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Educating for Deliberative Democracy: The Role of Public Reason and Reasoning

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Abstract

Across the country, Americans are experimenting with a form of democracy—often referred to as deliberative democracy—in which ordinary citizens, public officials, and politicians engage in an open, inclusive process of dialogue, deliberation, and action in order to address matters of public concern. At the core of deliberative democracy is a conviction that conflict and competing policy concerns are best resolved through a process of collective, or public, reasoning. Our political and social systems should be organized to encourage citizens and policy makers alike to be reasonable and to be able to give reasons for their views, actions, or policy choices. This article explores the role of reason in public life. It reviews how terms such as *reasonableness* and *public reason* are used in legal and political theory. It then calls upon higher education to examine the role of reason and reasoning in student learning and development and as a critical component of education for citizenship in a diverse democracy.

The United States may be in the midst of a shift in the way American democracy works. Across the country, thousands of communities are experimenting with public dialogues, study circles, issue forums, and community conversations—meaningful opportunities for ordinary citizens with diverse viewpoints and values to come together and discuss social, economic, and political matters and to influence the laws and policies that govern these matters. On a national level, citizens are ratcheting up calls for accountability and demanding that political leaders provide transparent reasons for their policy choices. This shift to a more *deliberative democracy* seems to have been motivated by a number of concerns: continuing patterns of social and economic disparity and injustice; dissatisfaction with partisan politics and power-based policy making; frustration with the choices made by a professional, political elite; and warnings about the state of the nation's civic health and ensuing efforts to increase citizen participation in community life. Driving this movement is a sense that something is not right in American public life. When social and economic injustice persist, when the public is far removed from national issues and public policy making, and when citizens disengage from their communities and from each other, American democracy is weakened.

A deliberative democracy takes seriously core American principles of equity, justice, and responsible freedom. It provides people with constructive, everyday ways to interact and collaboratively address social and political issues; it is an antidote to citizen dissatisfaction with and disengagement from public life and society in general. Yet, deliberative democracy practiced by thousands in a nation of millions will not supplant

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the adversarial and distant form of democracy that nonetheless dominates public policy and decision-making at all levels. The movement toward a more deliberative democracy remains an experiment that has yet to grow to scale.

This article is grounded in the assumption that deliberative democracy is worth aspiring to: that democracy's guiding *principles*—equity, justice, and responsible freedom—are core American values that must always remain central to citizen interaction and public work, and that its *practices*—inclusive dialogue, informed participation, public reasoning, conflict transformation, and collaborative policy and decision-making—are essential civic and life habits (Thomas and Mallory, 2007). It does not make the case for deliberative democracy. That case has been made by philosophers, ethicists, and social and political scientists (Gutmann and Thompson, 1996 and 2004; Macedo, 1999; Schoem and Hurtado, 2001), by practitioners in public deliberation, democratic dialogue and social change (Leighninger, 2006; see also *Resources*), by educators (Gastil and Levine, 2005; Walsh, 2007; Mallory and Thomas, 2003; Thomas and Mallory, 2007), and even by politicians themselves (Gore, 2007; Edwards, 2007; Obama, 2006). Nor does this article respond to critics and naysayers;² such a response has also been done elsewhere (Macedo, 1999; Gutmann and Thompson, 2004; Gastil and Levine, 2005; Leighninger, 2006; Thomas and Mallory, 2007).

Instead, this article focuses on one critical element to effective citizen engagement in a deliberative democracy: the challenge of asking citizens who might disagree morally and ideologically to engage in a collaborative process of *public reasoning*. As Gutmann and Thompson note in their introduction to *Democracy and Disagreement*, “Deliberative democracy involves reasoning about politics, and nothing has been more controversial in political philosophy than the nature of reason in politics” (p. 2).

This article begins by examining terms such as “the reasonable person” standard in the law, John Rawls's and others' concept of “public reason” as a normative value and “public reasoning” as a procedural ideal, “reasonableness,” citing Iris Marion Young, as well as related concepts of reciprocity, justification, objectivity, opinion, interests, and perspective. It then turns to the movement itself, focusing on the exemplary, practical work of contemporary democracy builders in the United States. The final section focuses on the role of colleges and universities as educators of the next generation of citizens in a deliberative democracy. In this final section, *public reasoning* is considered as an educational goal for student learning at the college and university level.

