar-Main, 2017, p. 19). As a result, “students can develop knowledge, tolerance for others’ views, and an expanded view of the role of citizens in a democracy” (Molnar-Main, 2017, p. 20). In line with Albert and Steinberg (2011, as cited in Molnar-Main, 2017, p. 23), deliberation supports two distinctive forms of cognition: the *reasoned pathway*⁴ and the *social*

⁴ Reasoned pathway Reasoned pathway is based in “conscious, deliberate evaluation of costs and benefits of choice alternatives,” (Albert & Steinberg, 2011, as cited in Molnar-Main, 2017, p. 23).

reaction pathway.⁵ In this sense, deliberation in the classroom presents an excellent opportunity for student growth and development.

Taking into account the civic mission of the public school, schools are promising sites for experiencing deliberation and developing an understanding of how controversial issues are dealt with in a democracy (Gibson & Levine, 2003; Hanson & Howe, 2011; Hess, 2009; Maurissen et al., 2018; Parker, 2003). More importantly, schools can be perceived as spaces where “students live together and shape their ideas and identity as citizens” (Flanagan, 2013, as cited in Maurissen et al., 2018). Considering the variety of students’ identities and characteristics (e.g., gender, religion, social background, intelligence), schools offer an opportunity for adolescents to engage with a diversity of perspectives, ideologies, and experiences (Hess & Gatti, 2010; Parker, 2003). Students can explore their views on political issues by practicing deliberation in a fair, respectful, and responsive environment (Maurissen et al., 2018). Exposing students to deliberation in the classroom promotes tolerance towards the diversity of perspectives, ideologies, and experiences (Hess, 2009; Parker, 2003), which is inherently a fundamental quality for citizenship education (Gutmann, 1995; Hess & McAvoy 2015; Macedo, 1995, as cited in Maurissen et al., 2018). Moreover, by participating in deliberation, students can expand their knowledge about a particular topic and advance their skills to engage with *high-quality public talk* (Hess, 2009).

In this regard, by investigating the learning experiences and outcomes of the middle school students in the NIF model can provide an opportunity to pay attention to situational and contextual factors and generate insights regarding the practical implications of the NIF model of

⁵ Social reaction pathway Social reaction pathway is “grounded in experiential processes,” (Albert & Steinberg, 2011, as cited in Molnar-Main, 2017, p. 23).

deliberation in the classroom. To produce a thick description of the learning experience associated with deliberation in the classroom, it is also crucial to assess deliberation as pedagogy and explore how individual students see themselves as citizens. Drury et al. (2017, p. 195) have developed the Deliberative Pedagogy Learning Outcomes (DPLO) rubric which includes learning outcomes such as collaboration, reason giving, synthesis of ideas and information, understanding of trade-offs and tensions, reflection, awareness of relationships, and empathy. In this regard, research design should include Drury et al.'s (2017) DPLO rubric.

Visual Thinking Strategies

VTS is a student-centered art-based pedagogical model that fosters students' ability to describe, analyze, and interpret visual art through observation and discussion (Hailey et al., 2015). In line with Dewey (1934/1980, 1938/1997), Vygotsky (1962, 1978), the VTS curriculum is grounded in social learning theory. Initially, the VTS model was developed by cognitive psychologist Abigail Housen and museum educator Philip Yenawine as an elementary school curriculum to advance visual literacy. In particular, the VTS model is a structured facilitation technique to develop *aesthetic understanding* and critical thinking (Hailey et al., 2015; Housen, 2002). Drawing on Hailey et al. (2015) and Landorf (2006), a VTS session may take up to fifteen minutes to discuss each piece of art and consistent with the following steps:

1. The facilitator presents a carefully selected image. An ideal image should contain strong narratives and understandable meanings given specific students' ages and backgrounds.
2. The facilitator starts the process by asking participants to look at the image for a few moments silently. It is important to stay neutral and recognize each student's response by paraphrasing.

3. To encourage students to make interpretive comments, the facilitator asks questions such as, *what is going on/happening in this picture?* Next, the facilitator paraphrases every comment along with pointing to visual evidence.
4. The facilitator asks questions like, *what do you see that makes you say that?* This question asks students to provide concrete evidence for their observations, which keeps the conversation focused on the subject. By paraphrasing every comment, the moderator encourages active listening, increases students' self-esteem, and can increase students' vocabulary. Pointing to each particular part of the artwork allows everyone to *see* what the respondent is seeing and encourages students to keep looking.
5. By linking comments and remaining neutral, the facilitator builds the connections between students' thoughts and encourages students to make their own connections. Linking responses is essential for students' growth and requires listening and the ability to keep a grasp on the broader points of the discussion.
6. The facilitator asks, *What more can we find?* This question encourages the notion that there is always more to discover. This question allows students to look further and stretch their visual and critical thinking abilities.
7. The facilitator thanks the group for their participation.

By answering three open-ended questions, participants look closely at the piece of art and comment based on their judgment, reasoning, and personal experiences in a VTS session. As follows, VTS incorporates “fact-finding, questioning, speculating, and personal association to help individuals move to deeper levels of understanding” (Yenawine, 1997, as cited in Hensel & Moorman, 2015, p. 365). In addition, repeated practice in VTS sessions encourages students to discover deeper meanings (Housen, 2002). Due to the multilayered and interpretative nature of

works of art, participation in VTS provokes diverse and divergent interpretations of artwork informed by participants' various backgrounds and experiences (Chin, 2017; Hailey et al., 2015; Hubbard, 2010; Yenawine & Miller, 2014). Gonçalves (2016) emphasizes the empowering role of art in intercultural communication and dialogue. According to Gonçalves (2016), art may act as a cultural mediator and meaningful language that allows people to express emotions and feelings, as well as intellectual insights, in a safe and powerful way to encourage intercultural cooperation. In this sense, the VTS model provides an opportunity for individuals to develop multiple ways to read and understand situations and to engage in “divergent and convergent thinking, evidence seeking, and wondering intermingle” (Hailey et al., 2015, p. 57).

The facilitator creates a safe space for collaborative inquiry by asking open-ended questions, modeling mutual respect, listening intently, and paraphrasing (Moorman, 2013, 2015). The facilitator paraphrases every interpretative comment, builds connections between individuals' thoughts, and encourages them to make their connections. Students are encouraged to support their opinions with visual evidence and co-construct meanings together (Landorf, 2006). By linking comments, including both agreements and disagreements, the facilitator fosters meaning making and collaborative inquiry (Hailey, 2014; Hailey et al., 2015; Landorf, 2006; Yenawine & Miller, 2014). Thanks to the multilayered and interpretive nature of works of art in VTS sessions, knowledge co-creation through art exploration has the potential to open participants to a deeper understanding of human experiences. This can significantly contribute to the experience of dialogue.

The VTS school curriculum was tested in a longitudinal study at the Museum of Modern Art in New York City, as well as in St. Petersburg, Russia; Vilnius, Lithuania; Byron, Minnesota; and San Antonio, Texas (DeSantis & Housen, 2007; Housen, 2002, 2007). In regard

to the study with the San Antonio Museum of Art, data was collected twice a year for three years using pre- and post-VTS aesthetic development interviews to evaluate the growth of aesthetic and critical thinking skills of an initial sample of 25 experimental and 25 control students (DeSantis & Housen, 2007). The findings demonstrate that the students who participated in VTS sessions significantly outperformed control group in both aesthetic and critical thinking growth (DeSantis & Housen, 2007). Additionally, the study results reveal that the participants transferred critical thinking skills to “individual viewing experiences of non-art objects” (DeSantis & Housen, 2007, p. 6). Furthermore, the VTS curriculum has been employed by science museum educators and classroom teachers to improve students’ ability to critical thinking skills, communication skills, visual literacy, and collaborative interactions among peers (VTS, 2022). The VTS curriculum has being practiced in over 300 schools in the United States (Shifrin, 2008; Yenawine, 2013).

Later, practitioners and scholars have investigated how using the VTS model helps develop critical thinking and communication across disciplines, including medical schools and nursing programs (Frei et al., 2010; Hensel & Moorman, 2017; Klugman et al., 2011; Moorman & Hensel, 2016; Yenawine & Miller, 2014). Along with that, educators employ VTS practice to encourage students to construct meaning from a wide range of images, historical texts, literature, math, and science lessons (Yenawine, 2013). In addition, studies have revealed that VTS was effective for improving writing (Franco & Unrath, 2014; Moeller et al., 2013), encouraging risk taking (Franco & Unrath, 2014). Moreover, the VTS model has been used to improve attention to detail during physical assessments, improve sensitivity and communication, and increase collaboration (Jasani & Saks, 2013; Klugman et al., 2011; Naghshineh et al., 2008).

It is observed that “the ability to describe concretely what is perceived, the ability to separate fact from inference, and the understanding that observation takes time” can be developed through participation in VTS sessions (Boudreau et al., 2008 as cited in Hailey et al., 2015, p. 60). In addition, participants have reported increased tolerance of ambiguity (Geller, 2013; Klugman et al., 2011). Furthermore, Chapman et al. (2013) investigate how the VTS model can foster dialogue. Their results suggest that social interactions for the construction of knowledge influence participants’ “shifts in awareness, perspective-taking, attitude change, and more complex thinking” (Chapman et al., 2013, p. 457).

Despite that the VTS curriculum was initially designed for critical thinking and visual literacy development, there are additional practical implications of the VTS model. According to Hailey et al. (2015), through the development of visual literacy, participants become comfortable with ambiguity, improve critical thinking, and develop awareness “that understanding is enriched by the perspectives of others” (p. 65). In this regard, the VTS model has practical implications for deliberative civic learning by (a) allowing participants to practice observation, thinking, and communication skills; (b) encouraging students to engage in collaborative inquiry; and (c) developing multiple ways to read and understand situations. Moreover, conceptually, the VTS model has potential to create a space for participants to engage in dialogue (Kakim & Priest, 2020). In this fashion, individuals can develop reasoning, active listening, and critical thinking through repeated participation in VTS sessions. However, there is a range of limitations associated with VTS practice. For example, to promote cognitive development, students should engage in multiple VTS sessions over time guided by a trained and skilled facilitator in which artwork selection should be an intentional and strategic choice.

Integrated Praxis: Deliberative Civic Learning

To introduce integrated praxis of the deliberative civic learning framework, I consider how the practical solutions align with the theoretical perspectives drawing on the constitutive role of communication (Figure 2.3). I begin by describing how deliberation that employs a NIF model in the classroom and VTS model align with deliberative pedagogy and social cognitive theory. Then, drawing upon approaches to the conceptualization of leadership through a collective lens in which discursive practices are important, I suggest that the VTS and NIF education models can foster democratic leadership development of youth. Finally, I suggest that the NIF and VTS models have potential for cultivating of intellectual humility (Figure 2.1).

National Issues Forums/Visual Thinking Strategies and Deliberative Pedagogy

Drawing upon the existing body of literature related to deliberative pedagogy, the VTS and NIF models, I offer a comparative analysis to demonstrate how these practical solutions’ design aligns with the deliberative pedagogy framework (Table 2.2).

Table 2.2. National Issues Forums, Visual Thinking Strategies, and Deliberative Pedagogy

Deliberative Pedagogy	National Issues Forums	Visual Thinking Strategies
Teaching strategy that “encourages students to encounter and consider multiple perspectives, weigh trade-offs and tensions, and move toward action through informed judgment” (Longo, Manosevitch, & Shaffer et al., 2017, xxi).	The goal of deliberation in the classroom is to “promote improved understanding of the issue, awareness of the consequences of various responses, and recognition of commonly held values that can inform future action” (Molnar-Main, 2017, p.13).	A pedagogical model that provides an opportunity for students to develop multiple ways to understand situations, engage in divergent and convergent thinking, and provide evidence (Hailey et al., 2015).
“Deliberative pedagogy builds on this thinking with an in-depth examination of the theory, processes, and practice of deliberative	Deliberation in the classroom creates a safe environment for young people to express their views and enables	A diversity of perspectives thanks to the multilayered and interpretative nature of works of art contributed by participants’ backgrounds and

pedagogy—offering a way of teaching, learning, and engaging that cultivates spaces for diverse voices and perspectives to listen, speak, and act” (Shaffer et al., 2017, xxxii)	“diverse students to learn together, identify common ground, and connect their learning to civic action” (Molnar-Main, 2017, p. 19).	experiences (Chin, 2017; Hailey et al., 2015; Hubard, 2010)
Collaborative engagement (Longo & Gibson, 2017)	Deliberation in the classroom promotes common ground for action (Mathews, 2002).	Collaborative inquiry and sense-making (Hailey et al., 2015; Kakim & Priest, 2020)
Informed judgment (Shaffer et al., 2017)	Scientific evidence and practical wisdom are required for the development of sound judgment during deliberation (Mathews, 2004)	Developing a deeper meaning; multiple ways to understand situations (Hailey et al., 2015; Yenawine, 1997)

Granted that the VTS model is designed to create a space for exchanges of viewpoints and exploration of meaning, the VTS model fosters meaningful engagement. Thinking, reasoning, and providing evidence while encountering a diversity of perspectives is a common feature of interactions during deliberation and VTS model discussion. Meanwhile, the VTS model offers a unique opportunity to create a safe space for individuals with diverse backgrounds and various levels of articulation to meaningfully engage with one another in mediated through multilayered and ambiguous nature of works of art dialogue (Hubard, 2010). As a result, the VTS model integrated with the NIF model has the potential to encourage participants to consider views of other participants and co-construct meaning, promote a greater understanding, and refine their perspectives.

Based on informal conversations with Philip Yenawine, utilizing the VTS model for developing capacity for democratic citizenship is a new learning context to explore the impact of the VTS model. By conducting an exploratory study to investigate how these educational models

are implemented in an educational setting, one might generate insights regarding implications for programmatic efforts.

National Issues Forums/Visual Thinking Strategies and Social Cognitive Theory

Drawing upon the existing body of literature related to social cognitive theory, the VTS and NIF models, I offer a comparative analysis to demonstrate how the NIF and VTS process models align with social cognitive theory (Table 2.3).

Table 2.3. National Issues Forums, Visual Thinking Strategies, and Social Cognitive Theory

Social Cognitive Theory	National Issues Forums	Visual Thinking Strategies
Children learn through observing, modeling, and cognitively processing the behavior of others, in which social and cognitive factors are crucial for promoting personal change (Bandura, 1986, 1997, 2004, 2006).	An intentional space for diverse citizens to (a) engage in reasoning and talking about public problems together, (b) make choices on how to approach complex public issues in the United States, and (c) develop <i>public judgment</i> (Johnson & Melville, 2019; Melville et al., 2005).	An opportunity for students to develop multiple ways to understand situations, engage in divergent and convergent thinking, and provide evidence (Hailey et al., 2015).

During the NIF model of deliberation, participants develop sound public judgments through advancing individuals’ cognitive and deliberative skills (Gastil & Dillard, 1999). During a VTS session, participants engage in cognition and reflection through reasoning, observing, thinking, and listening (Chapman et al., 2013; Hailey et al., 2015; Housen, 2002, 2007). Moreover, through the interpretative nature of artwork, participants surface multiple interpretations of a piece of art that are informed by their identities and experiences (Chin, 2017; Hailey et al., 2015; Hubard, 2010). In this regard, learning and teaching strategies associated with the NIF and VTS models align with social cognitive theory.

National Issues Forums/Visual Thinking Strategies and Leadership Development

According to Kakim and Priest (2020), youth leadership development grounded in social constructionism can foster young people’s capacity to deal with uncertainty and navigate complexity and multiplicity. They argue that VTS aligns with constructionist perspectives to post-heroic leadership grounded in discursive approaches to leadership development. In other words, the VTS model incorporates a set of discursive practices that foster sense-making and dialogic moments (Kakim & Priest, 2020). As I noted previously, deliberation framed by the NIF model can serve as a mode for leadership practice and learning for youth. Drawing on the literature concerning the VTS and NIF models and collective-leadership-as-lens perspective, I offer a comparative analysis to demonstrate how the practical solutions’ processes promote leadership development (Table 2.4).

Table 2.4. National Issues Forums, Visual Thinking Strategies and Leadership Capacity Building

Leadership Practice	National Issues Forums	Visual Thinking Strategies
Leadership is “as an ongoing process signifying the pursuit of direction in the production of a space for co-action.” (Sklaveniti, 2020, p. 548). Leadership is about “mutual adjustment, shared sense-making, collective learning, or mutual transformation” (Drath et al., 2008, p. 650). Shared insights lead to mutual transformation that can signify relational leadership (Uhl-Bien, 2006).	During a NIF discussion, citizens participants discuss the benefits and costs of various options for addressing a public issue, explore trade-offs of different approaches, engage in decision-making about complex public issues, and identify any common ground for action (Johnson & Melville, 2019; Melville, 2012).	“By linking comments, including both agreements and disagreements, the facilitator fosters meaning making, dialogue, and collaborative learning” (Kakim & Priest, 2020, p. 85).
Navigating adaptive challenges and dealing with complex information (Heifetz, 1994). Multiple ways to understand situations, to be present, and	During a NIF discussion, citizens <i>work through</i> and develop a shared understanding of the complex problem and	Reflecting upon an open-ended question, “What is going on in this picture?” encourages to tolerate ambiguity and uncertainty (Hailey, 2014;

reflect on communication experience assists leadership (Barge & Fairhurst, 2008).	common ground (Johnson & Melville, 2019; Melville & Kingston, 2010).	Yenawine & Miller, 2014); promotes the development of a deeper meaning and multiple ways to understand situations (Chapman et al., 2013; Hailey et al., 2015; Yenawine, 1997).
Framing the development of leadership as dialogic practice (Gergen & Hersted, 2016). Discursive practices of leadership (Barge, 2012).	During deliberation that employs a NIF model in the classroom, participants consider each option, a facilitator encourages individual and group reflection to consider a common ground for action (Molnar-Main, 2017).	VTS promotes collaborative inquiry and collective sense-making (Hailey et al., 2015; Kakim & Priest, 2020; Moorman, 2015). By linking comments, including both agreements and disagreements, the facilitator fosters meaning making, dialogue, and collaborative learning (Kakim & Priest, 2020, p. 85).

To summarize, both the VTS and NIF models promote better engagement among participants and serve as means for leadership development. By participating in VTS sessions over time, youth can develop the capacity to engage with multiple perspectives. In this sense, the employment of the VTS and NIF models in educational settings provides an opportunity for further exploration of post-heroic leadership through individual and collective sense-making as well as working through tensions and understanding of common ground. The VTS model also serves as collective leadership development practice in age-appropriate developmental practice. Consequently, by capturing and exploring the learning experiences of youth, the study can gain insights regarding leadership capacity building for early adolescents.

National Issues Forums/Visual Thinking Strategies and Intellectual Humility

As noted previously, I argue that deliberative pedagogy can serve as an educational model for the cultivation of intellectual humility. Drawing upon the existing body of literature related to the NIF and VTS models, Lynch's (2021) and Pritchard's (2020) conceptualization of

intellectual humility, I offer a comparative analysis to demonstrate the implication of the practical solutions for cultivating intellectual humility (Table 2.5).

Table 2.5. National Issues Forums, Visual Thinking Strategies and Capacity Building for Intellectual Humility

Intellectual Humility	National Issues Forums	Visual Thinking Strategies
Intellectual humility includes “being open to the evidence supplied by the experience and testimony of others. But ‘evidence’ here is key” (Lynch, 2021, p. 145).	“Forum moderators stress the importance of maintaining mutual respect, encouraging active participation, and suggesting careful listening throughout the forum” (Gastil & Dillard, 1999, p. 185).	Students are encouraged to support their opinions with visual evidence and co-construct meanings (Landorf, 2006).
While being “confident enough to realize what you know, and what you don’t” (Lynch, 2021, p. 142), one may realize that “others might have something to teach you, that there may be something to gain from the experience of other people” (Lynch, 2021, p. 141).	Exposure to deliberation results in interest in listening to opinions different from their own, as well as an increased level of confidence (Hess & McAvoy, 2015).	Through the development of visual literacy, participants become comfortable with ambiguity, develop critical thinking, and develop awareness “that understanding is enriched by the perspectives of others” (Hailey et al., 2015, p. 65). By participating in a VTS session, individuals develop multiple ways to read and understand situations and engage in “divergent and convergent thinking, evidence seeking, and wondering intermingle” (Hailey et al., 2015, p. 57).
Pritchard (2020) explains that students need “both the courage of their convictions, when epistemically appropriate, while also exhibiting the intellectual respect for others that we have seen to be characteristic of intellectual humility” (p. 406).	Through the practice of deliberation in the classroom, students also learn how to form and share their opinions, listen respectfully, and engage with others with whom they might disagree (Avery et al., 2013).	Through the participation in VTS sessions, individuals co-construct knowledge together, resulting in “shifts in awareness, perspective-taking, attitude change, and more complex thinking about” (Chapman et al., 2013, p. 457).

To sum, through listening, reasoning, evidence seeking, and generating interpretations of the multilayered nature of pieces of art, the integration of the VTS model with NIF model can serve as an intentional space for individuals to spark curiosity, develop deeper meaning, and have respect for others' contributions in a non-threatening way. Accordingly, by conducting an exploratory study and capturing young participants' perceptions of the process, one can gain a greater understanding of the application and implementation of VTS and NIF models in an educational setting and generate insights to contribute to deliberative pedagogy framework. To this end, the integrated praxis of the deliberative civic learning that includes the VTS and NIF models can function as an education model for cultivating intellectual humility.

Gaps in the Literature

The literature review suggests that the limited studies have investigated early adolescents' subjective experience of deliberation in the classroom. Moreover, the existing studies have primarily employed survey design, worked with educators, which have not allowed researchers to explore a learning experience in-depth and consider contextual and situational factors that may significantly influence the learning process. In addition, the conceptual literature highlights the importance of intellectual humility for democratic work. However, the very limited studies explored factors and processes that promote the cultivation of intellectual humility in adolescence. Given that contextualization is important when considering studies that involves children and young people (Greig et al., 2013), this calls for a contextualized study that examines learning experiences of early adolescents in order to develop a more nuanced description of deliberative pedagogy.

Informed by engaged approaches to research, I suggest that the infusion of the VTS model with the NIF model can serve as educational interventions that promote students' capacity

for democracy work, including democratic leadership capacity and intellectual humility. Conducting an exploratory study to examine middle school students' learning experiences and outcomes in the NIF and VTS models can address the gaps in research outlined above. To capture learning experiences and outcomes of deliberative pedagogy, I suggest that qualitative methods used to investigate participants' learning experiences may produce a thick description that includes contextual and situational factors that may be overlooked in the previous studies.

Additionally, contemporary communication scholars provide a framework to examine deliberation, calling on research that focuses on “what actually happens when people are gathered together to deliberate” (Carcasson et al., 2010, p.15). In this fashion, Black et al. (2010) suggest a case study approach as an umbrella approach that can include participant observation, in-depth interviews, and content analysis and surveys. Black et al. (2010) also suggest an investigation of the communicative behaviors and interactions by analyzing records of interactions or/and a transcript or video. Moreover, Haug and Teune (2008) provide a framework to guide how to construct fieldnotes and analyze interactions. In this regard, the deliberative civic learning conceptual framework guides the multi-methods study, which aims to capture early adolescents' experiences with dialogue and deliberation.

Chapter Summary

This chapter drew upon deliberative democracy premises to propose deliberative civic learning as a pathway to youth capacity building for democratic citizenship. By reviewing the body of scholarship related to deliberative pedagogy, the constitutive role of communication, the contemporary approaches to leadership, and social cognitive theory, I proposed that deliberative civic learning has potential for the cultivation of intellectual humility and democratic leadership development. I also claim that by exploring the learning experience of early adolescents in the

NIF and VTS models, one can bring new insights regarding deliberative pedagogy among early adolescents. This calls for a qualitative study using multiple methods to capture contextual and situational factors. The research questions concerning a description of learning experiences and outcomes of the middle school students related to their participation in deliberation and dialogue can generate insights. To this end, conducting an exploratory study to examine middle school students' learning experiences in the infusion of the VTS model with the NIF model might develop a more nuanced description of deliberative pedagogy and shed light on intellectual humility as a learning outcome of deliberative pedagogy.

Doll 3: Situating the Methodological Framework

Land-grant institutions' civic mission is carried out through community engagement (Holland, 2005; Peters et al., 2005; Sandman & Weerts, 2008). One of the avenues for community-university engagement is the university extension service model (McDowell, 2001, 2004; Sandman & Weerts, 2008). Traditionally, cooperative extension operates by distributing scientific, technical knowledge, and expertise to help solve community issues as well as experience to benefit community members (Adams et al., 2005; Peters et al., 2005; Shaffer, 2012). In this fashion, through the scholarship of integration and application, extension educators disseminate the knowledge, expertise, and experience to benefit community members (Adams et al., 2005).

Additionally, engagement is characterized by interactions between faculty, students, administrations, or other professional staff members “on a given campus and the geographically delineated communities primarily located external to the university” (Ward & Moore, 2010, pp. 34-35). By partnering with campus units, extension can increase its impact in local communities (Smith, 2004). Accordingly, through the partnership between K-State and the federal, state, and county governments, K-State Research and Extension (KSRE)⁶ offers various programs to

⁶ Scholars acknowledge the tension between maintaining confidentiality and openness, authenticity, and recognition of partnership with community partners in community-engaged research (Brugge & Cole, 2003). Individuals tend to be acknowledged in different ways based on their level of participation in community-engaged research (Castleden et al., 2010). Meanwhile, the language of research ethics draws on the notions of protection and responsibility, which results in “alienating community partners from ethical decision making processes” and maintaining the power difference between the researcher and the researched (Reid & Brief, 2009, p.83). Taking into account specific areas of expertise of multiple stakeholders and local knowledge, a Midwestern land-grant institution and cooperative extension can be easily identified. Considering the collaborative research paradigm and importance of recognition of the partners contribution, pseudonyms have been used only for the research site and research participants. Moreover, two recent community-engaged studies have mentioned the real names of the projects and locations. For example,

generate and distribute knowledge and expertise to benefit the well-being of Kansans (K-State Research and Extension, 2021).

Extension can promote public engagement and advance democracy by employing deliberative and participatory approaches (Peters et al., 2005; Peters et al., 2018). Guided by the scholarship of engagement (Boyer, 1996), the partnership between the K-State Institute for Civic Discourse and Democracy (ICDD) and KSRE has been established. ICDD is an interdisciplinary, nonpartisan organization that engages in research, education, and facilitation of civic conversations to promote greater citizen participation through deliberation and dialogue (K-State's ICDD, n.d.). In addition, ICDD offers youth an opportunity to employ their leadership and communication skills to learn how to have tough conversations about societal issues.

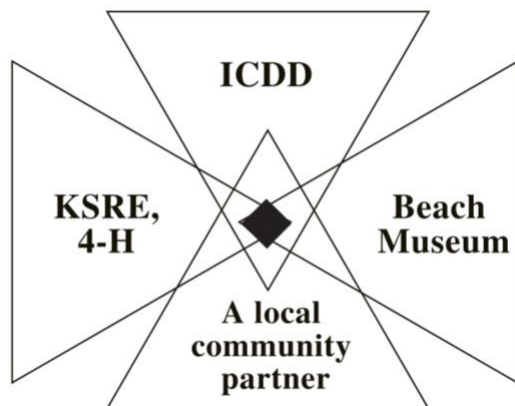
Furthermore, extension services offer programs for K-12 students via 4-H youth development across the United States. With nearly six million participants in school and after-school programs, community clubs, and camps, 4-H is the most extensive positive youth development program in the United States (4-H, 2022). Moreover, 4-H, in partnership with public universities, offers opportunities for youth to engage in various developmental projects.

In 2020, KSRE, the Kansas 4-H program (4-H) collaborated with ICDD and the Marianna Kistler Beach Museum of Art (Beach Museum) to launch a pilot project, *Stories Matter: Growing Empathy in Youth through Social Justice Engagement*. Beach Museum is an art museum on the K-State campus that furthers the teaching, research, and service missions of K-State by collecting, studying, caring for, and presenting the visual art of Kansas and the region

Haglund et al. (2021) mentioned Bembé Drum and Dance, the project community-based participatory research project located in Milwaukee. Mendelson et al. (2013) focused on school-based initiatives based on community-engaged partnership between the Holistic Life Foundation and Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health and Pennsylvania State University.

(The Marianna Kistler Beach Museum of Art, 2022). The partnership between ICDD, KSRE, 4-H, the Beach Museum, and a local community constitutes an engaged campus (Ward & Moore, 2010). Guided by engaged approaches to research, the presented partnership has implications for research site selection for this engaged doctoral project (see Figure 2.2).

Figure 2.2. Engaged Campus



Research Site

This partnership between ICDD, KSRE, 4-H, the Beach Museum, and multiple local communities, including public schools and community clubs in Kansas, was aimed to advance youth capacity building. Through this partnership, middle and high school students received different facilitation training and participated in *community conversations* exploring a diverse range of topics, including mental health, bullying, house divided, policing, safety, and climate choice. For engaged scholarship, research site selection is determined by the existing and emerging partnership between the higher education institution and private and public sectors, including community members (Peters et al., 2005; Post et al., 2016). Correspondingly, the collaborative and mutually beneficial partnership between KSRE, 4-H, ICDD, the Beach Museum, and a local community presents a unique opportunity for engaged scholarship (Kellogg Commission, 1999, as cited in Peters et al., 2005; Post et al., 2016).

