# Democracy & Education

## Deliberating Public Policy Issues with Adolescents
### Classroom Dynamics and Sociocultural Considerations

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**Abstract**

Classroom discussion and deliberation have been widely touted in the research literature as a center-piece of high quality civic education. Empirical studies, however, of such processes are relatively few. In a public policy deliberation on immigration conducted in three Midwestern high schools during the academic year 2015–16, the authors found that analysis of a set of deliberations on the subject of immigration policy in the United States reveals the ways in which sociocultural identity aspects of the settings and participants influenced the processes and dynamics of these classroom events. Reflecting upon this analysis suggests a set of factors that reveal the degree to which classroom deliberations are shaped by factors other than rational consideration of the topic.

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P ROMOTING DELIBERATION OF social and public policy issues has a long tradition in K–12 education (Abowitz & Harnish, 2006; Biesta, 2011; Hess, 2002; Parker & Hess, 2001), as does discussion of controversial issues (Hess, 2009; Hess & McAvoy, 2015). Civic education scholars advocate both discussion and deliberation (Kawashima-Ginsberg, 2013; McAvoy & Hess, 2013). Here, we draw on Parker and Hess's (2001) conceptualization of deliberation, which they define as discussion "that is aimed at reaching a decision at an action plan that will resolve a problem that a 'we' faces. It is the key citizenship behavior of 'we the people' in democracies if they are not simply to exercise power (e.g., voting; direct action) but to think with one another about the power they exercise" (p. 282).

Discussions and deliberations of public policy issues in classrooms have been shown to enhance students' skills in reasoning and argumentation, use of evidence to back claims, consideration of alternative perspectives, and compromise in pursuit of consensus (Hess, 2009; Kuhn & Crowell, 2011). Deliberations on current controversial issues have been identified as one of the promising practices that can bring about greater engagement of youth in civic life (Levine & Kawashima-Ginsberg, 2017).

Deliberation carried out in public arenas has similar goals, for example, that "opponents will learn from each other and expand each other's horizons" and are particularly well-suited to engagement about issues on which "difference exists, where consensus is not likely and compromise is the best that one can hope for—where partners can arrive at acceptable solutions via dialogue without having to give up on core moral values" (Dahlgren, 2006, p. 278).

Classroom contexts involving discussion and deliberation of public policy issues provide an opportunity for adolescents to rehearse and enact the kinds of skills that Dahlgren described as critical to deliberation in the public square.

Little empirical research exists, however, about deliberation in secondary social studies classrooms (Samuelsson, 2016), although somewhat more attention has been given to discussion (e.g., Avery, Levy, & Simmons, 2013; Dull & Murrow, 2008; Hess, 2009; Hess & McAvoy, 2015; Parker & Hess, 2001). This article describes an effort to conduct deliberations on two topics—immigration and Internet privacy—in three secondary classrooms. Although the paper broadly explores the deliberations on both topics, the data and analysis provided throughout much of the paper are drawn from the deliberation on immigration. The study described here is part of a larger study investigating the relationships among adolescent sociocultural identity, social and political trust, and evidence use. Although the focus of the larger study is on evidence use, here we present a set of themes emergent from the deliberation on immigration, specifically the interaction of students' sociocultural identity attributes with the ways they discussed the topic in the three schools.

At the outset, we wish to comment on what, in our judgment, might be considered the failure of deliberation in these events (by "event" we are referring to the enactment of the deliberations we planned). If by deliberation, we mean, as Parker has suggested, discussion that allows for decision-making about a course of action related to public policy, then the classroom events we witnessed did not manage to "resolve a problem a 'we' faces," as Parker and Hess (2001) put it (p. 282). In the case of immigration, discussion did occur, even if the use of evidence (the focus of our larger study) fell short of what we had expected. In the case of Internet privacy, even discussion faltered since the students saw so little problem with the perceived trade-offs between the advantages of social media and privacy concerns as to barely generate a conversation. With that in mind, we focus this paper on the discussions on immigration, paying particular attention to the nature of these discussions in each of the three schools and the degree to which what unfolded in them might have prevented these discussions from turning into true deliberations. Such a focus, we believe, may stimulate greater attention to the pedagogical affordances and hurdles involved with deliberating public policy issues within the context of contemporary secondary classrooms.

### Literature Review: Deliberation in Public and Classroom Settings

Many factors influence the way discussions and deliberations occur; in our study, we found that social identity theory and the civic opportunity gap played key roles. We review scholarship in these areas here.

#### Social Identity Theory

Scholars have written about the role of social identities in whose voices get heard and whose arguments carry the most weight in public deliberations (Karpowitz, Mendelberg, & Shaker, 2012; Mansbridge, 1991); on the stances individuals take (Greene, 2004;

Iyengar, Sood, & Lelkes, 2012; Lodge & Taber, 2013); and about the degree of openness participants exhibit toward ideas that challenge their existing beliefs and group affiliations (Haidt, 2012).

