Teacher Companion for Deliberative Scenario: The Use of Prescription Stimulants for Enhanced Academic Performance

This teacher companion provides instructors with step-by-step instructions for facilitating deliberation. The deliberative scenario, “The Use of Prescription Stimulants for Enhanced Academic Performance,” is particularly well suited for science or health classes in high school and college, and can be used in a variety of other settings.

Phase 1: Before the Deliberation

Provide Background and Context

Provide students with “Deliberative Scenario: The Use of Prescription Stimulants for Enhanced Academic Performance” and with “Guide to Classroom Deliberation for Students and Teachers.” Both are available on bioethics.gov in the Education section. If desired, assign additional readings on deliberation from the Additional Resources section in “Guide to Classroom Deliberation for Students and Teachers.” Ask students to think about the differences between deliberation and debate or discussion, and the goals and method of deliberation.

Clearly state the goal of the deliberation: to develop a consensus on a practical policy for the school system to implement regarding non-prescription use of stimulants.

Provide all students with the following readings (available online) to learn about cognitive enhancement.


Assign Roles

Option 1: Assign each student a role from among the following stakeholders: teachers, students, school administrators, clinicians (including a primary care physician, a psychiatrist, and a school nurse), parents, law enforcement officers, and other community members.
Option 2: Ask students to generate a list of stakeholders who would serve on the special purpose committee and assign roles from that list. The list should include participants with a wide variety of perspectives on the matter.

Note: You can also assign multiple students to the same role, as even people in the same role can have different perspectives. These readings provide additional perspective for each role.

Assign Role-based Readings

Based on a student’s specified role, assign role-specific readings from the additional reading section at the end of this document.

Phase 2: During the Deliberation

Questions to Guide and Focus Deliberation

Remind students of the goal of this exercise: To practice democratic deliberation by considering many different perspectives, providing reasons for their arguments, listening respectfully to opposing viewpoints, and finding a way forward.

Instruct students to begin the deliberation by introducing themselves and stating which role they will play.

During the deliberation, ensure that the following questions have received sufficient attention. If a question has not been answered, pose the question to the group.

- What are the purposes of using prescription stimulants? Who could benefit and who could be harmed? (Empirical question: provides factual evidence)
- Is using this pharmacological intervention to enhance cognitive performance different from using older, more familiar methods, such as caffeine? How so? (Empirical question: provides factual evidence)
- Do prescription stimulants have enhancing effects on cognitive abilities? (Empirical question: provides factual evidence)
- What are the risks of using this type of intervention? (Empirical question: provides factual evidence)
- Who are the individuals likely to have access to the stimulants? (Empirical question: provides factual evidence)
- If shown to be safe and effective, who should be allowed to have access? (Normative question: provides answer to question of what we should do)
- What are the consequences to society if use of these stimulants becomes mainstream? (Thought exercise: includes possible factual and moral consequences)

Strategies to Improve the Deliberative Process
If some students are quiet or refrain from contributing, ask the class: Are there any views that have been left out? Whose views might those be?

If there is a swift and seemingly straightforward answer or a premature dominant view developing that could crowd out other views, ask the class: What are some other perspectives that we have not heard or considered yet?

**Strategies to Improve Content**

If students come up with recommendations without justification, ask the class: Do the suggested courses of actions treat people equitably? Treating people differently can be justified, but clear mutually understood reasons must be stated.

**Scenario Shift**

If the students reach consensus on recommendations with time leftover, you might introduce a shift in the scenario. Pick one or more of the following scenario shifts and ask students to discuss how this new information changes things.

- New evidence is revealed that prescription stimulants taken for enhancement do not alter academic performance. Will this information alter your policy recommendation? If so, how will you update it?
- The private school, Randolph Prep, decides to take no action to address the use of prescription stimulants. Would you update your recommendations after hearing this news? If so, how?
- You learn that a national body of medical professionals has developed guidelines instructing physicians to prescribe these drugs only to patients with a medical diagnosis that indicates a need for the stimulants. Would you change your policy recommendations based on the new guidelines? If so, what would you change?

**Developing a Policy Recommendation**

Ask the students to develop recommendations that reflect the consensus-driven process of deliberation. The recommendations should include mutually acceptable reasons for a policy choice.

**Phase 3: After the Deliberation**

**Presenting the Policy Recommendation**

Instruct students to write a half-page press brief for the local newspaper stating their recommendations and the justifications for them. Alternatively, ask students to present this information orally.
Assessment and Reflection

Ask the class to reflect on the process and outcome of the deliberation using the following questions.

- Do the recommendations provide reasons for a policy choice?
- Are all of the deliberators satisfied with the outcome? If not, was a dissenting statement included?
- Does this policy recommendation seem more legitimate than one decided by majority vote? By elected representatives? Why or why not?
- What are the strengths of deliberative decision making? What are the weaknesses?
- Is the set of recommendations contingent upon new facts or values coming to light? When would a new deliberation be needed?

Additional Role-based Readings

If the role assigned is a teacher, assign the following readings:


If the role assigned is a student, assign the following readings:


If the role assigned is a school administrator, assign the following readings:


If the role assigned is a primary care physician, assign the following readings:


If the role assigned is a **psychiatrist**, assign the following readings:


If the role assigned is a **school nurse**, assign the following readings:


If the role assigned is a **parent**, assign the following readings:


If the role assigned is a **law enforcement officer**, assign the following readings:

- Find the Federal regulations about Adderall using these resources.

If the role assigned is a **general community member**, assign the following readings:

## Relevant National Educational Standards

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