² There are valid questions about whether deliberative democracy is realistic or even desirable: The ground rules for truly democratic dialogue—inclusiveness, reciprocity, open-mindedness, informed participation, active listening, respect and civility, careful analysis, reasonableness, and a goal of seeking common ground—seem unattainable. Conditions of inclusiveness and reciprocity call for those with privilege and power to check their positional authority at the door, and it is impossible to enforce that level of personal integrity. A deliberative process is time consuming and impractical. Public dialogue may have worked when the participants shared backgrounds, expectations, and frameworks, but contemporary American society is too diverse and complex for mutual understanding and agreement. An “inclusive” process is one in which all opinions, perspectives, and beliefs count. Yet too many moral conflicts are irreconcilable and inviting intense personal perspectives and moral views into an organized process of public policy making is unproductive and possibly dangerous. Although valid, these concerns should not derail efforts to bolster the movement. Rather, they are worthy of further study and discussion.

Reasonableness as a Legal Standard

In law school, the “reasonable person standard” is a concept all students learn. The “reasonable person” is a fictional ideal, an individual who would act as any average person would act given the circumstances. First-year law students get introduced to the reasonable person in tort class where they consider claims of human negligence. They learn that how the reasonable person would act becomes the standard of care for the purpose of assigning liability. Consider the case of a deer hunter’s responsibility for accidentally shooting a person hanging laundry in his yard. Was the hunter a reasonable distance from the house? Was it reasonable for the hunter to anticipate that the bullet might miss its intended target and hit someone? Were the consequences of these actions reasonably foreseeable? Juries, mediators, and judges evaluate human action by what an ordinary person would have done under the circumstances and by applying objective standards to subjective thinking that triggers action or inaction.

The concept of reasonableness also plays a significant role in contract law, criminal law, trusts and estates, and other areas of the law. Consider a contract case, where one party promised to sell another person property yet, before any formal agreement was made, the buyer made improvements to the property. The seller backed out. Was the would-be buyer reasonable to expect the seller to follow through on the deal? Are the circumstances such that the buyer can claim “reasonable reliance” and enforce the contract? In trusts and estates, probate judges might have to determine whether a person is competent or *reasonably able* to manage his own affairs. In antitrust law, courts consider whether a corporation’s actions constituted an “unreasonable restraint of trade.”

Decision makers rely on the reasonable person standard because they cannot absolutely *know* what might be going on in the minds of the deer hunter or person hanging laundry, the landowner or buyer, or the person of questionable competency. “Plato restricted the word ‘knowledge’ and allowed it only for people who know something so well and so deeply that they can never be refuted” (Woodruff, 2005, p. 176). What at one time may be regarded as knowledge may be challenged at a later time, as new experiences, insights, or points of view become available. As an alternative to *knowing* what is going on in someone’s mind—a subjective standard—decision-makers sort through the facts and then reach conclusions based on an objective standard, what others would have done under similar circumstances.

It is this last point—that people are judged by the surrounding circumstances—that makes determining what is reasonable so difficult. What if the hunter was hunting in a designated hunting area, or, unreasonably, the victim was hanging out the laundry in a designated hunting area? What if the hunter believed that the homes were unoccupied? In the well-known *U.S. v. Carroll Towing* case, Judge Learned Hand articulates what became known as the Hand Test, a way of examining circumstances to balance the risks and benefits to determine whether one outweighs the other. So, in the case of the hunting accident, if the hunter shot the gun in a residential area, the risk would be high (and the likelihood of finding game low). Judge Hand suggested that courts employ almost a formulaic approach to examine the facts and circumstances to determine reasonableness.

Legal scholars continue to analyze and debate the Hand Test and whether it is an economic, cost-benefit way of analyzing cases (c.f., Posner, 2002). Philosophers dating back to Aristotle, however, might disagree and argue that the reasonable person is virtuous, someone who possesses the moral character and intellectual capacity to examine a situation from a personal perspective and from the perspective of (and out of respect for) others. He or she would make the rational choice, guided by an internal, ethical disposition and practical reason. Virtue is manifested by action.

