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Teaching and Developing Deliberative Capacities
An Integrated Approach to Peer-to-Peer, Playful, and Authentic Discussion-based Learning

Rousiley C. M. Maia (Federal University of Minas Gerais), Gabriella Hauber (Federal University of Technology—Paraná), Danila Cal (Federal University of Pará), Augusto Veloso Leão (Federal University of Minas Gerais)

Abstract

Drawing on theories of deliberative democracy, this article analyzes initiatives in educational settings to develop deliberative capabilities—defined here as a person's motivation and abilities to explain their views based on thoughtful considerations, reciprocal engagement, and more inclusive and respectful communication. Building and expanding on previous education experiences and citizen assemblies, we propose an integrated approach that includes: (a) peer learning, (b) playful and performative activities, and (c) authentic discussions about controversial political issues in small groups. Our field experiment involving more than 500 public school students in Brazil is used to illustrate combinations of methods to develop conceptual understandings and promote practice and self-reflection. We claim that these methods should not be conducted separately, but different combinations can complement each other to achieve better results in different contexts. This article has theoretical and practical implications for programs that seek to promote democratic communication, in particular through improving deliberative skills.

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Rousiley C. M. Maia is a professor of political communication at the Federal University of Minas Gerais, Brazil. She is a researcher for the National Council for Scientific and Technological Development (CNPq), coordinator of the Research Group in Media and the Public Sphere (EME/UFMG), and member of the Institute of Democracy and Democratization of the Communication (INCT/IDDC) and Institute for Disputes and Informational Soberany (INCT/DSI).

Danila Cal is an adjunct professor in the Faculty of Communication and the Graduate Program Communication,

Culture and Amazon (PPGCom) at the Federal University of Pará (UFPA). She coleads the Communication and Policy Research Group in the Amazon (Compoa—UFPA/CNPq). Her dissertation and thesis were awarded by Andi—Communication and Rights Program and the National Association of Graduate Programs in Communication (Compós) and received the Eduardo Peñuela Compós de Theses Award 2015.

Gabriella Hauber is an adjunct professor of organizational communication at the Federal University of Technology, in Paraná, Brazil. She is a researcher at the Grupo de Pesquisa em Mídia e

Esfera Pública (EME/UFMG), Grupo de Pesquisa Discurso, Comunicação e Democracia (DISCORD/UTFPR), and Grupo de Pesquisa em Comunicação, Política e Tecnologia (PONTE/UFPR).

Augusto Veloso Leão is a postdoctoral research fellow at the Research Group Media and Public Sphere (UFMG).

T HIS ARTICLE EXAMINES methods for developing young people's willingness to deliberate and skills to engage in discussions about controversial political issues. Although increasing attention has been devoted to deliberation in the fields of formal and informal education, how deliberation should be taught and how the required abilities should be developed in practice remain a challenge. Distinct deliberation initiatives have evolved and intertwined with civic education projects (Avery et al., 2013, 2014; Godfrey & Grayman, 2014; Maurissen et al., 2018) to promote political and civic participation, mobilization, and acquisition of social capital (Feldman et al., 2007; Gershtenson et al., 2010). Important initiatives have more explicitly employed deliberative principles in educational practices in elementary and middle schools (Nishiyama, 2019, 2021; Molnar-Main, 2017; Samuelsson, 2016), high schools (Maia et al., 2023a; Andersson, 2015), universities (Bogaards & Deutsch, 2015), and adult education (Ferreira, 2023; Shaffer et al., 2017; Longo & Shaffer, 2019).

Despite this significant turn toward deliberative theory, proponents still face challenges in the field of education. First, deliberative theory has a broad philosophical basis and a number of normative controversies (Bächtiger et al., 2010; Chambers, 2018; Maia, 2012; Maia et al., 2023b; Habermas, 1996, 2018; Steiner, 2012). Therefore, a recurring difficulty lies in translating the concept of

deliberation into practical teaching strategies: How should teaching deliberation be planned and implemented in educational environments? Second, and relatedly, from a pedagogical perspective, the challenge is not only to address a set of deliberative concepts, norms, and principles but also to motivate young people to practise deliberation. To this end, which methods can be used?