Social identity theory (Tajfel, 1981; Tajfel & Turner, 1986) provides insights into why aspects of social identity play a role in public deliberation. In contemporary American politics, social identity attributes have been shown to be a contributing factor to partisanship (Greene, 2004; Iyengar, Sood, & Lelkes, 2012). Partisanship drives attitudes and behaviors toward members of out-groups (Iyengar & Westwood, 2015). Strongly held partisan beliefs act as an informational filter through which individuals interpret and accept new information (Lodge & Taber, 2013). Partisan identities function as a powerful inhibitor of discourse between political groups since individuals are often reluctant to listen to perspectives that challenge their group's identity and worldview (Haidt, 2012; Lupia, 2016).

These concerns raise other questions about public deliberations, including the capacity of individuals to engage in ways that enhance decision-making and build empathy, equality, perspective-taking, and open-mindedness rather than "backfiring" by producing situations that "amplify the strength of a majority opinion" (Mendelberg, 2002, p. 159) or privilege the voices of those with education and income (Jacobs, Cook, & Delli Carpini, 2009).

Social identity factors also play a role in the dynamics of secondary classrooms (Cohen, 1997), and the insights from classroom research as well as political science research may be worthy of consideration regarding pedagogical approaches to classroom discussion and deliberation. The impact of social identity on secondary classroom dynamics can be attributed, in part, to the fact that adolescents stand at a critical juncture of personal and social identity formation (Erikson, 1968) and civic identity formation (Hart & Atkins, 2002; Youniss, McLellan, & Yates, 1997), which makes them susceptible to peer influence (Ryan, 2000). Likewise, students are not immune from the influence of parental partisan leanings and the polarized political and media climate nationwide (Vercellotti & Matto, 2010).

#### Civic Opportunity Gap

Another set of factors influencing whether and how discussion and deliberation are carried out in classrooms is the civic opportunity gap between schools in affluent or impoverished areas (Levinson, 2012). Schools and classrooms serve as a primary location of adolescent political socialization (Rothstein & Jacobsen, 2007), but not all civic education experiences are equally impactful nor does every student have equal access to civic education opportunities. Open classrooms where students feel free to disagree with each other and the teacher, where respect for diverse opinions is fostered, and where teachers engage students in political and social issues improve both political and civic knowledge and anticipated future engagement (Campbell, 2008). Research on the "civic opportunity gap" (Kahne & Middaugh, 2009) suggested that affluent school environments provide more frequent opportunities for powerful civic education experiences such as deliberations and other activities demanding higher level thinking and student engagement than do schools in poor, urban school districts.

Once again, one reason to focus attention on deliberations is that such approaches (and, admittedly, there are a variety of ways in which deliberations can be conducted) can have positive long-term consequences for students' later engagement in civic life (Niemi & Junn, 1998). Other approaches can also have positive effects, such as dialogic exchanges in classrooms (Nystrand, 1996), project-based learning (Levy, 2011; Parker et al., 2011; Parker et al., 2013), action civics, and service-learning (Levine & Kawashima-Ginsberg, 2017). Finally, it is important to note that civic education can occur outside social studies classrooms (Lenzi et al., 2014) because a democratic school climate has also been shown to foster civic engagement.

## Methods: Considering Immigration

As previously noted, the study described here derives from a larger study conducted between September 2015 and June 2016 that focused on the potential relationships among adolescent sociocultural identity, social and political trust, and evidence use. We briefly describe the goals of the larger study before turning our attention to the aspect of the larger study considered here, that is, the deliberation on immigration, a topic that other social studies authors have identified as an important topic for contemporary social studies classrooms (Hilburn & Jaffee, 2016). In the deliberation on immigration, we noticed the strong impact of sociocultural identity attributes on the dynamics of the classroom event.

The research questions for the larger study were as follows:

1. What forms of evidence do students find persuasive in deliberations about public issues? Are there differences that relate to sociocultural identity and levels of social trust?
2. How do students use evidence to build arguments within the context of deliberation about public issues?

The study was conducted in three U.S. social studies classrooms in three high schools in the Midwest. Across all three classrooms, there were 90 student participants. From these 90 students, we identified 30 students (10 in each classroom) who became "focal students," who were selected based on a set of sociocultural and political identity factors and a set of instruments gauging their levels of social/political trust. For the 30 focal students, we sought a range of levels of social/political trust and a mix of ethnic/racial identity, gender, and political affiliation.

