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Review of Deliberative Pedagogy: Teaching and Learning for Democratic Engagement. Edited by Timothy J. Shaffer, Nicholas V. Longo, Idit Manosevitch, and Maxine S. Thomas. (Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2017)

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Abstract

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Keywords

Deliberation, pedagogy, education

Entering into a growing conversation about how to fulfill (or perhaps revive) the democratic promise of higher education, the editors of *Deliberative Pedagogy* offer a collection of essays that unpack the promise of teaching discussion and deliberation, providing examples of deliberative pedagogy in practice across disciplines and borders, and connecting readers with resources and further reading into deliberative scholarship. This collection represents an incisive response to the perceived need for post-secondary education to prepare students for more consistent, productive, and critical engagement with public life and its institutions. The book's themes and framing evidence decades of research and practice supported by the Charles F. Kettering Foundation; chapters across four of the book's sections are authored by associates of the Foundation, demonstrating that organization's deep commitment to citizen-centered deliberation as the primary mode of democracy. As editor Maxine Thomas notes in her preface, the book represents both a concrete, identifiable pedagogical approach and an introduction to a field of practice that is both timely and growing.

Deliberative Pedagogy is a pathbreaking book in the attempt to clearly outline deliberation as a recognizable pedagogy, and will quickly become required reading for anyone interested in pursuing deliberation or democratizing practices within the college classroom. The volume is overall excellent in its scope and quality, despite some discernable tensions with which practitioners and teachers of deliberation need to reckon as we refine our methods for incorporating deliberation throughout the university and the larger community. The book is ambitious: At points it positions deliberative pedagogy as a movement, for which this functions as a manifesto, and at other times it speaks to the already committed who want to learn how to actually bring deliberation into their pedagogic practice.

The editors argue that colleges and universities can fundamentally shift their orientations to, and purposes within, the larger community; they seek to prove this by describing how their model of deliberation works as a classroom practice across a variety of disciplines. In truth, this is exactly where we must begin—by describing, and then theorizing, our best practices. Three important ways of theorizing and putting deliberative practices to work jump out from these descriptions: Teaching students a subject matter *through* deliberation, teaching students *to* deliberate, and teaching students *about* deliberation. While there is some overlap, these seem to represent distinct approaches to deliberative pedagogy.

First, these authors propose to teach students *through* deliberative practice. The central chapters of the volume relate the experiences and varying degrees of success of educators employing structured deliberative exercises to engage students in co-constructing their curriculum, assessments, and projects in a variety of course disciplines. Participating in deliberative experiences, the argument goes, teaches

students to make meaningful connections between their subject material and the larger communities that universities and colleges can, at times, feel separated from. Deliberation is a mode for coming to understand issues, arguments, and their relationship to a larger world. Representative chapters include those from Part 5, “Bridging Campus and the Community,” where Angela Romano presents the processes of learning through deliberation in vocational journalism programs in the U.S., New Zealand, and South Africa. A most welcome addition is her focus on the importance of learning to “listen publicly” to identify the perspectives circulating in a community. Janice McMillan’s chapter illustrates clearly engaging students (in this case in a South African engineering course) in the collaborative processes of deliberation in building their course and its connections to the world outside the university. Rebecca Townsend ends this section with recounting the experiences of teaching communication and public speaking courses in a community college and addresses a gap in our understanding of service-learning models; they tend to be focused on non-community colleges, and thus, Townsend argues, miss out on the rich affordances of the diverse and widespread community college setting.

The second possibility for deliberative pedagogy is teaching students *to* deliberate, to develop a set of practical skills. In many cases, accounts of classroom practice are not as explicit about the skills, the actual recipe for deliberating, as they are about highlighting benefits of participating in and facilitating deliberations. In this regard, the second and third sections seem fairly united. Leila Brammer’s chapter opens Part 2, “Classroom Practices,” by detailing her experiences with a first-year seminar where she engaged those students with deliberating about their course and the final project of leading a campus deliberation. In the following chapter, Idit Manosevitch ruminates on the important differences in democracies around the world that impact how we approach the work of teaching deliberatively (not even teaching deliberation). Sara Mehlretter Drury and Martín Carcasson, in the final two chapters, relate the experiences of incorporating deliberation into communication and basic science courses. Each of these chapters offers a full and compelling account of the experiences of these educators putting deliberation to work, and highlights the positive experiences of students and the benefits for learning crucial higher-order reasoning skills, developing empathy, and encouraging greater community identification.

Some chapters discuss deliberation somewhat abstractly, as applying to generic human actors, even though people are not equal, but separated by relations of power and difference. The chapters of Part 3, “Comparative, Gender, and Cross-Cultural Deliberative Pedagogy Practice,” follow a similar format to those in the previous section; they present the experiences of teachers incorporating deliberative practices into their courses—often for the first time—in order to address the specific challenges that gender and cultural differences raise. These brief chapters

recount both the successes and challenges of teachers employing deliberative pedagogy while recognizing the diversity of students, and encourage further practice and study of incorporating deliberative techniques across the academy. J. Cherie Strachan weaves deliberative pedagogy into the larger discourse of public sphere theory, illustrating how engaging students through deliberation helps them develop the discursive skills that will aid marginalized groups find wider and more successful circulation in the public sphere. Ekaterina Lukianova and Jack Musselman further demonstrate the cross-cultural potential of this pedagogy by exploring the difficulties American students may encounter with peers from different cultural and democratic traditions. Ibtesam Al-Atiyat's experiences applying deliberative pedagogy to her Introduction to Women's and Gender Studies course highlights the valuable analytic space deliberative practice can create, since students are able to break down and better understand power relations and the impacts that controversial issues have within democracies. Finally, with a compelling example from Hungary, Ferenc Hammer's chapter demonstrates how deliberative teaching promotes more effective and reflective advocacy by detailing the experiences of students participating in campus-wide movements at Eötvös Loránd University. In addition to skills, these chapters also continue to valorize the work of teaching subject matter through deliberation, which seems to stem from some ambiguity about whether deliberation is a means or an end.