The Concept of Public Reason

Public reason as an ideal has a long history worthy of more consideration than can be covered in this article. Students might consider Aristotle, Hobbes, Rousseau, Jefferson, and Kant to explore the many uses of the term.³ The scholar most often associated with the ideal of public reason, however, is John Rawls, who in the 1980s developed the concept as a dimension to promoting justice and as a guideline for assigning the appropriate role of religious, philosophical, and moral doctrines in public discourse. His concept of public reason received a great deal of attention from political theorists after his original essays on it in the 1980s, followed by a flurry of essays and books on public reason and related issues of liberalism, justice, reciprocity, justification, respect, civility, impartiality and enlightened self-interest, and accountability (Audi, 2000; Bohman, 1995; Bohman and Rehg, 1997; Greenawalt, 1995; Gutmann and Thompson, 1996 and 2004; Solum, 1993 and 2006).

Rawls begins with the premise that justice is critical to a constitutional democracy. Because a basic feature of a democracy is the plurality of perspectives and conflicting beliefs of its citizens, however, it is understood that not everyone will agree on the nature of justice or on what constitutes justice in a given situation. "Citizens realize that they cannot reach agreement or even approach mutual understanding on the basis of their irreconcilable comprehensive doctrines" (Rawls, 1997 [2], p.765). The

³ Aristotle uses the term "civic friendship" to describe the good will individuals need to interact and make community choices. In *Leviathan*, Thomas Hobbes responded to concerns over legitimating purported miracles. He described *publique reason* as "the reason of God's Supreme Lieutenant, Judge. . . sovereign power" (Hobbes, as cited in Solum, 1993, fn 40). Hobbes believed that the judgment of the sovereign, as God's agent, should prevail as a way to maintain political stability and to obtain broad public acceptance of a decision. Jean-Jacques Rousseau understood public reason as an expression of the common or collective will of people rather than the will of a sovereign. He described stages of human development and an individual's ongoing transformation from a natural state toward a more civilized state. In a natural state, humans are autonomous and self interested. As they develop, they move beyond this natural state to a *civil* state, characterized by rationality, self-legislation, and laws that reflect a unified collective will. The transformative feature is that humans reason and act in ways that are oriented toward the common good. Kant viewed public reason as a restriction on public discourse among the enlightened. Thomas Jefferson also used the term *public reason* in his *First Inaugural Address* (1801). There, he outlined what he deemed the essential principles of American government, "those which ought to shape its administration." These principles include "equal and exact justice to all men, of whatever state or persuasion, religious or political," as well as freedom of religion and the press. Among them, he identified "the diffusion of information and the arraignment of all abuses at the bar of public reason," a pledge to be publicly accountable for laws and policies.

challenges of achieving justice are particularly difficult when religious beliefs and moral values are at stake. For democracy to work, citizens need to propose and consider *only those perspectives and practices that seem reasonable to all members of a society*, even when their personal moral or religious views conflict. They “need to consider what kinds of reasons they may reasonably give one another when fundamental political questions are at stake” (p.765). Citizens and decision makers should propose laws and policies based on politically reasonable viewpoints and arguments. “Understanding how to conduct oneself as a democratic citizen includes understanding an ideal of public reason” (Rawls 1997 [1], p.97).

As he developed the concept further, Rawls distinguished between the *idea* and the *ideal* of public reason. By limiting discourse on the basis of the *idea* of public reason, Rawls believes “we honor an ideal: the ideal of democratic citizens trying to conduct their political affairs on terms supported by public values that we might reasonably expect others to endorse” (Rawls 1997 [1], p. 123). The *ideal* of public reason is realized when public officials, judges, and politicians can explain to other citizens their reasons for supporting a position in terms of the political conception of justice that they regard as most reasonable (Rawls 1997 [2], pp.768-69). Public reason does not apply to all people in all contexts. It only applies to judges, public officials, and politicians when making public policy decisions and laws or as part of the public forum. It is also ostensibly limited to issues that affect “constitutional essentials,” of justice, as well as equity and freedom (Rawls 1997 [1], p.105). Public reason, according to Rawls, need not apply to general matters of policy.