Our research approach involved bringing out a conceptual understanding of deliberation among students and the practice of deliberation itself. The first part of this article deals with these conceptual issues. We argue that a normatively informed definition of *deliberation* helps us outline teaching strategies in the educational context and delineate specific characteristics of deliberation (differentiating it from other programs based on discussion and dialogue). We address a set of studies and initiatives in the education sector designed with deliberative principles in order to elucidate the distinct underlying objectives and expected results of deliberation.

In the second part of this article, we address contemporary methodological issues and develop an integrated approach that includes strategies to promote: (a) peer learning about deliberation principles and behaviors; (b) playful and performative activities; and (c) authentic discussions in small groups. Much of the research in the field of citizens' assemblies focuses on the practice of deliberation, without much attention to the development of its conceptual understanding among participants. Some initiatives in educational environments involve students in deliberative practice, and others promote self-reflection and analysis of deliberation. By summarizing the advantages and limitations of each method just mentioned, we suggest an integrated approach to help young people understand deliberation and put it into practice. To illustrate the feasibility of this endeavor, we use our own field experiment developed in Brazil between 2018 and 2020, called Developing Deliberative Capabilities in Public Schools. We conclude by outlining how an integrated approach can contribute to the expansion of knowledge and highlighting that any teaching project based on the ideals of deliberative democracy must take into account different realities and contexts of its participants.

A Working Definition of Deliberation

John Dewey, in his classic *Democracy and Education* (1916/2011), long advocated that schools should function as a democratic institution: The classroom could operate as a public sphere where students potentially meet students with different moral political positions and perspectives. While the goal of developing willingness and skills to engage young people in democratic discussions is not necessarily related to deliberative theory, the connection is easy to make. Deliberation teaches the value of specific behaviors and democratic attitudes, such as explaining one's opinions and concerns in an attempt to be understood by others; being a good listener; and maintaining common ground for constructive and reciprocal discussions (Bächtiger et al., 2018; Chambers, 2020; Maia, 2012; Gutmann & Thompson, 2018; Habermas, 1996, 2018). A broad definition helps us get started. The editors of the *Oxford Handbook of Deliberative Democracy* pointed out: "We define deliberation minimally" as "mutual communication that involves

pondering and reflecting on preferences, values and issues related to the common interest" (Bächtiger et al., 2018, p. 2). Exchanging views and seeking mutual understanding may seem like a very modest practice, but they lie at the heart of deliberative democracy.

Having antecedents in philosophical thought, the concept of deliberation recurrently evokes theoretical and normative controversies (Bächtiger et al., 2010; Chambers, 2003, 2018; Maia, 2012; Maia et al., 2023b; Mansbridge 2007; Steiner, 2012; Thompson 2008). In our research, we follow Habermas's writings (1987, 1996, 2017) that provided the backbone for a set of principles that define the conditions, procedures and means of a deliberative communicative exchange. To achieve deliberation, according to Habermas (1996, pp. 305–306), participants should: (a) provide justifications, considerations and explanations for their concerns and positions; (b) reciprocally engage with each other's views; (c) build a free interaction between interlocutors, without coercion; (d) treat participants with mutual respect, recognizing their interlocutors as political equals; (e) be open to the inclusion of other partners, themes, visions, or perspectives in discussion; and (f) afford the possibility to change preferences or reverse decisions (outcomes, results) based on critical considerations (Habermas, 1996; see also Cohen, 1997). In this article, we adopt the normative principles as a critical parameter that allows us to identify when the communicative interaction gets closer to (or distances itself from) ideal requirements.

It should be noted that the theory of deliberative democracy has attracted its supporters and critics since its launch, becoming one of the most active areas of political science and adjacent areas. Lively debates inquired into: (a) the type of communication needed for deliberation; (b) the view that deliberation should follow an open procedure aimed at reaching reasoned agreement; (c) the type of equality required to give voice to citizens and empower them for inclusion in deliberative politics; and (d) the view of deliberation as oriented toward simple consensus, understood as unanimous agreement, on both a certain course of action and the reasons for it. These controversial debates were also carried out in the educational field. Critics have contested that models oriented by deliberative theory eliminate passions to attain rational consensus (Mouffe, 2005; Tryggvason, 2018); pondered whether appeals for unity are likely to disallow dissent; and argued that the notion of common good can cover domination and reproduce oppression of certain groups, obfuscating differences based on race, gender or sexual orientation under the guise of a concern for all (Gürsözlü, 2009; Ruitenberg, 2009; Zembylas, 2011).

