DELIBERATION AS A CORE PART OF TEACHER EDUCATION AND CIVICS CLASSROOMS[1]

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Abstract. The author argues that deliberation should be an integral part of secondary civics classrooms and teacher education programs. Drawing on a wide range of research, she contends that teaching and learning deliberative skills has the potential to build individual and group civic capacity. She focuses on the results of an evaluation of one 10-nation project, *Deliberating in a Democracy*, which suggest that teachers can learn to conduct deliberations in secondary classrooms. Further, across countries, students reported increases in their understanding of issues, their ability to state their opinions, and their confidence in talking about controversial issues with peers. Most importantly, students demonstrated greater perspective-taking abilities than a comparison group not involved in the project. The potential limitations and weaknesses of the deliberative model are discussed, as are the implications for civic pedagogy and learning.

Keywords. Citizenship, citizenship education, civics, social studies education

> *I think that in this class … in this project, Deliberating in a Democracy, we're learning to express ourselves and express our opinions and we learn to listen to other people, what they have to say and then we should make … and then we'll learn to make a conclusion about everything that is important. (Biljana,[2] Macedonian focus group)*

> *And I learned better how to express myself, of course, and it was great. So I have to … I need to know how to express myself. I learned to talk about the idea, to express your ideas, not against the person who said something, but against the idea. (Veronica, Romanian focus group)*

> *And I could say on behalf of the whole class that people do like these deliberations. And I like them personally because they teach us to express our opinions and thoughts and to engage in the development of civic society. (Irena, Ukrainian focus group)*

The students quoted above were describing their experiences with the *Deliberating in a Democracy (DID) Project*, a project aimed at teaching teachers and students from 10 countries how to deliberate about controversial public issues in their classrooms. The project engaged teachers in a minimum of three professional development sessions per year, during which teachers learned a specific model of deliberation, Structured Academic Controversy (SAC), and used the model in their secondary classrooms. I have been the lead evaluator for the project the past six years (2004-2010). The project has been quite successful in enhancing students' ability to formulate and state their opinions, listen to opposing viewpoints, and take multiple perspectives. Overall, the teachers did not find the pedagogical model difficult to implement.

In this article, I describe deliberation and the SAC model, how the model was used in the *DID Project*, and highlights of the evaluation results. I conclude by arguing that despite some cautionary notes, deliberation has an important role in teacher education and civic education.

DELIBERATION: WHAT IT IS AND IS NOT

Civic deliberation is the serious and thoughtful consideration of conflicting views on controversial public issues for the purpose of decision making. Theorists generally agree that there are at least three criteria for a genuine deliberation: the issue is contested, that is, there are legitimate differences of opinion around the issue; the setting must be public; and people must have equal access to the deliberations (Conover, Searing, & Crewe, 2002). Deliberative democracy theorists envision public spaces in which ordinary people from diverse backgrounds come together to think deeply about substantive public issues (see Gutmann & Thompson, 1996; Habermas, 1996). Democracy in this sense is less a form of government than a way coming together and working through different viewpoints about common issues. Reasoning about issues in a public forum is the cornerstone of deliberative democracy. In a deliberative forum, citizens study an issue, consider alternative solutions and potential consequences, and develop some consensus on ways to address the issue. This is not to say that all participants agree

with the consensus position, but that through thoughtful consideration of the issue, areas of agreement are brought into relief.

Democratic theorist Amy Guttman (2000) believes that one of the key ways in which citizens can talk about public issues is through deliberation: «Deliberation is public discussion and decision making that aim to reach a justifiable resolution, where possible, and to live respectfully with those reasonable disagreements that remain unresolvable» (p. 75). The issues must be those about which reasonable people can have legitimate disagreements. Deliberating about how our youth should be educated and the content of that education is a legitimate issue; it would not make sense, however, to deliberate on whether our youth should be educated. There is near unanimity across cultures that youth should be educated (though there are legitimate differences of opinion as to how, when, and by whom).

