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## Guide to Classroom Deliberation for Students and Teachers

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Building on the work of the Bioethics Commission in [\*Bioethics for Every Generation: Deliberation and Education in Health, Science, and Technology\*](#), this guide to deliberation provides instructors and students with a condensed overview of how to conduct classroom training in deliberation as a decision-making method. Adapting and building upon the process described in Appendix I of *Bioethics for Every Generation*, this guide is intended for instructors and students to use in combination with specific “Deliberative Scenarios” available at [bioethics.gov](http://bioethics.gov).

### Introduction

**Democratic deliberation** is an inclusive method of decision making used to address an open question or decide on a way forward. It requires a diverse set of participants to consider both relevant empirical information as well as ethical and moral bases for decisions. Participants justify their arguments with reasons that are accessible to all participants and treat one another with mutual respect, with the goal of reaching an actionable decision on how to move forward (such as a rule, policy, or law). The method includes openness to future challenge or revision should additional information emerge.

Practicing deliberation in the classroom requires active participation and helps prepare students to make collaborative decisions that embrace respectful exploration and discussion of opposing views. Deliberation calls for students to work toward agreement when it is possible and to maintain mutual respect when it is not. It encourages participants to adopt a broader perspective and work toward a mutually agreeable conclusion.

Democratic deliberation is a decision-making method that works well when a group is faced with an open policy question on which reasonable disagreement exists. The method addresses the question ‘what should we do?’ especially when there are several reasonable options for action. Deliberation requires articulation of values and ethical considerations in addition factual and empirical evidence, including lived experience. While science tells us what we *can* do, ethics helps us decide what we *should* do.

Deliberation is different than discussion or debate. Discussion is typically used to help participants develop an understanding of a topic. Debate is typically used as a means of swaying or convincing an opponent of the rightness of one’s position. Deliberation, on the other hand, is typically used to reach an agreed-upon way forward on a challenging topic for which there are several reasonable alternatives. Often it involves discussion (i.e.,



developing an understanding) but does not involve the typical winner-take-all approach often associated with debate. The aim is to reach a negotiated way forward that finds common ground and meaningful agreement.

## **Conducting Democratic Deliberation in the Classroom**

### ***Before the Deliberation***

Step 1: Choose an open question and consider distinct points of view. An open question requires consideration of facts as well as social values. Open questions can be seen from multiple perspectives. The question should have an applied component, including questions about how best to move forward and what should be done. Each “Deliberative Scenario” will present an open policy question. Group reflection on what makes it an open policy question can help set the stage for deliberation.

Step 2: Allow ample time for deliberation. Deliberation is a reflective process, which requires time. In the case of an urgent situation, conduct deliberation simultaneously, and apply results as soon as possible. Consider the time-sensitive nature of the current question and how long you have available for deliberation. These considerations might determine the extent and content of background preparation before deliberation. Be sure to dedicate some of the available time for articulating recommendations or developing a concrete proposal. Build time into the process for assessment.

### ***During the Deliberation***

Step 3: Use sound and relevant information to inform the deliberation. Make established facts and perspectives available to all participants in the form of accessible background materials. Successful proposals for a way forward require developing a shared knowledge base. Scenarios will include background readings to help form a common ground. If new information emerges, introduce it into the deliberation. Evaluate evidence through an established and reliable mechanism before and during deliberation.

A “Teacher Companion” to each “Deliberative Scenario” will include suggested background readings for this step. Instructors might seek out supplemental resources on their own to tailor scenarios to their classroom needs. Classes with more allotted time can encourage students to actively participate in seeking out relevant background information before and during the deliberation. In addition to shared background readings for all participants, those assigned various roles for deliberation might have corresponding readings that inform the perspective that each participant brings to deliberations.



“Teacher Companions” will outline these optional readings for various roles. In addition, “Teacher Companions” include optional *Scenario Shifts* that instructors can introduce at their discretion as deliberation unfolds. *Scenario Shifts* provide key expert insights or points of emerging information that might change the direction of the deliberation.