We acknowledge that much of these debates have been crucial for setting a more plural approach to reason-giving, demonstrating the relevance of narratives for people to situate and resituate themselves in relation to collective problems and also value personal histories to disclose harm and injustices (Backer, 2017; Maia 2014; Maia et al., 2020; Steiner et al. 2017; Young, 2002). We adopt a nondichotomous view of reason, conceiving emotions as an important component in cognition and moral judgments (Bickford, 2011; Habermas, 1990, 1995, 1998; Morrell 2010; Neblo, 2020; Maia et al., 2017; Maia & Hauber, 2019; Maia et al., 2023a; Maia et al., 2023b). We also understand that power asymmetries,

authority, and imbalances of status play a large role in conflicts and reasoning processes. Creating a structure of opportunities to enable the oppressed or marginalized to articulate their views requires much broader measures of inclusion to have their voices adequately expressed and effectively listened, as well as to improve empowerment and representation to achieve recognition (Maia, 2012, 2014; Maia et al., 2017).

Most studies now point out that deliberative practice can emerge with varying levels of normativity at "certain moments" during discussions (Gastil & Knobloch 2020; Maia et al., 2017; Steiner et al., 2017), particularly when the context is appropriate (Chambers, 2018; Dryzek & Hendriks 2012; Neblo, 2015; Maia et al., 2023b). The importance of the normative principles becomes clearer when democratic inclusion is violated, reciprocity and respect are undermined, and demands for publicity, transparency, and sincerity (or accuracy) are denied. Providing concrete spaces, resources, methods for discussion practices, or incentives (such as empowering less-advantaged participants and improving group listening capacity) are practical means to approximate procedures to an ideal discussion situation and compensate for less-than-optimal conditions in real-world deliberations.

Rather than purely philosophical problems, this body of theory offered significant guidelines for developing practical initiatives. While acknowledging that most discussions are not structured around these ideal requirements in everyday life settings, many scholars and practitioners have created ways to engage people in discussion to better assess problems that affect their lives and recommend solutions. Deliberatively designed initiatives have been held in different contexts—from legislatures, public administration, and citizens' assemblies to educational environments. With varying goals, these experiences include several methods for recruiting participants, moderation types, composition of group participants, and recommendation processes at local, national, and transnational levels (Farrell et al., 2019; Fishkin, 2009; Gastil, 2018; Gerber et al., 2016; Grönlund et al., 2014; Reuchamps et al., 2023).

Perhaps one of the greatest achievements of this body of scholarship has been to offer guidelines to create spaces, resources, and methods for democratic and constructive discussions. Put another way, practical deliberation initiatives depend less on ready-made institutional structures than on the development of programmatic methods or approaches to achieve the aforementioned conditions and behaviors for interpersonal discussion in practice. The goals could be producing and achieving more informed decisions, mitigating divergences between divided groups, or generating a shared sense of justice (Caluwaerts & Reuchamps, 2014; Luskin et al., 2014; Maia et al., 2017; Steiner et al., 2017; Ugarriza & Caluwaerts, 2014).

In the next section, we explain the benefits, challenges, and insights provided by a normatively informed definition of deliberation to plan teaching strategies. We look at efforts and practical initiatives to develop deliberative skills and behaviors, that is, more thoughtful communicative exchanges (reflective or critical considerations) about issues affecting people's lives and more inclusive and respectful interactions. It should also be noted that

methodological accounts (forum design, information provision, type of moderation, etc.) are largely cumulative. At the same time, schools have their own organizational arrangements, routines, and specificities of interaction between participants that should not be neglected.

Why Is Teaching Deliberation Important?

The value of adopting principles of deliberation in schools, where young people are socialized and construct their own political views, has long been recognized (Andersson, 2015; El Kadri et al., 2019; Englund, 2000, 2011, 2016; Gastil, 2004; Longo et al., 2017; Nishiyama, 2019, 2021; Parker, 2003). Following the writings of Dewey and Habermas, Englund (2000, 2011, 2016) was one of the first scholars to draw attention to the potential of schools as privileged spaces for cultivating deliberative communication between social and cultural groups in order to "reason on the basis of the views of others and to change perspectives" (Englund, 2011, p. 236). Are deliberative initiatives different from previous programs based on dialogue and collective discussions? If so, how can one understand such differentiation?