The research proceeded in several stages: First, we presented students with seven forms of evidence "in the abstract" and then conducted one-on-one semistructured interviews asking them about how trustworthy and persuasive they found the various forms of evidence. Second, using the same seven forms of evidence, we then presented analogous pieces of evidence based on a "settled" public policy case of a previously controversial issue—school segregation (Hess, 2009). Once again, we asked them about which of the forms of evidence they found most trustworthy and persuasive. Finally, we prepared evidence packets for both deliberations on immigration and Internet privacy in order to provide students with evidence to support differing

perspectives on the questions posed and positions from which they should choose.

We selected the topics of immigration and Internet privacy in consultation with the participating classroom teachers, who assumed, as we did, that students would find these topics engaging so that these events would stimulate a high level of student discussion and debate. Immigration was not only a topic raised frequently in the 2016 presidential election but also a topic already being explored in each of the social studies classrooms. The teachers had advised us against using climate change as the second choice for the deliberation since they said that the students all agreed on this topic, which ironically proved to be the case with our second topic, Internet privacy. We only discovered after the fact that the students' views on Internet privacy (i.e., that they were not concerned with privacy or at least were prepared to accept the tradeoffs in exchanging privacy for the affordances of technology) were reflected more broadly in public opinion polls of adolescents nationwide (Madden et al., 2013).

The approach to the immigration deliberation was modeled on deliberations sponsored by the National Issues Forum (NIF), an organization that prepares public policy deliberation materials for adult audiences (see https://www.nifi.org/) but are also used in secondary and college classrooms. NIF stresses the importance of providing three public policy options in a deliberation. The policy options were based on a NIF prompt: Which of these three courses of action do you think U.S. policymakers should take regarding immigration?

1. Welcome anyone who wants to come into the country legally.
2. Prevent undocumented immigrants from entering the country and deport all those already here.
3. Allow only people with very specific job-related skills to enter.

Procedures were similar across each of the cases. Each classroom spent one period (almost one hour) led by the teacher reviewing the evidence packets to clarify terms and ensure comprehension. Teachers set the rules of engagement, which were slightly different in each school depending on past practice. Although teachers launched the event, reminded students about the three policy options available, and encouraged them to rely on the material in the evidence packets, they mostly stayed out of the way thereafter, except for occasional reminders that students should reference the evidence to substantiate and guide their claims.

On the day of the deliberation, members of the research team observed and video-recorded (with the use of three video cameras) the deliberations and took notes about who was speaking (male or female, other identity markers, body language, etc.) and to whom. We then reviewed and transcribed the video recordings and analyzed them along with the transcripts of the interviews with focal students and teachers. Analysis of the transcripts and video recordings involved at least two members of the research team. Researchers used a constant comparative methods of analysis

(Glaser, 1965) with these research artifacts to arrive at the themes presented here.

## Study Context, Participants, and Summary of Deliberations

We selected the three schools to represent a range of different socioeconomic status, racial/ethnic composition of students, and students' prior experiences with deliberations as a class. Before turning to the themes that emerged from our analysis, we present demographic background about each school and a brief review of the deliberation in each setting.

**Glendale High School.** Glendale High School is located in a middle-class, mostly White, small Midwestern city, situated a few miles from a postindustrial urban center. The student body, totaling 2,767 students, somewhat more diverse than that of the city itself, was composed of 72.6% Whites and 27.4% students of color (15.9% African American, 3.5% Hispanic, 3.1% Asian/Pacific Islander, 0.4% American Indian/Alaskan Native, and 4.5% multiracial). Twenty-seven percent of students were eligible for free or reduced-priced lunch (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2017). The school's four-year graduation rate was 92% (Michigan Department of Education [MDE], 2017). The deliberation conducted for this study was the first students had experienced in that class, although they had brief discussions (less than 15 minutes in length) on current events each week. The teacher indicated that four students in this class had parents who immigrated to the U.S. on professional visas.

The deliberation in Glendale represented the wide spectrum of contemporary U.S. societal views regarding immigration (see, for example, Newport, 2015). The class was evenly split between the second and third policy options, with about half the students advancing legal and economic issues to lament the high number of illegal immigrants and suggest that undocumented immigrants don't contribute sufficiently to the economy, do burden the social safety net, and do pose a threat to safety and national security. Rather than having the U.S. use funds to care for illegal immigrants, those students proposed that money should be spent on improving the lives of American citizens. The remaining students argued that the problem is not illegal immigrants, who are often put in situations threatening their dignity and resulting in their resorting to crime, but with a U.S. system that does not provide them with opportunities for success and then blames them for their lot, much like it does with poor Americans.