In understanding the essence of deliberation, it is also helpful to consider what it is *not*. Deliberation is *not* debate. In a debate, there are winners and losers; the goal, in fact, is to win the debate through verbal sparring, characterized by the skillful and clever arrangement of arguments and counterarguments. Participants present the best possible case for their side, ignoring or diminishing the weaknesses in their own arguments and the strengths of the opposing side's claims. The goal of civic deliberation, however, is not to «win.» Instead, the goal is to arrive at the best possible solution to an issue through the thoughtful consideration of alternatives. In deliberation, the group seeks to uncover the best possible rationales for alternative positions, ferret out their weaknesses, and consider the possible short- and long-term consequences associated with positions.

A RATIONALE FOR DELIBERATION

Advocates of the deliberative process suggest that it has beneficial effects on the individual, the deliberative group, and the broader democratic polity. The individual becomes more knowledgeable about the issue; as part of a group, he or she also develops an enhanced understanding of the issue by considering multiple perspectives. The group process itself has the potential to foster a sense of community as members strive toward the mutual goal of achieving consensus. Ideally decisions are based on «*our* best thinking» and «*our* shared interests» as opposed to «*my* best thinking» and «*my* self-interest.» «I,» in essence, become «we.» Perhaps most important, the process may enhance belief in the legitimacy of the

democratic process. I may not like the group's consensus position, but if I feel the process was fair and all views were given an equal hearing, I am more likely to feel positive about the group's decision. The deliberative process itself is thought to enhance belief in core democratic tenets—fairness, equality, tolerance, and cooperation, for example.

Despite a rich theoretical base, the empirical evidence for the benefits of deliberative democracy is limited. This is not surprising—there are few public spaces explicitly designed to allow citizens to come together to deliberate issues of common concern. Thus, studies of deliberation have usually been in settings that have been intentionally developed for deliberation. Examples of programs and activities grounded in deliberative democracy theory include, among others, Brazil's public management councils (Coelho, Pozzoni, & Montoya, 2005); Denmark's consensus conferences (Hendriks, 2005); James Fishkin's deliberation polls (http://cdd.stanford.edu/), the Jefferson Center's citizens juries (www.jefferson-center.org), and the National Issues Forums sponsored by the Kettering Foundation (http://www.nifi.org). Fishkin's systematic studies (n.d.) of deliberation polls have consistently shown increased issue knowledge and significant opinion change, as did Barabas's (2004) study of a deliberative forum.

Critics of deliberative democracy often express concern that deliberative spaces may not be inclusive, and that even if they are purposefully inclusive spaces, some individuals' and groups' views will be privileged over others' (see Sanders, 1997, for a cogent critique of deliberation). Individuals bring to the deliberative table varying levels of knowledge about issues, different skills in articulating their views, and different degrees of willingness to express their opinions. Ideally, deliberation is predicated on participants recognizing and valuing the contributions of all group members, but in practice, this may be difficult to achieve.

SCHOOLS, DISCUSSION, AND DELIBERATION

Schools, and civics classrooms more specifically, have traditionally not assumed a prominent role in preparing young people to engage in discussions about public issues. Research indicates that many students are unlikely to be exposed to in-depth discussions about public issues (Kahne, Rodriguez, Smith & Thiede, 2000; Torney-Purta, Lehmann, Oswald, & Schulz, 2001), and low-socioeconomic status, immigrant, and urban students are particularly unlikely to experience such discussions

(Conover & Searing, 2000). Further, some research suggests what teachers identify as «discussions» are more characteristic of recitation (Alvermann, O'Brien, & Dillon, 1990; Larson & Parker, 1996).

Students and teachers often have a minimalist conception of discussion in which the mere fact that students state their opinions in class (and feel free to do so) constitutes a discussion. Researchers who observe classrooms, however, are often looking for substantive discussions in which there is an exchange of viewpoints, an exploration of multiple perspectives, and defense of positions with evidence. To be fair to students and teachers, there is evidence that their conception of discussion is shared by the adult population. British and U.S. adults report that they enjoy exchanging their opinions with others (considered a discussion), but truly dislike «*contested* discussions» in which participants challenge one another (Conover et al., 2002).