In the educational context, dialogue and active exchanges to foster critical thinking have been around for many decades (Freire, 1996, 2000; Mazur & Hilborn, 1997; Topping, 2005). A large number of studies explore discussions in the classroom, teaching methods for enhancing students' civic and political participatory skills, and abilities to deal with conflictive or controversial political issues (Parker & Hess, 2001; for a review, see Ho et al., 2017). Examples include the Open Classroom Climate (OCC), a model that supports dialogical exchange between educators and students, and among students themselves, in order to create the most favorable conditions for learning (Dassonneville et al., 2012; Godfrey & Grayman, 2014; Maurissen et al., 2018).

What is at stake here—and, by its turn, characterizes deliberatively designed models—is a self-conscious effort to promote behaviors and interactions closer to normative principles of deliberation. It is worth noting that *open dialogue* is a broad concept, often loosely defined. Our argument is that deliberative theory, while placing a strong emphasis on open and authentic communication, also makes us more aware of a set of behaviors necessary for constructive democratic discussions, as listed in the previous section (providing explanation of concerns, reciprocity, equal or horizontal exchanges, noncoercion, mutual respect, inclusion, reflexivity, or openness to changing points of view). As empirical scholars and professionals move from abstract principles to practice, this theoretical framework offers more detailed conceptual guidance for designing concrete actions or methods. Interventions should be planned with multiple behaviors in mind (not as a single dimension) to achieve deliberative discussions.

Deliberative capabilities (seen as a person's motivation and abilities to explain their point of view based on thoughtful considerations, reciprocal engagement, and more inclusive and respectful communicative exchange) are not equated with other civic virtues, such as gaining knowledge about a certain political issue, trust in democratic institutions, community cooperation, etc. Specific deliberative programs and pedagogical initiatives are expected to focus on a set of behavioral discussion capabilities, which can enhance other forms of political and civic agency (or mitigate deficiencies) in democratic participation.

Deliberative Models in Education

Recently, important initiatives have explicitly addressed normative principles of deliberation in formal and informal educational settings. Looking at these experiences is crucial to clarifying the circumstances or understanding how to configure the spaces for teaching and training deliberation. These experiences include deliberative pedagogy, deliberative facilitation, mini-public events, and field experiments, all of which illustrate different ways of organizing teaching and practicing deliberation, with varying institutional arrangements, management levels, scope of activities, and scales. This is, of course, a schematic account of a complex picture of plural experiences in educational environments.

Scholars and practitioners working in deliberative pedagogy focus on norms of deliberation as guidelines for conducting teaching and establishing interactions within the classroom (Ferreira, 2023; Longo & Shaffer 2019; Nishiyama, 2019, 2021; Shaffer et al. 2017). According to Longo, Manosevitch, and Shaffer (2017), these educators' interactions with students in the classroom are based on the philosophy and objectives of deliberation. In their words, "the work of deliberative pedagogy is about space-making: creating and holding space for authentic and productive dialogue, conversations that can ultimately be not only educational but also transformative" (p. xxi). Molnar-Main (2017) listed six main characteristics of deliberative pedagogy:

> 1. The focus or topic of learning is an issue of significance to individuals and society; 2. The learning is highly interactive and discussion based; 3. Teachers and students share responsibility for learning; 4. The process emphasises weighing options or deciding; 5. Multiple perspectives, including marginalised views, are given balanced consideration; 6. Students are treated as citizens or decision makers, often engaging in follow-up activities related to these roles. (location 189 of 2045)

Another educational approach is based on mini-public forums to promote collective discussion on controversial issues of common interest. These initiatives are usually planned to provide qualified and plural information to participants (Fishkin, 2009; Fishkin & Luskin, 2005; Gastil & Knobloch, 2020). Organizers are expected to set the discussion agenda, recruit participants, define the moderation style, and also provide resources for collective recommendations or reporting on results. The initiative by Bogaards and Deutsch (2015) offers a good illustration of this approach. These scholars conducted a university course for undergraduate students to familiarize them with the literature on deliberation and mini-public methods. The objective was "to allow students to practice and study deliberative democracy at the same time" (p. 221). Throughout the course, students were expected to plan every step to implement a "day of deliberation" on campus, in line with Fiskin's (2009) deliberative polls. Students were also asked to use research methods to collect data and analyze the results of this initiative. The reported results indicated a gain in

knowledge and a change in the participants' opinions, as predicted in the literature (Fishkin & Luskin, 2005).