Guided by the conceptual framework outlined in Chapter 2, this study employed the following criteria for a research site: the site was required to be a local community partner that works with middle school students and uses VTS and NIF in an educational setting. Scholars also emphasize the importance of establishing a partnership with a local community (Nelson & Dodd, 2017; Post et al., 2016; Ross et al., 2010). One of the long-term community partners of the KSRE, 4-H was Hillview School⁷. Through the existing partnership, Hillview School's middle school students participated in Community Conversation series during the 2019-2020, 2020-2021 academic years. With the support of Aliah Mestrovich Seay, the 4-H Youth Development Specialist for Community Vitality with KSRE in 2020, initial discussions started in November 2020. As a result, I had an opportunity to connect with Dr. Lisa Bietau, the gifted education coordinator at Hillview School. Dr. Bietau expressed interest in documenting and evaluating the collaborative programmatic effort in December 2020. Moreover, Dr. Bietau received a grant project to assess and document her educational efforts during the 2020-2021 academic year. As a result, Hillview School was collaboratively selected as a research site for this study.

Research Questions

Due to the involvement of multiple partners (ICDD, KSRE, 4-H, the Beach Museum, and Hillview School), the agenda of the research project was connected to the interests and priorities of these multiple organizations. Collaborative engaged research includes “publicly identified problems, outcomes that influence practice and policy, equitable and shared decision-making process between academic and community partners in all aspects of the research design and process, shared authorship: community and academic audiences, journals and other public

⁷ A pseudonym.

outlets” (Jacquez et al., 2016, p. 80). Moreover, community-engaged research is characterized by respectful and mutually-beneficial partnerships that include equitable and shared decision-making processes between academic and community partners in various facets of research design, reciprocity, and commitment to long-term research relationships (Jacquez et al., 2016; Post et al., 2016; Ross et al., 2010; Zhang et al., 2020). In this sense, the collaboration between academic and community research partners implies that partners have an opportunity to provide input regarding the course of the research project (Ross et al., 2010).

Therefore, in line with the “Ата-Әже” engaged research framework, informed by the multidisciplinary conceptual framework, this research project addressed both theoretical questions and practical concerns (Figures 2.3, Figure 2.4).

Figure 2.3. Engaged Multidisciplinary Conceptual Framework

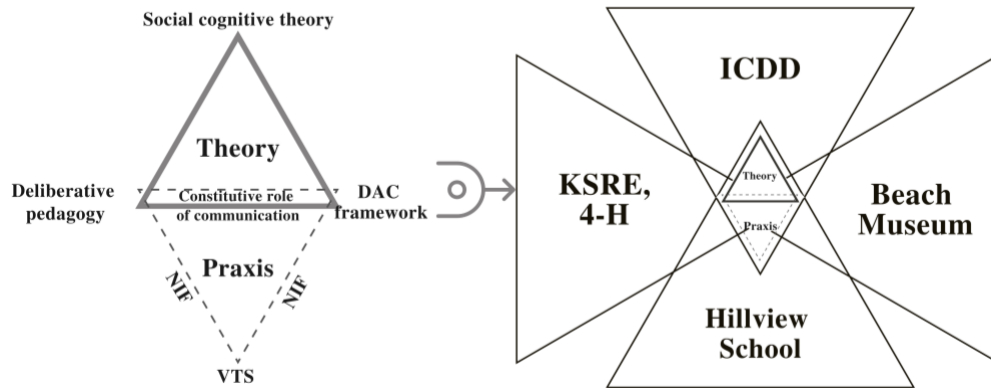
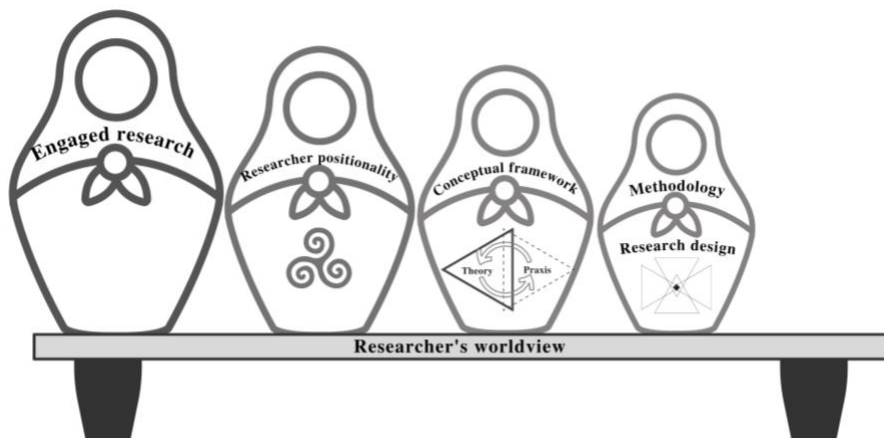


Figure 2.4. “Ата-Әже” Engaged Research Framework: Research Design



There are various degrees of how community members can engage in collaborative partnership in project design, implementation, and evaluation (Horowitz et al., 2009; Post et al., 2016). In this sense, research design should include the local community's priorities and concerns (Jacquez et al., 2016; Peters et al., 2005; Zhang et al., 2020). Accordingly, this engaged study acknowledged the research partners as active research collaborators, and their interests are included in the agenda of the engaged research. Thus, Dr. Bietau and Aliah Mestrovich Seay were members of the research team and had access to procedures and protocols of the research design and the study's findings.

Adams et al. (2005) argue that extension teaching focuses on outcomes, impacts, results, and changes in knowledge and behavior, which aligned with the purpose of this study. Granted that a public school focused on assessing and documenting the programmatic efforts that incorporated deliberative civic learning, research questions concerning the description of learning experiences and outcomes were considered relevant (Lisa Bietau, personal communication, March 17, 2021). Moreover, Dr. Bietau emphasized that it was important to provide an opportunity for "youths to tell their stories" (Lisa Bietau, personal communication, December 15, 2020). Since community-engaged scholarship recognizes relational, localized, contextual knowledge, and diverse types of knowledge (Post et al., 2016), this study considered the choice of methodology and research design that can address both theoretical questions and practical concerns.

Chapter 3 - Research Design

The purpose of this doctoral study was to describe gifted middle school students' learning experiences in visual thinking strategies (VTS) integrated with National Issues Forums (NIF). Using multiple methods, this exploratory study aimed to consider contextual and situational factors to examine the learning experiences of youth. To accomplish this, I addressed the following research questions:

1. What do gifted middle school students learn as they engage in deliberative civic learning through participation in VTS integrated with NIF?
 - a. How do gifted middle school students describe their experience in VTS integrated with NIF?
 - b. What are the perceived outcomes of gifted middle school students' participation in VTS integrated with NIF?

This chapter provides a detailed description of the research design and methodology guided by the research purpose and questions. To address the research questions, this study employed a qualitative case study design. In this chapter, I describe the study design, including participant selection criteria and data collection methods, timeline, and alignment with the research questions. Then, I describe how data management and analysis were organized and implemented. Additionally, I give details on my role and the insider-outsider relationship throughout the data collection and analysis processes. In addition, ethical considerations were a crucial component of the study, especially since it involved youth, qualitative design, and engaged approaches to research. Finally, I review the criteria of quality in qualitative research and discuss the limitations of the study.

Choice of Methodology

Guided by engaged approaches to research, this study focused on advancing knowledge and addressing a real-world problem/situation. Theoretical perspectives in the fields of communication, education, and psychology informed this study to advance theory and practice. This study also focused on young individuals' learning experiences and their understanding of these experiences. Therefore, the study recognized and appreciated the multiplicity of identities and the complexity of reality. In this sense, it was crucial to ensure that the study's design incorporated diverse theoretical perspectives and focused on outcomes of inquiry.

To reconcile the dualism of theory and praxis and enable communication between theoretical perspectives, this study recognized pragmatism as an overarching research paradigm and methodological approach. Pragmatism acknowledges an objective or subjective ontology and epistemology or a combination of both and focuses on the relation of theory and praxis and the predetermined outcomes of an inquiry (Van de Ven, 2007). Bowman (2019) argues that pragmatism views *theoretical reasoning* as a form of *practical reasoning*. As an approach to case study research, pragmatism suggests that "knowledge, knowledge application and knowledge creation cannot be separated from action." (Bowman, 2019, p. 559).

Pragmatism "sought to reconcile rationalism and empiricism by showing that knowing and doing are indivisibly part of the same process" (Van de Ven, 2007, p. 54). Moreover, "pragmatists believe that multiple paradigms can be used to address research problems" (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011, p. 6). In other words, pragmatism offers an opportunity for "a productive interplay of perspectives, models, and world views" (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2000, as cited in Van de Ven, 2007, p.37).

According to Creswell (2013), pragmatism offers a wide range of research methods, techniques, and procedures that best meet their needs and purposes. In this sense, pragmatism allows researchers to use multiple data sources and frameworks for data interpretation and ensure a rigorous design. Consequently, pragmatism as a methodological approach recognizes the constitutive role of communication and presents an opportunity to capture the perceived learning outcomes of students by employing a set of practices and methods.

I conducted this research to understand the meaning people have constructed and how individuals made sense of their experiences that were not experimentally examined or measured (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Guided by pragmatism, this study implemented qualitative, interpretive approaches to research by privileging multiplicity of identities, truths, and contextualized realities, as well as by including perspectives of youth. To this end, this doctoral study drew upon pragmatism and was guided by qualitative, interpretive approaches to research.

Case Study Design

Informed by the multidisciplinary conceptual framework and engaged approaches to research, this study focused on the learning experiences of a group of the Hillview School's middle school students as they participate and reflect on their engagement in a predetermined number of educational activities related to deliberation and dialogue during the 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 academic years. Guided by pragmatism, the design of the study aimed to reconcile theory and praxis. According to Merriam (1998), case studies "can accommodate a variety of disciplinary perspectives as well as perspective on the nature of research itself" (p. 2). Schwandt and Gates (2018) suggest that "all case study research exists to address the dialectic that lies at the heart of understanding—an ongoing investigation of the empirical to refine the theoretical

and the theoretical to better understand and explain the empirical” (p. 607). In this sense, a case study design can align with a multidisciplinary conceptual framework. Therefore, this study employed a case study design.

Case studies aim to “understand process of events, projects, and progress and learns to discover context characteristics that will shed light on an issue or object” (Sanders, 1981, p. 44). The case study approach is appropriate for an in-depth exploration from multiple perspectives of the complexity and uniqueness of a particular project, program, or process in a real-life context (Merriam, 1998; Schwandt & Gates, 2018). Since the doctoral study focused on the students’ learning experiences in the extra-curriculum program delivered through the partnership between K-State Institute for Civic Discourse and Democracy (ICDD), K-State Research and Extension (KSRE), the Kansas 4-H program (4-H), and the Marianna Kistler Beach Museum of Art (Beach Museum), this study employed a case study design.

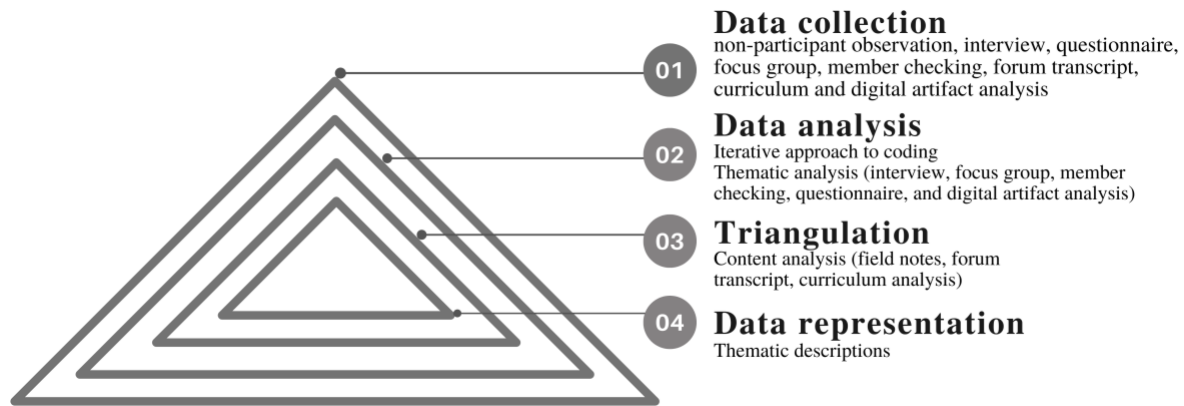
According to Yin (2018), “a case study is empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon (the ‘case’) within its real-life contacts, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context may not be clearly evident” (p.16). In line with Yin (2018) and Merriam (1998), case study research is an appropriate approach when:

- There is a focus on contemporary events within their real-world settings and context.
- The study aims to produce a thick description of the phenomenon and the real-life context in which it occurred, and *how* or *why* questions are being posed.
- The researcher has little control over behavioral events.
- The boundaries between phenomenon and context are blurred.

To ensure rigor and coherence, it is important to align theoretical paradigm, conceptual framework, and research design (Bhattacharya, 2017; Tracy, 2010). Given the focus of this study

on contemporary events and the focus of the research questions around inquiry of *how* and *what*, a case study design was appropriate. As such, I designed data collection and analysis processes in line with case study research, which Black et al. (2010) suggest case study approach to examine specific deliberative events and analyze group deliberation, which include participant observation, in-depth interviews, and content analysis and surveys. Through multiple methods, I sought to describe and analyze group deliberation and specific deliberative events. Additionally, Creswell (2013) points out that case study research “explores a bounded system (a case) or multiple systems (cases) over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information (e.g., observations, interviews, audio-visual material, and documents and reports), and reports a case description and case-based themes” (p. 97). As follows, this study utilized multiple methods of data collection to address the research questions and research problem and focus on the practical implications of the study (Luck et al., 2006; Van de Ven, 2007). The use of multiple methods of data collection also aligns with engaged approaches to research. By utilizing multi-method research designs, community-engaged scholarship produces findings that will be academically meaningful and practically significant (Post et al., 2016; Schram, 2014; Shockley-Zalabak et al., 2017). To this end, this study utilized a case study design by employing a variety of methods (see Figure 3.1). These include non-participant observation, interview, questionnaire, focus group, curriculum and artifact analysis, field notes, and forum transcripts (Grauer, 2012; Merriam, 1998; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Figure 3.1. Research Design



Qualitative Case Study

It is essential to conduct case study based on a theoretical framework that guides the research process (Merriam, 1998). Given the conceptual framework I presented in Chapter 2, this study focused on a nuanced understanding of the learning process as research participants participated in deliberative civic learning. As a result, this study acknowledges that knowledge creation that is apart from positivist and objective scientist perspectives (Bhattacharya, 2017; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Qualitative inquiry aims to understand individuals' subjective experiences and how people make sense of these experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In addition, the goals of qualitative research are to describe, understand, and interpret (Bhattacharya, 2017; Merriam, 1998; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Since qualitative inquiry allows us to explore and capture youths' learning experiences, this study utilized a qualitative case study design.

Moreover, guided by interpretive approaches to research, children's studies should occur in natural contexts by focusing on explaining and describing phenomena (Greig et al., 2013). In this regard, this study sought to examine early adolescents' points of view and capture their subjective experiences and meanings (Greig et al., 2013). Drawing upon Merriam (1998) and

Merriam and Tisdell (2016), this qualitative case study was guided by the multidisciplinary conceptual framework to offer a detailed account of the learning experiences of gifted middle school students.

Descriptive Interpretive Case Study

In line with Merriam (1998) and Merriam and Tisdell (2016), I drew from theoretical perspectives emerging from the fields of education, communication, and psychology to design questions examining the *how* and *what* of learning, thus setting a descriptive and interpretive intent of this study. Descriptive case study is “useful, though, in presenting basic information about areas of education where little research has been conducted. Innovative programs and practices are often the focus of descriptive case studies in education” (Merriam, 1998, p. 27). Taking into account that this study offered a unique opportunity to explore the experiences of early adolescents as they participated in the VTS and NIF models, this descriptive case study aimed to produce a thick description of the phenomenon under investigation (Merriam, 1998).

Additionally, interpretive case studies also generate a rich description of that being observed (Merriam, 1998). According to Merriam (1998), “the descriptive data, however, are used to develop conceptual categories or to illustrate, support, or challenge theoretical assumptions held prior to the data gathering” (p. 28). Drawing on Merriam (1998), this study was a combination of description and interpretation, common for case studies in education. Consequently, this study utilized a qualitative case study design to generate a rich description of how early adolescents understood their learning experiences as they participated in dialogue and deliberation.

Single Case Study

Scholars argue that single-case studies should not be underestimated (Flyvbjerg, 2006; Gerring, 2007). Yin (2018) suggests that single-case study designs are particularly relevant when the case is critical, unique, or extreme. Moreover, the single case may be appropriate when there is an emphasis on description and in-depth portrayal of a case, and it has not been studied before (Schwandt & Gates, 2018; Yin, 2018). Investigation of the learning experiences of the Hillview School's eighth-grade students who participated in the VTS integrated with NIF during their time in the middle school can shed light on meanings, experiences, and processes that previously have not been explored.

There are three reasons that this study presented a unique opportunity. First, the collaborative and mutually beneficial partnership between KSRE, 4-H, ICDD, the Beach Museum, and Hillview School presented a unique opportunity for engaged scholarship. Second, the existing body of empirical literature concerns the learning experiences of high school and college students. Finally, an innovative component of this programmatic effort was the use of the VTS model together with the NIF model. Therefore, exploring programmatic efforts related to deliberative civic learning in middle school was a unique case. In this fashion, examining the learning experiences of gifted middle school students in VTS integrated with NIF model can bring new insights regarding deliberative civic learning for early adolescence. Given this rationale, this study utilized a qualitative single case study design.

Definition of Case

The focus of this study was on the learning experience that occurred as students participated in deliberation and dialogue through the use of NIF and VTS models. Since a case study focuses on an in-depth investigation of a bounded system (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Yin,

2018), it is crucial to define a case. As Merriam (1998) suggests that “the bounded system, or case, might be selected because it is an instance of some concern, issue, or hypothesis” (p. 10). Stake (2006) points out that “a case is a noun, a thing, an entity; it is seldom a very, a participle, a functioning. Schools may be our cases – real things that are easy to visualize” (p.1). Since the bounded system was the definite number of activities associated with VTS integrated with NIF, I considered Hillview is a research site, Community Conversation Series is a bounded context in which the middle school students’ learning experience occurred as they engaged in deliberation and dialogue through the use of NIF and VTS models. Community Conversation Series included elements of deliberative civic learning and took place during the 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 academic years. The engagement with deliberative civic learning happened during the research participants’ time in seventh and eighth grades.

Research Site

Hillview School was a small urban middle school in the Midwestern United States (grades 6-8). At the time of the study, the research site had a total student population of approximately 500 students. The student population was 49% female and 51% male. One hundred fifty-seven students qualified for free and reduced lunch, approximately 32% of the student population. Regarding the ethnic distribution of the student population, 5.5% identified as African American, 0.2% identified as American Indian/Alaskan, 6.4% identified as Asian, 65.1% identified as Caucasian/White, 12.9% identified as Hispanic, and 9.9% identified as two or more races. The school is located within a more affluent side of the city.

Community Conversation Series

The Hillview School offered students an enrichment program that includes growth mindset development, leadership, civic engagement, communication, and conflict management.

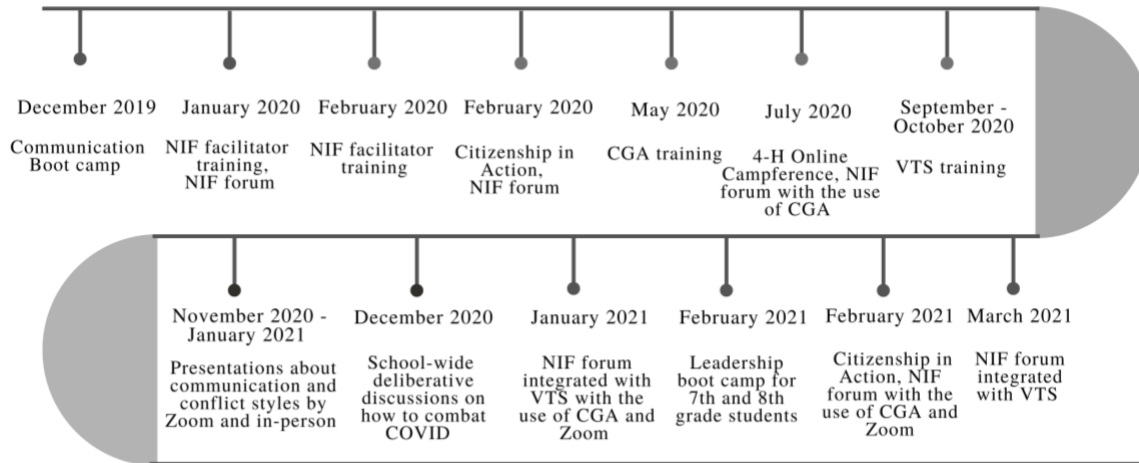
The middle school student’s participation in the enrichment program was voluntary. Through the collaborative effort, middle school students participated in Community Conversation series that included communication boot camp, NIF and VTS facilitator training, Common Ground for Action (CGA) online forum platform training (The National Issues Forums Institute, 2020b). The students also joined various NIF forums on mental health, mass shooting, land use, house divided, policing, and bullying prevention during the 2019-2021 academic years (Figure 3.2 and Table 3.1).

Table 3.1. Community Conversations Series Timeline

Time Period	Description
December 2019	Communication Boot camp delivered by KSRE, 4-H
January 2020	NIF facilitator training, community conversation on mental health organized by KSRE, 4-H and ICDD
February 2020	NIF facilitator training delivered by KSRE, 4-H
February 2020	Kansas 4-H Citizenship in Action, community conversations on land use, mass shooting, and bullying prevention
May 2020	CGA platform training delivered by KSRE, 4-H, and ICDD
July 2020	4-H Online Campference, community conversation on bullying prevention with use of CGA
September 2020- October 2020	VTS training delivered by Beach Museum over Zoom (VTS Training)
November 2020- January 2021	Youth-led presentations about communication and conflict styles for the Hillview School’s middle school students by Zoom and on site
December 2020	Youth-led Kansas Beats Virus community conversation
January 2021	Community conversation started with VTS on bullying prevention with the use of CGA over Zoom (VTS/NIF forum-1)
February 2021	Youth-led onsite leadership and communication boot camp for the Hillview School’s middle school students (Onsite Lead Camp)
February 2021	Kansas 4-H Citizenship in Action, community conversations on topics such as policing and house divided with the use of CGA over Zoom (Forums-2)
March 2021	Onsite community conversation started with VTS on mental health with the use of CGA (VTS/NIF forum – 3)

The presented timeline was developed based on interview data and informal conversations with Dr. Bietau.

Figure 3.2. Community Conversations Series Timeline



Case

Since Miles et al. (2014) view a case as “a phenomenon of some sort occurring in a bounded context” (p. 28), the gifted middle school students’ perceptions of their learning experiences are phenomenon under investigation. It is also important to articulate the bounded system within which the case occurs. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) explained that:

One technique for assessing the boundedness of the topic is to ask how finite the data collection would be; that is, whether there is a limit to the number of people involved who could be interviewed or a finite time for observations. If there is no end, actually or theoretically, to the number of people who could be interviewed or to observations that could be conducted, then the phenomenon is not bounded enough to qualify as a case. (p. 39).

Considering that the study aimed to understand the learning experience (phenomenon) that occurred throughout a predetermined number of events and activities, the data collection

occurred in March – May 2021, the case was the learning experience of the eighth-grade students’ as they engaged in Community Conversation series in March – May 2021 and reflected on their participation in Community Conversation series at Hillview school in the 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 academic years.

Unit of Analysis

Consistent with Merriam (1998), this study focused on a holistic description and explanation of the bounded system (case). According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), for it to be a case study, *one* particular program or *one* particular classroom of learners (a bounded system), or *one* particular older learner selected on the basis of typicality, uniqueness, success and so forth, would be the unit of analysis. (p.39, emphasis in original)

As follows, the unit of analysis in this study was each eighth-grade students’ experiences and their perceptions regarding their participation in the VTS integrated with NIF during their time in middle school in the 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 academic years.

Participant Selection

Qualitative inquiry utilizes purposeful sampling, which includes recruiting individuals from whom researchers can obtain in-depth, rich, and detailed information about the phenomenon under investigation (Bhattacharya, 2017; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Patton, 2015). To generate a thick description of the phenomenon, this study aimed to capture a wide range of experiences of eighth-grade students, which aligns with the principle of *watching margin* (Becker, 2002).

Initially, I had identified criteria for research participants to focus on a high level of engagement from youth. However, it was also important to ensure shared decision-making about

sampling, which is consistent with engaged approaches to research. Ross et al. (2010) claim that “the academic researcher might provide expertise in determining appropriate sample size for scientific soundness and power while the community partner might provide expertise regarding how the appropriate sample size might be obtained” (p. 23). In line with engaged scholarship, I worked with Dr. Bietau to realign exclusion criteria to accommodate the educational context of the enrichment program.

While the resulting sample was not as highly engaged as the initial design, the varied experiences allowed for a greater understanding of the learning process. Guided by Merriam and Tisdell (2016) and Patton (2015), this study utilized unique purposeful sampling. To be eligible to participate in this study, potential participants were required to be:

- eighth-grade students,
- between the ages of 13 and 14 years,
- trained in the NIF model AND/OR VTS model,

Additionally, eligible participants had to meet at least two of the following:

- have experience facilitating AND/OR participating in VTS sessions,
- participated AND/OR facilitated deliberative forums guided by the NIF model in 2019-2021, or
- facilitated a NIF deliberative forum in March 2021.

The research participants were identified in collaboration with Dr. Bietau. As a result, nine eighth-grade students at Hillview School were identified, and eight of these nine students participated in the study. It is important to note that the nine eighth-grade students were members of the Hillview School’s youth leadership team that played an instrumental role in organizing a series of events related to dialogue and deliberation at Hillview School.

The youth leadership team members selected images for VTS discussions and identified mental health as the topic for the VTS/NIF forum – 3 on March 12, 2021. The students who were part of the youth leadership team participated in VTS integrated with NIF in the 2019-2021 academic years to various degrees (Lisa Bietau, personal communication, March 17, 2021). Accordingly, this posed a challenge related to the homogeneity of data. However, this sample allowed me to gather data that represented a range of experiences with a degree of variation of their engagement (Luborsky & Rubinstein, 1995). Since this exploratory study focused on an innovative educational program context, the purposive sampling was appropriate for the study.

Research Participants

At the time of the study, the eight research participants were eighth-grade gifted students at Hillview School, aged 13 to 14 years old. Five participants identified as female and three as male, and each had different dispositions and interests. Three participants identified as Caucasian/White, and five identified as Asian American. The eight participants engaged with the programmatic efforts at various levels of length and breadth of engagement. To maintain confidentiality, I assigned pseudonyms to each research participant (Table 3.2.)

Table 3.2. Research Participants

Participant	Pseudonym
Participant 1	Cleo
Participant 2	Jessie
Participant 3	Angel
Participant 4	Jamie
Participant 5	Noel
Participant 6	Avery
Participant 7	Jan
Participant 8	Alva

Membership Role

My membership role was two-fold and changed over time. First, I had an opportunity to work with Aliah Mestrovich Seay, 4-H and KSRE staff member, staff members from the Beach Museum, ICDD, and Hillview School educator Dr. Bietau. My role with the Kansas 4-H Community Vitality Leadership Team was instrumental in understanding the programmatic efforts and building connections with multiple local communities in 2020, including Hillview School. During 2020 and 2021, my role changed from peripheral to active membership (Adler & Adler, 1987; Bhattacharya, 2017). I took part in regular team meetings, observed NIF and VTS facilitator training sessions, and assisted with several tasks to support the sustainability of a pilot project, *Stories Matter*, which later transformed into the Community Conversations series during 2020 and 2021. However, I did not participate in the delivery of the Community Conversation series.

Second, I had an opportunity to interact and connect with the eighth-grade students at Hillview School. My role with Hillview School also changed from peripheral to active membership throughout my involvement, as well as through the data collection and analysis processes in 2021 (Adler & Adler, 1987; Bhattacharya, 2017). Initially, as a member of the Kansas 4-H Community Vitality Leadership Team, I attended VTS Training. In this role, I observed online VTS peer-to-peer sessions in which eighth-grade students facilitated VTS sessions in 2020. Later, I took part in virtual meetings with Dr. Bietau and eighth-grade students, where I was introduced as a researcher interested in VTS, which may have influenced students' perceptions.

I received a letter of support from the principal in December 2020. I observed (a) VTS/NIF forum-1 in January 2021 and (b) Forums-2 in February 2021 (Table 3.1). In this

regard, my role was peripheral until April 2021. After the research project was granted IRB approval on February 1, 2021 (see Appendix A), I attended Onsite Lead Camp in February 2021. I also had a chance to interact and establish personal connections with the research participants by attending meetings and events and completing small tasks along with them. I took a complete (non-participant) observer role during VTS/NIF forum – 3 in March 12, 2021. By attending Onsite Lead Camp in February 2021, the school board meeting in April 2021, and observing their facilitations in the classroom in May 2021, I was able to develop relationships with the students along with working together on a presentation for Kansas Civics Showcase sponsored by the Kansas State Department of Education in April 2021. In this regard, my role transformed into an active member role with Hillview School as well.