**Sloan High School.** Sloan High School, one of the highest-ranked schools in the state academically, is located in an affluent suburb of a large, post-industrial Midwestern city. The student population, totaling 1,351 students, was 88.8% White and 11.2% students of color (4.7% African American, 2.2% Hispanic, 2.9% Asian/Pacific Islander, 0.1% American Indian/Alaskan Native, 1.3% multiracial) (NCES, 2017). Four percent of students were considered economically disadvantaged, and the school's four-year graduation rate was 97% (MDE, 2017). The U.S. Government class was part of an interdisciplinary program that attempts to foster students' intellectual skills and civic engagement in a pluralistic society, and one in which discussions took place on a regular basis. Only one student in this class was an immigrant whose parents had come in on a J1 visa. Two other students had relatives who legally immigrated to the U.S.

The deliberation in Sloan was, as is normally the practice in this setting, divided into two groups, each in a different classroom and led by one of the two teachers co-teaching this class. These two groups took divergent approaches to the ways in which they framed responses to immigration. The first group mostly explored economic issues, using legalistic and technical terms. They focused less on undocumented immigrants per se than on large corporations in the U.S. that use the H1-B1 visa system to bring low-paid immigrants into the country to replace native-born workers. Several students spoke about these practices as problematic ethically, for both the immigrants and displaced American workers. Some students raised concerns regarding issues of safety and national security in light of the influx of undocumented immigrants into the country. The second group tended to examine the issue through a humanistic and philosophical lens that focused more centrally on the ethical issues underlying immigration policy. Students suggested that, as a country of immigrants, U.S. policies ought to be more sympathetic toward new immigrants and even provide a support system that ensures their integration and success. Despite prevailing assumptions about the financial burden of immigrants, these students felt that the majority of undocumented immigrants contribute to society by working and paying taxes. Overall, these students tended to reject option one, advocating for some combination of and modification in options two and three.

**Eisenhower High School.** Eisenhower High School is an urban school situated in a medium-size, lower-middle-class, diverse, industrial city. Student enrollment, totaling 1,525 students, was composed of 76.1% students of color (42.7% African American, 18% Hispanic, 9.7% Asian//Pacific Islander, 0.5% Native American/Alaskan, 5.2% multiracial) and 23.9% White students. Fifty-four percent of students received free or reduced-price lunch (NCES, 2017). The school's four-year graduation rate was 78% (MDE, 2017). Half the students in the class were either immigrants themselves or had parents who had immigrated to the United States. The deliberation on immigration was the first time that students had experienced this approach in their class, which usually relied on direct instruction via lecture with some recitation.

Although several issues that arose in other schools, such as economic and legal considerations and public safety, were also present in the deliberation at Eisenhower, the students were almost unanimously in favor of the first position, that is, opening entrance into the United States to anyone interested in it. This outcome was not surprising in a class in which half of the students were either themselves immigrants or children of parents who had immigrated to this country. As such, discussion took on a more personal tone, whereby students supported their opinions with immigration stories of their own families. Overall, students condemned the existing, restrictive immigration system in the United States that is either oblivious to struggles faced by immigrants or overtly discriminates against them. Students also challenged the idea that immigrants are a burden on society, suggesting instead that

immigrants enrich the society through diversity, pay their taxes, and should, therefore, receive the same privileges that citizens have.

## Findings: Crosscutting Themes Related to Immigration

We highlight four crosscutting themes in this section that reflect dynamics related to the classroom event on immigration: (a) language, cultural capital, and dis/engagement; (b) positionality; (c) the insider-outsider divide; and (d) deliberations, evidence use, and persuasion. These themes illuminate considerations relevant to discussion and deliberation of public policy issues. Before turning to these themes, we paint an overall picture of what transpired in these classrooms.

### Description of the Events

Across the schools, students raised a variety of issues around immigration, for example, federal policy, safety and security, human value (and values), and the pragmatics of living within an increasingly diverse society. Students viewed these issues through different lenses, ideologies, and perspectives as they raised moral, ethical, economic, and political questions pertaining to immigration policy and its impact on individuals and society. Overall, their exchanges surfaced the ideological partisanship on this issue that manifest itself so prominently during the U.S. presidential primary season, illustrating the range of perspectives circulating from nativism, nationalism, protectionism, and isolationism, to a more global sense of responsibility and citizenship underlined by an ethics of care, compassion, and responsibility for those individuals living beyond one's national borders.

Most students were highly engaged in talking about immigration. Most spoke at one point or another, with many contributing multiple times, making the events inclusive and engaging. When we interviewed our focal students, they suggested to the research team that they would like more learning opportunities like this one in their courses. They found the collective consideration of the public policy issues and the opportunity to express their views and listen to others' opinions to be valuable. Teachers also indicated that if they did not face time constraints in covering curriculum in their classrooms, they would like to carry out activities such as these more frequently. Two of the teachers were surprised that the topic had elicited student participation from individuals who rarely spoke up in their classes.