More recently, experiments have been used to understand and compare the conditions of teaching deliberation and effects on students' knowledge gain and changes in attitude that may be of interest to the investigator. For example, Andersson (2015) conducted a field experiment using regular classrooms and their teachers in a civics education course. Deliberative teaching was employed in the treatment group, while conventional teaching was provided in the control group. The teaching dynamic was based on assigning problematic cases or dilemmas to students for resolution through collaborative discussion. According to Andersson, students were instructed to "help one another to present their arguments, listen to each other, not interrupt or offend each other with comments, focus on finding a solution to the problem, and not give up if they found it difficult to succeed" (p. 607). Samuelsson (2016) explored different discussion formats to demonstrate how teachers can use questions to open up space for disagreement while also providing opportunities to reach collective conclusions. It is worth highlighting that controlled experimental and systematic comparison allows scholars and practitioners to understand specific characteristics or dimensions of learning, that is, how deliberative behavior can arise from a specific activity or operate under a particular situation. Before discussing our methodological approach, a more specific introduction of our own field experiment is necessary.

The Design of Our Field Experiment Research

Our research consisted of a field experiment in five different public schools in two cities in Brazil (Belo Horizonte and Belém), involving 516 students, aged between 15 and 18 years (Magalhães & Cal, 2019; Maia et al., 2023a).[1] Our key aim was to promote conceptual understanding of deliberation among participants and randomly selected, two for treatment and one for control. In total, 10 treatment classes (n = 326 students) were combined across grades with five control classes (n = 134 students). The entire experiment took place simultaneously in 15 classrooms over a period of five months (March to July 2019). To observe the extent to which our workshop influenced students' behavior, we analyzed discussions before and after treatment (First Discussion Event and Second Discussion Event, see Figure 1).

To observe complex interactions of learning deliberation with socioeconomic and contextual factors, two public schools were selected in middle-class and three in vulnerable environments. Identical deliberative training was conducted in all treatment classrooms. In our field research, normative principles of deliberation were employed in different workshops and activities (Maia et al., 2023a). Instructors were members of our research team, including researchers as well as undergraduate and graduate students of different ages, genders, ethnicities, social backgrounds, and academic fields. To properly plan the experiment, a pilot program was carried out in both cities in 2018. The field operation provided important information and guidance for a broad review of the workshop designs, activities, and scripts. A few weeks before the experiment, the research team provided intensive training to familiarize all instructors with the facilitation functions and activities. Our research team also defined protocols for the workshops and for dealing with various classroom situations, for example, disrespect between students and against researchers, or situations where neutral moderation needed to be suspended.

Table 1 provides an overview of activities in each meeting. The workshop activities were carried out with the whole class or in small groups, according to the purpose of each meeting described in Table 1. Students in the control groups were engaged only in the First and Second Discussion Events, with no treatment between.
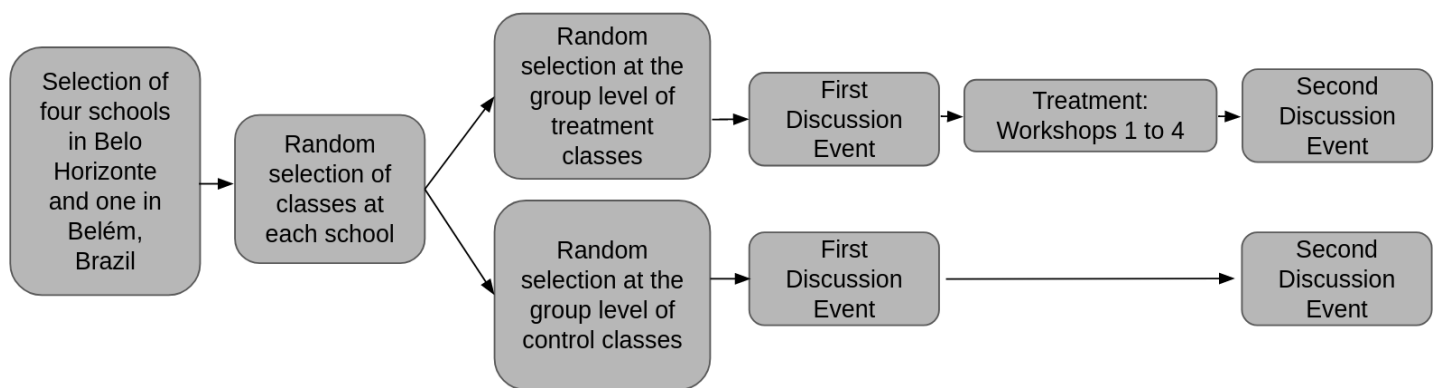