There were several crucial aspects of the collaboration, including existing relationships and building trust, as well as learning to navigate virtual collaborations during the COVID-19 pandemic. For this doctoral study, having prior established personal connections played a significant role as the global pandemic started in March 2020. At that point, the following interactions and collaborations moved online. The partners' willingness to collaborate and support this research was instrumental for my doctoral study.

Building trust is crucial for any respectful partnership. Minkler and Wallerstein (2008, as cited in Ross et al., 2010) explained that “trust is established by relationship-building, spending time together listening to each other’s concerns, interests, and needs, and incorporating them into the research agenda” (p. 20). Considering that engaged research is contextualized, I worked closely with Dr. Bietau to develop relationships and understand the context of the study.

Data Collection Method

Since the study focused on gaining a better understanding of the eighth-grade students' learning experiences, qualitative data was gathered through non-participant observation of VTS/NIF forum – 3 in March 2021, interview, a focus group discussion, questionnaire, and curriculum and artifact analysis (Merriam, 1998; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2018). By utilizing observation, interview, and transcript analysis, the study allowed the phenomenon to be explored from multiple perspectives. More importantly, each piece of data was a piece of the puzzle that contributed to the researcher's understanding of the whole phenomenon (Baxter & Jack, 2008).

To capture interactions during VTS integrated with NIF, a specific event in which the eighth-grade students participated and facilitated was selected. On March 12, 2021, seventh and eighth-grade students participated in a VTS informed activity followed by an in-person deliberative forum guided by the NIF model on mental health. After NIF integrated with VTS on March 12, 2021, I invited the research participants for an interview. The preliminary findings based on interview data were presented during a focus group discussion to deepen reflection and member-checking further. As a result of the focus group discussion and collective sense-making, the research participants created a video presentation for the Kansas Civics Showcase, sponsored by the Kansas State Department of Education, which was used as a digital artifact for this study. The analysis of the deliberative civic learning curriculum offered by KSRE, 4-H, ICDD, and the Beach Museum was also included in the data analysis to triangulate the findings. Table 3.3 represents the timeline of data collection.

Table 3.3. Data Collection Timetable

Time Period	Data Collection	Comments
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March 8 – 12, 2021	<p>Dr. Bietau suggested nine students to whom I should reach out for interviews</p> <p>I created observation field notes and audio recorded VTS and NIF discussions</p> <p>I distributed a Qualtrics link for a questionnaire to nine students</p> <p>Conversation bootcamp, community conversations facilitator training, and VTS curriculum collected</p>	<p>One VTS discussion transcript</p> <p>Two NIF forum discussion transcripts</p> <p>Two field notes</p> <p>One audio recording</p> <p>Eight responses to questionnaire</p> <p>Three curriculum documents collected</p>
March 15 – 19, 2021	<p>I conducted an informal online interview with Dr. Bietau</p> <p>I reached out to nine students to schedule a one-on-one synchronous semi-structured online interview via Zoom</p> <p>One synchronous semi-structured interview via Zoom conducted</p> <p>Analytic Memo for weeks 1-2 created</p>	<p>One field note</p> <p>One online semi-structured interview transcripts</p> <p>One audio recording</p> <p>One analytic memo</p>
March 22 – 26, 2021	<p>I distributed a Qualtrics link for online program evaluation questionnaire</p> <p>Six synchronous semi-structured online interviews via Zoom conducted</p> <p>Analytic Memo for week 3 created</p>	<p>Eight responses to online program evaluation questionnaire</p> <p>Six online semi-structured interview transcripts</p> <p>Six audio recordings</p> <p>One analytic memo</p>
March 29 – April 2, 2021	<p>One synchronous semi-structured online interview via Zoom conducted</p> <p>I distributed a Qualtrics link for online follow-up questionnaire</p>	<p>One online semi-structured interview transcript</p> <p>One audio recording</p>
April 5 – 9, 2021	<p>Six online follow-up questionnaires received</p> <p>Analytic Memo for week 5 created</p>	<p>Six responses to online follow-up questionnaire</p> <p>One analytic memo</p>
April 12 – 16, 2021	<p>I created observation field notes and audio recorded a focus group discussion on April 12th, 2021</p>	<p>One field note</p> <p>One audio recording</p>
April 19 – 23, 2021	<p>Digital artifact submitted for state-wide civics showcase sponsored by the Midwestern State Department of Education</p>	<p>One digital artifact transcript</p> <p>One audio recording</p>

	Audio recording of digital artifact produced Analytic Memo for weeks 6-7 created	One analytic memo
April 26 – 30, 2021	Member checking	
May 3 – 7, 2021	Member checking	Eight member-checking transcripts
Total	Non-participant observation Interview Questionnaire Focus group Curriculum Digital artifact	Eleven audio recordings Two VTS discussion transcripts Two NIF forum discussion transcripts Four field notes Eight online interview transcripts 22 responses to different questionnaires One focus group discussion transcript One digital artifact transcript Eight member-checking transcripts Three curriculum materials' text Three analytic memos

Non-Participant Observation

Field Notes and Transcript of VTS

By employing an *observer as participant* method, I created descriptive and inferential field notes generated by non-participant observations as I attended the event in person at the research site (Frey, 2018). In this sense, I created descriptive field notes to capture the middle school students' interactions during two VTS discussion on March 12, 2021, as neutrally as possible (Frey, 2018). Inferential field notes focused on “attempting to understand interpretations and assumptions that extend beyond the data—about what is observed and the

underlying motives, affect, and/or emotions of the events and behaviors observed” (Frey, 2018, p. 678).

Furthermore, guided by Merriam and Tisdell (2016) as well as Bhattacharya (2017), and taking into consideration the educational context, I produced additional field notes to describe overall impression of the interactions in two VTS sessions (See Appendix B for observation guide). With informed consent of parents, I was able to audio record the discussion during VTS/NIF forum – 3. The audio was transcribed and used for further analysis. The field notes and the transcript became part of text data to analyze and triangulate themes derived from interview data.

Field Notes and Transcript of NIF

Through non-participant observations, I generated descriptive field notes to capture middle school students’ interactions during a VTS/NIF forum – 3 (Bhattacharya, 2017; Frey, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I listened attentively to produce field notes during and after the observation and noted body language when possible (Bhattacharya, 2017; Emerson et al., 2011). I also considered the contextual and situational information and my reactions (Hamilton & Corbett-Whittier, 2013). I started with in-the-field *jottings*, which I later turned into more coherent field notes (Frey, 2018; See Appendix B).

Consistent with Groundwater-Smith et al. (2015), non-participant observation provided an opportunity to become familiar with the young research participants and their contexts. Moreover, initial observations helped me adjust and edit interview questions to ensure they were grounded in “the discourse of those being interviewed” (Eder & Fingerson, 2001, p. 183). For example, I used stories matter and community conversations in interview questions to frame accessible interview questions.

There were two small group discussions – nine students participated in Group #1, and eight participated in Group #2, including moderators. Since the two small-group discussions occurred simultaneously, I focused on the interactions in Group #1. However, with informed consent from parents, I audio recorded both small-group discussions during VTS/NIF forum – 3. Given that seven out of nine research participants took part in both small-group discussions, I used two forum transcripts for analysis.

During VTS/NIF forum – 3, the middle school students employed the Common Ground for Action (CGA) online forum site.⁸ I was granted access to two CGA reports which contained a summary of the participation, including each forum summary, forum details, personal stories, and chat log. I used the text data from the CGA reports to supplement the forum transcripts. Two separate transcripts, in addition to the field notes, became part of the text data to analyze and triangulate interview data.

Interview and Questionnaire

To explore eighth-grade students' learning experiences and perceptions, I gathered data by conducting interviews and questionnaire (Bhattacharya, 2017; Greig et al., 2013; O'Reilly & Dogra, 2017). Greig et al. (2013) emphasize that research with children and young people should consider the context. In considering (a) the educational context, (b) situational factors like role and tasks within the young leadership team, (c) the young participants' profiles, and (d) their academic load, I wanted to ensure that protocol and procedures were appropriate and sensitive (Eder & Fingerson, 2001; Greig et al., 2013; Hamilton & Corbett-Whittier, 2013; O'Reilly & Dogra, 2017). It is also important to note that adolescents manage major biological, educational, and social role transformations that occur concurrently (Bandura, 2006). Additionally, young

⁸ For more on the Common Ground for Action model, visit <https://www.nifi.org/en/cga-online-forums>.

people aged 12 to 18 years have “greater pressure on them in terms of their physical development, changing social relationships and academic stress” (O’Reilly & Dogra, 2017, p. 30).

Given the pandemic context, I took into consideration several factors in designing data collection that allowed for both online and participatory data collection tools (Greig et al., 2013). These included the use of asynchronous and synchronous approaches to data collection (Dodds & Hess, 2021; Janghorban et al., 2014; Pocock et al., 2021; Tremblay et al., 2021). They also involved intentional types of questions for interviewing early adolescents (Eder & Fingerson, 2001; Greig et al., 2013; O’Reilly & Dogra, 2017; See Appendix C for Interview guide).

Use of Synchronous and Asynchronous Online Approaches to Data Collection

Conducting research amid the COVID-19 pandemic required qualitative researchers to consider innovative data-gathering methods, such as synchronous and asynchronous methods, as well as the use of virtual communication technology (Davies et al., 2020; Pocock et al., 2021; Tremblay et al., 2021). An online interview is a structured conversation, which includes the technology used to conduct and record the interview between an interviewer and an interviewee (Lupton, 2021). For synchronous online interviews, I used the K-State Zoom licensed 5.3.1 version. Zoom is a cloud-based videoconferencing service that has been used for research purposes (Archibald et al., 2019; Daniels et al., 2019; Kite & Phongsavan, 2017; Lobe, 2017; Matthews et al., 2018; Tremblay et al., 2021). Zoom offers online meetings in real-time and enables secure recording, user-specific authentication, real-time encryption of meetings, and transcription. Moreover, the Zoom platform is compliant with the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPPA). For asynchronous methods such as questionnaire, I employed Qualtrics, a web-based survey tool to conduct data collection activities.

Communication technology can allow for synchronous data collection methods, which can (a) be cost and time efficient, (b) make processes more convenient and comfortable by offering more flexibility and control in choosing the time and space, and (c) allow participation of vulnerable groups (Dodds & Hess, 2021; Pocock et al., 2021; Tremblay et al., 2021). More importantly, thanks to the nature of the virtual interface, communication technology may shift power imbalances between the research investigator and research participants, thus making interactions less intimidating (Dodds & Hess, 2021; Pocock et al., 2021; Tremblay et al., 2021).

According to O'Reilly and Dogra (2017), it is crucial to create a comfortable and safe environment for young people when interviewing them, treat young people with respect, and acknowledge them as experts. It is also important to understand that young people may be anxious about responding and allow students to reflect on their answers and respect their pace in conversations (O'Reilly & Dogra, 2017). The combination of synchronous and asynchronous approaches to data collections was appropriate. For these reasons, I employed Zoom and Qualtrics as communication technologies for interviews.

Additionally, asynchronous approaches to data collection may prompt reflective responses by letting participants respond at their own pace and allowing research participants to edit their responses before sending them (Fritz & Vandermause, 2018; Gibson, 2017; McCoyd & Kerson, 2006; Pocock et al., 2021). Furthermore, participants may prefer to submit anonymous responses. Thus, written information can generate more meaningful data (Groundwater-Smith et al., 2015).

Virtual research is less contextualized than traditional in-person data collection methods (Meho, 2006; Weller, 2017). There are several disadvantages to using communication technologies, such as (a) limited opportunity to capture context and pick up nonverbal cues, (b)

loss of spontaneity, (c) reduced opportunity to build rapport, (d) potential misinterpretation of responses, (e) possible technology issues, (f) *Zoom fatigue*, and (g) concerns with privacy and access to stable internet connection and devices, all of which can influence the quality of the interview (Abrams et al., 2015; Dodds & Hess, 2021; Gibson, 2017; Hamilton & Bowers, 2006; Lee, 2020; Pocock et al., 2021; Tremblay et al., 2021). To address these concerns, I was introduced to the students in person and had an opportunity to observe them, build relationships, and capture the context in this study.

Considering the educational and pandemic context, the young participants' profiles, and ethical guidelines, I collected data over time through the following four types of methods:

1. Questionnaire, asynchronous method to capture reactions regarding their participation in NIF and VTS using a Qualtrics form in March 2021
2. Online program evaluation questionnaire using a Qualtrics form in March 2021
3. Synchronous semi-structured online interviews conducted using the K-State Zoom licensed 5.3.1 version from March to April 2021
4. Online follow-up questionnaire using a Qualtrics form in April 2021.

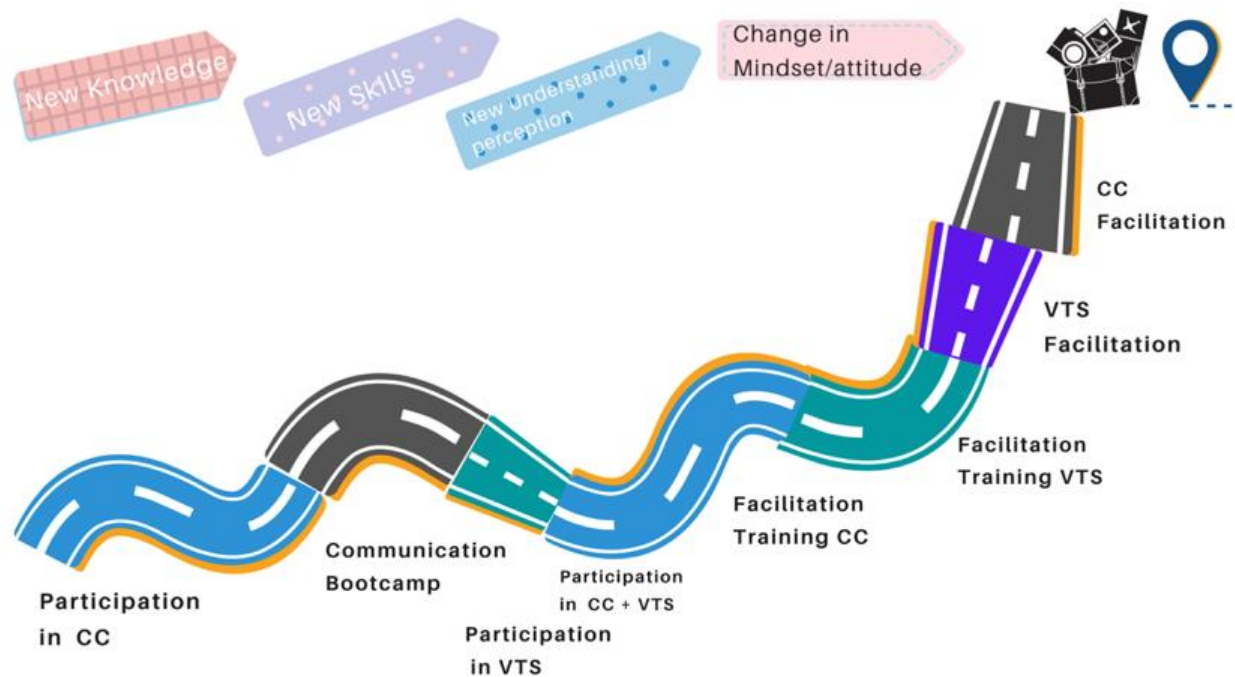
Use of Online Participatory Tools

Participatory methods can facilitate youth engagement (O'Reilly & Dogra, 2017). These methods can also help to reduce the unequal power relationship between a researcher and a participant (Punch, 2002). The participatory mapping method is suggested for research with children and young people (Groundwater-Smith et al., 2015). Participatory mapping is an interactive approach with the use of visual methods and interviewing, which can serve both as a record of interactions and a prompt for further exploration (Emmel, 2008; Groundwater-Smith et al., 2015). Since most young people are familiar with and feel comfortable utilizing online

communication technology and have access to a stable internet connection, this study used internet-based participatory data collection tools (Greig et al., 2013; O'Reilly & Dogra, 2017). I used Google Jumbo as an online engagement tool in real-time for the synchronous semi-structured online interviews.

During synchronous semi-structured online interviews, I invited research participants to map out their learning journey by utilizing photo-elicitation and Google Jumbo in real-time (Figure 3.3). This method allowed young people to reflect on their learning throughout the series of events they participated in by assembling visual images and sharing personal responses. I also used photo elicitation, which allows various images to be used as prompts for verbal data (Bates et al., 2017; Harper, 2002; Tinkler, 2013). For photo-elicitation, I used the Digital Visual Explorer deck as prompts. For instance, I asked students to (a) reflect on their experience in Stories Matter by selecting an image from the Digital Visual Explorer deck that represented big *a-ha* moments or important *take-aways* over the last year and then (b) locate the image on Google Jumbo in real-time.

Figure 3.3. Learning Journey Map



By sharing an image and how the picture connected to their thoughts and experience, the research participants reflected on their experiences. Additionally, I was able to follow up and further explore their responses and reactions.

Types of Interview Questions

Semi-structured interviews are common in research involving youth as these allow a respondent to reflect on their experiences of a specific phenomenon (Heath et al., 2009). When interviewing youth, it is also recommended to begin with unstructured, easy, and soft opening questions relevant to the scope of the study, as well as to avoid the type of questions that can be perceived as having an expectation of a *right* and *wrong* answer (Eder & Fingerson, 2001; Frosh et al., 2002; Heath et al., 2009; Reinhartz, 1992; Tammivaara & Enright, 1986).

Moreover, I maintained a “flexible and open style of questioning and encourage[d] them to direct the interview agenda as much as possible” during interviews by ensuring that I asked questions “in a different order, ask[ed] new questions, or omit[ed] questions depending on their

responses,” if needed (O’Reilly and Dogra, 2017, p. 25). Furthermore, young people interviewed in educational settings may often equate the interview experience with *a difficult and frustrating lesson* (Frosh et al., 2002). In this regard, it was essential to start with open questions to invite the researcher participant to talk freely and shift gradually to the topic under discussion (O’Reilly & Dogra, 2017). For example, I asked questions, such as: *Can you describe your typical day at school? How did you learn and get involved with Stories Matter?* In this sense, I utilized descriptive, grand tour, and task-related grand tour questions to generate conversation (Bhattacharya, 2017; Spradley, 1979).

To better understand meanings that participants assigned to their experiences and interactions, I asked them to reflect on and to share detailed and concrete examples and descriptions from their participation in VTS session(s) and NIF discussions, as well as their thoughts and feelings about their experience (Bhattacharya, 2017; Kim, 2016; Weiss, 1995). By conducting individual interviews, I was able to learn about individual students, obtain data, prepare preliminary findings for the focus group discussion, and understand the discussion more fully in the focus group (Eder & Finderson, 2001). Table 3.4 shows the alignment between the interview guide and the research questions.

Table 3.4. Alignment Between Research Questions and Interview Questions

Research Question	Interview Questions (Examples)
a) How do gifted middle school students describe their experience in VTS integrated with NIF?	<p>Can you share any big “a-ha” moments from when you participated in community conversations? What happened?</p> <p>Could you describe the main activities and events that have happened since you started participating or during last year in Stories Matter?</p> <p>Can you tell me about your experience as [...] Youth Facilitator? What did you learn from the experience?</p> <p>Reflecting on your role as a Youth Facilitator (including your participation and/or facilitation in Community</p>

	Conversations and VTS), why do you think Stories Matter is important?
b) What are the perceived outcomes of gifted middle school students' participation in VTS incorporated with NIF?	<p>What important lessons have you learned personally?</p> <p>Can you share any big “a-ha” moments from when you participated in Visual Thinking Strategies (Stories Matter)? What happened?</p> <p>How are you different now because of your participation or/and facilitation in Community Conversations (overall)?</p> <p>Can you tell me about your experience as a [...] Youth Facilitator? What did you learn from the experience?</p> <p>What did you learn about others and about yourself?</p> <p>Can you describe one example of how your experience in VTS on March 12th, 2021 changed your everyday interactions with peers in school and/or outside of school (family)?</p> <p>Can you describe one example of how your experience in the recent community conversation on March 12th, 2021 changed your everyday interactions with peers in school or/and outside of school (family)?</p>

Focus Group

A group with peers is considered a natural setting for a discussion with young research participants (Eder & Fingerson, 2001). Group interviewing can (a) create an encouraging environment for informal interaction; (b) invite a group reaction to specific processes and patterns, exchanges of ideas, co-creation of shared meanings, and a deeper reflection; and (c) reduce the power imbalance between the researcher and participants (Albrecht et al., 1993; Bagnoli & Clark, 2010; Eder & Fingerson, 2001; O'Reilly & Dogra, 2017).

Moreover, group interviews allow a researcher to consider the influence of context (Bagnoli & Clark, 2010) and recognize the importance of peer culture and the social construction of meaning (Groundwater-Smith et al., 2015). Additionally, a focus group discussion can elicit more accurate accounts if participants interact daily (Eder & Fingerson, 2001). However, a group interview has several disadvantages, including the influence of a focus group's physical and

social context on participant engagement, peer pressure, and the influence of individuals who might impose or frame ‘shared’ meanings (Groundwater-Smith et al., 2015; Heath et al., 2009). In this regard, the complimentary use of group and individual interviews allows the researcher to gain an understanding of both individual and collective meaning creation (Heath et al., 2009).

Accordingly, for this study, a focus group discussion presented an opportunity to observe peer-to-peer interactions, gather additional data by generating a discussion around themes based on interview data, and conduct member-checking. It was also an opportunity to create intentional space and time for the youth leadership team to learn about their peers’ responses and reactions (Bagnoli & Clark, 2010; Eder & Fingerson, 2001; Groundwater-Smith et al., 2015). The scheduling of the focus group discussion was based on the students’ availability and was implemented at the research site on Monday, April 12, 2021.

To create a prompt for the group reflection I used open and evaluation coding to analyze the interview data (Saldaña, 2021) and created a visual representation of the emerging themes. With the help of Dr. Bietau, I invited students to participate in the focus group discussion. Seven students participated in person, and one student attended via Zoom. Using their electronic devices, every research participant had an opportunity to leave comments on the slides available through the Google Jumbo app. I encouraged participants to reflect on the presented patterns by asking: *What did you observe? What are your comments on the themes? Is there anything in the themes that stuck out to you or surprised you? What else would you add to the themes? Do they raise any questions for you? What conclusions can you draw from your experience in activities? If you could do the project again, what would you do differently?* The focus group interview guide can be found in Appendix D.

I also generated field notes regarding the focus group discussion, which provided me with an opportunity to become familiar with the research participants' interactions and their contexts (Groundwater-Smith et al., 2015). Granted informal consent of parents and minor assent, I audio-recorded the focus group discussion. The audio was transcribed and, combined with the visual representation of the themes and field notes, became part of text data to analyze and address the research questions.

Curriculum Materials

The instrumental role of the Community Conversations series at Hillview School was the deliberative civic learning curriculum offered by ICDD, KSRE, 4-H, and the Beach Museum. In line with Merriam and Tisdell (2016), "the data found in documents can be used in the same manner as data from interviews or observations, data can furnish descriptive information, verify emerging hypotheses, advance new categories and hypotheses, offer historical understanding, track change and development" (p. 182). Document refers to a variety of "written, visual, digital, and physical material relevant to the study" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 162). Throughout the program, research participants took part in training: (a) conversation bootcamp (4 hours), (b) community conversations facilitator training, including online ICDD facilitator training (4 hours) and (c) VTS training (6 hours).

Considering the educational context, data collection also included curriculum. Specifically, for this study, (a) conversation boot camp included brief online video recordings and PowerPoint presentations, (b) community conversations facilitator training included a PowerPoint presentation, online ICDD facilitator training included a detailed moderator guide and script, and (c) VTS training (6 hours) offered by the Beach Museum included the recorded introduction session available on the 4-H website and PowerPoint presentations regarding the

VTS model and VTS facilitation. The Beach Museum provided the VTS PowerPoint materials. However, it is also important to recognize the limitations of document analysis, given that the information in documents has not been created for research purposes (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In this sense, the transcript and text data were used for analysis to triangulate the interview data.

Digital Artifact

Artifacts are usually “three-dimensional physical ‘things’ or objects in the environment that represent some form of communication that is meaningful to participants and/or the setting” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 162) However, Plowright (2011) broadens the definitions of artifact to include “objects or events that are produced by people” (p. 93). For example, an artifact could refer to newspapers, brochures, drawings, videos, and music.

In this study, research participants were offered an opportunity to create a video presentation about their experiences in the program. Accordingly, members of the youth leadership team collectively produced a video presentation to present on their engagement with deliberative civic learning. The video presentation was submitted for Kansas Civics Showcase in April 2021.

Drawing on Plowright (2011), a ten-minute-long presentation is both an informational and presentational artifact. The latter is created by recording information to store and keep, while the former is generated through describing events and information to share and present to others (Plowright, 2011). Considering that the digital artifact was created by recording individual students’ audio and then adding photos, the audio was transcribed and used as text data to address the research questions.

Member Checking

Member checking is an important part of qualitative inquiry that can indicate if investigators understand research participants' experiences and perspectives (Frey, 2018; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Simpson & Quigley, 2016; Tracy, 2010). Additionally, member checking provides an opportunity for researchers to discuss and clarify their interpretations and invite research participants to contribute additional viewpoints (Brantlinger et al., 2005; Frey, 2018).

In this fashion, member checking can increase the trustworthiness of a study, establish credibility, and confirm the accuracy of interview transcriptions (Brantlinger et al., 2005; Frey, 2018; Grauer, 2012). The first level of member checks, or technical level, occurs when researchers share transcripts before data analysis and interpretation to see if data was captured accurately (Brantlinger et al., 2005; Frey, 2018). The second level, or analytical level, happens when research participants react and respond to analytical themes, codes, and/or findings (Brantlinger et al., 2005; Frey, 2018).

I conducted the focus group discussion to discuss and clarify the data interpretation, which reflected the analytical level of member checking (Brantlinger et al., 2005; Frey, 2018). Moreover, I included member checking of interview transcripts to ensure individual students' input for verification and confirmation of the transcript accuracy and gain a deeper understanding of their experiences and perspectives. It was important to respect the students' time and not overwhelm them with a possibly significant amount of time to read transcripts (Simpson & Quigley, 2016). Consequently, I used a flexible strategy and reduced transcripts to a few pages (Simpson & Quigley, 2016). In particular, I "omitted fillers and repetitions, as these were not necessary for the purpose of my research and may only have served to disillusion participants regarding the fluency of their speech" (Harvey, 2015, p. 28).

To encourage reflective comments, I posed prompt questions: *What are your reactions and thoughts about the interview transcript? Does this match your experience? Do you want to change anything? Do you want to add anything?*” (See Appendix E). In this way, I offered an additional opportunity to reflect and contribute new insights regarding their experiences in the program. As a result, students either commented on the document or emailed me a separate response. All data were included as text for further data analysis.

Analytic Memos

Given the qualitative nature of this study, it was crucial to capture emotions and thoughts to reflect on my salient identities and how these may have influenced interactions with youth during data collection (Bhattacharya, 2017; O’Reilly & Dogra, 2017; Saldaña, 2021). I created a journal to include the description and chronology of events, decisions, and questions that emerged throughout the data collection process (Burgess, 1981). I also documented information of events and information about participants. More importantly, I reflected on my personal reactions to events, emotions, and feelings. I generated analytic memos to reflect on how I personally related to participants and/or the phenomenon, the research questions, and any problems with the study, as well as any personal or ethical dilemmas throughout data collection (Saldaña, 2021). Three analytic memos were included as data for further data analysis and interpretation. Moreover, analytic memos content was supplied by informal conversations with Dr. Bietau.

Drawing on the scholarship from communication and education fields, including the body of literature related to research with young people, each piece of gathered data is considered a *puzzle* contributing to the researcher’s understanding of the whole phenomenon (Baxter & Jack,

2008). Guided by qualitative case study design, Table 3.5 shows the alignment between research questions and data collection methods.

Table 3.5. Alignment between Research Questions and Data Collection Methods

Research sub question	Data source and references
How do the middle school students describe their experience in VTS integrated NIF?	Questionnaire, online program evaluation questionnaire, synchronous semi-structured online interview, online follow-up interview, focus group (Eder & Fingerson, 2001; Greig et al., 2013; Groundwater-Smith et al., 2015; O'Reilly & Dogra, 2017; Pocock et al., 2021; Tremblay et al., 2021); Digital artifact analysis (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Plowright, 2011) Member checking (Bhattacharya, 2017; Frey, 2018; Harvey, 2015; Simpson & Quigley, 2016) Analytic memo (Burgess, 1981; Saldaña, 2021) Field notes (Bhattacharya, 2017; Haug & Teune, 2008; Frey, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016)
What are the perceived outcomes of middle school students' participation in VTS incorporated with NIF?	Questionnaire, online program evaluation questionnaire, synchronous semi-structured online interview, online follow-up interview, focus group (Eder & Fingerson, 2001; Greig et al., 2013; Groundwater-Smith et al., 2015; O'Reilly & Dogra, 2017; Pocock et al., 2021; Tremblay et al., 2021) Field notes (Bhattacharya, 2017; Haug & Teune, 2008; Frey, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) Analytic memo (Burgess, 1981; Saldaña, 2021) Curriculum analysis (Kansas 4-H website) VTS and NIF discussion transcript

Data Management

It is essential to organize data from multiple sources to ensure the quality of analysis (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2018). Merriam and Tisdell (2016) suggest creating an inventory of the entire data set. In this study, multiple pieces of gathered data included the transcripts of the interviews, focus group discussion, digital artifact, the discussion guided by the VTS and NIF models, along with curriculum materials, the field notes, and analytic memos (See Table 3.6).