### Language, Cultural Capital, and Dis/Engagement

Our focus in this section is on the dynamics of these events through the prism of cultural and linguistic capital (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). Linguistic capital, a form of cultural capital, speaks to one's mastery of the language of power and, to some degree, helps explain differences in academic achievement of students of different social classes in educational contexts. Linguistic capital expresses itself in one's ability to invoke and utilize the "correct" grammar, language, and linguistic dispositions that are promoted (and, through their use, help sustain and reproduce) the hegemonic language and dominant sensibilities found within a stratified society.

One way in which social and linguistic capital manifest themselves was through the use of terms associated with morality in talking about immigration. Our analysis of the video recordings of the deliberations showed an increase in the explicit invocation of these terms as school-level socio-economic status (SES) and parental education levels rise. A combination of those words was used 15 times in the deliberation in Sloan, the school located in the highest SES area where many of the parents had a college degree (or higher). The words were used six times in Glendale, an area with lower SES and parental education levels. In Eisenhower, situated in the lowest SES and parental education levels of the three schools and also where more students and families were immigrants themselves, none of those words ever entered the deliberation.

We questioned whether uneven usage of words such as *moral* and *morality* reflected the linguistic capital available to students in the more affluent school. We noted the difference in the prevalence of the words in each location not to claim that moral issues were explored more often or extensively or even in a more sophisticated way in one school or another. Instead, we found that the deliberation in Eisenhower, where such words were never invoked explicitly, did involve issues of social justice, personal responsibility, and communal obligations as prominently as in the schools where students deployed the terminology explicitly. Perhaps using the words (or not) has something to do with linguistic and cultural capital, or perhaps with other aspects of the curriculum being studied at each school, or with the luxury that comes from higher socioeconomic status, which allows one to consider philosophical issues as an abstraction not available to those confronting the daily challenges associated with living when one is not secure economically. Although we cannot provide a definitive answer to this question, the linguistic differences among the schools in framing the issue as a policy problem was striking.

Likewise, we questioned what use of such terminology accomplishes from a rhetorical standpoint. We wondered whether use of such terms might help distance students from such engagement, providing a shield from it that, as we noticed later, manifests itself in other ways. In Eisenhower, where such words were not invoked but where students had recent, personal connections to immigration, the deliberation seemed more visceral, reflecting not only what was on students' minds but what was expressed through their voices and bodies in their passionate and personal articulation of the issues, reflecting no less concern with social justice even though they did not deploy this abstract language to signify their concerns.

Overall, the discussion of this topic at Sloan, and to some extent at Glendale, was more intellectual, academic, and dispassionate than it was at Eisenhower. Sloan's students were well-versed in language, sophisticated in vocabulary, and seasoned in the art of classroom discussion. They seemed to be conducting an intellectual exercise that signaled through their modes of discourse that immigration was a remote concern with little connection to most of their lives. To be sure, the Sloan discussion was lively, disciplined, focused, articulate, and informed. Students performed the classroom exercise using high academic language—the kind of

polite discourse often viewed as a model for public deliberation. Nevertheless, these students, by and large, appeared to be observers doing a school exercise rather than implicating themselves in a public policy issue in which they personally had a stake. Somewhat surprisingly, not one student brought up the role of immigrants working in low-wage, low-status jobs in their community, whether in restaurants or as gardeners

or housekeepers. By and large, the Sloan conversation was less about immigrants as persons with needs, wants, and desires than about immigration as an abstract and disembodied phenomenon. Having the linguistic capital to speak well (that is, academically) about an issue, however, doesn't necessarily make for actual engagement with it. It might, in fact, as Felman (1982) suggested, illustrate a form of ignorance—that is, not as a lack of knowledge about immigration but as a way to ignore and defend against its ramifications and implications for one's self, family, or community.

### Positionality Matters

Another aspect of the deliberations that seemed to shape the classroom dynamics was positionality. As one of the Sloan students astutely noted, "Where we come from and the kind of baggage we bring has a huge effect on our perspective." These perspectives manifested themselves in the positions taken and how they were articulated and by whom in these discussions.

We expected to find that the positionalities students brought into the classroom would influence the views they expressed, especially in light of the national political context. In fact, we did find that our focal students who had self-identified as conservatives or liberals at the outset of the study spoke up about immigration in predictable ways. Besides the partisan talk, however, classroom discourse also diverged along gender lines to some degree in two of the three settings. Glendale and Sloan focused chiefly on economic issues from the standpoint of the employer of immigrant labor, while the least affluent school, Eisenhower, took up the perspective of the worker who was an immigrant.