Figure 1. Experiment Design

Note. Adapted from Maia et al., 2023a.

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1   The schools shared an interest in adhering to our project and the corresponding experimental protocol. In each class, only students who themselves and their responsible tutor expressed explicit consent participated in our project. This research was approved by the corresponding Research Ethics Committee.

Table 1. Workshops—Description of Activities in Each Meeting

Meeting	Activity
1	*Introductory meeting* Students responded to a pre-treatment survey.
2	*First Discussion on the selected topic* First Discussion Event on the limits of freedom of expression and intolerance and hate speech on social media
3	*Workshop 1* was designed for students to understand two distinct forms of collective decision-making: voting and deliberative discussion practices. Students were asked to vote on four performing arts options (dance, drama, music, recitation), which their class would present at the talent show to be organized in the coming months on the university campus. Then, students were motivated to engage in a collaborative discussion (clarifying and explaining their preferences) for collective decision-making. At the end, the facilitators presented a banner with six benefits of deliberation (inspired by Cooke, 2000) for students to discuss and discover the benefits of deliberative practices for collective problem-solving.
4	*Workshop 2* was designed to enable students to gain awareness and reflect on seven deliberative norms as pillars of deliberation (respect, justification, equality, inclusion, noncoercion, reciprocity, and reflexivity). Facilitators instructed a small subgroup of students to build a banner focusing on a single normative principle and collect input from other subgroups. Depending on the size of the classroom, one or two subgroups were assigned to each principle. Then, students were motivated to bring all banners into the classroom conversation, and students helped each other build arguments and explanations.
5	*Workshop 3* was based on a card game (Which Profile Is That?), involving a small subgroup of participants. Students were instructed to play different deliberative roles (explaining their opinions and preferences, helping others present their arguments, listening carefully to each other, being respectful) or nondeliberative roles (talking too much, interrupting others, sounding arrogant or deviating from discussion of others with off-topic stories). After playing different roles, students were encouraged to reflect and discuss their feelings and reactions to behaviors that help or hinder deliberation.
6	*Workshop 4* was based on small subgroup discussions about controversial topics. It was designed for students to gain self-awareness and learn from each other about how to put deliberative principles into practice. The pictures representing particular profiles in the game and the banner with what we call Seven Pillars of Deliberation were displayed in the center of the discussion subgroup. The strategy sought to motivate students to focus on deliberative attitudes and signal to another if a participant seemed to contribute to or disrupt deliberative engagement.
7	*Second Discussion on the selected topic* Second Discussion Event on the limits of freedom of expression in relation to intolerance and hate speech on social media. Unlike the first event, students were asked here to write practical recommendations for solving problems, as a collective undertaking.
8	*Conclusion* Students responded to a post-treatment survey and participated in a round of conversation to evaluate the project. We finished with a collective snack and distribution of gifts.
Concluding Activities	*Talent Show on the university campus* A two-day presentation by students from all classes engaged in our experiment, including dance, theater, music, recitation, etc. *Follow-up* Two monitoring meetings in two schools in Belo Horizonte, 60 days after completion of the project, to verify learning. We applied a questionnaire and did a small-group discussion on another controversial topic (the reform proposed by the Schools without Political Party, an ultraconservative Brazilian social movement).

Note. Adapted from Maia et al., 2023a.