Although public issues discussions may not occur in classrooms as frequently as democratic theorists and scholars would like, there is evidence that when such discussions *do* occur (both inside and outside the classroom) they are related to various desirable outcomes, including higher political knowledge, interest, trust, and participation (Andolina, Jenkins, Zukin, & Keeter, 2003; Conover & Searing, 2000; Hahn, 1998). In over two-thirds of the 28 countries involved in the IEA Civic Education study (Torney-Purta et al., 2001), students' report of «experienc[ing] their classrooms as places to investigate issues and explore their opinions and those of their peers» (p. 137) was a significant predictor of their civic knowledge and their stated expectation that they would vote as adults (pp. 151-155).

Parker (2010) argues that public schools are a particularly appropriate site for discussions, including deliberations, because schools bring together students from diverse backgrounds and perspectives in a public space that is ostensibly designed for the express purpose of educating democratic citizens. While students in the typical school are likely to have some close friends, they also share this space with others who may best be identified as acquaintances or even strangers. These latter groups are less likely to share a given student's interests and experiences, and thus schools become places in which students must interact with students who hold a diverse range of interests and experiences, though admittedly that range is sometimes narrow and sometimes wide. Still, the school is a more diverse setting than most students would choose if left to their own devices. Social network studies have repeatedly demonstrated that people tend to associ-

ate with people who share their worldview (Mutz, 2006). Consequently when they do discuss politics, their thinking is unlikely to be challenged.

The school offers one of the best possible sites for face-to-face encounters with people who think and experience the world differently from one's self. That schools in democratic societies are typically charged with educating youth for citizenship gives them the responsibility and the moral authority to engage students in controversial issues discussions; as previously noted, the research has consistently indicated that students who participate in issues discussions in open and supportive classrooms are more likely to demonstrate qualities associated with enlightened and engaged citizenship. If public schools are to take their mission to educate students for citizenship seriously, then teaching with and for discussion (using discussion as a method for learning, teaching discussion as a way of engaging with other citizens, see Parker & Hess, 2001), then discussion should be an integral part of citizenship education.

In education, deliberation is considered one form of discussion. Parker and Hess (2001) identify three types of discussion: deliberation, seminar, and conversation. Each serves a different purpose, and engages students in different ways. Deliberation, according to Parker and Hess, is most appropriate when students are discussing issues of public policy and the goal is to understand and then select from several alternatives. Structured academic controversy (SAC) is one method for engaging students in deliberation about controversial public issues.

STRUCTURED ACADEMIC CONTROVERSY (SAC)

The SAC format, developed by Johnson and Johnson (1979, 1993), is a sequence of steps in which students examine two sides to an issue. Issues are framed such that they can be approached from «pro» and «con» positions, for example, «Should voting be compulsory in a democracy?» «Should our nation sign a binding international treaty to regulate global greenhouse gas emissions?» «Should democracies require citizens between 18 and 25 years of age to participate in at least one year of national service?» Teachers often provide students with reading material, but may assign students to research the topic on their own.

The process of the SAC is, as the name implies, structured. Typically, the teacher divides the class into heterogeneous groups of four. Two students are assigned

the «pro» position, and two students prepare the «con» position. Each pair presents arguments for their position, while the opposing pair listens, takes notes, and asks questions for clarification. The pairs then switch sides and present the opposing side's view. In the final phase, students abandon their positions and try to reach a consensus on the issue based on the merits of the arguments presented (see Figure 1 for the SAC process adapted by the *DID Project*).

The theory of constructive controversy underlying the SAC process suggests that participants typically experience conceptual conflict when they hear new information or views that differ from their original understandings of the issue. Johnson and Johnson (2009) note that «uncertainty, conceptual conflict or disequilibrium tends to motivate *epistemic curiosity*. The result is an active search for (a) more information and new experiences, and (b) a more adequate cognitive perspective and reasoning process in the hope of resolving uncertainty» (p. 41). In a debate situation, disequilibrium could prompt participants to solidify their position, and reject opposing points of view. But because SAC is framed as a process to find the best possible solution as opposed to winning the argument, participants typically become more open to possibilities, and seek novel ways to address the problem at hand given new information.[3] Positive goal interdependence, one of the foundations of the SAC model, encourages students to work together toward the mutual goal of addressing the issue. The two competing positions they explore become sources of information for the deliberative process.