A third strand engages how we teach *about* deliberation. This perspective receives (perhaps appropriately) the least attention, as only the first three chapters directly engage the historical and theoretical development of deliberative practices. Part 1, "Theory and History of Deliberative Pedagogy," looks to establish the social value and problem-solving pedigree of deliberation, and explores the connections between education, democracy, and community deliberation. Martín Carcasson's rich and generative first chapter identifies "wicked problems" as the core focus of deliberative pedagogy as a teaching philosophy, and describes how the pedagogy seeks to connect students with the communities and organizations around them and the university with which they must engage to address these problems. In his entry to this section, Timothy Shaffer uncovers the roots of teaching discussion in America as a mode of deliberation. He gives a substantive literature review of conversation and deliberative teaching movements extending from Progressive Era reformers like John Dewey through today. An essential feature of these movements, he argues, has always been the educational character—they have identified themselves as necessary training for active citizenship and greater, more thoughtful citizen participation in community life. This focus—on the inter-community connections campuses can nurture—is developed further in Nicholas Longo and Cynthia Gibson's entry. They look at existing efforts at integrating students with wider community life, such as service learning courses, and explore how

deliberative pedagogy takes this engagement to a new level, by involving students in action-oriented deliberations that bear real consequences for them and their neighbors.

While not explicitly addressing the theory and history of deliberation, Part 4, “Deliberative Pedagogy and Institutional Change,” and Part 6, “Assessing Deliberative Pedagogy,” are dedicated to institutional configurations which foster the teaching and practice of deliberation. Part 4 illustrates a growing uptake in universities, especially through the work of centers and program dedicated to educating for democracy. Scott London details two such sites—the New England Center for Civic Life and the center at Virginia Tech that became known as the “Crossroads of the Blue Ridge.” London demonstrates how interest in deliberative education is taking active root both inside universities and within non-governmental organizations devoted to involving people in more consistent and structured deliberations about their common issues. Timothy Steffensmeier and David Proctor outline the processes by which Kansas State University faculty developed a dedicated institute to building “community capacity for informed, engaged, civil deliberation” (p. 136), and further, to promote deliberative practices in the undergraduate curriculum. Closing Part 4, Marshalita Sims Peterson recounts the experiences of bringing deliberative democracy to life at a historically black college through National Issues Forums. This effort responded effectively to the need to create spaces on campus where deliberation and public engagement can take place; the structures of the NIF lend themselves well to this goal and to demonstrating the value of deliberation at the center of the curriculum. The chapters of Part 6 seek to further establish the value of the book’s pedagogical argument by showing the concrete differences teaching students deliberative practices has made in several communities. Katy Harriger, Jill McMillan, Christy Buchanan, and Stephanie Gusler’s longitudinal study demonstrates clearly that we can, in fact, find measurable differences between students who have been exposed to deliberative pedagogy and those who have not—and, importantly, they point to the need for further longitudinal research to refine these practices. Offering another tool for interested teachers to put deliberation at the heart of their classes, Sara Mehlretter Drury, Leila Brammer, and Joni Doherty’s chapters elaborate a rubric for deliberative pedagogies that aids in assessing the crucial factors that will make or break a classroom. Further, they outline the ways their rubric maps onto the sorts of learning goals relating to skill-building, reflection, and assessment that any college-level course must be sensitive to. Finally, Telma Gimenez and Andressa Molinari address the thorny issues of how best to assess language use in deliberations, and argue for the application of the insights of critical discourse analysis to remedy this potential hazard.

This collection will certainly spark challenging and fruitful discussions about where and how to employ deliberative pedagogy. As more educators adopt deliberative practices and attempt to democratize their classrooms, the project started by this book will necessarily need to expand its scope, in terms of both its reach across disciplines and the resources upon which practitioners of deliberative pedagogy can draw. Further investment of time, resources, and critical reflection upon this model of teaching will, in all likelihood, aid in the development of a more expansive, more flexible set of practices. One particular omission, given the range of interdisciplinary discussion the book offers, is the first-year composition course: The insights of the vast rhetoric and composition literature and pedagogy can be applied to the deliberative, democratic practices such as we find here—and vice versa. While the book heavily represents the perspectives of communications studies, there exists a rich tradition of community-engaged and critical composition pedagogies which have for many years worked to involve students in the same sorts of democratic discussions that are advocated within the volume. The text strongly suggests that deliberative pedagogy is a capacious and flexible set of practices with rich possibility for many disciplinary traditions. All told, we can look forward to seeing the emergence of deliberative pedagogies as more teachers put these methods to use, develop new perspectives on their form and function, and experience new sites of resistance or challenge to make practical deliberations more open, accessible, and effective in realizing their democratic potential.