Deliberative Pedagogy: Teaching and Learning for Democratic Engagement
Edited by Timothy J. Shaffer, Nicholas V. Longo, Idit Manosevitch, and Maxine S. Thomas.
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Deliberative Pedagogy: Teaching and Learning for Democratic Engagement is a timely publication. Myriad sectors, from government, education, and the press, to religion and public problem solving organizations decry the common practice of shrouding our mind (and heart) in echo chambers of favorite ideas mired into irrevocable viewpoints and perspectives. The lack of civil discourse from community members to the national political stage is a source of bewilderment for those of us who have believed this nation’s citizens, and especially its leaders, were immune to such behavior. Democracy’s very survival has been called into question as we lose the ability to weigh multiple perspectives for collaborative problem solving.

The editors of Deliberative Pedagogy have responded to a call for “new models of teaching and learning to include public deliberation – a process through which a range of stakeholders...make collective decisions that form the basis for public action” (Longo, 2013, p. xx). Although generously giving credit where credit is due for the historical giants of the pedagogical evolution of experiential education, civic engagement, active learning, engaged pedagogy, and deliberation as a public enterprise essential for community problem solving, Deliberative Pedagogy offers a unique lens of the work of deliberative theory and practice specifically with its role for education for democracy. Additionally, this work offers excellent guidance for civic engagement educators to leverage the rise of college campus programs fostering deliberative dialogue in all its forms, as well as enhancing the ability to take advantage of national support for deliberative pedagogy (e.g. Campus Compact; Sustained Dialogue Institute). The editors have also included a section on assessment, critical for those of us accustomed to crafting compelling arguments as to the value of engaged pedagogies. Professionals new to the field will find helpful the solid grounding of the historical roots of this unique form of pedagogical practice; each author(s) of chapters providing ample citing of the evolution of the theory and practice of deliberative pedagogy.

Deliberative Pedagogy is divided into six parts, beginning with David Mathews’ Forward providing an historical context as of the ancient practice of deliberation and the work of citizens. Maxine Thomas’ Preface outlines the central questions with which deliberative pedagogy wrestles: “What is the role of students and graduates of colleges and universities and the way they see their role in democratic society?” and, “What role do educators play in helping students realize their efficacy to participate as citizens in communities?”

In Part I, covering the theory and history of deliberative pedagogy, Carcasson begins the section by establishing the need for deliberative pedagogy, examining obstacles to the practice, especially on college campuses, and identifying a model that provides a framework for all disciplines. Especially endearing in this opening chapter is his introduction of Kaner’s (2014) model of working with students through the “groan zone” to move from divergent thinking to convergent thinking as part of the deliberative process. He states, “In the end, deliberative pedagogy can perhaps be best understood as pedagogy whose focus is to help students negotiate the important tensions and polarities that are inherent to democratic living and problem-solving” (p. 18).

Shaffer follows the opening chapter with a well-crafted overview and history of deliberative pedagogy, documenting its past and current intersections with education for democracy. Of course, John Dewey, Jane Addams and Mary Parker Follet are given just due, however, Shaffer also gives a nod to the awareness of the turn of the century’s rising and influential belief that technology, rather than people, will be the salvation of democracy’s social problems. Additionally, Shaffer cedes that historically, the voices of the lower socioeconomic strata have been absent in our democracy’s deliberations (Keith & Cossart, 2012).

Rounding out the first section of the book is a chapter by Longo and Gibson that skillfully helps the reader distinguish among the multiple community engaged pedagogies providing the specific and value-added role of deliberative pedagogy within the broad context of civic education. These scholars
nicely blur the lines between classroom and community as they identify the inherently democratic nature of the skills gained in the process of in-class deliberation as well as how the values inherent in deliberative pedagogy promote the critical reciprocity in community partnership development. Here, Longo offers a concise definition of deliberative pedagogy: “an emerging field of research and practice that seeks to identify ways by which faculty members can effectively educate college students for deliberative values, norms and behavior (p. 61). The authors address head-on the common critique of deliberative processes as “all talk, no action” with specific examples of how to build students’ capacity as community discussion facilitators as well as equipping them to participate in community visioning, planning and action.

Part II of Deliberative Pedagogy focuses on classroom practices. This section’s first chapter by Brammer explains how, after using deliberative techniques for years in class assignments, she designed a first year experience in which the entire course was based on deliberative pedagogy. Written from the perspective of a reflective practitioner, she used this class to research the claims of A Crucible Moment: College Learning and Democracy’s Future (National Task Force, 2012) in which deliberative skills deepen students’ commitment to and expertise in perspective transformation, “negotiating and compromising, and organizing across differences for democratic ends” (pp. 55-56). Brammer’s conclusions offer interesting insight not only for student impact, but also for the profound impact on her personal and professional development and pedagogical choices for other courses.

In Manosevitch’s chapter, readers are introduced to an international context to discuss how deliberative pedagogy answers a concern that resonates with many of us engaged with civic education in the US, namely the increased nationalistic spirit among youth with a weakening of the perceived importance of democratic foundations. Manosevitch offers readers a crash course on two vying speech cultures: one valuing relationship-building and its contrast, a more aggressive speech form leaving little room for listening to varying perspectives on any issue. Within the chapter, he outlines his understanding of the values and learning goals inherent in deliberative pedagogy, along with concrete curriculum details to prepare a deliberative student conference.