The research base on SACs is fairly extensive, and suggests that students engaging in SACs develop more positive attitudes toward conflict, demonstrate higher levels of moral reasoning and perspective-taking, and develop more positive attitudes toward working with individuals from different racial and ethnic groups (Johnson & Johnson, 1979, 1993, 2009). The model has been used in secondary science, math, English, and social studies classes; in first grade through graduate school; and with preservice teachers, veteran teachers, and administrators (Johnson & Johnson, 2009). In a meta-analysis of 39 studies of structured academic controversy conducted with primary grade children through adults, Johnson and Johnson (2009) found that SACs compared favorably to debate and individualistic learning in terms of student achievement, cognitive reasoning, perspective taking, motivation, attitudes toward task, interpersonal attraction, sense of social support, and self-esteem. Effect sizes ranged from 0.20 to 2.18. Johnson and Johnson believe that the SAC model helps students develop

Figure 1. Structured Academic Controversy, adapted for *DID Project*

- *Careful reading of a common text.* Students in groups of four or five read a common text, which provides background information on the topic.
- *Introduction of the question for deliberation.* After they have developed a common understanding of the text, the teacher presents a public policy question raised by the reading, such as «Should voting be compulsory in our democracy?».
- *Presentation of pro and con positions.* Once the question has been posed, each small group is again divided into two teams. Team A finds the most compelling pro arguments, and Team B finds the most compelling con arguments. Team A teaches their pro arguments to Team B allowing only clarifying questions. Team B then teaches the con arguments, followed by any clarifying questions Team A may have.
- *Reversal of positions.* The teams then reverse positions with Team B now adopting the pro position and Team A taking the con position.
- *Deliberation of the question.* Students then drop their roles and deliberate the question as a group. While deliberating, students can use what they have learned and for the first time, offer their personal experiences to help them formulate opinions regarding the question while finding areas of consensus.
- *Whole class discussion and debriefing.* Finally, a large group debriefing follows during which a poll of student decisions is taken, the most compelling reasons for each side are identified, and areas of consensus are explored. Questions that remain unanswered are raised and ways to address those questions are discussed.

attitudes and skills that are consistent with democratic citizenship, such as tolerance, perspective-taking, critical thinking, and problem solving.

It is worth noting that the model differs somewhat from what deliberation theorists might envision. Students are initially required to adopt positions with which they may disagree. This role playing addresses two practical issues. First, prior to deliberation, it may be the case that all students in a class share the same opinion (or, perhaps, have not yet formulated an opinion). By assigning positions, it is guaranteed that different viewpoints will be expressed and given consideration. Second, a small minority of students may hold an unpopular viewpoint, but feel uncomfortable expressing it due to peer pressure. The assignment of positions assures that students can present viewpoints without necessarily being identified personally those positions. Notwithstanding this imposition of roles, the SAC model shares the essential characteristics of deliberation: a focus on a controversial public issue

and the weighing of different positions and their potential consequences.

The SAC model was chosen by project coordinators as the foundation of the *DID Project* because they felt it was likely to promote the habits and characteristics associated with effective, thoughtful democratic citizens.

THE DELIBERATING IN A DEMOCRACY (DID) PROJECT

The *DID Project* involved over 20,000 secondary students, ages 12-19, and 400 teachers in 10 countries, including: Azerbaijan, Czech Republic, Estonia, Lithuania, Macedonia, Romania, Russia, Serbia, Ukraine, and the United States. Each year, teachers participated in a minimum of three professional development workshops in which they learned how to conduct SACs. At the first workshop, teachers participated in a SAC, and then discussed how they would implement the pedagogical model in their classrooms. The second and third workshops generally focused on teachers' reflections on their classroom deliberations. Teachers conducted at least three deliberations in their classrooms over the course of a year, choosing issues they felt were a good fit with their curriculum, and would likely engage their students. Currently there are 23 readings and issues for deliberation, all of which are downloadable from the web (www.deliberating.org). Table 1 shows examples of five deliberation topics and issues questions.

As part of the evaluation of the project, multiple types of data (interview, focus group, observational, survey) from multiple sources (students, teachers, administrators) were collected. I focus here on two questions: What

were teachers' experiences with the deliberation process? What did students learn from the deliberations?