Table 3.6. Data Organization

Data Collection Method	Data Format	Type of Data	Document Format for NVivo	Individual/Group Data
VTS Transcript	Audio recording	Text & Visual	PDF	Individual & Group
Forum Transcript	Audio recording	Text & Visual	PDF	Individual & Group
Questionnaire	MS Excel file	Text & Visual	PDF	Individual
Synchronous semi-structured interview	Audio recording			
Member checking	MS Word document			
	Email text			
Online program evaluation questionnaire	MS Excel file	Text	MS Word	Individual
Online follow-up questionnaire	MS Excel file	Text & Visual	PDF	Individual
Focus group	Audio recording	Text & Visual	PDF	Individual & Group
Digital artifact	Audio recording	Text	MS Word	Individual & Group
Curriculum materials	Online video recordings	Text	PDF	Group
	PowerPoint presentations			
Analytic memos	MS Word document	Text	MS Word	Group
Field notes	MS Word document	Text	MS Word	Individual & Group

The data set was organized and labeled regarding the type of data and data attribution, such as individual or group data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Additionally, data was organized chronologically, with the exception of member checking, which was merged with individual interview data. I used a mix of manual and computer management. First, I familiarized myself

with the data, and the initial data analysis was conducted using MS Word. After the initial analysis, I started using NVivo 12, a computer software program. NVivo supports effective data management strategies by enabling the collection of numerous types of data, including visual data. The audio recordings, transcripts in Microsoft Word and PDF formats, and images in JPEG and PNG formats were stored on a password-protected computer, and digital files will be deleted after five years.

Data Analysis

According to Merriam (1998), data analysis is “the process of making sense out of the data. And making sense out of data involves consolidating, reducing, and interpreting what people have said and what the researcher has seen and read – it is the process of making meaning” (p. 178). Thematic analysis allows a researcher to organize and make sense of data by defining and analyzing patterns within the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). O’Reilly and Dogra (2017) suggest that thematic analysis and content analysis are commonly used to analyze child interview data. Moreover, thematic analysis is a flexible method compatible with a broad range of theoretical, epistemological, and ontological perspectives (Braun & Clarke, 2006; O’Reilly & Dogra, 2017). Considering the multidisciplinary conceptual framework of the study, I used thematic analysis to address the research questions. To triangulate findings from the interview and focus group data, I employed thematic content analysis of curriculum, a macro-analytic approach to qualitative content analysis to analyze the VTS and NIF transcripts of the group discussions (Black et al., 2010; Schreier, 2014).

Iterative Approach to Thematic Analysis

For this study, descriptive thematic analysis was utilized to answer the research sub-questions: *How do gifted middle school students describe their experience in VTS integrated with*

NIF? What are the perceived outcomes of gifted middle school students' participation in VTS incorporated with NIF? I analyzed qualitative data to identify patterns by applying an iterative approach to coding and analysis (Lewis-Beck et al., 2004; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; O'Reilly & Dogra, 2017; Saldaña, 2021; Tracy, 2013). Descriptive thematic analysis aims “to summarize and describe patterned meaning in the data” (Clarke et al., 2015, p. 226). Consistent with Clarke et al. (2015), I familiarized myself with the data by reading the transcripts and the observational/field notes multiple times and listening to the audio recordings. This process was followed by an inclusive and comprehensive iterative coding process involving categorizing, searching for, and defining themes (Clarke et al., 2015). While reading transcripts, I highlighted insights and logged them as analytic memos.

In line with thematic analysis, the gathered qualitative data went through two levels of coding processes: (a) assigning codes to a category and (b) identifying similar patterns from categories to create a theme (Bhattacharya, 2017; Clarke et al., 2015; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Moreover, I applied a phronetic iterative approach to data analysis (Tracy, 2013). Consistent with Tracy (2013), I iteratively coded data using Saldaña's (2021) coding techniques into descriptive first-level codes and analytic second-level codes. I began with open and descriptive coding and then implemented interpretive second-level analytic codes (see Table 3.7.) First, I conducted open coding to stay open to any emergent themes. Then, I utilized holistic coding, descriptive coding, values coding, in vivo coding, emotion coding, and evaluation coding during the first cycle coding process (Saldaña, 2021). Table 3.7. illustrates the connection between data collection and analysis methods to address the research questions of the study.

Table 3.7. Data Analysis

Research (Sub) Question	Data Collection Method	Data Analysis
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How do gifted middle school students describe their experience in VTS integrated with NIF?	Questionnaire, Online program evaluation questionnaire, Synchronous semi-structured interview, Online follow-up questionnaire, Member checking, Focus group Digital artifact	Thematic analysis First cycle of coding: Holistic Coding, Descriptive Coding, Values Coding, In Vivo Coding, Emotion Coding Second cycle of coding: Pattern, Focused, and Axial Coding
What are the perceived outcomes of gifted middle school students' participation in VTS incorporated with NIF?	Questionnaire, Online program evaluation questionnaire, Synchronous semi-structured interview, Online follow-up questionnaire, Member checking, Focus group Digital artifact	Thematic analysis First cycle of coding: Holistic Coding, Descriptive Coding, Values Coding, In Vivo Coding, Emotion Coding, Evaluation Coding Second cycle of coding: Focused and Axial Coding
What do gifted middle school students learn as they engage in deliberative civic learning through participation in VTS integrated with NIF?	Curriculum materials	Thematic content analysis Descriptive Coding (for triangulation)
What do gifted middle school students learn as they engage in deliberative civic learning through participation in VTS integrated with NIF?	VTS and NIF discussion transcript Field notes	Qualitative content analysis, macro-analytic approach (for triangulation)
What do gifted middle school students learn as they engage in deliberative civic learning through participation in VTS integrated with NIF?	Analytic memos	Descriptive Coding, Theming

During the second round of coding, to interpret, organize, and synthesize codes, I utilized axial, focused, and pattern coding to (a) group codes together; (b) look for the most salient patterns, connections, and relationships; and (c) examine codes and compare them for similarities and differences to respond to the research questions (Saldaña, 2021; Tracy, 2013). The sample of this study includes high-achieving students. Guided by Tracy (2013), during the second cycle of coding and theming, I reflected on the research questions and the relevant literature and multidisciplinary conceptual framework presented in Chapter 2. Considering that the phronetic-iterative approach draws on the literature review (Tracy, 2013), I utilized the pattern, focused, and then axial coding based on the scholarship on gifted children to address the research question, *How do gifted middle school students describe their experience in VTS integrated with NIF?* In particular, through identifying patterns, relationships (pattern coding), the most frequent or significant codes (focused coding), and core category and related categories (axial coding), I conducted data analysis (Saldaña, 2021). Considering that gifted students are “highly reactive to social or emotional stimuli” (Wiley, 2019, p. 1534) that I drew on gifted education as a unique context that informed the analysis and discussion of the findings regarding the research participants students.

To address the research question, *What are the perceived outcomes of gifted middle school students’ participation in VTS integrated with NIF?*, the data were analyzed using focused and axial coding (Saldaña, 2021). Since phronetic-iterative approach draws on the literature review (Tracy, 2013), the study aimed to gain a deeper understanding of middle school students’ experience in deliberation in the classroom, I utilized Drury et al.’s (2017) DPLO rubric for axial coding. I also paid close attention to nuances in students’ descriptions of their experiences.

Therefore, based on the data, I added (a) *building blocks*⁹ (Main-Molnar, personal communication, February 23, 2022) for (a) awareness of perspectives and relationships, such as becoming aware of different ways of thinking through VTS, becoming aware of multiple interpretations of artwork, becoming more open-minded and (b) reflection - and gaining a better understanding of others' thinking through VTS.

During the iterative process, it was crucial to look for patterns, negative instances, and alternative interpretations (Bhattacharya, 2017; Mason, 2017; Tracy, 2013). By *watching the margins*; analyzing data variation; seeking qualifications, exceptions, and nuances; and looking for a greater number of possible negative cases, I was able to generate a full and thick description (Becker, 2002; Katz, 2004). Finally, I defined and developed overarching themes related to general topics and ideas suggested by the data (Clarke et al., 2015; Saldaña, 2021). I utilized NVivo 12 features to cross-check analysis across different attributes and research participants and to triangulate data.

Data Analysis in NVivo

I utilized NVivo 12 for data analysis. NVivo has the potential to facilitate data analysis (Dollah et al., 2017), and analysis can be conducted across multiple data sources. Additionally, NVivo as a qualitative data analysis tool has been mentioned by researchers for its utility in organizing different types of collected data and assisting data analysis for case study research (Basu et al., 2015; Bazeley & Jackson, 2013; Houghton et al., 2013; Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2011).

⁹This term was mentioned by Stacie Main-Molnar during research exchanges focuses on deliberative citizenship and building capacity of youth at the Kettering Foundation in 2022.

NVivo assisted with data organization and analysis of text and visual data by providing tools for classifying and categorizing data, as well as for identifying themes and patterns (Alam, 2021; Bazeley & Jackson, 2013; Bonello & Meehan, 2019; Dollah et al., 2017). In this sense, NViVo enabled coding, category construction, and analytic memory simultaneously, which assisted with conducting rigorous and systematic analysis.

Three primary themes were identified based on the thematic analysis conducted (see supplementary materials in Appendix H). To compare and visualize important three themes, I utilized the NVivo 12 hierarchy chart feature to compare the number of coding references for each theme (see Figure H.1, Figure H.2, Figure H.3. Figure H.6, Figure H.7 in Appendix H). In addition, by utilizing NVivo 12 hierarchy chart feature, I identified the most prominent findings in each theme and among the themes. For example, I identified that findings related to perceptions and feelings associated with NIF facilitation (not easy), a role and tasks of a NIF facilitator (to creates a comfortable environment) as well as challenges to engage participants in VTS (lack of engagement), perceptions associated with VTS facilitation (comfortable environment); awareness of perspectives and relationships, reflection, sense of agency, and communication skills as the most salient categories (see Appendix H). Next, based on the hierarchy chart results, I used NVivo 12 to create a visual representation of the most prominent findings to tell a story of gifted middle school students' learning journey as they engaged with deliberative civic learning that will be discussed in Chapter 4.

Visual Data Analysis

During the data collection, I gathered visual data through the elicitation of images. Saldaña (2021) suggests that by including the researcher's deep reflections, impressions, and holistic interpretations of the images, document field notes, and analytic memos, we are able to

“generate language-based data that *accompany* the visual data” (p. 73, emphasis in original). In line with Saldaña (2021), codes within the memo could be derived from the interpretations of the visual data. In this sense, I described impressions and overall interpretations of the collected images to deepen my understanding of the research participants’ reactions and responses in analytic memo.

Codebook

In line with Tracy (2013), it was necessary to create a qualitative codebook. The codebook in Table 3.8. illustrates the list of key codes, definitions, and examples. I worked with a faculty member specializing in deliberative pedagogy and a debriefing peer who is a doctoral candidate in the leadership communication doctoral program to engage in intercoder reliability practices (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). For this research project, I crafted a single codebook that included a range of different types of collected data.

Table 3.8. Codebook

Code Name	Code Description
Becomes aware of different ways of thinking through VTS	When the participant notes moments of raised awareness regarding differences in thinking of others as they engage in VTS
Becomes more open-minded	When the participant notes moments of increased perceived receptiveness to new ideas, arguments, and information as they engage in the Community Conversation series
Not easy	When the participant notes any perceptions about challenges and feelings associated with their facilitation experience
Increased confidence to express an opinion	When the participant notes moments of changes in own perceptions and feelings regarding sharing opinions and shares observations about others’ expressing views as they engage in the Community Conversation series
Friendship	When the participant notes feelings and associations related to their relationships with their peers during a Community Conversation series

Intellectual Humility

Drawing upon Lynch's (2021) understanding of intellectual humility, I identified pieces of data that might be associated with building blocks for intellectual humility. Given that intellectual humility is also associated with knowledge acquisition, reflective thinking, intellectual openness, and open-minded thinking (Alfano et al., 2017; Deffler et al., 2016; Krumrei-Mancuso et al., 2019; Krumrei-Mancuso et al., 2020; Leary et al., 2017), I selected codes such as "Becomes more open-minded," "Reconsiders a position in light of new information or perspective," and "Increased confidence to express an opinion."

Using the NVivo 12 comparison diagrams feature, I analyzed the data by comparing two codes. First, I compared codes "Becomes more open-minded" and "Increased confidence to express an opinion". Second, I compared codes "Reconsiders a position in light of new information or perspective" and "Increased confidence to express an opinion." (see Figure H.8 and Figure H.9 in Appendix H). The discussion of the findings is presented in Chapter 4.

Analytic Memos

Guided by Saldaña (2021), I created analytic memos as I analyzed the gathered data by reflecting on (a) the research questions; (b) coding choices; (c) operational definitions of codes; (d) emergent patterns, categories, and themes; and (e) the connections among the codes. In line with Tracy (2013), I documented insights and reflections on coding and its properties, the examples of raw data that illustrated the code, and how codes related to other codes. Moreover, as Saldaña (2021) suggests, I reflected on ethical dilemmas and future directions for the study as I was conducting the data analysis.

Triangulation

Using data triangulation to confirm emerging findings was important to enhance the rigor of the study (Denzin, 1978). To triangulate findings from the interview and focus group data, I utilized thematic content analysis of curriculum and qualitative content analysis of VTS and NIF transcripts, field notes, and theming of analytic memos.

Thematic Content Analysis

Content analysis is typically used to analyze documents in qualitative inquiries (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). For this study, I conducted thematic content analysis of curriculum (Lewis-Beck et al., 2004). In line with Lewis-Beck et al. (2004) and Saldaña (2021), I employed descriptive coding to create a detailed inventory of the curriculum's content and identify the most salient and dominant themes in the text.

For this study, conversation boot camp included brief online video recordings and PowerPoint presentations covering topics such as empathy, active listening, and communication styles; culture and diversity wheel and the seven circles activity; activities from the conflict resolution network; and the intercultural conflict style inventory (Kansas 4-H, 2019). Community conversations facilitator training included a PowerPoint presentation with information related to principles of civic discourse; ICDD ground rules (Longo & Shaffer, 2019, p. 29); facilitator fast five; helper questions; options, actions, and drawback questions; recorder best practices; a roadmap for facilitators; prompting questions; and summary questions (Kansas 4-H Youth Development, 2021). Additionally, online ICDD facilitator training included a detailed moderator guide and script that aimed to assist young facilitators in getting familiarized with the CGA online forum site. By analyzing the curriculum, I identified the following topics: (a) active listening; (b) empathy; (c) three communication styles; (d) civic discourse principles

(Longo & Shaffer, 2019, p. 21-38); (e) facilitator fast five such as neutral, friendly, inclusive, helpful, respectful; and (f) the considerations of actions and drawbacks for each option.

VTS training included the recorded introduction session available on the 4-H website and PowerPoint presentations regarding the VTS model and VTS facilitation. Regarding the VTS curriculum, the following topics were highlighted: (a) civic discourse principles and three questions; (b) conditional language; (c) creating a space through paraphrasing; (d) not requiring people to speak; (e) image selection principles; and (f) the importance of the introducing a VTS session. In addition, a VTS facilitator is responsible for (a) linking agreements or disagreements, (b) listening to answers from others, (c) paraphrasing, (d) staying neutral, and (e) trying not to add any other questions.

Qualitative Content Analysis

Black et al. (2010) suggest a macro-analytic approach to discussion analysis to consider the conversation as a whole by investigating the transcript overall and making a judgment about the quality of the deliberation that occurred. According to Schreier (2014), qualitative content analysis focuses on a detailed description of the data and utilizes concept-driven and data-driven categories within a coding frame. Considering that the NIF model of deliberation guided the discussions, I utilized Haug and Teune's (2008) framework to generate field notes after the event. Since a macro-analytic approach does not analyze individual speaking turns and contributions, using Haug and Teune's (2008) framework, I have created three types of field notes: (a) *group portrait* describes the overall impression of the interactions during deliberation; (b) *session report* serves as a description of deliberation; and (c) *controversy protocols* which can be filled out for each conflicting view on the discussed issue during the forum (Haug & Teune, 2008). I analyzed the transcripts of two small-group discussions, developed field notes,

and analyzed the conversation using qualitative content analysis. In addition, I reviewed my analytic memos to capture salient themes and triangulate the emerging themes.

During the VTS sessions, students discussed two images (Figure H.4 and Figure H.5 in Appendix H). Philip Yenawine, the co-author of the VTS curriculum, provided several images for middle school students to facilitate. I shared the images with Dr. Bietau, and two were selected by one of the participants for the activity. The student who moderated the VTS sessions utilized three VTS facilitation questions well, did not rush, and allowed the students to take time to think over the image. Also, the moderator student was able to pick up on disagreements and agreements, which was necessary for the quality of the discussion. The students were using iPads and Zoom to be able to look closer at the explored images. Most of the students were engaged, provided descriptive and interpretive comments, and elaborated and built on the comments of others. I also noticed that the students who commented, for the most part, were those who either received VTS training in the past and/or attended a brief VTS training session conducted by the Beach Museum educator in February 2021. The discussion of the second image seemed to be more engaging and sparked more interpretative comments.

I reviewed the NIF forum transcripts and audio recordings. The students participated in a NIF forum titled, *Mental Illness in America. How Do We Address a Growing Problem?* Seventh and eighth-grade students selected the issue during Onsite Lead Camp (see Table 3.1). There were two small group discussions during VTS/NIF forum on March 12, 2021. Nine students participated in Group #1, and eight participated in Group #2, including moderators. The students also utilized the CGA online forum site. This blended approach using the CGA and in-person interactions allowed students to stay focused on the discussion. The overall interactions in Group #1 were energetic and engaging. I noted that some words in the NIF issue guide were unfamiliar

to the students. Jan who moderated Group #1 introduced the framework of the forum and ground rules. Students had time to write and reflect on their personal stories and devoted time to explaining the CGA functions. I noticed a student's confusion about the meaning of *drawback* in CGA. The students built on each other comments and did not have a lot of disagreement. Most students shared at least one comment and supported their opinion with reasons and evidence. I also noted that students discussed trade-offs and tensions only briefly. Although some students shared their opinions more than others, the facilitator provided adequate speaking opportunities to all participants. The students demonstrated mutual comprehension of each participant's perspectives. The students were sitting in a circle; they turned toward each other and openly talked with one another, except for one student.

Jamie moderated a discussion in Group #2. The facilitator initially forgot to introduce the framework and ask for personal stories. This was an active discussion where the moderator was balancing facilitator responsibilities and struggling to maintain neutrality. The facilitator was reminded about time limits by one of the participants and overall seemed confused about the process. The students built on each other's comments and did not disagree much. Students also supported their opinion with reasons and evidence, and a few students discussed drawbacks and tensions. There was not much disagreement or conflicting viewpoints in either group, which may be explained by the classroom context and possible social connections between participants.

Ethics

Research with Youth

Ethical considerations have been emphasized in literature regarding research with children and young people (Eder & Fingerson, 2001; Greig et al., 2013; O'Reilly & Dogra,

2017). I considered and addressed three aspects of ethics as I planned and conducted this doctoral study.

First, it is essential to balance power differences between researchers and research participants (Eder & Fingerson, 2001; Greig et al., 2013; O'Reilly & Dogra, 2017). Consequently, developing sensitive and appropriate research protocols, creating a natural environment, and building rapport are crucial for research with young people (Eder & Fingerson, 2001; Greig et al., 2013). By accommodating the students' schedules, implementing participatory synchronous and asynchronous approaches to data collection methods, and conducting a focus group discussion, I hoped to reduce the power imbalance. Moreover, Greig et al. (2013) emphasize that it is crucial to acknowledge that the researcher has a limited understanding of how children and young people perceive and understand the world. Consistent with Alderson and Morrow (2011), I included two levels of member checking to ensure that the young participants had *editorial control* to comment and check for fairness and accuracy.

Second, it is crucial to ensure that young participants know and understand their right to decline or withdraw from participation (Greig et al., 2013; O'Reilly & Dogra, 2017). To ensure the principle of autonomy, I provided basic information about the research purpose, procedures, and method; reassured that lack of participation would not influence their involvement with the extra-curriculum program; and asked for additional verbal minor assent before proceeding with data collection. Given that the research participants were eighth-grade students who took part in the extra-curricular program and their attendance did not affect their grades, they participated voluntarily. During the data collection process, one of the identified and invited students did not participate in data collection, which can indicate that the students understood their rights to withdraw from participation. Moreover, O'Reilly and Dogra (2017) suggest it is necessary "to be

clear about your role in the research, who you are, why you are there and what you want from them before you proceed with the interview” (p.31), which I expressed every time I engaged with the students. See Appendix G for the parental or guardian consent form and minor assent.

Third, it is crucial to ensure confidentiality (Eder & Fingerson, 2001; O’Reilly & Dogra, 2017). To protect youth, I use pseudonyms to demonstrate findings. In addition, I initially intended to use pseudonyms for partners as well. However, Aliah Mestrovich Seay and Dr. Bietau indicated that they wanted to be included by their actual names. The involved multiple stakeholders have been described by their real names (see Doll 3), this research project included local knowledge and involved multiple stakeholders and partners, making it easy to identify the partners and participants. In this way, honoring partners and their contribution, I used their real names and titles to ensure authentic partnership and community-engaged research (Milne & Hamilton, 2021).

Since the study focused on the students’ perceptions of their learning experiences in the extra-curricular program and did not consider a sensitive topic, the risk associated with participation was minimal. Furthermore, the processes of data analysis and dissemination of findings occurred after the research participants graduated from middle school. Additionally, consistent with Alderson and Morrow (2011), I stored data separately from records of personal details. Furthermore, all collected data were stored on a password-protected computer and will be deleted after five years.

Online Research

Scholars point out that virtual qualitative research requires additional ethical considerations with regard to ensuring privacy, confidentiality, and data protection along with standard ethical procedures (Hamilton & Bowers, 2006; Lobe et al., 2020; Salmons, 2016). First,

it is crucial to ensure the security of any audio-visual platform and online transcription services (Lobe et al., 2020). Accordingly, I utilized the Zoom platform for semi-structured interviews. Zoom is compliant with the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPPA). Zoom provides protection for meeting data since Zoom communications are established using 256-bit TLS encryption, and all shared content can be encrypted using AES-256 encryption and optional end-to-end encryption. Second, it is recommended to ensure the secure storage of virtual data (Lobe et al., 2020; Marhefka et al., 2020). The audio recordings were stored on a password-protected computer, separate from personal information (Hamilton & Bowers, 2006; Lobe et al., 2020). Moreover, it is suggested to utilize computer-based storage and avoid cloud-based options (Lobe et al., 2020).

Engaged Research

This study was informed by engaged approaches to research, which emphasize equitable and shared decision-making (Jacquez et al., 2016; Post et al., 2016; Ross et al., 2010; Zhang et al., 2020). Consequently, it is important to ensure shared decision-making, which has ethical implications. In other words, it is crucial to consider the time and other commitments of a local community partner and acknowledge the possible burden of participating in the project. During data analysis and interpretation, “the competing agenda of the academic researcher and the community research partners may come into tension” (Ross et al., 2010, p. 27). As an illustration, the academic researcher may focus on generalizable findings, whereas the local community partner may focus on local relevance (Ross et al., 2010). Accordingly, since public schools focus on assessing and documenting programmatic efforts, the set of research questions informing this study included the description of learning outcomes. Moreover, throughout the

research project, the data collection timeline accommodated the academic schedule of the research participants, as well as Dr. Bietau.

To this end, it is critical for emerging engaged scholars to foster self-reflexivity and examine how to respond to ethical considerations. I kept a self-reflective journal to capture reactions, thoughts, and assumptions, as guided by Burgess (1981) and Maxwell (2005). More importantly, I developed analytic memos to reflect on how I related personally to the participants and/or the phenomenon, as well as to note any personal or ethical dilemmas throughout the data collection and interpretation processes (Saldaña, 2021). The analytic memos were included as data for further data analysis and interpretation.

Standards of Quality

It is essential to ensure the quality of any qualitative research project by applying relevant criteria, such as worthy topic, rich rigor, sincerity, credibility, significant contribution, ethics, and meaningful coherence (Tracy, 2010). In this section, I provide evidence regarding the quality of this study.

Worthy Topic

This dissertation study aimed to describe the collaborative effort and contribute to a larger body of scholarship regarding capacity building of early adolescents for democratic citizenship. This exploratory study investigated the learning experiences of gifted middle school students and shed light on how deliberative pedagogy can cultivate intellectual humility among early adolescents and democratic citizenship. Existing empirical studies focus on the experiences of high school and college students. Furthermore, there is a limited body of conceptual and empirical literature concerning intellectual humility. Additionally, this doctoral project drew on engaged approaches to research. In this study, the collaborative effort of community-university

partnership provided middle school students an opportunity to engage with deliberative civic learning calls. This aligns with higher education institutions' civic mission (Boyer, 1996).

Rich Rigor

This study utilizes a variety of data collection methods such as non-participant observation, interview, focus group, curriculum and artifact analysis, and forum transcript, along with generated analytic memos and field notes, which enhances data credibility (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Tracy, 2010; Yin, 2018). This dissertation project drew upon my multidisciplinary conceptual framework. The data gathering and interpretation processes were guided by scholarship in the fields of education and communication and conducted systematically. Additionally, Warren et al. (2018) argue that community-engaged scholarship is more rigorous than traditional scholarship.

I have provided justification for data collection methods and analysis processes to ensure rich rigor (Tracy, 2010). The gathered data was organized and analyzed using NVivo 12, a computer software program that enabled analysis across multiple data sources and allowed integrity. Moreover, to achieve rigor in the research, I engaged in peer debriefing, member checking, and reflexivity (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Sincerity

To ensure sincerity, I kept a reflective journal filled with insights regarding values, biases, and assumptions that I brought to the research (Burgess, 1981; Maxwell, 2005; Saldaña, 2021). While conducting this study, I attempted to cross socio-cultural and linguistic boundaries. As such, it was essential to maintain transparency about my biases and goals and how these affected the data collection and interpretation.

To ensure transparency, I created notes with the description and chronology of research decisions and activities and the questions that emerged throughout the research process. I also provided a thick description of employed data collection and analysis methods. I provided information about my membership role and how I achieved access to the research site. Additionally, I continued engaging in active reflection during data interpretation and writing up findings.

Credibility

To ensure credibility, I also engaged in triangulation and member checking during data collection and analysis. I compared and crosschecked the gathered data through various forms of interview, observation, and informal interview with Dr. Bietau. Considering that the data collected through interviews and focus groups relied on self-reporting, I collected data through observation, forum transcripts, and an informal interview with Dr. Bietau (Frey, 2018). Furthermore, I utilized multiple theories to confirm emerging findings to enhance the rigor of the study (Denzin, 1978). I also provided a thick description and considered contextual and situational knowledge.

Significant Contribution

Given the current context of high political polarization and democratic backsliding, the importance of developing the capacity of youth to participate in civic life and engage respectfully with one another is essential. This research has practical implications for youth capacity building, which is important for K-12 educators, school board members, and principals. This study also has implications for deliberative pedagogy both conceptually and empirically.

Ethics

I have considered the different dimensions of ethics, including a set of practices implemented to ensure power balance between the researcher and the young research participants. Additionally, I have reviewed ethical considerations regarding engaged scholarship to ensure an equitable decision-making process.

Meaningful Coherence

To ensure meaningful coherence, I made connections between literature from the fields of education and communication, the research questions, findings, and interpretations (Tracy, 2010). I provided evidence of the alignment between the research purpose and the data collection and analysis methods and procedures employed in this study.

Limitations

There are multiple limitations of the study. This study was descriptive and did not consider cause and effect. It is also important to note that the implementation of the study was impacted by the pandemic context with adherence to physical distancing measures due to COVID-19. Given the pandemic context, I had limited access to the research site, and data were collected within a short window of time. Moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic impacted deliberative civic learning programmatic efforts and youth learning and engagement.

Learning is a complex phenomenon intertwined with various factors outside of the classroom and school that contribute to learning and its impact. However, this study did not consider the role that families and parents' political and civic engagement play in the research participants' interests and commitment. Additionally, the considered collaborative efforts to deliver deliberative civic learning programmatic efforts included a blended format of the NIF model and CGA in which peer-to-peer facilitation was essential. Also, VTS sessions included

activities included peer-to-peer engagement, which does not align with the traditional design and Vygotsky's (1962, 1978) social learning theory. This has implications for skillful facilitation and possibly limited impact on youth participants in the forum. Furthermore, the gathered data relied on self-reporting.

Moreover, the sample of this study consisted of gifted students who are not representative of the public school's population. Besides, their engagement with the extra-curricular program was varied, which has implications for data interpretation and findings. Along with that, this study did not consider a control group of students who have not been exposed to deliberative civic learning or those who have only attended NIF and VTS model discussions. Furthermore, this study takes place in a suburban Midwestern and liberal small community in which a higher education institution plays a significant role in demographics. Also, my facilitation skills may have impacted the quality of information collected through online interviews and focus groups (Davies et al., 2020). Finally, my biases and assumptions may have affected the research process.