Public reason is both a normative value akin to respect, civility, civic friendship,⁴ justice, and fairness and a procedural standard for public discourse in a diverse democracy. It is, in effect, a ground rule for meaningful and effective democratic dialogue and deliberation. Public reason establishes “guidelines and values in accordance with which citizens of diverse and incommensurable moral, religious, and philosophical perspective may nonetheless come to stable and mutually acceptable agreements about the basic institutions of political society and concerning the most fundamental questions that confront democratic societies” (Button, 2005, p. 257).

Consider, then, the role of religion in public life and political decision-making. Must those with strong faith beliefs accept public policies, laws, and personal actions that are inconsistent with their beliefs? Applying the standard of public reason, one can see that there are justifiable limits to what is appropriate in the public square. Individuals should not introduce beliefs that are not likely to be shared by across traditions or faiths, both secular and faith-based. Asking others to adhere to the beliefs of a few or of a particular faith is both unreasonable and disrespectful. Public reason “imposes a moral, not a legal duty—the duty of civility” (Rawls, 1993, p. 217). In Rawls’s view, values of the U.S. Constitution, particularly justice, provide the appropriate common ground for reaching public decisions.

A flurry of articles and books followed Rawls’s call for public reason. Some generally supported public reason as a standard, although they might use different language, such as “public justification” (Gaus, 1997) or “democratic legitimacy” (Cohen,

⁴ Rawls used the term in *A Theory of Justice* (p. 5).

1989) or “justifiable, as far as possible, to everyone bound by them” (Gutmann and Thompson, 1996, p. 13).

Critics expressed the concern that public reason “restricts the agenda of public discussion, defines in advance what can count as legitimate political reasons, and neglects the distinctive viewpoints of groups at the margins of the dominant culture” (Macedo, 1999, pp. 3-4, citing Benhabib, 1994). It might even be viewed as a form of censorship. It reinforces and privileges the dominant groups whose views are generally the status quo; it marginalizes and oppresses dissenting views. It “trivializes” religious perspectives in particular (Carter, 1993), while simultaneously privileging secular perspectives, as if they were presumed to be legitimate. It might deny individual freedom (the right to religious speech and the free exercise of religion, for example) and social diversity. The strategy of avoidance robs our politics of its most profound sources of vigor, excitement, and importance (Macedo, 2000, p. 213). Inviting diversity in perspectives would produce more authentic and robust public discourse and policy making.

Public Reason and Reciprocity, Interest, Opinion, and Perspective

The response by some has been to call for deliberative democracy *in place of* Rawls’s liberalism with its ideal of public reason (Gutmann and Thompson, 1996; Macedo, 1999). The challenge is that deliberative democracy does not automatically bring to mind a simple definition, so most of the work that followed Rawls’s call has been for deliberative democracy guided by an array of principles and standards. Gutmann and Thompson in particular shaped the discussion by identifying standards of *reciprocity*, *publicity*, and *accountability* as critical to the “reason-giving process” (p. 52). *Publicity* describes the forum in which reasons are given; the process of decision making, the reasons officials and citizens give to justify their policy choices, and the information upon which they base those reasons and decisions should be open to the public (except in circumstances calling for privacy and secrecy, pp. 101-26). *Accountability* implies that *to* whom and *by* whom reasons are given matters (p. 52). It suggests that officials and citizens can explain their choices in particular to those most significantly affected by a law or policy (p. 129).

Reciprocity is the fundamental value of a deliberative democracy. Reciprocity means being given and giving in return acceptable reasons justified by principles and terms acceptable to others. It is “a characteristic of justice that has special force in a democracy, where people should be regarded and regard one another as free and equal members of a cooperative social system” (Gutmann and Thompson, 2004, p. 141). Beliefs, opinions, and so forth do not quash reason. Rather, it suggests that citizens and officials should have open minds, seek moral agreement when they can, maintain mutual respect when they cannot (p. 142), and create laws and policies that will continue to be open to challenge, critique, and ongoing deliberation. Reasons that satisfy the standard of mutual justification are accessible (clear and comprehensible) (pp. 144-45), moral (general enough to be shared by many moral and political theories) (pp. 147-150), respectful (pp. 151-53), and revisable (pp. 156-158).