1. Teachers' experiences

Teachers were overwhelmingly positive about their professional development experiences. Indeed, the *DID Project* was specifically designed to reflect the characteristics of high quality professional development: active learning; ongoing support; peer collaboration and reflection; and time for the iterative process of learning, doing, and reflecting (see Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman, & Yoon, 2001; Penuel, Fishman Yamaguchi, & Gallagher, 2007). The teachers particularly appreciated participating in a deliberation themselves with peers, and experiencing what their students would be experiencing. The following comments were typical:

«Involvement was very important when we ourselves were like students during the test deliberation.» (Russia, Year 2)

We were practicing [the deliberations] as students… in the role of students who are participating in this discussion….during the workshop, we had to change our role or our position in a different dimension. We were students and then we were teachers. [It] helped us realize how students feel in such situations. (Ukraine, Year 1)

We modeled the process and knew what we wanted the outcome to look like when we engaged the students in their deliberations. Our practice prepared us to tackle the information like the students and for me, I was able to better empathize with the students

Table 1. Selected Deliberation Topics and Issues Questions

Deliberation Topic	Issues Question
Educating Non-citizens	Should our democracy extend government support for higher education to immigrants who as young people entered the country illegally?
Free and Independent Press	Should our democracy permit monopolies of broadcast news media in local communities?
Freedom of Expression	Should our democracy permit hate speech?
Juvenile Justice	In our democracy, should juvenile offenders who are accused of serious violent crimes be prosecuted and punished as adults?
Minorities in a Democracy	Should our democracy fund elementary education for children of minority groups in their own language?

who were deliberating issues of which they had very strong opinions.» (United States, Year 1)

The teachers also found the professional development workshops to be a source of collegial support, where they could reflect together on their classroom experiences with deliberation, and plan how to conduct future deliberations. A Serbian teacher said: «[The discussions with other teachers] were helpful because we had the opportunity to exchange experiences, to see how each of us implemented the project in their own environment.»

Many of the professional development sessions included content experts from the community, who could share their in-depth knowledge of a particular issue. For example, in Serbia a juvenile district court judge spoke with teachers about the status of juvenile justice in their country prior to teachers leading their students in a deliberation on the topic of juvenile justice, and in the Czech Republic, an artist whose sculptures have engendered controversy spoke to Czech teachers about freedom of expression prior to their classroom deliberations on the same topic. Thus, while the teachers were learning how to deliberate for the purpose of teaching deliberation to their students, they were also increasing their content knowledge. This increased content knowledge enhanced teachers' confidence in their ability to conduct the classroom deliberations.

Across the six years, over 90% of the teachers «agreed» or «strongly agreed» with the statements: «After my involvement with this project, I have enough skill to conduct effective deliberation in my classroom» and «Because of my involvement in this project, I will continue using deliberation in my classroom in the coming years». Our classroom observations (n=55) at each of the sites over the six years indicated that most of the teachers were implementing the deliberations in accordance with the model, with modest adaptations to fit their teaching style and context. In the majority of classrooms, students were exposed to multiple perspectives and gave serious consideration to those perspectives. One difficulty we noted in 25% of the classes was the lack of attention to debriefing the deliberation experience (indeed, the debriefing phase was also the weakest part of the deliberation experience modeled to teachers in the professional development workshops). This is important because while we generally observed students doing a good job of presenting the opposing positions in their small groups, they were less skilled in challenging those positions. Without the whole class debriefing, students' positions often lacked the type of in-depth examination that teachers should have been able to facilitate. There

is an abundance of research that suggests teachers have difficulty talking about controversial issues in their classrooms, and often avoid such discussions (Kahne et al., 2000; Nystrand, Wu, Gamoran, Zeiser, & Long, 2003). It is therefore not surprising that we occasionally observed the teachers rushing through the debriefing, or omitting it altogether. Although certainly time constraints sometimes accounted for the truncated SAC experience, research would also support the notion that teachers are not comfortable dealing with controversial issues. In classrooms in which full debriefings occurred, students' ideas were more likely to be challenged and elaborated upon. Still, across classrooms, students were engaged in examining multiple perspectives and developing a better understanding of issues.