This divergence was by no means always about opposing positions based on gender. Indeed, some of the more anti-immigrant positions were assumed by females at Sloan. By and large, however, male students spoke more often about perceived threats from immigrants, for example, alleging a high level of criminality among undocumented immigrants. They argued that immigrants do not contribute to the economy, drain the welfare system, and pose a danger to U.S. national security and Americans' personal safety. These male students called for restrictions on immigration and an overhaul of the nation's immigration policy to make it easier to prevent illegal immigration and deport those here illegally. Most of the female students took a more forgiving stance, blaming unreasonable U.S. policies and international economic and political "systems" for the plight of immigrants. They spoke more consistently about the human dimensions related to immigration and less on immigration as a policy issue. Given the attribution to women of an "ethic of care" (Gilligan, 1982) and a "caring" orientation (Noddings, 1984), the tendency toward

differences between the young men's and women's perspectives was not surprising.

It was also not surprising that students at Eisenhower, half of whom were either immigrants themselves or children of parents who had immigrated, often as refugees, into the United States, explored this policy question from a more personalized perspective. In Glendale and Sloan, the issue was one that was looked at dispassionately, with an emphasis on the economic and legal implications for U.S. workers of immigration policies. Several of the students at Sloan commented that they knew very little about immigration generally and had not thought deeply about it prior to the deliberations. Although one Sloan student was an immigrant herself, she entered the United States with her parents who came in on professional visas (H-B1), obtained by their future employers with little involvement (or risk) by the family. When the Sloan students turned to the question of how difficult it was to gain authorization for immigration into the United States, three other students recounted stories of relatives who had to wait long periods of time to obtain entry. These narratives served as counterexamples—ways to counter—the idea that desperate immigrants have no other viable way to enter the country than by doing so illegally. After all, the stories brought into the discussion by these students were used to support the position that one can in fact enter the country legally if one is patient.

By contrast, at Eisenhower, students drew repeatedly on their families' and friends' experiences as immigrants to make the counterclaim that coming into the United States was extremely difficult, especially if one were seeking asylum as a refugee. These voices pivoted the discussion toward one based on empathy for immigrants and their plight, the need to loosen restrictions on immigration, and the need to construct a system that would better help refugees and asylum seekers integrate into society. In that regard, the more visceral deliberation in Eisenhower stood in sharp contrast to those at either Sloan or Glendale.

We highlight gender and positionality to stress the ways in which personal histories and underlying ideologies influence, if not determine, students' stances on immigration, regardless of the carefully curated set of evidentiary resources provided to students in advance of the deliberation and the pedagogical moves made by the teacher to encourage students to rely on the evidence for their arguments. Sociocultural identity, personal experience, and ideological leanings seemed to drive the dynamics in ways that reflected what political scientists call "motivated reasoning" (Redlawsk, Civettini, Emmerson, 2010; Redlawsk, 2002).

### An Insider-Outsider Divide: Or, Where Positionality Matters Less

In all three schools, students tended to establish an insider-outsider dynamic by using terms such as *these people*, *them*, or *they* when referring to immigrants and *we* and *us* when referring to U.S. citizens. The ubiquity of such terms across locations and sociocultural identities is a manifestation of the potency of belonging and citizenship when discussing immigration. Such locutions establish a symbolic distance between insiders and outsiders, allowing for dispassion, distance, and even downgrading one's responsibilities

toward the "other," who, in the case of refugees or displaced persons, are suffering human beings without access to this country and/or citizenship.

Such distancing might be expected in affluent schools such as Sloan. Nevertheless, we were surprised when this language was employed by students at Eisenhower, although to a lesser extent than at either Glendale or Sloan. This word choice reflects the group dynamics involved with belonging, even in the case of recent arrivals. Indeed, the very act of separation from one's prior group affiliation often works to legitimize one's desired belonging to the new group. Participating in the public debate about immigration in U.S. classrooms positions one as an insider with all the privileges of excluding outsiders that result from this status. Thus, those participating in these classroom considerations of immigration made their privilege palpable through their choice of words in talking together in each of these classrooms.

### Deliberations, Evidence, and Changing Minds

Few students changed their minds regarding immigration as a result of these events, and even fewer students drew significantly on the evidence we provided them. Instead, students mostly used this opportunity to voice their already held beliefs about immigration, which largely reflected their positionalities coming into this exercise, at least among the focal students. They may have listened to opposing views politely but it was not evident that they were, as a result, reassessing their initial positions. In the end, only a handful of focal students changed their minds or told us that they considered doing so (cf. Samuelsson's "explorative discussion" model [2016, p. 4]). What we found instead was that students used the occasion as a forum for validating prior beliefs rather than an opportunity to reconsider or shift their thinking.