Iris Marion Young suggests that reasonableness refers “more to a set of dispositions that discussion participants have than to the substance of people’s

contributions to debate” (Young, 2000, p. 24). Reasonable people often disagree about actions, but they enter into a discussion for the purpose of solving a problem or reaching agreement. They are open to new ideas. They listen to and *then* aim to persuade each other. They are willing to change opinions or preferences. Again, the central ingredient is respect: When some speak, others acknowledge the expression in ways that allow for the discussion to continue (pp. 24-25). Young believes that interests, opinions, and social perspectives enrich social knowledge and a public decision making process.

Interests are what matters to individuals (p. 134). The media frequently refer to “special interest groups” or the coercive nature of “interest politics.” To Young, those with similar interests will inevitably mobilize to gain political power. The goal is to accept that reality and build it into the process so that conflicts do not get reduced to a zero-sum game (p. 134).

Opinions are welcome in Young’s deliberative democracy. She characterizes an individual’s principles, values, and priorities as opinions, and opinions influence a person’s judgments about what public policies should be adopted (p. 135). Young writes, “Opinions may be religious, or derive from religious reasons, or they may be culturally based in a world-view or history of social practices” (p. 135). A deliberative democracy allows for a wide range of free expression of *and challenges to* opinions.

Similarly, *social perspectives*—points of view group members have on social or political matters because they are members in that group—are welcome in Young’s democracy (p. 137). Because of their “social locations,” some people may be more attuned to particular meanings than those of other social positions. They approach an issue with different experience and knowledge, and that experience and knowledge matters. They understand situations and view potential consequences differently (p. 136).

When applied, are principles of public reason and of reciprocity significantly different? Both are grounded in the principle of respect: It is disrespectful to promote a position that is not shared by others or that forces others to counter on moral rather than rational terms; it is disrespectful, if not intolerant, to expect officials and citizens to disregard their own moral values. Reciprocity may not call for officials or citizens to abstain from expressing their personal beliefs entirely, but it does call for them to think, act, and aspire to decisions that are based on mutually acceptable reasons. Perhaps Gutmann and Thompson’s deliberative democracy provides a more detailed way of acknowledging and considering moral disagreements. And they certainly argue that Rawls simply eliminates from the political agenda the most divisive issues, whereas they argue for agreement on how to deliberate and reach agreement in a morally pluralistic society. The results may be close. Macedo summarizes,

In their elaboration of the value of reciprocity, Gutmann and Thompson seem to me to capture nicely the core aspirations of public reasonableness. They extend public reason into the realm of middle democracy. The reciprocity they seek is a reasoned, deliberative reciprocity. Deliberative reciprocity helps bring public reason firmly within the ambit of ordinary citizens. . . . [They] help make it clear that the aspiration to mutually accessible reasons is a worthy part of democratic politics: the keystone of a democratic community of principle. (Macedo, 1999, p. 8)

Perhaps public reason is defensible if understood in this way: The reasons that citizens and officials offer on a matter of public concern should reflect public, not private interests. Reasons should be intelligible across a range of beliefs, opinions, and perspectives. They should be subject to critique and revision, based on reliable information or alternative but shared perspectives. Citizens and officials should be ready to explain the basis of their actions to one another in terms each could reasonably expect that others might endorse as consistent with their freedom and equality (Rawls, 1997, p. 97).

Rawls concludes that we should honor public reason as we would any ideal:

[It is] the ideal of democratic citizens trying to conduct their political affairs on terms supported by public values that we might reasonably expect others to endorse. The ideal also expresses a willingness to listen to what other have to say and being ready to accept reasonable accommodations or alterations to one's own view. Public reason further asks of us that the balance of those values we hold to be reasonable in a particular case is a balance we sincerely think can be seen to be reasonable by others. Or failing this, we think the balance can be seen as at least not unreasonable in this sense: that those who oppose it can nevertheless understand how reasonable persons can affirm it. This preserves the ties of civic friendship and is consistent with the duty of civility. On some questions this may be the best we can do. (Rawls 1997, p. 123)

From the Field: Public Reasoning and Deliberative Democracy

The first sections of this article reviewed the role of reason in public life, drawing from legal and political theories and the writings of contemporary political philosophers. The concept of public reason is critical to a deliberative democracy where "decisions derive from the collective will of its members, where the decision-making process is grounded in the *public reasoning* of its members" (Gastil and Levine, 20) (emphasis added). And although there is no perfect definition of deliberative democracy, it is being used here to describe more than a procedural movement. A deliberative democracy takes seriously central principles of justice, equity, and freedom. It is a unification of two trends in our aspirational democracy: (a) ongoing efforts to provide an effective voice to historically underrepresented groups seeking access to government agencies and public policy makers, and (b) cyclical efforts to increase citizen engagement in public life (Gastil and Levine, p. 20). Reason or reasonableness and related concepts of justification, reciprocity, legitimacy, inclusiveness, respect, civility, objectivity, and accountability are critical, guiding principles *and* practices in a deliberative democracy.