2. Student Learning

Across the years, 82-87% of the students «agreed» or «strongly agreed» with the statement: «I learned a lot by participating in the deliberations.» In Year 6, when students from Macedonia, Romania, Serbia, Ukraine and the United States were participating in the project, we conducted further analysis to determine whether demographic factors, such as gender or parents' education level, impacted students' response to this item. None of the demographic factors significantly impacted students' self-reported learning from deliberations. This is remarkable, considering that students from five countries, with a variety of socio-economic, ethnic, national, and linguistic backgrounds, were involved.

But what did they learn? Each of the six years, substantial majorities of students consistently «agreed» or «strongly agreed» with the following statements:

- As a result of participating in the deliberations, I developed a better understanding of the issues. (85-88%)
- My participation in the deliberations increased my ability to state my opinions. (75-81%)
- Because of my participation in the deliberations, I am more confident talking about controversial issues with my peers. (64-76%)

In student focus groups (67 across the six years), students frequently spoke of how they had learned to listen to one another. Although they described «listening» in different ways, many made reference to approaching listening with an attitude of respect for the other: An Azerbaijani student said: «We learned how to respect others' ideas— the person may have different ideas than yours but we should respect the person's ideas» (Year 1). A Russian

student reported that he «learned to hear people and to express my opinion and I learned to be more tolerant of other people» (Year 3). And a Lithuanian student explained that *listening* also meant *hearing*: «In class we learned not [only] to listen but to hear also and we understand that almost all have very different opinions and we accept it» (Year 1).

Through this listening, students reported that they learned to understand the perspectives of others. An Estonian student noted that «Mostly, the problem is that we only see one side and we just don't want to see the advantages of the other side, so [the deliberations] were very important. We learn to see the whole picture» (Year 2). One Ukrainian student said: «We learned to understand each other and to hear another point of mind» (Year 4). As a result of seeing other perspectives, students learned that they could change their minds. A student from the United States said: «The whole deliberation helped me open my mind more about all sorts of issues. Before I was, in my mind set on my opinion, and I was ready to say anything back to anyone, but during the deliberation, you were able to see how other people think. I know I changed my opinion for like two of the deliberations mostly because of sitting and listening to other people talk about it» (Year 1).

Over the years, students consistently told us in focus groups or in responses to open-ended questionnaire responses that the deliberations increased their ability to take different perspectives. In Year 6, we put this proposition to a more stringent test. Using a quasi-experimental research design, we paired 9 DID Project teachers and their classes with 9 teachers and classes matched in terms of grade level and subject area. A questionnaire was administered to all students (n= 494 DID Project students; n=493 comparison students) after the DID students had completed their deliberations. *Perspective-taking* was measured by having students respond to the following prompts: Some schools are considering a policy that would require all students to wear school uniforms. What reasons are there to *support* such a policy? What reasons are there to *oppose* such a policy? Students were then asked to indicate their agreement with the policy (Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree). This issue was not part of the deliberations. It was, however, a subject about which we felt students should be able to form an opinion without extensive background information. After discarding nonsensical, redundant, and/or illogical reasons (interrater agreement = 92%), we calculated two scores: the number of arguments students offered in support of their personal opinion, and those offered in support of an opinion with which they disagreed. Both scores are important, but we

consider the ability to identify rationales for positions one does not hold to be a marker of perspective-taking.

Unsurprisingly, most students (67%) in both the Project and Comparison groups did not favor mandatory school uniforms. However, the Project students were significantly more likely to be able to identify reasons for the position which they did *not* support than were the Comparison students (p=.001). For example, a Project student who did *not* believe her country should instate a law mandating school uniforms was likely to be able to give more reasons why someone might *favor* such a law. Additionally, Project students were able to identify more arguments for their own positions than were the Comparison students (p=.001).

The finding is not only statistically significant, but more importantly, educationally significant. The ability to identify rationales for positions with which one disagrees, in particular, is critical in a democracy. If we can identify legitimate rationales for positions in opposition to our own, we have at least started to understand the nature of the controversy, to understand that reasonable people can disagree. We begin to open spaces for dialogue with «others» with whom we disagree. We may also develop better understanding of our fellow citizens, and a recognition of the role that our own experiences play in the development of our opinions. This can lead to a better understanding of why people hold the positions they do, without the demonization of the other.