Likewise, the students' approach to evidence was telling. As we explored with focal students in the interviews after the discussions, the sources they found most trustworthy in the evidence packet were ones that reinforced their perspective on the issue, what has been called in the social science literature "confirmation bias" (Kahne & Bowyer, 2017). As noted previously, students tended to ignore the material in the evidence packets. Instead, students relied heavily on information they brought into the classroom, which, they indicated, had come from the media, without specifying which media exactly, and/or anecdotes about immigration shared with them by families or friends. When the teachers referred students back to the evidence, students complied for a few minutes but soon after returned to their own sources of information. These adolescents appeared to have come to the deliberation with a form of "cognitive closure," in other words, seeking affirmation for previously held ideas and seemingly unwilling to accept information that might challenge those ideas.

### Conclusion: The Pedagogical Challenges of Discussion and Deliberation

Our focus here on the sociocultural issues, discourse patterns, and modes of reasoning about public policy issues in civic education highlights how complex discussion and deliberation are. Both contextual factors in the classrooms as well as structural features of how these events are designed and enacted will influence what occurs. In this case, a number of factors may have been at work in failing to stimulate consideration of immigration that led to true deliberation or consensus about a policy recommendation. Perhaps the NIF approach was an inappropriate structure for this effort in a secondary classroom.

How students talk together about difficult public policy issues is an important question for educators, as the approach adopted will surely give meaning to what takes place and influence who participates and how they engage. Perhaps originally framing these classroom events as deliberations is part of the problem we faced in our research since it raises an unrealistic expectation that students will (or should) arrive at consensus concerning a course of action. Instead, perhaps, uncoupling public policy discussions and deliberations from the need for action or resolution will allow students to explore challenging topics in ways that feel more authentic to their situations—and ultimately more meaningful in helping them develop their own judgments about complex social and political issues, absent the need for premature and inauthentic foreclosure of their thinking due to a demand that they "take a position."

From the standpoint of the educator who conducts these classroom lessons, it is important to realize that the dynamics of classroom deliberations mirror and reflect the desires, identities, and social/linguistic capital students bring with them into secondary classrooms and their ability and/or inclination to engage (or disengage) with a public policy issue during civic discourse with their peers. Bearing in mind the student's statement that "where we come from and the kind of baggage we bring has a huge effect on our perspective" would suggest the importance of having teachers work toward using this insight in developing modes of discussion and deliberation in secondary classrooms with the potential for enhancing students' listening, hearing, and appreciating the views of others, even if they don't change their minds as a result.

Although these events may have failed to become true deliberations, because students neither used the evidence in supporting their positions nor arrived at consensus about a policy choice, we believe this research speaks to civic education in several ways, including highlighting a set of factors related to civic education, student voice, and engagement/disengagement with social and political issues. In summary, we offer several concluding comments about our findings that may help to broaden their purview.

Other than in Glendale, where perspectives on immigration were, by and large, evenly split, in the other two schools there was an appearance of commonly shared understanding of issues, even while differences within that broader shared understanding were constantly present. This may be a result of the more homogeneous student body in each of those classrooms: a majority White, upper middle-class group in Sloan; a majority of students of color from working-class families in Eisenhower. But from the dissenting voices heard within these two classrooms during the discussions, as well as from survey data gathered at the outset of our study, it would be fair to suggest that each of those classes had students who harbor opposing views. Although those dissenting views were

heard, the voice of the majority tended to overwhelm dissent and generated an appearance of greater agreement than we believe existed based on our interviews with focal students afterwards. This masking aspect of discussion (Hemmings, 2000) highlights the discursive practices and social forces that work in and through the processes of discussion and deliberation in classrooms, in which forms of power circulate to invite, cohere, and discipline knowledge production in particular ways. It is the presence of this collective consciousness and the pressures of group-think that help determine how utterances and silences are displayed during a public or classroom event involving discussion or deliberation. In essence, students use the public encounter of these classroom interactions to enact particular positions and identities while they express opinions and beliefs within the context of their classroom.

We do not mean to suggest that power dynamics and group thinking necessarily invited students to share perspectives to which they did not otherwise subscribe (there was no evidence of that in interviews). But interview data do indicate in some cases that student utterances in these classroom events were often a form of *performance* rather than *performativity*.

We use these terms, performance and performativity, and see the difference between them as instructive in this case. In her discussions of gender and identity, Butler (1990, 1994) explained performance as an articulation of what already exists and is already established. Performativity, on the other hand, is an act of becoming, of creating oneself in the process of becoming. Put otherwise, performativity allows one to be transformed through one's actions, whereas performance simply displays what was already there. The application of Butler's thinking in the context of our analysis of adolescents in secondary school classrooms enabled us to examine the degree to which students used these events to publicly perform their already existing understandings about immigration.