Chapter Summary

Thanks to the collaborative partnership between KSRE, 4-H, ICDD, the Beach Museum, and Hillview School, middle school students had an opportunity to engage with deliberative civic learning. The purpose of this doctoral study was to describe the middle school students' learning experiences in VTS integrated with NIF. Using multiple methods, this exploratory study aimed to examine the learning experiences of youth. Through a qualitative case study design, this study focused on young individuals' learning experiences and their understanding of these experiences.

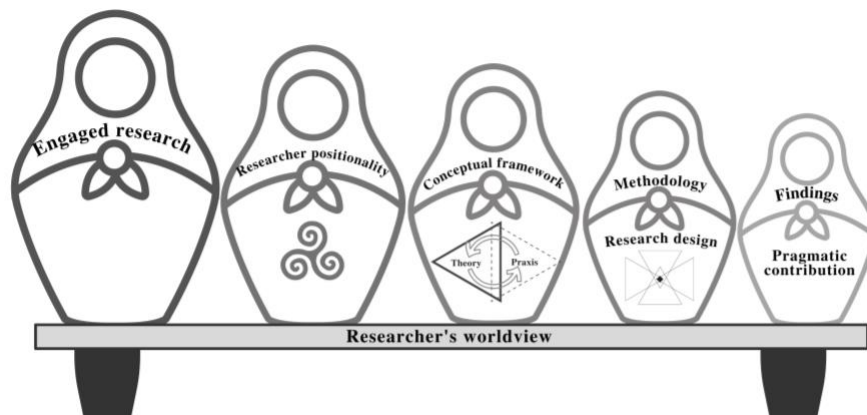
The research project employed a descriptive interpretive single case study design by using a variety of methods such as non-participant observation, interview, focus group, curriculum and artifact analysis, field notes, and forum transcripts. I conducted data analysis by

applying an iterative approach to coding, employing thematic analysis and thematic content analysis, and using a macro-analytic approach to qualitative content analysis. To ensure the quality of the study, I utilized the criteria of quality such as worthy topic, rich rigor, sincerity, credibility, significant contribution, ethics, and meaningful coherence.

Doll 4: Situating the Findings

Community-engaged scholarship is the partnership between higher education institutions and public and private sectors with the goal of sharing knowledge and resources to “enrich scholarship, research, and creative activity; enhance curriculum, teaching and learning; prepare educated, engaged citizens; strengthen democratic values and civic responsibility; address critical societal issues; and contribute to the public good” (Carnegie Community Engagement Classification, 2022). As cited in Ward & Moore (2010), the purpose of community engagement is “the mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge and resources in a context of partnership and reciprocity” (p. 47). Accordingly, the crucial aspect of engaged scholarship is finding ways to disseminate results to benefit the community partner. In this sense, the “Ата-Әже” engaged research framework highlights that the research design, methodology, and positionality impact the dissemination of findings. (Figure 3.4).

Figure 3.4. “Ата-Әже” Engaged Research Framework: Pragmatic Contribution



In line with Ross et al. (2010), it is important “to think creatively about how to ensure that the results are shared with the community in a way that is comprehensible, useful and empowering” (p. 27). In this study, the research findings were presented as a report for the local

school board and used to support an application for a small grant to secure the sustainability of future deliberative civic learning efforts which consistent with Ross et al. (2010). Moreover, by offering an opportunity for youth to think and talk in a structured way about themselves and their engagement with the program, I aimed to ensure reciprocity as a crucial aspect of the engaged project. As a result of the focus group discussion and collective sense-making, the research participants created a video presentation for Kansas Civics Showcase in April 2021.

Furthermore, the community-engaged research has ethical implications to maintain a long-term relationship and reciprocity (Post et al., 2016; Ross et al., 2010). The programmatic effort was a part of the larger collaboration between ICDD, KSRE, 4-H, and the Beach Museum. As a result, Dr. Bietau became a part of the Kansas 4-H Community Vitality Leadership Team, allowing for future partnerships in 2021-2022. Finally, the dissemination of findings should benefit a community through open discussion of research findings with partnering organizations to ensure programmatic efforts improvements (Ross et al., 2010).

Chapter 4 - Findings

This chapter provides a detailed description of the research findings based on the qualitative descriptive, interpretive single case study data. The primary source of data consisted of interview, questionnaire, focus group, and digital artifact. These were supplemented by non-participant observation field notes, forum transcripts, and curriculum materials, as well as analytic memos.

In this chapter, I begin by highlighting a visual representation of the salient findings. Next, the research findings were presented in thematic form and through descriptive accounts (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The presented findings include a general description of identified patterns in the data, quotes from the students interviewed, notes from field notes to support the findings, and interpretive comments (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Finally, I review the research findings in relation to intellectual humility.

Findings by Research Question

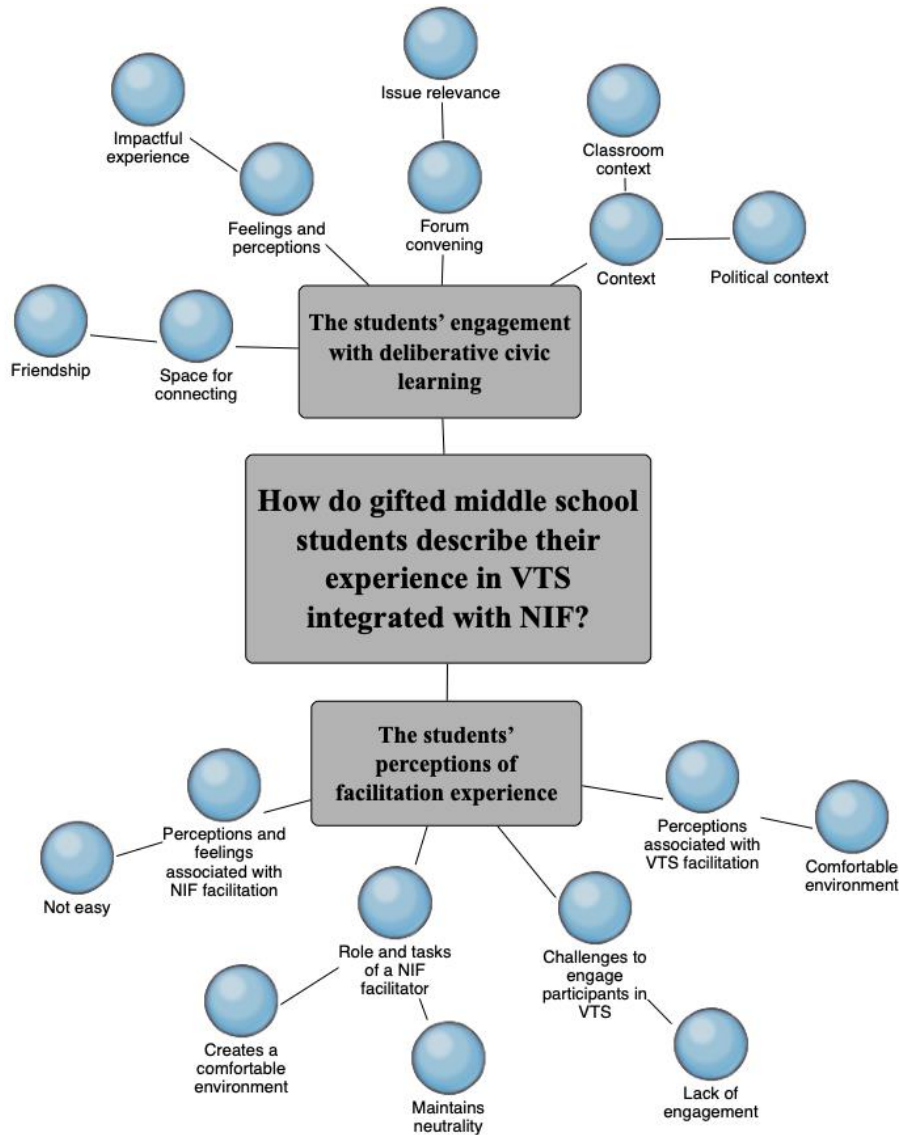
There are three main themes identified in response to the research question, *What do gifted middle school students learn as they engage in deliberative civic learning through participation in VTS integrated with NIF?*

1. The gifted middle school students' engagement with deliberative civic learning
2. The gifted middle school students' perceptions of facilitation experience
3. The gifted middle school students' growth and development

Research question: How do gifted middle school students describe their experience in VTS integrated with NIF?

The learning journey of eight gifted eighth-grade students at Hillview School appears to have been impactful, filled with a sense of accomplishment, learning about one another and their peers, and strengthening their friendship. It also seems that the participants understood the importance of creating a safe and neutral environment for a productive exchange about societal issues that they cared about. The student engagement was encouraged by the educator's support and guidance, and impacted by the pandemic. The main categories of the theme based on thematic analysis are presented in Appendix H. Figure 4.1 is a visual representation of the most prominent findings to tell a story of the participants' engagement with deliberative civic learning.

Figure 4.1. A Visual Story of Students’ Engagement With Deliberative Civic Learning



Theme 1. The Gifted Middle School Students’ Engagement With Deliberative Civic Learning

When I reached out to eight students through Dr. Bietau to invite them to join the focus group discussion in April 2021, a remote learner came to the school site to participate in the focus group. Another student joined via Zoom despite a recent sports-related injury. This may suggest that the participants viewed their involvement as valuable and important. It may be that the participants consider the program as an opportunity to interact with their peers outside of the

classroom given the pandemic context. The participants also interacted outside of their academic schedule through athletic or extra-curricular activities, they mentioned about visiting each other's homes and sharing inside jokes. Although a couple of participants may dominate a discussion occasionally, in general, the members of the youth leadership team were respectful of each other and described themselves as friends. For example, Cleo shared that "I grew closer to them and got to share an important experience with them," Angel mentioned that "Whether we're always there for each other, backing each other up so if one of us needs help someone else will step in." Jan mentioned that "I also started connecting with a lot more people who are now on the youth facilitation team". Throughout my observations, including the NIF forum and focus group, I noticed the natural flow of the participants' talkative interactions and laughter. When one of the participants joined the focus group discussion via Zoom due to a recent sports-related injury, most of the participants in the room first rushed to check in on the student and make sure that their friend has a space to share the thoughts and reactions.

The data indicates that the participants value their friendship as a part of their journey. Moreover, NIF and other events during the 2020-2021 academic year offered a space to engage and connect. For example, Avery shared that "It was really cool to meet all the new people who came to the conversation." The findings also suggest that the participants had positive reactions about their engagement with Community Conversation series. The participants framed their experiences as meaningful, impactful, powerful, and fun. Angel noted that "Having this conversation has raised my awareness of the issue of mental health," while Jan shared that "This [...] project will always be a big part of me for the rest of my life, and it has made me more grateful for the opportunities I receive at [Hillview School]." Moreover, Noel mentioned that:

I really liked when we were talking about the different way, communication styles, because I didn't really I hadn't really thought of it before, so it was interesting because, everything was new and, the whole thing finding common ground, because we do a lot of debate instead of you know, trying to find common ground and so that was kind of cool to learn about.

Through observations and conversations with Dr. Bietau, I also noted the positive attitude of the participants toward the program. Despite Onsite Lead Camp in February 2021 and VTS/NIF forum – 3 in March 2021 occurred during non-school day students, most of the participants facilitated and participants in both events. One of the possible explanations is that Community Conversation series responded to gifted students' characteristics and provided an opportunity to focus on real problems and processes, connecting with intellectual peers, and required effort (Housand, 2016). One unexpected data point emerged as Jamie disclosed that "I also think that we should stick with a topic rather than just doing one session on something and then throwing it away the next day." This may indicate the participants' orientation toward action and results. One of the recommendations for gifted education in K-12 is to connect curriculum to real-world problem and beyond the classroom (Housand, 2016).

The data also indicates that context influenced how the participants engaged with deliberative civic learning. First, the participants were introduced to civic discourse principles, deliberation, training, and a series of activities by Dr. Bietau (see Figure 3.2). Dr. Bietau had been a teacher for forty years, and she had worked in Hillview School for the last ten years. Dr. Bietau noted that she had the freedom and creativity to implement various programs for youth development, including Model UN, Science Olympiad, and Future City. From my observations and conversations with the participants, Dr. Bietau created a safe environment and

interdependent classroom culture for student-led learning. Moreover, Dr. Bietau actively engaged in her community, developed strong partnerships, and emphasized civic engagement in her conversations with the participants.

The pandemic context also impacted both student engagement and student learning. Another interesting finding was that the participants situated their engagement with deliberative civic learning as a counterbalance to the current zero-sum orientation in society. Jamie noted that “I think that a lot of people nowadays have very strong opinions and they are not open to thinking differently or just understanding the opposite side...especially with politics these days.” Similarly, Avery mentioned, “I think it was the situation we were in as a country with social media is acting as a news source for so many people and it's just that a lot of people just don't recognize the other side.”

Additionally, the findings demonstrate that the NIF issue should be relevant and compelling to ensure student engagement. The participants also preferred to convene NIF using technology such as the Common Ground for Action (CGA) online forum site (The National Issues Forums Institute, 2020b) and VTS in-person. For example, Jamie mentioned that “obviously a lot of people aren't comfortable being in person and with COVID and everything but and if we had the chance I would prefer in person every time.” While conducting NIF and VTS in-person and providing students the freedom to select a NIF issue for a forum may ensure greater student participation, the data also suggests that participants through their existing network and social connections encouraged their peers to participate in NIF forums.

Another unexpected data point emerged as Jamie disclosed, “I have presented things that I have not even looked at myself before presenting, so I had to act like I knew when I was presenting.” This may have various interpretations and implications. It is also important to

highlight the participants' competing priorities and academic load, which may have hindered their engagement with deliberative civic learning. In this sense, one of the challenges for student engagement with deliberative civic learning was the participants' competing priorities and finding common time for meetings outside of classes. In this sense, Dr. Bietau emphasized the importance of integrating deliberative civic learning into the general curriculum. To sum, it is important to create opportunities for gifted middle school students to engage with deliberative civic learning by creating conditions for teamwork and

Theme 2. The Gifted Middle School Students' Perceptions of Facilitation Experience

The participants had an opportunity to facilitate NIF forums and VTS sessions, which impacted their understanding of deliberative civic learning and fostered their growth. I identified that (a) the "not easy" perception associated with NIF facilitation, (b) emphasis on creating a comfortable environment as task of a NIF facilitator, and (c) lack of engagement during peer-to-peer VTS sessions as significant. The main categories of the theme based on thematic analysis are presented in Appendix H.

As data suggests that the participants found the facilitation experience rewarding, they also recognized the challenges associated with the process. For example, Alva shared that:

When you're facilitating for me personally, I feel like that it's a lot harder when you are dealing with people who may not know each other that well because creating that comfortable environment to talk about issues are more real and they can be pretty difficult so that feeling of finally getting a really good and engaging conversation going between the students is really accomplishing and it just feels like you are jumping over a barrier.

This finding suggests that it is crucial to provide additional support for early adolescents as they navigate facilitation experience.

The data show a range of feelings from anxiety and stress to rewarded and accomplished among those who shared about their facilitation experience. As an illustration, Alva shared, “Seeing peers or even strangers speak up about their thoughts and feelings is extremely rewarding.” Angel similarly expressed, “A lot of time I would fake it until I make,” while Jamie explained, “it [participation] is a lot less stressful.” One challenge that the participants shared was maintaining neutrality. Likewise, Angel noted that “I feel like it is also really hard to be a facilitator, cause you wanna your views and sometimes I'm honestly I've heard some views I think are wrong but I've had to refrain from disagreeing.” Additionally, Avery shared that “I think as a facilitator, the hardest part is not trying to give your opinion or make a face or do something.” Maintaining neutrality is the cornerstone of facilitation training and experience, and this skill takes experience to master. Another possible explanation of the “not easy” perception is the navigation of a new role and learning along with peer pressure.

The data suggests that the participants perceive VTS as an icebreaker. As an illustration, Angel shared,

I think it would like a lot harder to get the conversation going well eventually too because when they would actually participate it would like it kinda helped people get comfortable with sharing and you know just with other people and stuff.

Alva noted that VTS takes away communication barriers. Likewise, Jessie shared:

I think with the community conversations and I think we started off with visual thinking strategies, I think that was really helpful or really important because that sort of helped everyone to get to know each other and be comfortable with sharing their opinions.

My observation and curriculum analysis also demonstrated that VTS was introduced to the participants as *icebreaker*, impacting their perceptions.

Moreover, the results reveal that VTS facilitation assisted with maintaining neutrality. For example, Jamie noted that “it’s not just that they tell you on be neutral and don’t share your opinion they obviously do that but it’s also that after you get training like you’re open to new ideas and you’re constantly rethinking.” Both VTS and NIF facilitation training emphasized neutrality as a crucial quality of a facilitator to ensure inclusive and respectful exchanges among forum participants.

The participants noted a lack of engagement in VTS sessions, as Angel shared that “I had to do VTS when I was remote... like I just sat there for five minutes waiting for someone to say.” One possible interpretation that research participants offered concerns image selection. For example, Jan noted:

I feel like when people have different opinions it just makes the VTS conversation so much more interesting. And I really bizarre VTS images you’re like why and you take a minute to view what is this representing because I feel like that’s when we get the best conversation out of it.

Jan also considered how the experience might have been more meaningful, explaining, “Maybe getting introduced to VTS a little bit earlier.” This finding has implications for the importance of infusing the VTS model with NIF model for early adolescents.

One inconsistency in the data suggests the perception of lack of impact of VTS on students’ growth and understanding. For example, Cleo commented that “I don’t think VTS impacted me as much.” Avery similarly shared, “VTS didn’t really change my everyday interactions with people.” These findings suggest that the perceptions about VTS and its impact

were not consistent across the eight gifted middle school students. One of possible explanations is differences in interests and dispositions of the participants.

During the VTS/NIF forum – 3, most of participated students provided descriptive and interpretive comments, and elaborated and built on the comments of others. However, the students who commented, for the most part, were those who either received VTS training in the past and/or attended a brief VTS training session prior to VTS/NIF forum – 3. During the VTS/NIF forum – 3, Jan shared the ground rules and framed VTS as an “icebreaker to have more comfortable environment to share your opinions because there is not really right or wrong answers...VTS is important to create a supportive environment when you can share your opinion without feeling worried.” Alva summed up the implication of VTS for NIF as a way to:

establish that place where you’re comfortable sharing your opinions, in our conversation.

You will encounter some opinions different from yours so it’s important that we create an environment where everyone’s opens like sharing different opinions and working on finding that common ground that everyone agrees on.

Drawing on multiple observations throughout the program, it seems that when moderators describe an activity, students participate more actively. It may also appear that providing framing assist students in setting up expectations.

The findings suggest that the participants view a role of NIF facilitator to maintain neutrality, create a comfortable environment by setting up ground rules and recognizing different viewpoints and common ground. Moreover, the participants described the connection between a role of a facilitator and a leader. As Cleo mentioned:

...learning about things that you might not have learned about without doing [program]...

I guess how to be a leader you’ve always been told, be a more grown up, be more of a

leader...but nobody actually tells you what being a leader means so when you actually get to have people tell you what that is...I think, being a good leader means to...have your own opinions but don't be so like this is the only way, I think, being a leader means to be open to other things and to... find common ground between people and you don't even have to find it between yourself and another person, it can be between two other people, you can help them solve disputes or you can help.”

In this sense, Community Conversation series offered an opportunity for gifted middle school students to develop their leadership skills.

Research question: What are the perceived outcomes of gifted middle school students' participation in VTS integrated with NIF?

Based on self-reports, the following categories were identified: (a) reflection, (b) empathy, (c) communication skills, (d) awareness of perspectives and relationships, (e) collaboration, and (f) sense of agency. Although the participants did not frame their learning and insights in their interview and questionnaires as a synthesis of ideas and information, an understanding of tradeoffs and tensions, and reason-giving, I included these learning outcomes in the theme based on the analysis of VTS and NIF forum transcripts (see Appendix H).

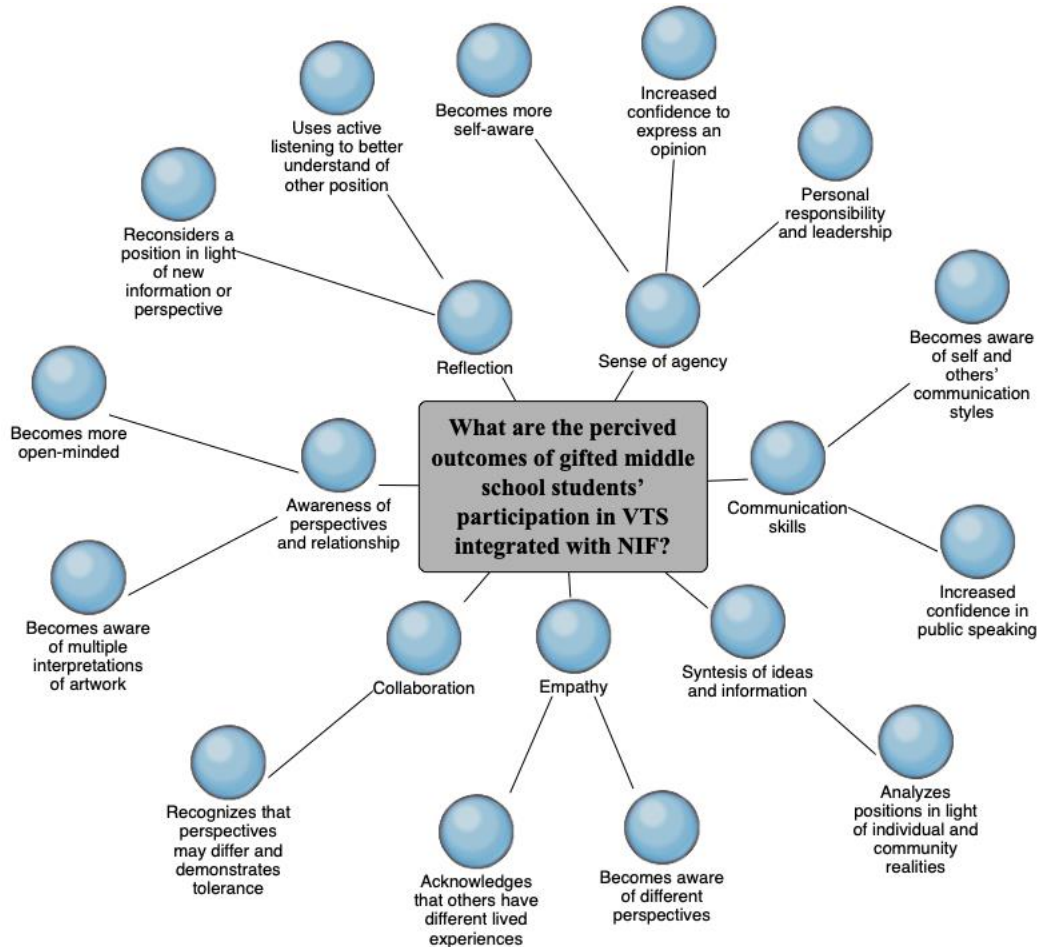
Theme 3. The Gifted Middle Students' Growth and Development

The learning journey of the eight gifted middle school students at Hillview School appears to have been impactful and promoted students' reflective thinking, active listening, and a greater perceived awareness of multiple interpretations of artwork. It also seems that participants gained a greater awareness of multiplicity and became more open-minded about different perspectives. The gathered data demonstrates that participants perceived that they (a) became aware of multiple interpretations of artwork through their participation and facilitation of VTS

sessions, (b) became more self-aware, (c) had increased confidence in public speaking, and (d) were able to reconsider a position in light of new information or perspective. Figure 4.2.

represents the most prominent findings to tell a story of the participants' perceived growth and development.

Figure 4.2. A Visual Story of Students' Growth And Development



Regarding a greater sense of awareness of perspectives and relationships, Jessie pointed out:

Do you remember that feeling when you look at a picture and you pretty much have a fixed point of view and someone said something and they opened up your third eye on?

Oh my god, I haven't thought of that. That's like weirdest feeling.

Jan noted:

Before VTS training before I became a facilitator, what I do, if I saw this image, then all I do is focus on my perspective, and try to prove why my perspective, might be right, or he correct one and one thing that I really about VTS is there isn't a correct answer it she's genuinely talking to find understanding.

Due to the interpretive nature of artwork, multiple interpretations can be surfaced during a VTS discussion. It is also important to point out that most participants attended VTS training, which increased their preparedness to engage in VTS sessions.

Additionally, the study reveals that the participants became more open-minded through their engagement with deliberative civic learning. In this regard, Alva mentioned that “I started to become a lot more open to different opinions and my own and I really started to see the importance of learning about different viewpoints and different ideas.” Jessie shared that “I feel like it allows you to be more open to different opinions just kind of helping you understand different opinions and views instead of just what you are thinking or seeing.”

Another important finding suggests that participants noted a greater sense of agency through participation in the program. Noel shared that “it [participation in NIF] made you feel like you could do a whole lot for the world, and it was I liked it.” Multiple participants also mentioned a greater perceived self-awareness. For example, Jan shared that “I can use what I learned about myself and my peers in this community conversation to be more self-aware about how I treat others.” Jessie stated that through “facilitation and VTS have we become more aware of my nonverbal body language.” Additionally, participants highlighted improved communication skills, including public speaking and active listening. This can be explained by the participants’ engagement with communication boot camp and the experience gained through

facilitation and participation in VTS and NIF over time. Moreover, the deliberative civic learning curriculum provided an opportunity for participants to learn about their conflict and communication styles, which seems an important building block for a productive exchange during deliberative discussions and dialogue.

With a note of caution, it appears that deliberative civic learning may deepen the participants' reflection. As an illustration, Jan shared that "It [VTS] also has allowed me to have a greater understanding of what others think." Similarly, Jessie noted that "Hearing other people's opinions in VTS helped me change or rethink my perspective." In this sense, the participants associated metacognition with their engagement in VTS sessions.

Furthermore, Jamie mentioned that "I've learned to consider other peoples' point of view. Even if I think strongly about a subject, I try to stay open minded and let my thoughts adjust or stay put based on what I've learned." As follows, the participant engagement in NIF discussions fosters reflective thinking.

Additionally, the data suggest that the participants emphasized the importance of active listening. For example, Noel noted:

I was thinking like...wow... I probably should have listened to, that is a really good point and to the other side of the argument, and then we have when to present and I was one side.

This finding suggests that exposure to deliberation provides an opportunity to improve active listening. Avery shared, "What's even more important is listening to the others in that ..that conversation, which is what really gives you an understanding...a better understanding...a true understanding of that subject." It appears that participation and facilitation in VTS and NIF, provided an opportunity for students to engage with reflective thinking and metacognition.

These results need to be interpreted with caution. First, the participants are cognitively advanced youth with a high ability to reflect, analyze, and synthesize. Second, given the educational context, the participants learned and developed in multiple ways as they engaged with school subjects, clubs, and activities. Third, the research design and gathered data do not identify the extent to which students' growth and development can be explained by the students' participation and engagement with deliberative civic learning. Meanwhile, the subjective experience of gifted middle school students in Community Conversation series illustrates empowerment and meaningful encouragement of early adolescents, which can have long-term impact.

Intellectual Humility

The findings demonstrate that the participants were able to reconsider a position in light of new information or perspective, noted that they became more open-minded, and mentioned increased confidence to express an opinion (Appendix H). However, the conducted comparative analysis of data does not demonstrate that these findings are consistent across the participants.

Chapter Summary

The findings suggest that the collaborative effort ensured meaningful student engagement with deliberative civic learning and led to students' development. The results reveal that gifted middle school students were able to (a) practice active listening skills to acquire a better understanding of their peers' viewpoints and (b) consider options that benefit the community based on new information and reflection. The findings also suggest that deliberative civic learning provided the gifted middle school students with an opportunity to learn about their peers' lived experiences. The participants associated their greater awareness of the various

opinions of their peers and willingness to learn about others' perspectives with deliberative civic learning through VTS integrated with NIF.

Chapter 5 - Implications

Guided by engaged approaches to research and the multidisciplinary conceptual framework, this exploratory study aimed to describe gifted middle school students' learning experiences in visual thinking strategies (VTS) integrated with National Issues Forums (NIF). Through the use of qualitative data collection methods and analysis, I generated a thick description to address the following research questions:

1. What do gifted middle school students learn as they engage in deliberative civic learning through participation in VTS integrated with NIF?
 - a. How do gifted middle school students describe their experience in VTS integrated with NIF?
 - b. What are the perceived outcomes of gifted middle school students' participation in VTS integrated with NIF?

The goal of this chapter is to discuss and synthesize the study's findings concerning the research questions, multidisciplinary conceptual framework, and existing body of scholarship. This chapter encompasses the summary and discussion of findings, along with implications for theory, practice, engaged scholarship, and future directions of research.