In American life, the deliberative democracy movement is integrally linked to the *democratic dialogue* movement. The dialogue movement includes efforts to (a) increase dialogue across difference (intergroup dialogues, interfaith dialogues, conversations on race), (b) confront and address historic and contemporary social injustice, (c) increase civility, respect, and tolerance, and (d) engage citizens in public policy making and social

change. Communities⁵ come together to frame a conflict, issue, or problem. Members of a community listen to each other's perspectives and ideas. They study in more depth what they do not know. They discuss the choices and weigh competing values and interests. Ideally, the community comes to accept refined versions of one or more solutions that are collectively viewed as reasonable. Decisions may not make everyone perfectly happy—they may not reflect a consensus—but they do reflect the reasoned overall will of the community (Thomas and Mallory, 2007). In his recent book, *The Assault on Reason*, Vice President Al Gore argues that “reason, logic, and trust seem to play a sharply diminished role in the way America now makes important decisions” (Gore, 2007, p. 9). He asks:

Why has America's public discourse become less focused and clear, less *reasoned*? Faith in the power of reason—the belief that free citizens can govern themselves wisely and fairly by resorting to logical debate on the basis of the best evidence available, instead of raw power—was and remains the central premise of American democracy. This premise is now under assault. (p. 11)

His observations appear to be based on the work of the federal government and the current executive administration in particular, and not on the work of nonpartisan, nonprofit organizations dedicated to citizen-driven public policy and decision-making, social action, and community change.

Americans seem to know little about the difference between dialogue and other forms of public engagement. Doing dialogue, as Daniel Yankelovich of Public Agenda states, takes special skills that most Americans do not yet possess (17). The proliferation of democracy-building organizations is a reflection of the realization that political banter, legislative meetings constrained by Robert's Rules, casual conversations, designated committees, focus groups, debates, and even individual activism are poor substitutes for productive, inclusive dialogue that leads to collaborative action. The democracy-building organizations help communities create the conditions where communities can create conditions for just and effective dialogue and public reasoning.

Consider Study Circles Resource Center's⁶ materials, which are designed for the general public. They indicate, “Sound principles and effective process design are the keys to achieving social and political changes in people, organizations, communities, and institutions....” The organization then identifies the principles that inform an effective democratic process do the following:

1. Involve *everyone*. Demonstrate that the whole community is welcome and needed.

⁵ *Communities* is used here in the broadest sense. It includes families, neighborhoods, municipalities, states, nations, governing bodies and branches of government, as well as campuses, schools, workplaces, and groups.

⁶ I am focusing on Study Circles Resource Center because I employ the organization's guiding principles and practices often, but other models, such as Public Conversations Project and appreciative inquiry, adhere to similar principles and practices.

2. Embrace diversity. Reach out to all kinds of people.
3. Share knowledge, resources, power, and decision-making.
4. Combine dialogue and deliberation. Create public talk that builds understanding and explores a range of solutions.
5. Connect deliberative dialogue to social, political, and policy change.

Similarly, the organization suggests that groups create ground rules for civic discourse, such as “Seek first to understand, then be understood” and “Listen respectfully to one another.” Neutral, trained facilitators, not experts, guide the discussions. The dialogues usually take place over a long enough period of time for participants to study the issues and seek knowledge that is beyond the original group. The process is designed to lead to personal commitment and collective action. Without specifically citing Rawls, Gutmann and Thompson, Young, and others, the organization promotes principles of respect and civility, inclusiveness, reciprocity, open-mindedness, informed participation, active listening, careful analysis, and a goal of seeking common ground. These *are* the critical components of effective public reasoning.