Wrapping up Part II are chapters using deliberative pedagogy within specific disciplinary contexts. Drury and Carcasson highlight how communication studies curricula is ideally situated to undertake deliberative pedagogy with distinctive uses of public rhetoric, and particularly “strong rhetoric” for public problem solving (Lanham, 1993, p. 156). Then Drury, in speaking of a science curriculum in the following chapter, most directly counters the belief in technological solutions for all social ills. Her compelling argument for deliberative pedagogy in science classes is that we need to prepare students to address society’s “wicked” problems, those for which there is no technical solution (Rittel & Webber, 1973).

Part III of the book moves from classroom practice to a focus on gender and cross-cultural matters through four chapters arguing for the value of deliberative pedagogy to bring women and other underrepresented groups more effectively into the public sphere of discourse and policy making. Strachan documents the negative impact of patriarchal prejudices not only on women, but also on all marginalized demographic groups who want full and equal participation in public life. She draws from the feminist movement and feminist pedagogy to note how deliberative pedagogy and hospitable environments can better usher female students into political actors in the public sphere. Al-Atiyat’s chapter describes the power of deliberative pedagogy to deconstruct the intersectionality of power structures, identities, sexualities, privilege and cultures. She generously provides guidance on course design including a listing of texts, assignments and an outline for a deliberative forum project. Lukianova and Musselman’s chapter describes a joint deliberation exercise in which American and Russian university students engage in online discussions of a thorny issue with relevance across societies. Reminiscent of David Bohm’s (1996) work on dialogue, the authors share that when confronted with heterogeneity of views within and across cultures, students experience opportunities to suspend judgment and examine their own assumptions in light of others. Readers will gain valuable insight on what worked well for Lukianova and Musselman, the challenges they faced, and how they would improve the course in the future. The final chapter in this section by Hammer pulls wisdom from research, participant interviews and observations of Hungary’s student activism during the 2012-2013 forums of Occupy University and The Student Network. Student deliberations there influenced national educational policies. Of particular interest is the discussion of faculty roles in the tension between student autonomy and faculty
expertise for which Hammer shares valuable recommendations appropriate for faculty or staff wanting to support student activism. With a focus on institutional change, Part IV of the book features three chapters exploring structural responses to the challenge of embedding civic education as a foundational tenet of higher education. London critiques the most common initiatives to inculcate citizenship development through civics instruction and service-learning, juxtaposing those efforts with the emergence of centers for civic life. The strength of his examples lies in the powerful collaborations of these campus-based centers and community-based entities including the opportunities for public scholarship to address issues within the community. The last two chapters of the section flesh out various structural approaches for the institutionalization of deliberation to increase student capacity as civic agents. Steffensmeier and Proctor describe how faculty and staff at Kansas State University gathered interdisciplinary support for deliberative pedagogy practice throughout the campus. Peterson enriches the argument of the value of deliberative pedagogy across contexts by sharing her years of research and teaching in creating the spaces within the curriculum for deliberation, asking “How can we use pedagogical processes effectively to teach students to explore, initiative, and apply public deliberation and civic engagement during their campus years and beyond?” (p. 143).

Part V, authors tackle how to bridge the campus and community. Romano describes the value of community-based projects using deliberative pedagogy and journalism through case studies in the United States, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa. These case studies incorporate deliberative media and public journalism as unique examples of deliberative pedagogy offered through the written word and based on public listening. McMillan (Janice) follows with a chapter on work in a South African engineering curriculum. hers is a perfect story of how engaged practitioners might successfully craft student development towards what Harry Boyte (2013) calls “Citizen Professionals,” reinventing careers as public work, filled with public purpose, in any discipline. Townsend brings readers “home” to the unique role community college students have to offer in community-based deliberative practices. She asserts:

There is very little understanding of what it means to be a community college student conducting this kind of learning, and almost none focused on deliberative projects. Neither service nor deliberation ought to be reserved for the elite...rather we should take advantage of the pedagogical richness of working with diverse students to help them recognize their common stake in their neighborhoods through practices that encourage collaboration, trust, and respect (p. 170).

Townsend concludes her chapter with an outline of a powerful participatory research project incorporating deliberative pedagogy to address community transportation needs.

Assessment is the focus of Part VI, recognizing that any innovative teaching and learning strategy needs to provide compelling evidence of impact. The editors’ choice to include a section on assessment is a gift to the practitioners of deliberative pedagogy as engaged pedagogy can be a lonely sport, fraught with naysayers. Arming oneself with data supporting student learning and engagement will prove valuable for requests for resource allocation for programmatic expansion. The first chapter in this section by Harringer, McMillan (Jill), Buchanan and Gusler reveals findings from a longitudinal research project—what we know and what we still need to learn in order to establish a robust research agenda. In this era of ever-higher calls for accountability, these four authors provide a blueprint for their mixed methodological study on a five-year democracy fellows program. The following chapter recognizes that even within circles of agreement on the importance of deliberative practices, assessing deliberation is challenging. Thus, authors Drury, Brammer and Doherty offer a deliberative pedagogy learning rubric to assist in the process. The final chapter of the section, by Gimenez and Molinari, considers the key role of power in the language of deliberation. Offering strategies for discourse analysis that connects the social and the linguistic, the authors provide a detailed outline of a moderators’ guide for a deliberative forum.

Nancy Thomas concludes the book by writing, “The authors in this book offer strategies for tackling the most immediate barrier: unease with the method. Simply stated, deliberative pedagogy feels risky” (p. 215). She continues by acknowledging that the authors understand the context and necessity of democratic teaching and learning, and confront this form of pedagogy practically and authentically throughout the chapters of this book. She offers clear advice: “Try it” (p. 221).

The editors, Shaffer, Longo, Manosevitch, and Thomas are to be commended for the clarity of structure, intentionality of authors
chosen, and topics addressed throughout this book. I would reiterate Thomas’ advice: try it, and make sure this book is beside you each step of the way.

References