We expected that students in treatment groups, in comparison with students in control groups, would: (1) show an increase in justifications to support their positions; (2) display more stories focused on the topic under discussion compared to off-topic stories; (3) have an increase in respect; and (4) become more participative. To measure students' capacities, we used systematic content analysis of transcripts of the two discussions. Our analysis followed the Deliberative Quality Index (DQI), a code scheme based on Habermas's discourse ethics, which is considered one of the best established operationalizations in empirical research (Bächtiger et al., 2022; Steenbergen et al., 2003; Steiner et al., 2004). To compare the performance of students in treatment and control groups, a Difference in Difference (DiD) test was applied to the proportions of all variables in the two discussion events. Finally, a follow-up meeting was held in two schools participating in our research, two months after the end of the experiment.

Our experiment has shown that deliberative capabilities can indeed be developed and that observing different capabilities is important (Maia et al., 2023a).[2] For example, in a situation where no informative material was provided on the topic under discussion, students from middle-class schools performed better in presenting justifications when compared to students from schools in vulnerable neighborhoods. As reasoning together is an interactive process where individuals can influence each other,

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2 In Maia et al. (2023a), we explain our findings, observed effects, and measurements in more detail. Here, we summarize just a few results, as our goal is to focus on teaching methods.

small-group discussion can also reflect the school context in which students receive deliberative training. A similar pattern of respect in interactions was observed in both treatment and control groups, in both middle-class and vulnerable environments. In general, the results indicate greater participation of female students in the treatment group, contributing to reducing the gender disparity in collective discussions. Our findings corroborated the view that learning deliberation cannot be considered a one-dimensional process and some capabilities are more easily achieved than others. Researchers are required to carefully study the conditions and mechanisms by which specific outcomes occur, in varying situations.

An Integrated Approach: Peer-to-Peer, Playful, and Authentic Discussion-Based Learning

In this section, we argue that analytical attention to normative principles should integrate strategies and incentives or resources to develop and train deliberative capacities in schools and other educational spaces. The attempt to apply (translate or rework in practice) abstract deliberative concepts in activities in the education sector can take different forms, and there is no clear toolbox for it. In our own field research, normative principles of deliberation were employed in different workshops and activities (Maia et al., 2023a). As already pointed out, a working definition of deliberation is important for shaping teaching strategies, implementing methods, and subsequently for observing, measuring, and evaluating the impact on students' incremental knowledge and changing behaviors. Here our aim is to investigate (or clarify) practical strategies to develop deliberative capabilities.

A common difficulty faced by educators and professionals is creating methods that are sensitive to the school environment, local culture, and everyday pedagogical dynamics. Schools promote everyday interactions in classrooms, and children or adolescents develop varied forms of communicative exchange (Nishiyama 2019, 2021; Shaffer et al., 2017). Unlike with citizen assemblies, that is, experiences that normally bring together participants who are unknown to each other (Fishkin, 2009; Reuchamps et al., 2023), in schools it is necessary to take into account the context in which students already socialize—whether or not the space favors exchange between groups with different socioeconomic backgrounds, as well as gender differentiation and racial or other divisions (Arneback & Englund, 2020; Karpowitz & Mendelberg 2014; Kishimoto, 2018). The surrounding context is a crucial factor that cannot be overlooked when engaging young people in learning deliberation in formal or informal education sectors.

In this article, we define methods as pedagogical strategies and "facilitating conditions" to develop deliberative capabilities. We understand "capabilities," as formulated by Sen (1999, 2009) and Nussbaum (2006, 2011), as the "complex combinations" of internal cognitive and emotional dispositions and abilities that can be created and often developed in interaction with socioeconomic, family, and political factors. This is a reminder that internal dispositions and personal traits should not be considered fixed but "flexible and dynamic" (Nussbaum, 2011, p. 21) and building

environments are intended to restructure conditions and provide effective opportunities for individuals to add, expand, or transform their dispositions and skills.

With these concerns in mind, we now turn to three methodological approaches used in our field experiment: (a) dialogic teaching and peer learning (about principles, values, and deliberative behaviors); (b) a game created by our research team to encourage students to become more aware of deliberative and nondeliberative behaviors in a discussion situation; and (c) face-to-face small-group discussions on sensitive issues based on real-life events. Some factors are technical, and we have chosen not to present technical details but rather to pay attention to the potential of each method in teaching and learning deliberation, highlighting areas or examples where each has been successful. We summarize strengths and limitations of each method and suggest possible combinations. Next, we provide some considerations about the benefits of employing an integrated approach.