3. Caveats to the Deliberative Process

Our analyses of students' experiences with the *DID Project* did lead to two cautionary notes. First, students who individually perceived their classroom climate to be more negative were less likely to report positive experiences[4] with the deliberations (p=.001). Classroom climate was measured by a six-item scale used in the IEA CivEd Study (Torney-Purta et al., 2001), and includes the following items:

- Students feel free to disagree openly with their teachers about political and social issues during class.
- Students are encouraged to make up their own minds about issues.
- Teachers respect our opinions and encourage us to express them during class.
- Students feel free to express opinions in class even when their opinions are different from most of the other students.
- Teachers encourage us to discuss political or social issues about which people have different opinions.

• Teachers present several positions on an issue when explaining it in class. (p. 207)

Response options include: never, rarely, sometimes, often. It appears that when students do not perceive an open classroom climate, they are less likely to find the deliberations engaging and beneficial. This finding would be consistent with deliberative theorists' contention that the context in which deliberation takes place needs to be characterized by fairness and respect. The professional development sessions focused on the pedagogical method of SAC, but did not address the importance of the classroom context in which the deliberations occurred.

We also looked at whether demographic factors, such as gender or parents' education level, impacted students' experiences with the deliberations. None of the demographic factors significantly impacted students' experiences with deliberations. That students generally had positive experiences with the deliberations no matter their background —across five countries— speaks to the power of deliberation. The results are promising in that teachers do have control over the classroom climate they establish; students' demographic characteristics, however, are beyond their control.

The second caveat that bears note relates to the characteristics of students who changed their opinions after the deliberative process. Girls and students whose first language was not the majority language were most likely to move toward the consensus position. No similar movement was found by race/ethnicity, highest level of parental education, or self-reported grades in school. One of the primary critiques of deliberative theory is that those who are accorded less status in society are those whose voices are less likely to be heard (Sanders, 1997). That two groups who have historically been marginalized were those to change their opinions suggests that deliberation, as enacted through SAC, may perpetuate a system in which female students and students whose families may not be part of the dominant culture feel that their opinions are less valid than are those of counterparts. Alternatively, of course, this finding may indicate that girls and students who spoke a language other than the dominant language at home are more open-minded and therefore more willing to change their opinions when presented with compelling information. But our findings raise a concern, and one that demands attention. Qualitative studies in which the dynamics of classroom interaction are examined during deliberations would further our understanding of this area.

THE SIGNIFICANCE ON THE DID PROJECT

Studies have repeatedly shown that students do not regularly engage in discussions about controversial public issues in their classrooms. Similarly, teachers are often reluctant to engage students in controversial issues discussions, and some researchers suggest that teachers may not have developed the skills required to facilitate such discussions (Hess, 2009; Parker, 2003).

The study described here suggests that SAC is a deliberation model that is relatively easy for teachers to use; although there were wide ranges in the teachers' typical pedagogical approaches and the length of their teaching experience, almost all of the teachers believed that they had achieved a high level of competence with the method at the conclusion of this phase of the Project. Our classroom observations indicated that the teachers were, with modest adaptations, adhering to the model.

Parker (2003) has used various pedagogical models in teaching beginning and experienced teachers to use deliberation in their classrooms. He believes the SAC model is particularly appropriate for novice teachers and for those experienced teachers who are making their first serious attempts to bring controversial public issues into their classrooms. He finds that «SAC scaffolds student teachers successfully into controversial issues deliberations, after which they are welcome to work with more ambitious models» (p. 142). Our work similarly suggests that it is a model that is quite accessible to beginning and veteran teachers. In the SAC model, not only is the controversy structured, but so too are the student and teacher roles. The SAC model thus addresses one of the primary reasons teachers often avoid introducing controversy into the classroom: fear of losing control of the classroom (McNeil, 1986).

Few studies have reported students' perceptions of the deliberation process (Hess, 2009, and Hess & Posselt, 2002 are notable exceptions). In the *DID Project*, students, regardless of age, gender, or nationality, appeared to like the model, and reported valuing different perspectives on controversial issues as a result of using the model. Why did this model appear to have a positive impact on students? There are a number of characteristics associated with the model that differentiate it from more traditional forms of pedagogy, and indeed, other types of class discussions. These characteristics acting in concer —rather than singly— created a positive learning experience for most students.