Summary of Findings

This study examined the collaborative efforts of the K-State Institute for Civic Discourse and Democracy (ICDD), K-State Research and Extension (KSRE), the Kansas 4-H program (4-H), the Marianna Kistler Beach Museum of Art (the Beach Museum), and Hillview School. Through this partnership, the gifted middle school students participated in the Community Conversation series that incorporated deliberative civic learning features. Eight students with

varying levels of length and breadth of engagement participated in this study. Three main themes were identified:

1. The gifted middle school students' engagement with deliberative civic learning
2. The gifted middle school students' perceptions of facilitation experience
3. The gifted middle school students' growth and development

Regarding the first theme, the study's findings suggest that the participants perceived their involvement as meaningful, impactful, and fun. In particular, students valued their social interactions developed throughout the program. In regard to the second theme, the participants found their facilitation experience rewarding. They also recognized challenges associated with the process. Likewise, the data shows that the participants noted a range of feelings from anxiety and stress to rewarded and accomplished associated with the facilitation experience.

Additionally, the participants perceived VTS as an *icebreaker*. The findings reveal that the participants noted how learning associated with VTS training and facilitation experience assisted with modeling and maintaining neutrality. Concerning the third theme, the research findings indicate that engagement with the Community Conversation series resulted in the participants' perceived growth and development. The participants mentioned that they (a) became aware of multiple interpretations of artwork, (b) became more self-aware, and (c) were able to reconsider a position in light of new information or different perspective. The participants stated they became more open-minded by engaging with deliberative civic learning, and improved communication skills, including public speaking and active listening. Another important finding suggests that the participants noted a greater perceived sense of agency and self-awareness through their participation in Community Conversation series.

To sum, the learning journey of the eight gifted middle school students at Hillview School appeared to be impactful, filled with a sense of accomplishment, and resulted in learning about their peers and strengthening their friendship. While, their participation was encouraged by the classroom environment and the educator's encouragement, it also appeared to be impacted by pandemic, the participants described their experiences as meaningful and fun. The participants' engagement with deliberative civic learning promoted their perceived reflective thinking, active listening, and a greater awareness of multiple interpretations of artwork. Given the findings presented in Chapter 4, the facilitation experience occasionally may be perceived as stressful. Meanwhile, the participants also understood the importance of creating a safe and neutral environment for a productive exchange about societal issues that they cared about. Drawing on the findings indicated in Chapter 4, it also seemed that the participants gained a greater perceived awareness of multiplicity and became more open-minded about different perspectives.

Discussion

According to Denzin and Lincoln (2000), qualitative inquiry focuses on a better understanding of a subject matter through data representation and interpretation. The gathered and analyzed data focused on a nuanced description of gifted middle school students' understanding of their engagement and learning outcomes through participation in VTS integrated with NIF. In this section, drawing upon three themes, I offer a synthesis of the findings to generate insights. By linking the connection between the relevant body of scholarship and the synthesis of the findings, I examined whether the offered interpretations contradict, deepen, or align with current empirical studies and conceptual literature. I also considered the context of the findings and the limitations of the study.

The study's findings offer suggestive evidence for promising aspects of an intervention's design to foster engagement among young people. Accordingly, I considered insights such as (a) dialogic communication to foster youth engagement and deliberative civic learning and (b) building blocks for collective efficacy. By exploring the participants' learning experiences, the data suggests that their engagement with the Community Conversation series resulted in deeper reflective thinking and a greater perceived awareness of different perspectives. These data must be interpreted with caution, given the limitations of the study. Meanwhile, the findings presented in Chapter 4 add to our understanding of the participants' subjective experiences and offer an opportunity to consider building blocks for democratic citizenship in early adolescents, including (a) understanding of post-heroic leadership through facilitation experience, (b) awareness of others' perspectives and relationships, and (c) intellectual humility.

Pathways to Foster Youth Engagement

In this section, I synthesized the findings from the first theme regarding gifted middle school students' engagement with deliberative civic learning and the second theme concerning gifted middle school students' perceptions of facilitation experience. I offered a discussion concerning pathways to foster youth engagement based on synthesized findings.

Dialogic Communication to Foster Youth Engagement and Deliberative Civic Learning

The findings suggest that the participants perceived VTS as an icebreaker to create a comfortable environment for forum participants to share their views. Previous studies suggest that a VTS facilitator creates a safe space for collaborative inquiry by asking open-ended questions, modeling mutual respect, listening intently, and paraphrasing (Moorman, 2013, 2015). In this sense, the VTS model has practical implications for deliberative civic learning related to fostering a safe environment and developing a better understanding by (a) allowing participants

to practice observation, thinking, and communication skills; (b) encouraging students to engage in collaborative inquiry; and (c) developing multiple ways to read and understand situations.

The findings based on macro-analytic approach to analysis of two VTS sessions in VTS/NIF forum – 3 (The timeline presented in Table 3.1) show that students generated interpretive comments in response to artwork when a moderator is skillful in the use of the VTS facilitation technique. However, I noticed that the students who commented, for the most part, were those who either received VTS training in the past and/or attended a brief VTS training session prior to the sessions. The discussion of the second image seemed to be more engaging and sparked more interpretative comments, which usually indicate that getting used to a VTS format takes time and practice. In this sense, VTS has potential to create a comfortable environment for participants to share their views in a small group discussion.

Granted that deliberative pedagogy draws on deliberative democracy in which communication has a crucial role (Shaffer et al., 2017; Longo & Shaffer, 2019), I offered a possible interpretation for this result. Gastil & Black (2008) argue that deliberation should include the analytic components and the social and dialogical aspects. The former represents a functional perspective on group communication; while the latter relates to relational communication (Carcasson et al., 2010). According to Gastil and Black (2008), the analytic processes include building an information base, prioritizing key values, identifying solutions, weighing solutions, and making the best decision possible. Likewise, the processes such as analyzing the problem, identifying goals and objectives to use as evaluative criteria, generating a variety of potential solutions, and using the criteria to analyze both the positive and negative aspects of each solution constitute the functional perspective on group decision-making (Hirokawa & Salazar, 1999). As follows, the analytic components of Gastil & Black's (2008)

model assist with building capacities for reasoned judgment, working through the competing preferences, and making collective decisions.

In line with Gastil and Black (2008), the social processes include ensuring equal and adequate speaking opportunities to group members, demonstrating mutual comprehension of one another's perspectives, adequately considering the views of other participants, and demonstrating respect for one another. This may also include demonstrating social support, developing shared meaning and collaboration, sharing narratives and personal experience, and building relationships that refer to relational communication (Keyton, 1999). In this regard, the social and dialogical aspects encourage participants to co-construct a shared meaning, respectfully consider the views of other participants, and create a sense of community (Gastil & Black, 2008). Additionally, dialogue is viewed as a “collaborative and relational process to engage with others and co-create meaning” (Longo & Shaffer, 2019, p. 22). Therefore, the social and dialogical aspects of deliberation are important for creating a space to recognize participants' unique experiences and perspectives (Gastil & Black, 2008).

As cited in Chapter 2, by connecting comments, the moderator in a VTS session fosters meaning making and collaborative inquiry (Hailey, 2014; Hailey et al., 2015; Landorf, 2006; Yenawine & Miller, 2014). Moreover, participants can explore a deeper understanding of human experiences through the multilayered and interpretive nature of artwork in VTS sessions which can significantly contribute to the experience of dialogue. In this respect, the findings show that incorporating VTS into the NIF model provide an opportunity for participants to engage in developing shared meaning and respectful exchange (dialogic moments) before they engage in discussing options and reason-giving. To sum, the data indicate that the participants recognize the importance of a comfortable environment for forum participants to share their perspectives.

The findings add to our understanding of the importance of creating conditions for dialogic communication before entering a deliberative discussion among early adolescents. Meanwhile the perceptions about VTS sessions and their impact were not consistent across the eight gifted middle school students. Accordingly, it is important to note that the study's conceptual framework considers the VTS model as an educational model that does not aim to offer *panacea* for education (Hunt, 2012).

Building Blocks for Collective Efficacy Through Deliberative Civic Learning

The findings suggest that participants perceived their social interactions with peers in the Community Conversation series as meaningful and an important part of the experience. The pandemic context in the 2020-2021 academic years may have influenced opportunities for gifted middle school students to engage with one another outside of the school. Thus, the Community Conversation series offered an additional space for gifted middle school students to learn and engage with one another. The data also indicate that participants mentioned experiencing a range of feelings associated with the facilitation experience. In particular, anxiety along with maintaining neutrality was a specific skill the participants had to navigate. In this regard, the value of teamwork and a sense of purpose that participants assigned to their experiences probably counterbalanced the negative feelings. Consequently, developing relationships and emphasizing teamwork can be a significant contributor to participants' perceptions of their experiences. This finding appears to be consistent with Bandura's (1986, 1997, 2004, 2006) social cognitive theory that emphasizes personal growth through enabling experiences.

According to Bandura (2006), adolescents foster their personal growth through enabling experiences, and the changes they experience are also contributed by social systems in which they navigate. In addition, Bandura (2006) highlights individual, proxy, and collective modes of

agency. Each mode of human agency is grounded in individuals' beliefs that they can influence the directions of events by their actions (Bandura, 2006). According to Bandura (2006):

people's shared beliefs in their joint capabilities to bring about desired changes in their lives are the foundation of collective agency. Perceived collective efficacy raises people's vision of what they wish to achieve, enhances motivational commitment to their endeavors, strengthens resilience to adversity, and enhances group accomplishments. (p.5).

Given that Community Conversation series included the training component, opportunities to facilitate NIF forums and VTS sessions, and leading peer-to-peer learning at Hillview School, engagement with deliberative civic learning has potential for individual and collective agency.

It appears that Community Conversation series created an intentional space for the participants to learn and understand the world around them. As such, providing opportunities for middle school students to select a NIF issue for a forum may ensure greater student participation. By creating opportunities within their own communities, young people learn to be active citizens (Bandura 1997; Flanagan et al. 2007). Consequently, a topic or issue with relevance and connection to a local community's issue, opportunities to engage with a broader community, and taking an active role in implementing actions can foster meaningful youth engagement with deliberative civic learning over time. Additionally, early adolescents can develop collective efficacy through teamwork, connection to real-world problems, and reflection on progress over time which consistent with Housand's (2016) recommendations for curriculum for gifted education in K-12. Therefore, it also can promote individual and collective efficacy, and can have long-term implications (Maurissen et al., 2018).

In sum, the study's findings suggest that design for deliberative civic learning among early adolescents should include opportunities to develop social connections and teamwork, as well as engage with a broader community and local issues. As early adolescents develop skills to foster dialogic communication to ensure both social aspects of a deliberative discussion and explore multiplicity, it is important to recognize socializing practices as being important alongside knowledge about the subject matter at hand.

Building Blocks for Democratic Citizenship Through Deliberative Civic Learning

The following perceived learning outcomes have implications for building blocks for democratic citizenship such as (a) becoming aware of self and others' communication styles, (b) becoming aware of different ways of thinking, (c) gaining a better understanding of others' thinking, (d) becoming more open-minded, (e) increased confidence to express an opinion, and (f) reconsidering a position in light of new information or perspectives (see Appendix H). I synthesized the findings from the second theme concerning the gifted middle school students' perceptions of facilitation experience and the third theme regarding gifted middle school students' growth and development. Drawing on the synthesis, I offered a discussion regarding building blocks for democratic citizenship in early adolescents, including (a) understanding of post-heroic leadership through facilitation experience, (b) awareness of others' perspectives and relationships, and (c) intellectual humility.

Understanding of Post-heroic Leadership Through Facilitation Experience

The findings indicate that the participants perceived the role of a facilitator as creating a comfortable and safe environment for a respectful exchange of views through maintaining neutrality, recognizing different perspectives, and identifying common ground. This finding has implications for developing democratic leadership learning and practices among participants.

Previous studies focused on developing leadership and deliberation skills of forum participants. Gastil (1994b) emphasizes that democratic leadership in small groups can be illustrated through the use of the NIF deliberation model. Moreover, Gastil and Dillard (1999) highlight that the role of a facilitator is crucial for a NIF forum. In this sense, through NIF forum's ground rules, a moderator encourages respectful exchange and active listening, resulting in both a deliberative discussion and democratic relationship among forum participants (Gastil, 1993). Accordingly, Gastil and Dillard (1999) suggest that forum facilitators promote forum participants' leadership and deliberation skills by guiding a deliberative discussion neutrally and respectfully and promoting shared decision-making. This aligns with the approaches that conceptualize leadership through a relational and collective lens (Cunliffe & Eriksen, 2011; Drath, 2001; Uhl-Bien, 2006; Uhl-Bien & Ospina, 2012). For example, participation in a NIF forum fosters mutual adjustment, shared sense-making, and collaborative learning, which can result in *pragmatic collective outcomes* (Drath et al., 2008).

Meanwhile, this study did not focus on forum participants' experiences solely. In this sense, this study's findings shed light on deepening understanding of post-heroic leadership through facilitation experience over time among the participants who have both participation and facilitation experience. The findings suggest that the participants had perceived experience of (a) using active listening to understand other positions better, (b) reconsidering a position in light of new information or perspective, (c) gaining a better understanding of other's thinking through VTS, (d) becoming aware of different perspectives, (e) acknowledging that others have different lived experiences, (f) becoming aware of different ways of thinking through VTS, (g) becoming more open-minded, (h) acknowledging and recognizing diverse opinions, and (i) analyzing a variety of positions to draw out conclusions for the community good (see Appendix H). Taking

into consideration that Gergen and Hersted (2016) claim that “the ability to change perspective and identify with others can be an important step in enhancing leadership skills in connecting to and relating sensitively to others” (p. 189), Community Conversation series offered an opportunity for gifted middle school students to develop their leadership skills.

Furthermore, considering the conceptualization of leadership through a collective lens, leadership is viewed as a co-constructed process in which communication is crucial for meaning-making (Fairhurst & Grant, 2010; Gergen, 1994). Likewise, the constructionist approach emphasizes developing leadership capacity and skills by highlighting dialogic practices (Drath et al., 2008) and discursive practices (Barge, 2012; Barge & Fairhurst, 2008). This suggests that discursive practices are crucial. Drawing on the study’s findings, I suggest that a role of moderator in a NIF forum offers a unique opportunity to develop democratic leadership capacity through practicing facilitation, understanding and exercising the civic discourse ground rules.

Guided by the civic discourse principles as ground rules for a deliberative discussion, participants gained a better understanding of leadership as practice, such as (a) seeking understanding and common ground, (b) expecting and exploring conflicting viewpoints, (c) giving everyone an opportunity to speak, (d) listening respectfully and thoughtfully, (e) offering and examining support for claims, (f) appreciating communication differences, (g) staying focused on issues, and (h) respecting time limits (ICDD, 2022). However, the findings are subject to limitations, including a facilitator’s experience and ability to stay neutral, quality of interactions, and presence of disagreements in a discussion. For example, as the conducted analysis of VTS/NIF forum – 3 demonstrates, there was not much disagreement or conflicting viewpoints in either of two small group discussions.

In line with the multidisciplinary conceptual framework, the findings support the notion that NIF and VTS models can serve as educational interventions to promote an understanding of democratic leadership among early adolescents. Given the limitations of the study, more research is needed to better understand how discourse practices unfold during a forum by examining forum transcripts more closely.

Awareness of Others' Perspectives Through Deliberative Civic Learning

The study's findings suggest that the participants associated perceived deeper reflective thinking and greater awareness of perspectives and relationships with the experience in Community Conversation series. Granted the developmental trajectory during the adolescent period, the subjective perceptions of learning and its impact may evolve over time. By paying detailed attention to meanings that the participants assigned to their learning experiences, I was able to gain a better understanding of how the gifted middle school students described their understanding of self and others as they engage with deliberative civic learning. The gathered data demonstrates that participants noticed a greater perceived awareness of others' perspectives. Moreover, it appears that participation and facilitation in VTS and NIF provided an opportunity for students to engage with reflective thinking and gain insights into their peers' viewpoints.

The existing studies suggest that deliberation in the classroom creates a safe environment for young people to express their views (Molnar-Main, 2017). Moreover, Molnar-Main (2017) points out that deliberation supports two distinctive forms of cognition: the "reasoned pathway"¹⁰ and the "social reaction pathway."¹¹ In this sense, through participation in deliberation in the

¹⁰ Reasoned pathway is based in "conscious, deliberate evaluation of costs and benefits of choice alternatives," (Albert & Steinberg, 2011, as cited in Molnar-Main, 2017, p. 23).

¹¹ Social reaction pathway is "grounded in experiential processes," (Albert & Steinberg, 2011, as cited in Molnar-Main, 2017, p. 23).

classroom, gifted middle school students developed reflective thinking and awareness of relationships which aligns with Drury et al.'s (2017) DPLO rubric.

This study's data suggest that the participants developed perceived (a) understanding of others' thinking through VTS, (b) perceived awareness of different ways of thinking through VTS, (c) perceived awareness of multiple interpretations of artwork. The participants were also able to reconsider of a position in light of new information or different perspectives. Of the possible explanations is that the delivered curriculum included the VTS curriculum, which is grounded in social learning theory. In line with Vygotsky's (1968) social development theory, when young people interact with their peers in the social and cultural environment, they develop learning strategies (McLeod, 2014). Existing VTS empirical studies demonstrate improved communication and observation skills among college students (Frei et al., 2010; Klugman et al., 2011). Additionally, Moorman's (2014) study indicate that elementary school students improved their communication and critical thinking skills by engaging with VTS. In this sense, empirical studies suggest that participation in VTS sessions can foster critical thinking and observational skills, which can enhance reflective thinking and awareness of others' perspectives.

Given the developmental trajectory during the adolescent period, (a) becoming aware of different ways of thinking through VTS and (b) gaining a better understanding of others' thinking through VTS can be viewed as building blocks for further deepening reflective thinking and awareness of relationships, which is generally compatible with Drury et al.'s (2017) DPLO rubric. Meanwhile, these findings need to be interpreted with caution. First, early adolescents develop over time as they engage with school curriculum and extra-curriculum activities. Second, the participants facilitated and participated in peer-to-peer VTS sessions, which does not align with the original design developed by Housen (1983, 1987, 1992). Further research should

be done to investigate the connection between early adolescents' perceptions of others' views as they engage with VTS over time.

The study's findings also indicate that participants highlighted a greater perceived awareness of their own and others' communication styles. The curriculum of Community Conversation series provided an opportunity for participants to learn about their conflict and communication styles, which is probably an important building block for a productive exchange during deliberative discussions and dialogue. In this sense, becoming aware of one's own and others' communication styles is a crucial building block for further development and growth.

Empirical studies suggest a positive impact of deliberation on youths' attitudes. These findings are consistent with the results of the previous studies regarding exposure to deliberation. In particular, exposing young people to deliberation in the classroom promotes tolerance towards the diversity of perspectives and experiences (Hess, 2009; Hess & McAvoy, 2015; Molnar-Main, 2017; Parker, 2003). In line with Avery et al. (2013), students who participated in deliberation in the classroom, learned how to articulate their opinions and listen actively. According to Hess and McAvoy (2015), students became more confident and interested in listening to opinions different from their own through participation in deliberation. Additionally, Molnar-Main (2017) points out that the exposure to deliberation in the classroom fostered students' listening and speaking skills.

Intellectual Humility

By exploring participants' learning experiences in NIF incorporated with VTS, I aimed to gain a greater understanding of how participants described their perceptions of self and others as they engaged with deliberative civic learning. In line with the multidisciplinary conceptual framework, I initially considered deliberative pedagogy as a model for the cultivation of

intellectual humility. Understanding that deliberative pedagogy draws on deliberative democracy (Shaffer et al., 2017), I aimed to analyze communication designs that can cultivate intellectual humility in adolescents. One study investigated factors that contribute to the development of intellectual humility in childhood (Danovitch et al., 2019), while other scholars have only examined related constructs (Richmond, 2020). For example, Danovitch et al. (2019) suggest that while confidence fosters motivation to try new tasks, overconfidence can impede new learning.

Drawing upon Lynch's (2021) understanding of intellectual humility and several empirical studies that demonstrate that intellectual humility is associated with knowledge acquisition, reflective thinking, intellectual openness, and open-minded thinking (Alfano et al., 2017; Deffler et al., 2016; Krumrei-Mancuso et al., 2019; Krumrei-Mancuso et al., 2020; Leary et al., 2017), I identified pieces of data that can provide insights regarding how participants described their perceptions of self and others in relation to intellectual humility as they participated in dialogue and deliberation.

Data from my study suggest that participants mentioned that they became more open-minded participants. They also noted that their increased confidence to express an opinion, while they were also able to reconsider a position in light of new information or different perspectives, which indicates positive impact for cultivation of intellectual humility (see Appendix H). However, the comparative analysis offered in Chapter 4 does not provide strong evidence that these three combined insights are consistent across all participants (See Figure H.8 and Figure H.9 in Appendix H).

Given the limitations of the study that are discussed later, these results need to be interpreted cautiously. The intersection of these insights might be considered possible building

blocks of intellectual humility. Future research should concentrate on comparative and longitudinal studies to assess the development of intellectual humility among adolescents as they engage with the NIF and VTS discussion models over time.

Context of Findings

The current political context in the United States, characterized by increased polarization, mistrust, and the spread of misinformation, has been described as reflecting *democratic backsliding* (Waldner & Lust, 2018). Democratic backsliding is associated with “electoral suppression, delegitimization of the press, partisan capture of supposedly neutral governmental institutions, attacks on minoritized communities, and embrace of authoritarian styles of leadership” (Waldner & Lust, 2018, as cited in Kahne et al., 2021, p.2). In this sense, future research may focus on the impact of the broader context on the students’ engagement with deliberative civic learning.

The data suggest that the classroom environment may determine student involvement with deliberative civic learning. As an educator, Dr. Bietau drew on constructivism, and her teaching philosophy reflected the Foxfire Approach to Teaching and Learning informed by John Dewey and the principles of experiential learning. In line with the Foxfire Approach to Teaching and Learning, an educator creates meaningful and experience-based educational environments that center on student experience, reflection, and growth mindset. Dr. Bietau also draws on constructivism as a guiding framework for inquiry-based educational experiences. Moreover, Dr. Bietau had developed strong partnerships within a local community and emphasized civic engagement in her conversations with students. In this regard, her role as an educator, beliefs, and ability to build partnerships were instrumental for students’ engagement. This finding aligns with existing literature that suggests that teacher beliefs and behaviors are linked to relevant

support for students' civic engagement (Cornbleth, 2001; Farkas & Duffett, 2010; Knowles & Castro, 2019; Reichert & Torney-Purta, 2019). Additionally, studies have suggested that district-wide level support for civic educators is crucial as well (Berkman, 2020a; Berkman, 2020b; Hodgins et al., 2020).

Limitations of Study

Several limitations need to be acknowledged. The findings of the study are restricted to a sample of high-achieving young people, and therefore there is limited transferability of the findings to broader public school student populations. The study sample also posed a challenge related to the homogeneity of data, as well as the study did not address issues of inequality. Moreover, the pandemic context impacted the participants' learning and the data collection process. Finally, the gathered data relied on self-reporting. As such, the presented findings must be interpreted with caution.

The sample of this study consisted of cognitively advanced youth. Students who are identified as gifted typically tend to develop well both socially and emotionally (Reis & Renzulli, 2004); high-achieving students are "highly reactive to social or emotional stimuli" (Wiley, 2019, p. 1534). However, several studies have shown that gifted students are well adjusted as their peers (Bracken & Brown, 2006; Cross et al., 2008; Mueller, 2009). Due to the disparity impacted by inequality and larger societal issues, students identified as gifted in the United States are overwhelmingly White, Asian, and upper-middle-class (Card & Giuliano, 2016; Peters et al., 2019; Wiley, 2019). Furthermore, the current body of literature indicates that students from low-income and marginalized backgrounds have fewer opportunities to engage with civic learning (Kahne & Middaugh, 2008; Kawashima-Ginsberg, 2013; Levinson, 2011).

However, the findings of the study do not imply that the broader school student population may not benefit from deliberative civic learning.

Given that students' involvement with the Community Conversation series occurred from December 2019 to March 2021 (see the timeline in Figure 3.2), their learning and engagement experiences were impacted by the pandemic. Additionally, the considered collaborative efforts to deliver deliberative civic learning programmatic efforts included a blended format of the NIF model and the Common Ground for Action (CGA) online forum platform in which peer-to-peer facilitation was essential. Also, in this study, VTS incorporated peer-to-peer engagement, which does not align with the traditional design developed by Housen (1983, 1987, 1992). This has implications for skillful facilitation and possibly limited impact on youth participants in the forum. It is also important to note that the pandemic context impacted the implementation of the study. As a result, I had limited access to the research site and the data were collected within a short window of time.

Implications of Findings

Considering engaged approaches to research, it is essential to consider how the identified findings can advance the multidisciplinary conceptual framework. It is also crucial to generate pragmatic recommendations. Drawing on the multidisciplinary conceptual framework presented in Chapter 2, this section also addresses how the findings can contribute to a better understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. I offered concluding statements and recommendations based on the discussion and synthesis of the findings. I considered the implications of findings for theory, practice, and engaged scholarship. Table 5.1 represents a summary of the proposed recommendations.

Table 5.1. Implications of Findings

Area	Recommendations
Theory	Consideration of building blocks for democratic citizenship among early adolescents Consideration of the VTS model for deliberative pedagogy Consideration of the NIF model as a space for developing an understanding of post-heroic leadership
Methodology	Suggestions for data collection methods for research projects involving adolescents
Engaged scholarship	The “Ата-Әже” engaged research framework
Practice	Individual and collective capacity building
Future research	Longitudinal ethnographic studies and comparative case studies regarding the cultivation of intellectual humility and understanding of post-heroic leadership

Recommendations for Theory

The study’s findings present a more nuanced understanding of subjective learning experiences associated with deliberative civic learning. Considering the findings and developmental trajectories related to adolescent time, I suggest developing building blocks of deliberative pedagogy learning outcomes for early adolescents. In this regard, deliberative pedagogy may include the building blocks for democratic citizenship such as becoming aware of others’ perspectives.

The study’s findings suggest that interactions encouraged by the VTS model may enhance students’ preparedness to encounter and consider multiple perspectives. However, this finding is not consistent across all participants in the study. In addition, the findings do not offer

strong evidence for intellectual humility as a learning outcome of deliberative civic learning. The findings add to our understanding of intellectual humility as a multifaceted concept, which can be explored by combining attitudes and abilities as building blocks.

The study has shown that the participants' facilitation experience has implications for promoting an understanding of democratic leadership among early adolescents. In this regard, the NIF model can be used to understand leadership as a process, in which discursive practices are crucial.

Methodological Implication

This qualitative study focused on the gifted middle school students' understanding of their participation in VTS integrated with NIF discussions. By utilizing synchronous and asynchronous approaches to data collection, member checking, the study produced a thick description and generated insights about early adolescents' experiences. Multiple approaches to data collection were utilized to balance out the power between the investigator and young research participants. Furthermore, employing data triangulation and triangulation through multiple theories to confirm emerging findings was important to enhance the rigor of the study (Denzin, 1978, Flick, 2018). This study showed that consideration of contextual and situational factors could assist with understanding gifted middle school students' learning experiences.

Recommendations for Engaged Scholarship

This study introduced the “Ата-Әже” engaged research framework. The crucial aspect of the “Ата-Әже” engaged scholarship framework is that each of the dolls is situated within the context of engaged research with attention to ethical considerations. Through the application of the “Ата-Әже” engaged scholarship framework throughout the research process in the educational context, I highlighted how a researcher's positionality might inform the research

process. I also offered a rationale for considering both theoretical perspectives and practical solutions for an engaged study. By including a local community's priorities and concerns to research agenda, I was able to ensure shared decision-making process. Finally, it was important to finding ways to disseminate results to benefit the community partner. The application of the "Ата-Әже" engaged scholarship framework has been presented throughout the dissertation (Figure 1.5, Figure 1.6, Figure 2.4, Figure 3.4). Future research should concentrate on the application of the "Ата-Әже" engaged research framework in other contexts. In addition, future engaged studies may consider including the dissemination of findings through open discussion of research findings with partnering organizations to ensure programmatic efforts improvements (Ross et al., 2010).

Recommendations for Practice

Based on the study's findings, I offered recommendations for building individual and collective capacity of early adolescents. I also highlighted the importance of building partnerships to ensure impactful deliberative civic learning curriculum.

Building Individual Capacity

The study has shown that building capacity for a productive exchange in a deliberative discussion should start with an intentionally designed curriculum and promoting dialogic interactions to ensure the social aspect of a discussion among gifted middle school students. The findings suggest that it is essential to introduce deliberative civic learning in early adolescence. The findings also indicate the potential of VTS for youth development.

The study's findings demonstrate that the presented collaborative model of deliberative civic learning can be used for individual capacity building by educators in middle and high schools and specialists in youth development programs. The findings also indicate that

emphasizing civic discourse principles throughout the programmatic efforts is crucial. It is also important to ensure an intentional explanation and exploration of tradeoffs that promote informed judgment.

Additionally, offering intentionally designed coaching and feedback to master VTS and NIF facilitation skills may benefit middle school students' experience. It is also important to ensure accessibility of issue guides and introduce VTS and NIF concurrently. The findings also indicate that learning about different conflict and communication styles is an important building block for a productive exchange during deliberative discussions and dialogue.

Given the civic mission of public schools, collaborative deliberative civic learning curriculum can meet the increased attention to civic education (American Academy of Arts and Sciences, 2020; Educating for American Democracy, 2021). As an illustration, Educating for American Democracy (2021) suggests “deep inquiry about the multifaceted stories of American constitutional democracy” and the importance of “creating student opportunities to engage with real-world events and problem-solving about issues in their communities.” (p. 16). In this sense, deliberative discussions of real-world issues can foster youth's development and respond to democratic challenges in the United States.