One notable point: Study Circles Resource Center encourages communities to engage in dialogues that start and end with personal stories and commitments. The expectation is that participants will draw from their values, belief systems, social perspectives, opinions, and lived experiences when expressing their views. They are more likely to build trust and reach practical solutions if they make connections and establish relationships. They are less likely to dismiss out of hand opposing perspectives or to walk away from the table if they are talking with people with whom they have established a relationship. For these reasons, the first portion of a study circles process is always dedicated to sharing personal stories and perspectives. Participants are not expected to bracket or quash their beliefs and perspectives, but they are expected to engage in a process where they not only express their views but also listen to those of others. They work through conflict and collectively commit to addressing, not avoiding or ignoring, polarizing assertions. The participants assume responsibility not only for moving toward action but also preserving the integrity of the process.

The Role of Higher Education

Higher education is famous for its reforms, some of which stick. By now, most educators have heard the calls for renewing higher education’s “civic mission” by educating students for active engagement in a society. Educators know that service learning experiences—classroom linked community-based learning experiences—can be valuable if done well. They also know that providing students with opportunities to volunteer occasionally—serving soup in the soup kitchen—is inadequate. Students need to study and understand the conditions that created the need in the first place—they need to understand the social, political, and structural conditions, including structural racism and economic injustice, which generated the need for the soup kitchen.

Educators also know that diversity is more than a matter of demographics and a welcoming campus climate. Colleges and universities generally know that diversity is an

educational asset and resource, that examining most issues and topics from diverse cultural, historical, political, and personal perspectives enriches learning. They also know that socio-economic, particularly racial and gender, disparities persist and that solving these long-standing problems will require an informed, dedicated, and culturally competent citizenry.

Educators know that real personal and social problems are interdisciplinary by nature, and that studying a discipline or profession in a vacuum limits rather than broadens the potential for real change. Critical thinking, moral reasoning, and problem solving are integrative skills.

Educators also understand that educating the next generation for engaged citizenship in a complex world involves teaching leadership and community organizing, conflict negotiation and resolution skills, and ethics and personal responsibility. More and more institutions are elevating these studies to stand-alone academic programs.

Finally, educators know that students learn best through interactive pedagogies, and that theory and content are best learned through experience and practice.

Deliberative democracy is not yet another reform movement or add-on but a set of principles and practices that can be integrated across teaching and learning. Weaving deliberative democracy across the curriculum can bring together often-disconnected educational aspirations such as civic engagement, diversity, leadership, ethics, and so forth. Yet in considering *how* to educate for a deliberative democracy, colleges and universities need to engage the question, what is the appropriate role of reason as both a normative value and a habit of civic engagement, and how is reasoning managed in a public context? Educators frequently create experiences in which students reason together, but do the dynamics change (or need to change) when moral values, social identity, and ideology are at stake?

There are other questions: Can colleges and universities require students to demonstrate, by the time they graduate, an ability to engage effectively in a process of public reasoning, in much the same way that they must demonstrate critical thinking and moral reasoning skills? Is educating for public reason an education in Constitutional principles, individual values clarification, essential citizenship and leadership skills, or something else? How would this skill set be measured and evaluated? These too require further consideration.

This article makes the case for teaching and learning for a deliberative democracy, where all students, not only political science or philosophy majors, learn about and practice democratic dialogue and public discourse. Given the voluminous literature on the subject, it provides an overview of reasonableness and public reason as standards in law and policy making, as well as public reasoning as a ground rule for public discourse. It links the concept of public reason to Constitutional values of justice, equity, and freedom. It traces some of the more recent arguments among political scientists and philosophers on the appropriate role of beliefs, values, opinions, interests and ideologies in public life. It points to exemplars in democracy building, organizations that work to invite diverse people and perspectives to participate in positive, productive, and reasoned public discourse. Finally, it argues that educating for democracy is a critical role of higher education, but complex questions remain about how to accomplish this goal.

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Resources

- The Democracy Imperative, <http://www.unh.edu/academic-affairs/democracy/>
- National Coalition for Dialogue and Deliberation: www.thataway.org
- National Issue Forums: www.nifi.org
- Public Conversations Project: www.publicconversations.org
- Study Circles Resource Center (soon to be Everyday Democracy) www.studycircles.org
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