First, the deliberations, while structured by the teacher, are student led. Students are responsible for developing

and articulating positions. Knowledge is socially constructed through the small group deliberations. In their study of middle and high school students' perceptions of text-based discussions, Alvermann et al. (1996) found that most students preferred small group discussions as opposed to teacher-led whole class discussions. Students felt that the small groups afforded them more opportunities to talk, and to voice opinions without embarrassing themselves in front of an entire class. The same sentiments were expressed by the students in the *DID Project*, both on the written questionnaire and in the focus groups.

Second, all students are actively involved in the process. Even in the best of whole class discussions, often times only half of the students are actively participating. The structure of the SAC process requires that all students participate. Our classroom observations indicated that while students participated in varying degrees (e.g., occasionally one student would dominate the presentation of a position), all students participated at some level.

Third, the content of the deliberations may also account for some of students' positive reaction to the process. Unlike many questions that are posed inside classrooms, the focus of the SAC process was on problems with no right answer. Students may have felt more comfortable taking risks in presenting positions for which there was no «right answer.» The content of the deliberations —current, controversial public issues— tended to be inherently engaging for students. Unlike many topics discussed in schools, students had little difficulty discerning the importance of the issues. While they may have found some issues more interesting than others, they were unlikely to see a topic as having little value beyond their classroom.

Fourth, the SAC process reflects many of the characteristics of effective discussion identified by Hess (2004): a focus on an interpretable text, issue, idea, etc.; more participant than facilitator talk; a sufficient amount of time devoted to a particular idea; a sense of «meaningful argument» in a comfortable atmosphere; a high level of participant involvement; and a focus on meaningful questions (p. 154). Further, inherent in the SAC deliberation process are the following characteristics:

1. Students are encouraged to be open-minded.
2. Multiple viewpoints are explored.
3. All students have a significant role.
4. The process is understandable and accessible to students.

From the teacher's perspective, the SAC model requires texts that present at least two opposing viewpoints in a fair and balanced fashion. But it does not require teacher superstardom or «wizardry» (see Hess, 2002, pp. 38-39) to implement. Indeed, inherent in the model is a structured method for teacher orchestration of student deliberation about very difficult, complex political and social issues. To be sure, not all teachers would find it easy to implement; but the vast majority of teachers are good teachers, and those teachers will find in the SAC model an accessible and meaningful method for teaching controversial issues.

The overriding significance of the model, however, is that it appears to help students develop some of the skills essential to an engaged, enlightened citizenry. The engaged citizen participates in political discussions; the enlightened citizen is aware of the legitimacy of differing perspectives. Neither discussion without the concomitant appreciation of multiple perspectives, nor the cognitive understanding of differing viewpoints without social exchange, furthers democratic practice. Meaningful participation in public issues discussions with an appreciation of various viewpoints, however, contributes to a stronger democracy.

The SAC model is not a panacea for all that ails democratic societies, nor is it a pedagogical approach that should trump all others. Indeed, the findings reported here suggest caveats associated with the approach. But the model does teach students that conflict is inherent in public issues, and that deliberation is a process for thinking deeply and purposefully about these issues. That the project took place in 10 countries at various stages in their histories as democracies, suggests the strength of the model.

NOTES

[1] I would like to express my appreciation to Carol Freeman, Kyle Greenwalt, Sara Levy, and Annette Simmons for their assistance in collecting and analyzing the data presented in this article.

[2] All names are pseudonyms.

[3] See, however, Cohen, Sherman, Bastardi, Hsu, McGoey & Ross for a fascinating study suggesting that participants in negotiations are more likely to compromise when their values and viewpoints are affirmed than when they are told that the goal is to reach a compromise position.

[4] Classroom experiences with the project were assessed through responses to five item: «I learned a lot by participating in the deliberations;» «I enjoyed participating in the deliberations;» «As a result of participating in the deliberations, I developed a better understanding of the issues;» «My participation in the deliberations increased my ability to state my opinions;» and «Because of my participation in the deliberations, I am more confident talking about controversial issues with my peers.» Response options included Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Agree, Strongly Agree.

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