Step 4: Cultivate an environment that encourages participants in the deliberation to practice mutual respect and reason-giving. In preparation for deliberation, participants might discuss what behaviors do and do not constitute respect for other participants. As deliberation unfolds, students must consider what adequate respect for differing perspectives in a democracy looks like in practice, and whether their own or others’ attitudes and behavior reflect democratic ideals of inclusivity and equality. Instructors must be prepared to facilitate deliberation, including managing disagreement when participants are unable to and asking students to consider views that have not yet been raised. In addition, teachers might spot moments to assist participants in overcoming obstacles to productive deliberation. Equally important, instructors must evaluate emerging consensus, watching for hidden assumptions, perspectives that have been overlooked, or considerations that have been prematurely dismissed. Teachers must address their own biases, and critically reflect on the decision to interject their own views—implicit or explicit—into deliberation. The *Additional Resources* section below provides teachers with more tips on how to foster open discussion, as well as more information on seeking out institutional and administrative support for deliberative classroom activities.

### ***After the Deliberation***

Step 5: Develop detailed, actionable recommendations or a proposal. Recommendations or a clear proposal for action require participants to articulate areas of agreement, even if other aspects of the question remain disputed or unsettled. Participants should consider how to format and share their findings and recommendations with policymakers to ensure that the results of their deliberations are considered in the policymaking process. Participants might also consider how deliberation is often iterative. They might identify key points in time for revisiting the proposed solution, or anticipate crucial emerging information that might suggest a need to begin deliberations anew. While recommendations or a draft proposal can provide a product that teachers might deem an appropriate object for assessment purposes, deliberation emphasizes the process of learning, not just the product. For this reason, student and instructor reflections on how deliberations went, and how they might be improved, should also constitute a central object of assessment. The *Additional Resources* section below provides participants and teachers with more information about how to use reflections in assessment of deliberative classroom exercises.



## **Additional Resources**

### General

Alfaro, C. (2008). Chapter 6: Reinventing teacher education: The role of deliberative pedagogy in the K-6 Classroom. In Dedrick, J.R., L. Grattan, and H. Dienstrfrey. (Eds.). *Deliberation and the Work of Higher Education* (pp. 143-164). Dayton, OH: The Kettering Foundation Press.

Bogaards, M. and F. Deutsch. (2015). Deliberation by, with, and for University Students. *Journal of Political Science Education*, 11(2), 221-232.

Hess, D. (2009). *Controversy in the Classroom*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Jhumki Basu, S., Calabrese, A. and E.T. Barton. (Eds.). (2011). *Democratic Science Teaching: Building the Expertise to Empower Low-Income Minority Youth in Science*. Rotterdam, Netherlands: Sense Publishers.

Morse, R.S., et al. (2005). Learning and teaching about deliberative democracy: On campus and in the field. *Journal of Public Affairs Education*, 11(4), 325-336.

Parker, W.C. (2003). *Teaching Democracy: Unity and Diversity in Public Life*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

### Fostering Support of Parents, Schools, and Administration

Hess, D.E., and P. McAvoy. (2015). Chapter 10: Supporting the Political Classroom. In *The Political Classroom: Evidence and Ethics In Democratic Education*. New York, NY: Routledge, pp. 204-212.

### How to Facilitate Discussion, Handle Instructor Biases Responsibly

Brookfield, S.D. (2005). *Discussion as a Way of Teaching: Tools and Techniques for Democratic Classrooms*. Second Edition. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Hess, D.E., and P. McAvoy. (2015). Chapters 8, 9: The Ethics of Framing and Selecting Issues; The Ethics of Withholding and Disclosing Political Views. In *The Political Classroom: Evidence and Ethics In Democratic Education*. New York, NY: Routledge, pp. 158-203.



Last Update: September 30, 2016

### Assessment

Handout 3: Student Reflection on Deliberation. From Lesson Procedures. Deliberating in a Democracy. Available at:

[http://www.did.deliberating.org/documents/Lessons\\_Procedures.pdf](http://www.did.deliberating.org/documents/Lessons_Procedures.pdf).

Student Rubric for Deliberative Dialogue. The Choices Program. The Center for Foreign Policy Development at Brown University and the Public Agenda Foundation. Available at <http://www.choices.edu/resources/rubrics/rubric-student-deliberative-dialogue.pdf>.