Our analysis suggests that much of what transpired in the classrooms we studied was performance. As noted above, few, if any, of the students changed their minds. Moreover, few if any even acknowledged and/or incorporated disconfirming evidence into their thinking. Instead, most students used these opportunities to perform—to publicly announce—their preexisting views about immigration policy and left the events with the same convictions with which they entered, at times even further solidifying those in light of the evidence presented. Perhaps they also engaged in performativity, whereby they grow and learn from the experience and shift their ideas as a result of what took place. At least in the short run, however, this did not appear to be the case.

In the contemporary political context, rationality, evidence, and reasoned argumentation no longer seem to play the role they once did in politics, if not in life. The question is whether rationality, argumentation, and evidence—whether in the context of deliberations on public issues or in other decision-making contexts—have *ever* had the positive effect we have ascribed them. Ought we consider in civic education that confirmation bias, sociocultural capital and dynamics, and linguistic processes related to performance and performativity play an important if

underappreciated role in classroom discussion and deliberation and work together on how to address these?

These factors shape the ways in which adolescents, like adults, approach the role of evidence in making arguments and deciding upon action from competing possibilities. Reflecting on how to structure discussion and deliberation to account for or mitigate the influence of these factors might be one way to move forward. Educators deal with how these factors influence classroom dynamics on a daily basis, as their students strive to defend themselves, their perspectives, and their positionalities from anything that disturbs and disrupts, that endangers the solidity of their sense of self and its rootedness in salient identities, families, and commitments—anything that might require them to confront new knowledge and its implications. In this sense, adolescents are like adults who exhibit an active desire to ignore what doesn't fit the schema they have developed for operating in the world (Felman, 1982), a situation that political psychologists are finding plays a large role in adults' political choices (Achen & Bartels, 2016). The social studies literature has yet to incorporate such nonrational considerations in its research on teaching and learning in classrooms (for an exception, see Garrett, 2017), relying instead on the seemingly uncomplicated understanding that the power of rational argumentation, evidence use, and facts will be accepted and adopted by students, without their existing beliefs, worldviews, and desires complicating the equation.

Missing in current discussions regarding civic education are the affective and psycho-dynamic aspects of learning, especially in discussion of controversial issues where students often experience the difficulty of dealing with competing understandings that challenge their already established beliefs. As Garrett (2017) pointed out, "when we encounter knowledge that runs counter to our already held theories of the ways people and the world operate [or should operate], we are much more likely to dismiss that information than we are to accommodate it and adjust our views accordingly" (p. 60). Evidence, Alcorn (2013) added, often operates in ways that don't necessarily "add wisdom to our decision-making processes" (p. 68), for we "do not abandon beliefs called into question by factual information" (p. 46). As educators, we nonetheless "keep faith in the transformative value of information itself . . . We see people not taking in facts, and our response is simply to insist more emphatically upon the facts" (p. 22; see also Garrett, 2017, p. 68).

With these understandings in mind, the idea presented here is to be cognizant of the varied, complex aspects that underlie discussion and deliberation, which can sometimes make them seem so difficult. Educators can explore these issues with students and address the affective and psychic elements embedded in how we think, our attachments to particular understandings, and even our resistance to having those understandings confronted. Doing so will help account for the complexities of learning and not learning in civic education contexts and to the various and multiple ways in which students position themselves publicly during discussions and deliberations in schools.

As Dahlgren (2006) suggested, beneath an assumption about the desirability of consensus or democratic decision-making may

be the belief that the problem to be "resolved" through deliberation is inherently an issue of inadequate communication—that if we only communicate our ideas better, then differences could be resolved and consensus achieved. Yet, as Dahlgren has reminded us, such an assumption may work to "suppress or deny the fact that conflicts indeed may have the character of real [and unresolvable] antagonisms, where shared values are insufficient to generate a common understanding of what is 'reasonable'" (p. 281). As a result, classroom deliberations as we currently conceive of them may result neither in yielding better forms of communication nor in actual consensus regarding the resolution of the issue at hand, a point taken up in Samuelsson's (2016) suggested typology about deliberations. Although the events described here exhibit two of the three criteria he posited for democratic deliberations in classrooms—giving reasons and reflecting on the issues at stake—perhaps achieving consensus on a public policy question is simply too challenging a task in certain contexts, on certain issues, and through certain structures that reveal themselves as inadequate to the task.

Going forward, therefore, what might be helpful would be for researchers and educators to explore the best structures, pedagogical approaches, and opportunities found within civic education for attending to the complex and nuanced relationships among the dynamics of communications or their breakdowns, the power relations that operate through them, and the forms of identity—as performance or performativity—that amplify and help construct adolescents' articulations, in their multiple forms, to advance the goal of meaningful citizenship education.

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