Moreover, the College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework for Social Studies State Standards indicates the connection between deliberation, participation, and citizenship (National Council for the Social Studies, n.d.):

This framework makes frequent reference to civic virtues and principles that guide participation and to the norm of deliberation (which means discussing issues and making choices and judgments with information and evidence, civility and respect, and concern for fair procedures). Their contributions to public discussions may take many forms,

ranging from personal testimony to abstract arguments. They will also learn civic practices such as voting, volunteering, jury service, and joining with others to improve society. Civics enables students not only to study how others participate, but also to practice participating and taking informed action themselves.” (National Council for the Social Studies, 2013, p.31)

In this sense, NIFI historic decisions issue guides¹² can be used by social studies teachers to introduce deliberative thinking in the general curriculum. The data suggest that conducting NIF and VTS in-person, in addition to ensuring opportunities for students to select an issue to discuss may promote a greater level of student participation.

Building Collective Capacity

The study’s findings indicate that through fostering teamwork, connecting discussions to real-world problems, engaging students in reflective activities over time, and creating opportunities and conditions can be intentionally designed for early adolescents to advance their collective efficacy. This highlights the importance of building trust and relationships among group members through reflective focus groups that can foster their learning from one another since each participant brings a unique perspective to a group. This probably also include developing avenues to engage with a broader community through considering local issues and implementing an action plan.

Building Partnership for Deliberative Civic Learning

¹² For more on the NIFI historic decisions issue guides, visit <https://www.nifi.org/en/issue-guides/historic-issue-guides>

The study showed that developing and maintaining partnerships between organizations, such as youth development programs, public schools, organizations focused on deliberation and dialogue, and art museums can ensure high-quality deliberative civic learning curricula for early adolescents. In this sense, practitioners and educators must expand their network to build collaborations across organizations and fields. This is important because each partner brings strengths and unique approaches to the partnership, resulting in an impactful experience for students.

Future Research

There are possible areas for further investigation that include comparative and longitudinal studies of exploration of early adolescents' perceptions of others' views and development of intellectual humility with the use of reflective diaries as they engage with VTS and NIF over time. Given the limitations of the study, more research is needed to better understand how discourse practices in NIF foster an understanding of leadership among forum moderators and participants. It is also crucial to consider how the broader school student population engages with civic learning. Future research may also concentrate on more conservative qualitative research standards that require an extended period of time to capture the nature of the phenomenon under investigation (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). Additional possible areas for further research include consideration of the perspectives of educators, principals, and caregivers. Regarding engaged scholarship, future investigations should consider application of the "Ата-Әже" engaged scholarship framework in other contexts.

Researcher's Reflection

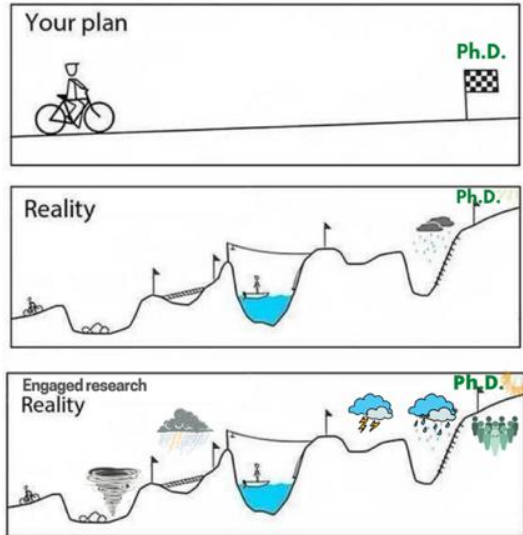
Denzin and Lincoln (2000) suggest that the researcher should reveal past experiences, biases, and assumptions that influence all aspects of the qualitative research process, including

the data interpretation and writing. In this regard, it is important to share the insights that I learned from conducting the study. This journey has been informed by Jacquez et al.'s (2016) collaborative engagement research paradigm, which required an active role of the research as a mechanism to develop relationships and maintain partnerships with the involved organizations and units.

Although the study focused on the learning experiences of the gifted middle school students in a Community Conversation series, I came to realize it has been a learning journey for me as an emerging scholar. As I have been reflecting on the learning journey, I came across Jain's (2013) expression of "your plan" versus "reality" of a Ph.D. journey. However, I added the third dimension to the meme. As I had an opportunity to document and reflect on my perceptions and experiences throughout the research process, I came to realize that engaged research may require the navigation of additional tensions. My experience was highlighted by navigating (a) the current culture and context of the university-community partnership; (b) tension between theory and practice; (c) ethical dilemmas and striving for equitable and shared decision-making; (d) disseminating the results that benefit the community partner; (e) conducting an interdisciplinary study; (f) maintaining flexibility for the research participants, while meeting requirements for IRB approval process; (g) maintaining the partnerships with key partners during the pandemic; and (h) conducting fieldwork in the pandemic. It was important to me to understand a phenomenon and ensure that the study could benefit a community member. My journey was also filled with a sense of purpose thanks to the experience working with the local community partner and learning from young people, which was rewarding. Since engaged research is a contextualized orientation, this approach to research requires that scholars build relationships by taking time to build connections and listen authentically to partners, and develop

an understanding of the cultures of organizations and communities. This engaged journey also encouraged me to deepen my self-reflexivity and cultural sensitivity and broaden my appreciation of the power of partnerships and collaborations (Figure 5.1.).

Figure 5.1. Emerging Engaged Scholar's Journey



Note: Adaptation of Jain (2013)

I have continued to reflect on questions: *How do we develop empathy, trust, and perspective-taking while respecting differences? How can we design a process to foster being in relation to one another? How can we engage meaningfully with one another and learn from each other while appreciating multiplicity?* Through this reflection, I was encouraged to think deeply of my own role as a citizen in my home country, including particular qualities and orientations across cultures and languages that are fundamentally important for active citizenship. After unpacking my own biases about visual arts and the role of dialogue in connecting and learning from one another, I still firmly believe that willingness to understand different human experiences of others and critical thinking supported by factual evidence is crucial. However, this learning journey made me realize that individual commitment and belief in collective capacity are fundamentally essential for democracy. In this sense, educators and practitioners can

assist in preparing youth for democratic work by creating conditions and opportunities for them and emphasizing the importance of capacities to work together as crucial as developing individual cognitive and thinking skills. Given the developmental trajectories, it is also important to start in early childhood by learning about others' views and human experiences.

Conclusion

This qualitative study drew upon the theoretical perspectives of deliberative pedagogy, the constitutive role of communication, contemporary approaches to leadership, and social cognitive theory. This study also introduced the “Ата-Әже” engaged scholarship framework through integration of a researcher's orientation and positionality, collaborative engagement research paradigm, and ethical consideration throughout the research process. Drawing on the engaged approaches to research, the research process aimed to advance theoretical perspectives and practical solutions. The study's findings suggest that the collaborative programmatic efforts ensured meaningful student engagement with deliberative civic learning and led to students' development. In particular, the VTS model integrated with the NIF model has implications for building blocks for democratic citizenship among early adolescents, including developing awareness of others' perspectives. In this regard, interactions encouraged by the VTS model may enhance students' preparedness to encounter and consider multiple perspectives. The findings also indicate the importance of creating opportunities for dialogic communication prior to entering a deliberative discussion for early adolescents. The peer facilitation in a NIF forum has the potential to provide an opportunity for developing an understanding of democratic leadership through learning by doing, understanding by practicing the civic discourse ground rules. Future longitudinal ethnographic and comparative studies are needed to explore the impact of deliberative civic learning over time.

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Appendix A - IRB



TO: Timothy Shaffer
Communication Studies
Manhattan, KS 66506

Proposal Number IRB-10521

FROM: Rick Scheidt, Chair
Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects

DATE: 02/01/2021

RE: Approval of Proposal Entitled, "Common Ground or Deliberative Civic Education for Youth: Case Study of a Small Urban Middle School."

The Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects has reviewed your proposal and has granted full approval. This proposal is **approved for three years from the date of this correspondence.**

APPROVAL DATE: 02/01/2021

EXPIRATION DATE: 01/31/2024

In giving its approval, the Committee has determined that:

No more than minimal risk to subjects

This approval applies only to the proposal currently on file as written. Any change or modification affecting human subjects must be approved by the IRB prior to implementation. All approved proposals are subject to continuing review, which may include the examination of records connected with the project. Announced post-approval monitoring may be performed during the course of this approval period by URCO staff. Injuries, unanticipated problems or adverse events involving risk to subjects or to others must be reported immediately to the Chair of the IRB and / or the URCO.

Electronically signed by Rick Scheidt on 02/09/2021 10:46 AM ET

TO: Timothy Shaffer
Communication Studies
Manhattan, KS 66506

FROM: Rick Scheidt, Chair
Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects

DATE: 02/26/2021

RE: Proposal #IRB-10521, entitled "Common Ground or Deliberative Civic Education for Youth: Case Study of a Small Urban Middle School."

MODIFICATION OF IRB PROTOCOL #IRB-10521, ENTITLED, "Common Ground or Deliberative Civic Education for Youth: Case Study of a Small Urban Middle School"

EXPIRATION DATE: 01/31/2024

The Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects (IRB) has reviewed and approved the request identified above as a modification of a previously approved protocol. **Please note that the original expiration remains the same.**

All approved IRB protocols are subject to continuing review at least annually, which may include the examination of records connected with the project. Announced in-progress reviews may also be performed during the course of this approval period by a member of the University Research Compliance Office staff. Unanticipated adverse events involving risk to subjects or to others must be reported immediately to the Chair of the IRB, and / or the URCO

It is important that your human subjects activity is consistent with submissions to funding / contract entities. It is your responsibility to initiate notification procedures to any funding / contract entity of any changes in your activity that affects the use of human subjects.

TO: Timothy Shaffer
Communication Studies
Manhattan, KS 66506

FROM: Rick Scheidt, Chair
Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects

DATE: 04/02/2021

RE: Proposal #IRB-10521, entitled "Common Ground or Deliberative Civic Education for Youth: Case Study of a Small Urban Middle School."

MODIFICATION OF IRB PROTOCOL #IRB-10521, ENTITLED, "Common Ground or Deliberative Civic Education for Youth: Case Study of a Small Urban Middle School"

EXPIRATION DATE: 01/31/2024

The Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects (IRB) has reviewed and approved the request identified above as a modification of a previously approved protocol. **Please note that the original expiration remains the same.**

All approved IRB protocols are subject to continuing review at least annually, which may include the examination of records connected with the project. Announced in-progress reviews may also be performed during the course of this approval period by a member of the University Research Compliance Office staff. Unanticipated adverse events involving risk to subjects or to others must be reported immediately to the Chair of the IRB, and / or the URCO

It is important that your human subjects activity is consistent with submissions to funding / contract entities. It is your responsibility to initiate notification procedures to any funding / contract entity of any changes in your activity that affects the use of human subjects.

Appendix B - Observation Guide

At the beginning of the deliberative forum, the researcher provided basic information about the research purpose, procedures or methods to be used, risks or discomfort anticipated along with anticipated benefits, and a statement of how the confidentiality would be maintained. The researcher shared that forum would be audio recorded for the purpose of transcription; the audio data would be transcribed into an electronic document and the recording and transcript would be stored on a password protected computer and deleted after five years. All identifiable information will be removed in any written transcripts to maintain confidentiality for each participant. The researcher shared that the data from this event would be analyzed as part of her dissertation study that has been approved by the Kansas State University Research Compliance Office (Proposal #10521).

The researcher shared that students' parent or legal guardian granted permission for them to participate in the study. The researcher stated that the students' participation is voluntary, and they could ask questions about the research as well as they are free to withdraw at any time, without loss of any opportunities of the educational enrichment program at the school district or penalty. Findings from this study may be utilized in later publications, however their name or any other identifiable data would never be used. The researcher may remind participants about healthy behaviors that reduce the risk of COVID-19 spread that they need to follow, such as handwashing, staying home when sick, maintaining 6 feet of distance, and wearing a mask. The researcher also made sure to follow environmental prevention practices such as cleaning and disinfection. Before the researcher to proceed the recording, the researcher asked if participants understand that the information, they share would be confidential and also utilized for dissertation research and asked participants for their assent to participation.

According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), the content of field notes includes: “verbal descriptions of the setting, the people, the activities; direct quotations or at least the substance of what people said; observer’s comments—put in the margins or in the running narrative and identified by underlining, italics, or bold and bracketing” (p. 152)

In line with Merriam and Tisdell (2016), the field notes can include the description of the following:

- 1) The physical setting: What is the physical environment like? What is the context? What kinds of behavior is the setting designed for? How is space allocated? What objects, resources, technologies are in the setting? The principal’s office, the school bus, the cafeteria, and the classroom vary in physical attributes as well as in the anticipated behaviors.
- 2) The participants: Describe who is in the scene, how many people, and their roles. What brings these people together? Who is allowed here? Who is not here that you would expect to be here? What are the relevant characteristics of the participants? Further, what are the ways in which the people in this setting organize themselves? “Patterns and frequency of interactions, the direction of communication patterns . . . and changes in these patterns tell us things about the social environment” (Patton, 2015, p. 367).
- 3) Activities and interactions: What is going on? Is there a definable sequence of activities? How do the people interact with the activity and with one another? How are people and

- activities connected? What norms or rules structure the activities and interactions? When did the activity begin? How long does it last? Is it a typical activity, or unusual?
- 4) Conversation: What is the content of conversations in this setting? Who speaks to whom? Who listens? Quote directly, paraphrase, and summarize conversations. If possible, use a tape recorder to back up your note-taking. Note silences and nonverbal behavior that add meaning to the exchange.
 - 5) Subtle factors: Less obvious but perhaps as important to the observation are
 - a. Informal and unplanned activities
 - b. Symbolic and connotative meanings of words
 - c. Nonverbal communication such as dress and physical space
 - d. Unobtrusive measures such as physical clues
 - e. “What does *not* happen” . . . especially if “certain things ought to happen or are expected to happen” (Patton, 2015, p. 379, emphasis in original)
 - 6) Your own behavior: You are as much a part of the scene as participants. How is your role, whether as an observer or an intimate participant, affecting the scene you are observing? What do you say and do? In addition, what thoughts are you having about what is going on? These become “observer comments,” an important part of field notes. (p. 141)

According to Bhattacharya (2017), after conducting the observation, the research should generate notes for reflective journal, by answering the following questions:

- What information were you able to gather when you were observing?
- What did you choose to focus on and why?
- What did you ignore and why?
- What level of detail did you document in your observation?
- What was especially challenging for you conducting these observations?
- What would you do similarly or differently going forward? (p. 145)

Debriefing Statement:

Thank you again for letting me observe your community conversation today. I wanted to share that all identifiable information will be removed in any written transcripts to maintain confidentiality and your privacy. The audio recording will be transcribed into a word document and the recording will be stored on a password protected computer and deleted after five years. The transcript from this (virtual) community conversation and field notes will be stored on a password protected computer and deleted after five years. The data will be analyzed as part of my dissertation study as approved by the K-State Research Compliance Office and you may choose to withdraw from the study at any time with no penalty. Findings may be utilized in later publications with all identifiable data removed. I may reach out to participants with an invitation for follow up interview. Thank you again. If you have any questions or concerns about the research process, please feel free to contact me Saya Kakim, saya@ksu.edu 785-317-7561 (cell phone) or [..]

Reference:

- Bhattacharya, K. (2017). *Fundamentals of Qualitative Research*. Routledge
- Merriam, S. B., & Tisdell, E. J. (2016). *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation* (4th ed.). Jossey Bass

Appendix C - Interview and Questionnaire Guide

1. Questionnaire

Questions will be distributed to eighth-grade students who facilitated the deliberative forum and participated in VTS and ICCD facilitation training via email. The electronic form will include basic information about the research purpose, procedures or methods to be used, risks or discomfort anticipated along with anticipated benefits, and a statement of how the confidentiality will be maintained. The survey will also include statements that the student's parent or legal guardian granted permission for them to participate in the study and the student's participation is voluntary. The survey will ask for her/his assent to participation and the participant are free to withdraw at any time, without penalty or loss of any opportunities of the educational enrichment program at the school district; she or he shares will be confidential. The data will be analyzed as part of the dissertation study that has been approved by the Kansas State University Research Compliance Office (Proposal #10521). Findings from this study may be utilized in later publications, however, the student's name or any other identifiable data will never be used.

Dr. Timothy J. Shaffer, Kansas State University, Saya Kakim, doctoral candidate, Kansas State University, and [...] wish to conduct a research study to explore how students make sense of their learning experiences in Visual Thinking Strategies informed activities integrated with Community Conversations series. Approval of the [...] principal to conduct this study was obtained. Parental or guardian consent form has been obtained as well.

This study will focus on gaining a better understanding of students' perceptions of their learning experiences, perspective taking and seeking common ground. Data collection will be conducted via an observation of the community conversation, online survey, online semi-structured interview, and a virtual focus group. The data gathered from this research will be private and confidential. The audio recordings will be transcribed into an electronic document. All original recordings will be deleted after five years. All responses will remain confidential and will be aggregated into thematic reports that do not identify individuals. The data will be analyzed as part of the dissertation study that has been approved by the Kansas State University Research Compliance Office (Proposal #10521).

You are invited to participate in this research study. You may find minor discomfort in sharing your perspectives, insights, and learning experiences. You can skip any question that makes you uncomfortable, and you can stop the interview or recording at any time. This study will assist you in fostering their learning by deepening the self-reflection regarding their experiences. Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you agree to participate in this study, you will respond to this survey and might be invited for interview. You are free to withdraw at any time, without penalty or loss of any opportunities of the educational enrichment program at the school district.

Questions:

Do you agree to participate in this research study? (Y/N)

What did you learn today? Please share your experience in detail.

How has what you heard affected your thinking?

How Visual Thinking Strategies, an activity with an image, affected your thinking?

How can you use what you learned about yourself and your peers in this community conversation?

What questions do you have about the topic of the community conversation or this event?

Please select your role today:

Please select 2-3 options when you are most available for the follow-up interview. The interview may take up to 30-45 min and will be conducted via Zoom.

Your first name:

Your grade

Your email

Your parent's email

Debriefing Statement:

Thank you for sharing your response. All identifiable information will be removed to maintain confidentiality and your privacy. The data will be analyzed as part of the dissertation study as approved by the K-State Research Compliance Office and you may choose to withdraw from the study at any time with no penalty. Findings may be utilized in later publications with all identifiable data removed. I may follow up with you with an invitation to participate in an interview. Thank you again. If you have any questions or concerns about the research process, please feel free to contact me Saya Kakim, saya@ksu.edu 785-317-7561 (cell phone) or [..]

2. Online Program Evaluation Questionnaire

Questions:

Describe the Stories Matter (VTS discussions, community conversations) experience that has had the greatest impact on your ability to speak in front of others.

What other “take-aways” do you have from your experience as an [...] Youth Facilitator?

What would you set as your next leadership and/or communication growth goal?

Would you recommend [...] Youth Leadership facilitation training to your peers? Why?

What do you think should be the next step for this project team?

What are you still wondering about?

3. Synchronous Semi-structured Online Interview

Due to COVID-19 restrictions, interviews were conducted virtually using the K-State's Zoom license 5.3.1 version, a videoconferencing platform which enables audio recordings. Participants: eighth-grade students who facilitated the deliberative forum and participated in VTS and ICCD facilitation training.

The researcher will provide basic information about the research purpose, procedures or methods to be used, risks or discomfort anticipated along with anticipated benefits, and a

statement of how the confidentiality will be maintained. The researcher will share that the interview will take approximately 45 minutes, and it will be audio recorded for the purpose of transcription; the audio data will be transcribed into an electronic document and the recording will be stored on a password protected computer and deleted after five years. The transcript will be stored on a password protected computer and digital files will be deleted after five years. All identifiable information will be removed in any written transcripts to maintain confidentiality for each participant. The data from this event will be analyzed as part of my dissertation study that has been approved by the Kansas State University Research Compliance Office (Proposal #10521).

The researcher will share that the student's parent or legal guardian granted permission for them to participate in the study. The researcher will state that the students' participation is voluntary, and she or he can ask questions about the research as well as they are free to withdraw at any time, without penalty or loss of any opportunities of the educational enrichment program at the school district. Findings from this study may be utilized in later publications, however, the student's name or any other identifiable data will never be used. The research will inform the participant that she or he does not have to answer any question they feel uncomfortable answering and may leave the discussion at any time.

Before the researcher to proceed the recording, the researcher will ask if the participant understands that the information, she or he shares will be confidential and also utilized for dissertation research and will ask the participant for her/his assent to participation.

Questions:

Can you describe your typical day at school?

Could you please talk about how and when you started your involvement with community conversations?

How many community conversations have you participated?

How many community conversations have you facilitated?

How did you learn and get involved with Stories Matter? How long have you been involved?

What important lessons have you learned personally? What did you learn about yourself? What experiences and events made an impact on you?

What conclusions can you draw from your experience in activities?

What did you learn about others and yourself?

How were you different when you finished this experience?

Can you share any big "a-ha" moments when you participated in community conversations?

What happened?

What did you learn during the Community conversation? How did you learn that? Can you share in more details?

Can you share any big "a-ha" moments when you participated in Visual Thinking Strategies (Stories Matter)? What happened?

Can you describe a discussion during Visual Thinking Strategies that you think went well? How did it start? Then what happened?

Could you describe the main activities and events that happen since you started participated or during last year in Stories Matter?

Can you describe your big “a-ha” moments and important “take-aways” have you learned from your experience as an [...] Youth Facilitator?

Can you tell me about your experience as [...] Youth Facilitator? What did you learn from the experience? What part of your experience was most challenging? What part did you find surprising? What did you observe?

Follow up questions regarding an individual’s survey response

Reflecting on your experience in Stories Matter (participation or facilitation or training experience), please select an image from the Digital Visual Explorer deck (<https://www.leadership.ventures/visualexplorer>) that represents big “a-ha” moments / important “take-aways”, engagement in the youth leadership team over the last year? Please share each image and how the picture is connected to your thoughts and your experience. Please share the image you chose and why you chose it. How is the picture connected to your thoughts? Describe the connection you made between the image and the question by explaining how the picture represents your response/reaction.

Is there anything else about the experience you want to share?

4. Online Follow-Up Questionnaire

We would like to continue learning about your experience in Stories Matter, including VTS discussions, Community Conversations, and Communication Bootcamp. Your thoughts matter as we move forward, and they will be kept private and confidential. Therefore, any information that can identify you will be removed. Your participation in this study is voluntary. You are free to withdraw at any time, without penalty or loss of any opportunities of the educational enrichment program at the school district. If there is a question you don’t want to answer, you can leave it blank. There are no right or wrong answers, so please answer all questions honestly.

The data will be analyzed as part of the dissertation study that has been approved by the Kansas State University Research Compliance Office (Proposal #10521).

Questions:

Do you agree to participate in this research study? (Y/N)

Reflecting on your role as AMS Youth Facilitator (including your participation and/or facilitation in Community Conversations and VTS), why do you think Stories Matter is important?

How are you different now because of your participation or/and facilitation in Community Conversations (overall)?

Can you describe one example of how your experience in the recent community conversation on March 12th, 2021, changed your everyday interactions with peers in the school or/and outside of the school (family)? Please share in detail. Note: If you didn’t have a chance to participate on March 12th, please recall to a different community conversation that you attended/facilitated

Please take a picture that captures your new understanding of yourself and others that you connect to your participation in the recent community conversation. Please describe what is

happening in the picture and how your picture connected to your thinking, feelings, and emotions.

If you prefer to describe drawing, painting, a visual card, or collage, it would be appreciated as well. You can upload your image here.

How are you different now because of your participation or/and facilitation in Visual Thinking Strategies (overall)?

Can you describe one example of how your experience in VTS on March 12th, 2021, changed your everyday interactions with peers in school or/and outside of the school (family)? Please share in detail. Note: If you didn't have a chance to participate on March 12th or would like to reflect on a different session, please recall to a different VTS session that you attended/facilitated.

Please take a picture that captures your new understanding of yourself and others that you connect to your participation in VTS on March 12th or another VTS session. Please describe what is happening in the picture and how your picture connected to your thinking, feelings, and emotions. If you prefer to describe drawing, painting, visual card, or collage, it would be appreciated as well. You can upload your image here.

What questions do you have about the current research study that you are part of?

Debriefing Statement:

Thank you for sharing your response. All identifiable information will be removed to maintain confidentiality and your privacy. The data will be analyzed as part of the dissertation study as approved by the K-State Research Compliance Office and you may choose to withdraw from the study at any time with no penalty. Findings may be utilized in later publications with all identifiable data removed. If you have any questions or concerns about the research process, please feel free to contact me Saya Kakim, saya@ksu.edu 785-317-7561 (cell phone) or [..]

Appendix D - Focus Group Discussion Guide

The focus group was conducted in-person on the middle school site. Participants: Eighth-grade students who have been previously interviewed. For students who were not able to participant in-person, they were able to join via the K-State's Zoom license 5.3.1 version.

The researcher provided basic information about the research purpose, procedures or methods to be used, risks or discomfort anticipated along with anticipated benefits, and a statement of how the confidentiality will be maintained. The researcher shared that the focus group discussion would take approximately 60 minutes, and it would be audio recorded for the purpose of transcription; the audio data would be transcribed into an electronic document and the recording and transcript would be stored on a password protected computer and deleted after five years. All identifiable information will be removed in any written transcripts to maintain confidentiality for each participant. The data from this event will be analyzed as part of the researcher's dissertation study that has been approved by the Kansas State University Research Compliance Office (Proposal #10521).

The researcher shared that the students' parent or legal guardian granted permission for them to participate in the study. The researcher stated that the students' participation is voluntary, and they can ask questions about the research as well as they are free to withdraw at any time, without penalty or loss of any opportunities of the educational enrichment program at the school district. Findings from this study may be utilized in later publications, however, your name or any other identifiable data will never be used. The research informed participants that they do not have to answer any question they feel uncomfortable answering and may leave the discussion at any time or use audio only. Before the researcher to proceed the recording, the researcher asked if participants understood that the information, what they share would be confidential and also utilized for dissertation research and asked the participant for their assent to participation.

The themes and visuals were be displayed using an interactive online platform, so that participants had an opportunity to comment the themes in real-time. Participants will be asked to reflect on why the experience was significant by answering the following prompt questions:

What did you observe? Is there anything in themes that stuck out to you or surprised you? What else would you add to the themes?

Does this match your experience? Do you want to chance anything? Do you want to add anything?

In what ways these themes meaningful to you? What are your comments on the themes? Do they raise any questions for you?

Would you criticize them? Would you like to say more about them?

What about that experience was most valuable to you?

What was particularly positive/memorable during that project? What sticks in your mind?

What conclusions can you draw from your experience in activities?

Participants will be asked to brainstorm on next steps: How will you apply what you learned from your experience? What follow-up is needed to address any challenges or difficulties? If you

could do the project again, what would you do differently? What does your ideal future look like for the team?

Debriefing Statement:

Thank you all for sharing your insights. I wanted to share that all identifiable information will be removed in any written transcripts to maintain confidentiality and your privacy. The audio recording will be transcribed into a word document and the recording will be stored on a password protected computer and deleted after five years. The transcript from this focus group will be stored on a password protected computer and deleted after five years. The data will be analyzed as part of my dissertation study as approved by the K-State Research Compliance Office and you may choose to withdraw from the study at any time with no penalty. Findings may be utilized in later publications with all identifiable data removed. If you have any questions or concerns about the research process, please feel free to contact me Saya Kakim, saya@ksu.edu 785-317-7561 (cell phone) or [..]

Appendix E - Member Checking

Please read the document and choose one of the ways you would like to respond:

Questions:

What are your reactions and thoughts about the interview transcript?

Does this match your experience?

Do you want to change anything?

Do you want to add anything? Please be as specific as possible.

If you participated/facilitated the community conversation on March 12th, what opinions and decisions have been made or changed based on your experience on March 12th, 2021?

If you didn't participate, please share what changes in your opinions and decisions have been made or changed based on your experience on April 12th (the Focus Group Discussion)? Please be as specific as possible.

Is there anything else about your experience in VTS and community conversations you want to share?

Appendix E Table E.1

Interview Transcript	Your Comments
Community conversations (including March 12 th CC) Facilitation Participation	
Visual Thinking Strategies: Facilitation Participation	
How different you are	
How you see others	
Training (VTS, ICDD, Bootcamp)	

Appendix F - Deliberative Pedagogy Learning Outcomes Rubric

Learning outcomes	Entry level: Self-affirming	Level one: Benchmark Absorbing	Level two: Milestone processing	Level three: Capstone deliberating
Collaboration	Prioritizes one's self-interest and opinions	Begins to engage in political discourse, comparing one's own self-interested position to others self-interested positions	Recognizes that in a democracy, perspectives may differ; demonstrates tolerance	Understands civic responsibility and demonstrates a commitment to work with others to come to share decisions
Reason giving	Affirms one's own opinions or positions without offering evidence	Recognizes the importance and use of evidence to support positions	Evaluates the strengths and weaknesses of different types of evidence	Uses complex reasoning to balance different types of evidence in own and others' arguments
Synthesis of ideas and information	Uses ideas and positions that affirm one's own position	Primarily uses summary and paraphrase to consider others' positions	Critically analyzes positions in light of individual, community, and global realities	Analyzes and crystallizes a variety of positions to draw out conclusions for the community good
Understanding of tradeoffs and tensions	Seeks solutions that do not recognize the tradeoffs or tensions in a position	Recognizes that there are tradeoffs intentions in public decisions that may minimize those associated with one's own position	Identifies various things that are valued for a given issue; weighs and trade-offs and tensions for different groups and the community	Prioritizes values intention by articulating the trade-offs and benefits of choices, and identifying preferred choices for the community
Reflection	Maintains position without engaging other perspectives	Pauses in decision-making; uses active listening skills to better understand other positions	Recognizes or modifies a position in light of new information or perspectives	Recognizes information as situational and contingent; applies new insights to create innovative options for

				addressing a problem
Awareness of relationships	Focuses on self without engaging others in the community	Tends to prioritize self in relation to the community	Acknowledges and recognizes diverse opinions in the community	Considers the complexity of community relationships
Empathy	Others' lived experiences and perspectives are not or rarely considered	Acknowledges that others have different lived experiences and perspectives.	Willing to listen and shows interest and others lived experiences and perspectives	Understands different perspectives and demonstrates willingness to work through differences or disagreements

Reference:

Drury, S. A. M., Brammer, L. R., & Doherty, J. (2017). Assessment through a Deliberative Pedagogy Learning Outcomes Rubric. In T. J. Shaffer, N. V. Longo, I. Manosevitch, & M. S. Thomas (Ed.). *Deliberative Pedagogy: Teaching and Learning for Democratic Engagement* (pp. 191-201). Michigan State University.

Appendix G - Parental or guardian consent form and minor assent form

March ____2021

Dear Parent or Guardian:

INTRODUCTION

Dr. Timothy J. Shaffer, Kansas State University, Saya Kakim, doctoral candidate, Kansas State University, and [...], wish to conduct a research study to explore how seventh and eighth-grade students make sense of their learning experiences in Visual Thinking Strategies informed activities integrated with Community Conversations series. Approval of the [.....] principal to conduct this study was obtained prior to this announcement. By signing this consent form, parents or legal guardians agree to allow their child to participate in the study. Any data collected will be reported as part of a group; individual student names will not be used.

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROJECT

This study will focus on gaining a better understanding of seventh and eighth-grade students' perceptions of their learning experiences, perspective taking and seeking common ground. Data collection will be conducted via an observation of the community conversation, online survey, online semi-structured interview, and a virtual focus group. During the community conversation, a deliberative forum, the researcher will employ non-participant observation to capture communicative interactions around the discussed issue. During the online interview, the researcher will ask students to reflect on their experiences and answer questions about various aspects of their interactions and learning. The students can skip any question that makes them uncomfortable, and they can stop the interview or recording at any time. The goal of the virtual focus group is to create an opportunity for students to reflect on their learning experiences, provide feedback about the activities, identify changes that can be made, and brainstorm about possible collective action. The online interview is expected to take about 45 minutes to complete, and the focus group is estimated to take 60 min. The community conversation, interviews, and focus group will be audio recorded for the purpose of transcription; the audio data will be transcribed into an electronic document and the recording will be stored on a password protected computer and will be deleted after five years. The transcript will be stored on a password protected computer and digital files will be deleted after five years. All identifiable information will be removed in any written transcripts to maintain confidentiality for each student. With this specific COVID-19 pandemic, interview and focus group data will be collected through the use of Zoom, a videoconferencing platform which enables audio recordings. Regarding non-participant observation of the community conversation, data will be collected via Zoom or in-person. The study will run from March – April 2021.

BENEFITS AND RISKS OF THE STUDY

The students may find minor discomfort in sharing their perspectives, insights, and learning experiences. During the virtual focus group, they may experience minor discomfort in sharing their perspectives in front of peers. While we will be asking students to share their personal learning experiences, all responses will remain confidential and will be aggregated into thematic reports that do not identify individuals. There is no additional risk beyond those experienced in the education setting and interactions with peers. We will seek to minimize the risks by providing detailed information about the research purposes and process.

This study will assist students in fostering their learning by deepening the self-reflection regarding their experiences. This study has the potential to bring positive impact on developing participatory approaches to youth capacity building and deliberative civic education. This study also has potential to contribute to deliberative civic engagement theoretical frameworks. The results will be used to inform and improve the replication of the program in other middle schools.

In case of conducting the community conversation, the students will be reminded about healthy behaviors that reduce the risk of COVID-19 spread such as handwashing, staying home when sick, maintaining 6 feet of distance, and wearing a mask. The research team will also make sure to follow environmental prevention practices such as cleaning and disinfection.

CONFIDENTIALITY

We will collect audio recorded data (interviews, focus group) through the use of Zoom platform and audio recording from the community conversation. All participants should be verbally reminded that recording will occur at the beginning of any part of the research. Zoom platform is the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPPA) compliant. Zoom provides protection for meeting data since Zoom communications are established using 256-bit TLS encryption and all shared content can be encrypted using AES-256 encryption, and optional end-to-end encryption.

The data gathered from this research will be private and confidential. The audio recordings will be transcribed into an electronic document. All original recordings from interviews and the focus group will be stored on a password protected computer and will be deleted after five years. Your child's information will be assigned a code number and pseudonym. Confidential transcripts will be password protected and stored in the password protected graduate student's personal computer as well as in a shared, password protected Kansas State University OneDrive folder. The list connecting your child's name to this code will be stored on a password protected computer separately and will be destroyed after 5 years.

The raw data with personal identifiers will only be seen by the graduate student. Confidential transcripts will be kept in word documents and stored for up to 5 years. We may publish the results of this study, but individual student names will not be used in reported findings, and data will be reported in the aggregate or using pseudonyms. The audio recordings and transcripts will

not be used for future studies or distributed to another investigator for future research studies without additional informed consent.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION

Your child's participation in this study is voluntary. The students will be informed that they do not have to answer any question they feel uncomfortable answering, and they can also use only audio during the focus group if they want.

WITHDRAWAL

The students may leave the discussion at any time and their participation or nonparticipation will not lead to the loss of any benefits to which they are otherwise entitled or will not influence their grade in any way. To withdraw from the study, the parent or participant must notify the researchers. Participants or their parents can request that their individual results be excluded from the final report.

QUESTIONS, COMPLAINTS AND RIGHTS

Participants and their parents/legal guardians have a right to view the results of the study. If you have questions about this research, including questions about scheduling the interview, focus group or regarding the community conversation, you can contact Saya Kakim, doctoral candidate, saya@ksu.edu and 785-317-7561 (cell phone) or [...].

If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, or wish to obtain information, ask questions or discuss any concerns about this study with someone other than the researcher(s), you may contact Rick Scheidt, Chair, Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects, 203 Fairchild Hall, Kansas State University, Manhattan, KS 66506, (785) 532-3224; Cheryl Doerr, Associate Vice President for Research Compliance, 203 Fairchild Hall, Kansas State University, Manhattan, KS 66506, (785) 532-3224.

DISCLAIMER

The [...] grant project is a sub-award from KSDE and funded through the U.S. Department of Education's Striving Readers Comprehensive Literacy Initiative. It is therefore an equal opportunity employer/program which provides auxiliary aids and services upon request to individuals with disabilities by calling 711 or 800-766-3777 Voice/TTY.

[...] does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, disability, or age in its programs and activities and provides equal access to the Boy Scouts and other designated youth groups.

CONSENT STATEMENTS

By signing this document, the administrator grants permission for student data collection and all reporting necessary for this study.

By signing this document, the parent/legal guardian grants permission for their child to participate in the study and has the opportunity to have his or her questions answered.

Student participants will be informed of the research purpose and activities and will be asked for their assent to participate upon parental approval.

School Administrator
Signature

Title of Administrator

Typed/Printed Name

Date

Parental/Legal Guardian Signature

Typed/Printed Name

Date

Student Signature (Assent)

Typed/Printed Name

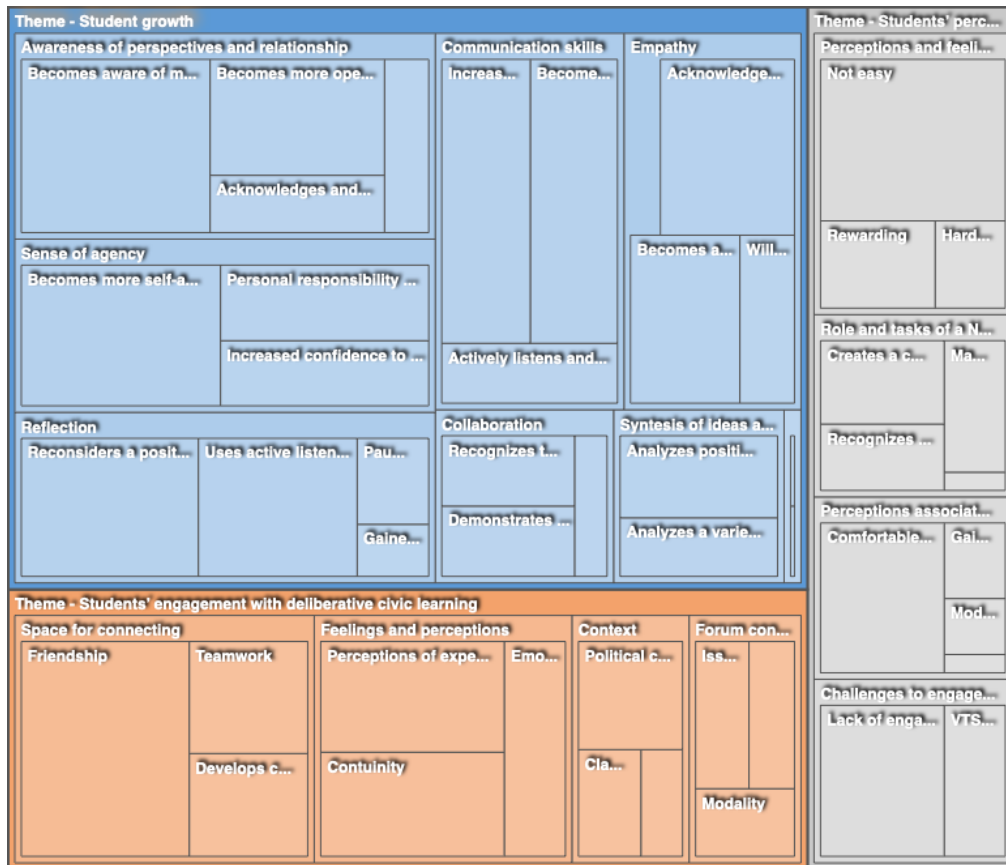
Date

Appendix H - Supplementary materials

Appendix H Table H.1 Thematic Descriptions

Theme	How many participants mentioned it across interview and focus group (thematic analysis)	Presence in transcript, field notes, and/or memos (content analysis)
Theme 1. The gifted middle school students' engagement with deliberative civic learning	8	Yes
Theme 2. The gifted middle school students' perceptions of facilitation experience	8	Yes
Theme 3. The gifted middle school students' growth and development	8	Yes

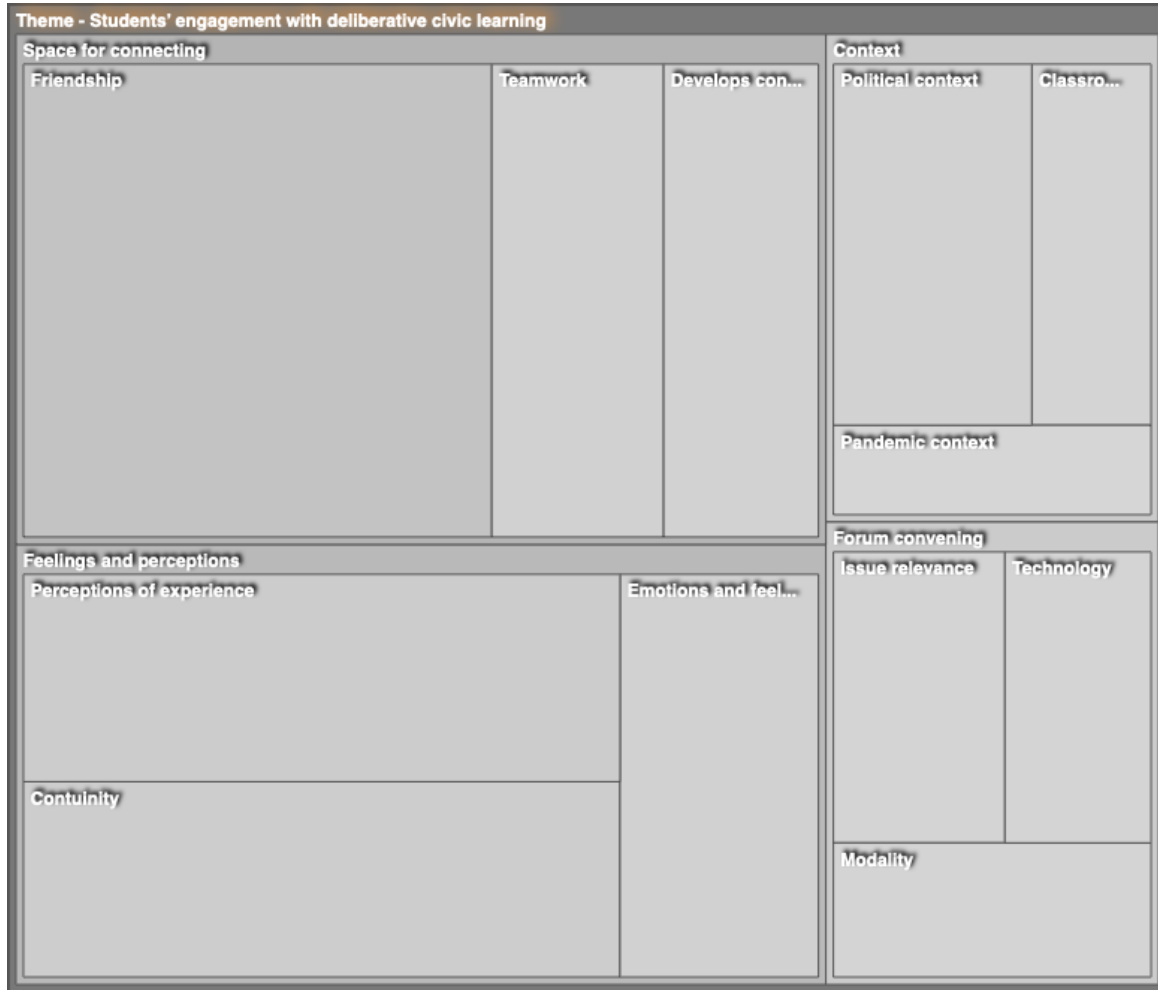
Appendix H Figure H.1 Hierarchy Chart: Main Themes



Appendix H Table H.2 Students' Engagement With Deliberative Civic Learning

Category	Code	How many participants mentioned it across interview and focus group (thematic analysis)	Presence in transcript, field notes, and/or memos (content analysis)
Feelings and perceptions	Emotions and feelings	8	Yes
	Perceptions of experiences		
	Continuity		
Space for connecting	Develops connections	8	Yes
	Friendship		
	Teamwork		
Forum convening	Technology	6	Yes
	Modality		
	Issue relevance		
Context	Classroom context	7	Yes
	Pandemic context		
	Political context		

Appendix H Figure H.2 Hierarchy Chart: Students' Engagement With Deliberative Civic Learning

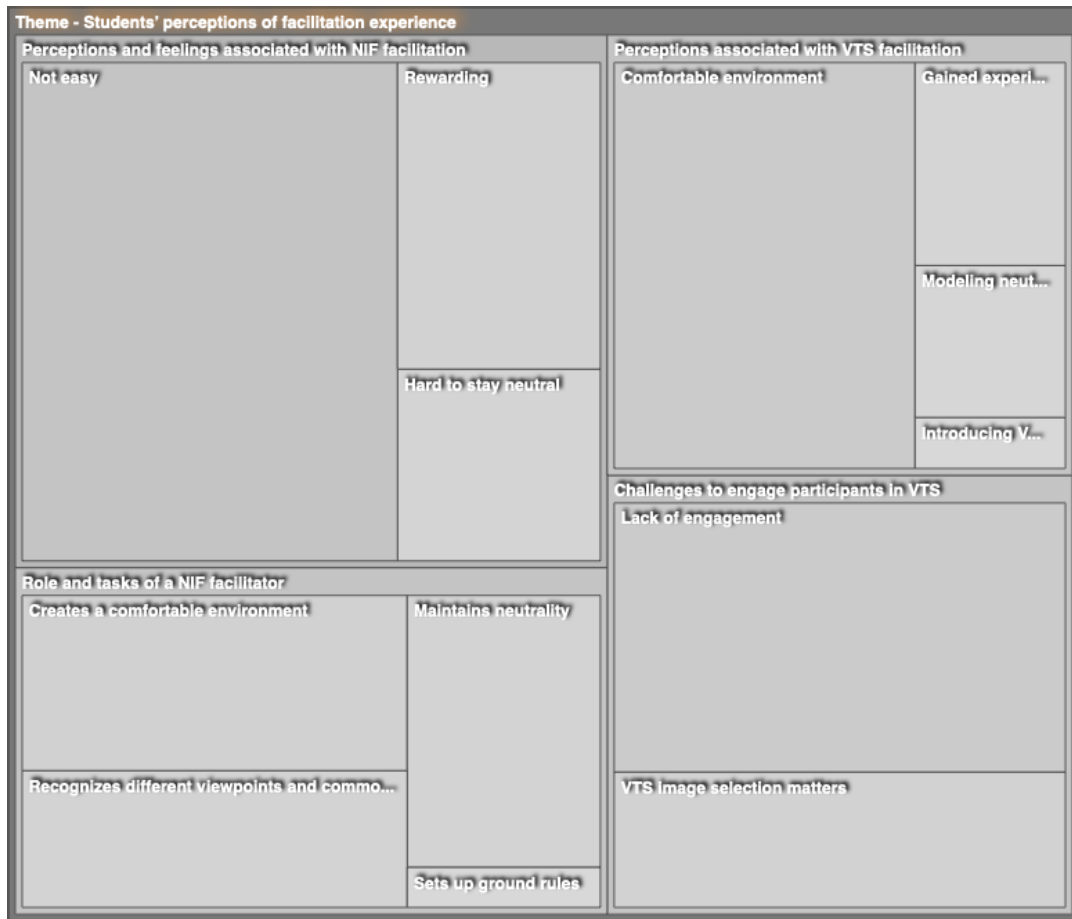


Appendix H Table H.3 Students' Perceptions of Facilitation Experience

Category	Code	How many participants mentioned it across interview and focus group (thematic analysis)	Presence in transcript, field notes, and/or memos (content analysis)
Role and tasks of a NIF facilitator	Creates a comfortable environment Maintains neutrality Sets up ground rules	6	Yes

	Recognizes different viewpoints and common ground		
Perceptions and feelings associated with NIF facilitation	Rewarding Not easy Hard to stay neutral	6	Yes
Challenges to engage participants in VTS	Lack of engagement Image selection	6	Yes
Perceptions associated with VTS facilitation	Gains experience Comfortable environment Models neutrality	7	Yes

Appendix H Figure H.3 Hierarchy Chart: Students' Perceptions of Facilitation Experience



Appendix H Figure H.4 Visual Thinking Strategies Image #1



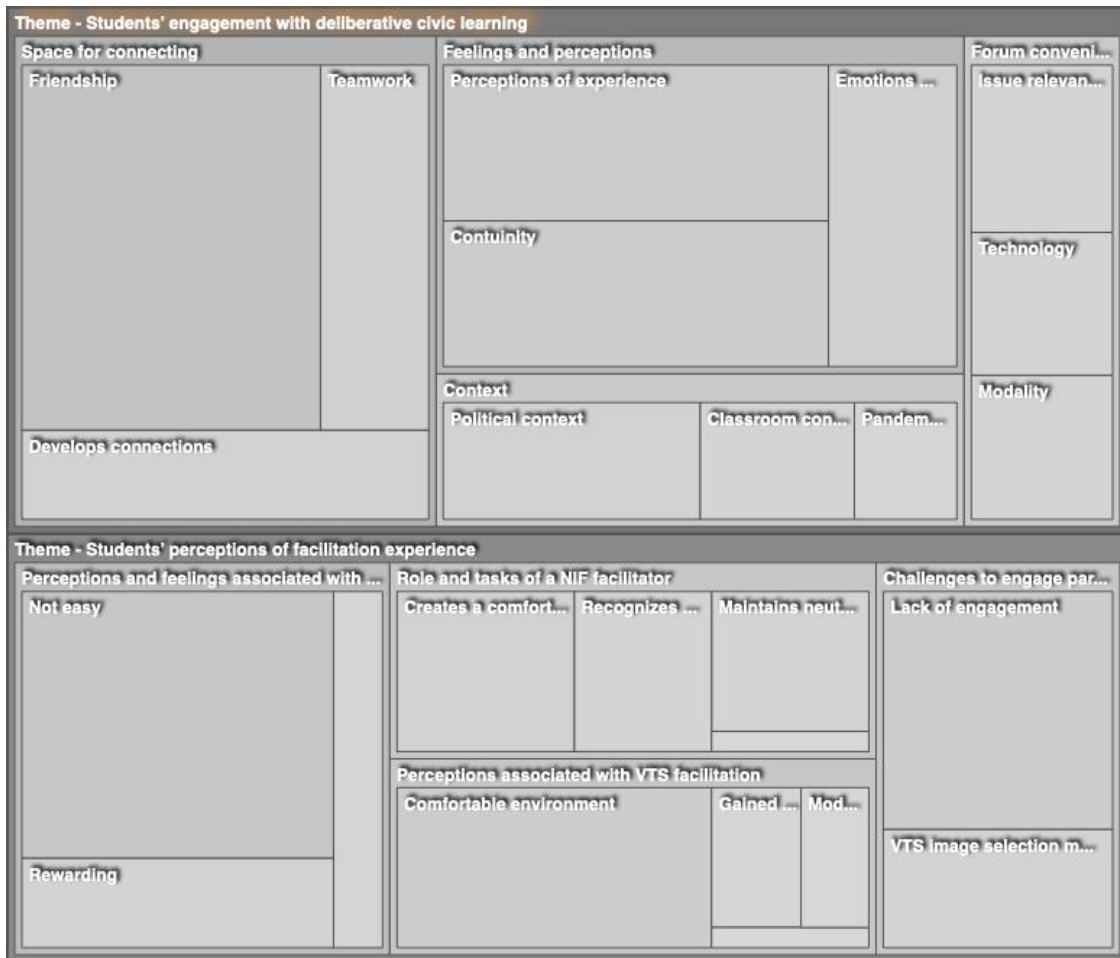
Note: Artist: Tetsuya Ishida, Untitled.

Appendix H Figure H.5 Visual Thinking Strategies Image #2



Note: Artist: Mark Steinmetz. Title: The Players

Appendix H Figure H.6 Hierarchy Chart – Students’ Engagement with Deliberative Civic Learning



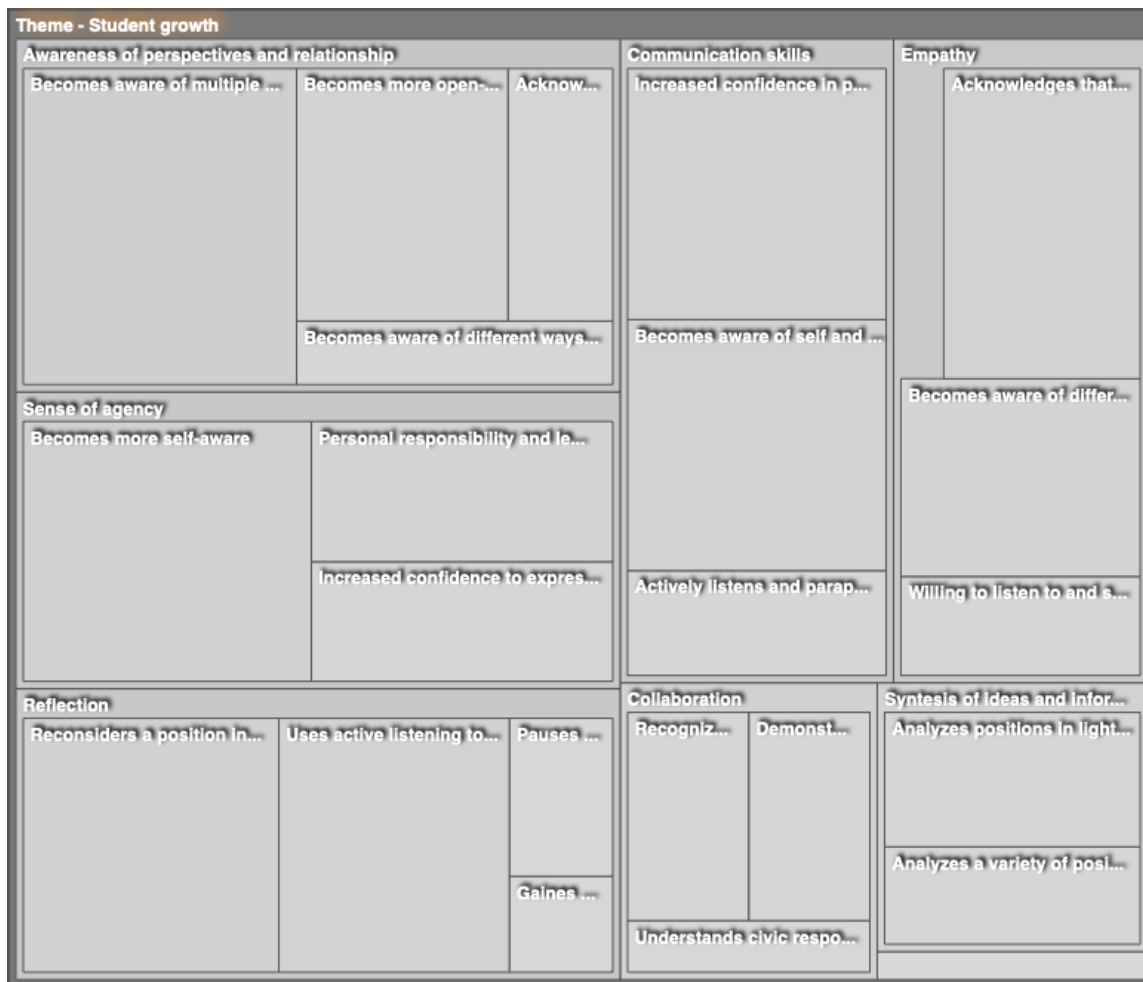
Appendix H Table H.4 Students’ Growth and Development

Category	Code	How many participants mentioned it across interview and focus group (thematic analysis)	Presence in transcript, field notes, and/or memos (content analysis)
Reflection	Pauses thinking and decision-making Uses active listening to better understand of other position	8	

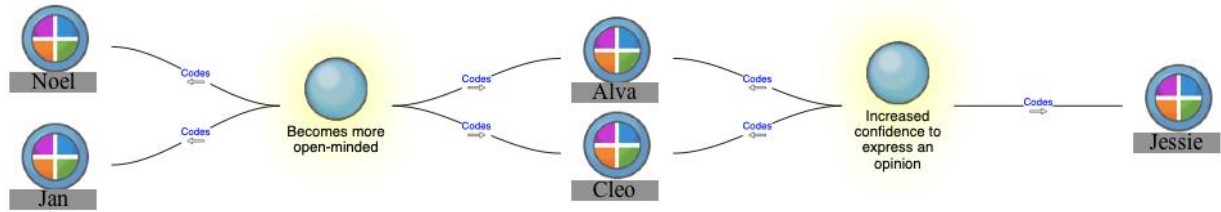
	Reconsiders a position in light of new information or perspective Gains a better understanding of other's thinking through VTS		
Empathy	Becomes aware of different perspectives Acknowledges that others have different lived experiences Willing to listen to and show interest in others' lived experiences and perspectives	8	
Communication skills	Increased confidence in public speaking Actively listens and paraphrases Becomes aware of self and others' communication styles	7	
Awareness of perspectives and relationship	Becomes aware of different ways of thinking through VTS Becomes aware of multiple interpretations of artwork Becomes more open-minded Acknowledges and recognizes diverse opinions	8	
Collaboration	Recognizes that perspectives may differ; demonstrates tolerance Understands civic responsibility and demonstrates a commitment to work with others to come to shared decisions Demonstrates interest in engaging with a broader community	7	
Synthesis of ideas and information	Uses summary and paraphrase to consider others' positions Analyzes positions in light of individual and community realities Analyzes a variety of positions to draw out conclusions for the community's good	6	Yes

Understanding of tradeoffs and tensions	Recognizes that there are tradeoffs Identifies tensions for different groups and the community	-	Yes
Reason giving	Recognizes the importance and use of evidence to support positions Evaluates the strengths and weaknesses of different types of evidence	1	Yes
Sense of agency	Increased confidence to express an opinion Personal responsibility and leadership Becomes more self-aware	8	

Appendix H Figure H.7 Hierarchy chart – Students’ Growth and Development



Appendix H Figure H.8 Comparison Diagram #1



Appendix H Figure H.9 Comparison Diagram #2