Peer-to-Peer Learning Approach

Peer learning involves a range of pedagogical strategies and activities, all anchored in the idea of collaborative, horizontally based interactions. Peer learning is expected to contribute to, in Topping's (2005) definition, "acquisition of knowledge and skills through active helping and support among status equal or matched companions" (p. 631). The writings of the Brazilian philosopher and educator Paulo Freire (1996, 2000), commonly known as critical pedagogy, have had a strong influence on different theorists and practitioners of active learning (McInerney 2009; Molnar-Main, 2017; Oliveira & Sousa, 2022; Peruzzo et al., 2022; Shaffer et al., 2017). For Freire, dialogue is a central component of learning, and authentic and active interactions must be placed at the center of educational praxis. Rather than seeing teachers as transmitters and students as receivers of information, Freire recommended structuring learning on reciprocal communicative exchange. Children and adolescents are expected to influence the views of their peers and teachers. Authentic and open dialogue, very much in line with deliberative theory, is taken as a way to trigger critical self-reflection on one's own views and experiences in order to expand or build new understandings.

The OCC is a well-known model that supports dialogical exchange between educators and students and among students themselves in order to create the most favorable conditions for learning (Dassonneville et al., 2012; Godfrey & Grayman, 2014; Maurissen et al., 2018). In contrast to conventional pedagogy, which relies on a one-way process or top-down transmission of lectures, the OCC model seeks to create space for dialogue and reciprocal interactions to help students express their points of view. Students are motivated to put their thoughts into words so as to trigger self-reflection on their own considerations.

An important variation is the Peer Instruction (PI) method, formulated by Mazur in the 1990s. The main objective is to assist students in structuring the inquiry process, to engage them with basic concepts as well as explain such concepts to each other (Bulut, 2019; Butchart et al., 2009; Mazur & Watkins, 2010). In this model, teachers start the lecture with a brief exposition to

introduce the subject, and rather than asking generic or informal questions, they present a "concept test" carefully planned in multiple-choice format (Crouch & Mazur, 2001; Mazur & Hilborn, 1997). Students are asked to give individual responses to the concept test by raising their hands or using color cards, mobile apps, etc. The teacher then asks small groups of two or three students—who offered different answers—to explain their thoughts to each other, aiming to convince the colleague that their answer is the correct one. After a few minutes, the same conceptual test is placed again, and the teacher reconstructs the explanations of the correct answer together with the students to elucidate doubts or reformulate remaining issues. While originating in the field of physics, the PI has become increasingly popular also in philosophy and social sciences. Studies report that involving students in the PI method generally increases individual emotional engagement, as well as the involvement of the whole class at once, and understanding improves, even if the correct answer is not reached (Bulut, 2019; Mazur & Watkins, 2010; Schell & Butler, 2018).

Our Peer-to-Peer Learning Workshops

It is perhaps appropriate to recall here that the peer-to-peer learning strategy is nothing new. In the late 20th century, the use of collaborative learning in the classroom became more pronounced, however, as studies demonstrated that learning is qualitatively different among people with similar skill levels than among students with a professional teacher or even between students with high and low levels of abilities. In our intervention in schools, the concept of deliberation was not taught top-down but worked bottom-up with the students. Students were encouraged to think for themselves and explain their thoughts to each other. In several activities, they were asked to help each other in reflection and construction of answers, instead of relying exclusively on the instructors to "give" the answers.

Our first step was to develop a basic understanding of how deliberation works, before introducing any theoretical concepts. Workshop 1 was designed for students to identify and explore two ways of making collective decisions, namely through voting and through deliberative discussions. For this, the instructor informed the students that their class was invited to present an artistic performance in a talent show on the university campus, to be held within three months, bringing together all school classes participating in our project. They were asked to vote between four artistic performance options (dance, theater, music, or recitation). Once the voting process was complete, the instructors asked them to explain their preferences to each other for a new round of discussion and collective decision-making. The instruction was: after collaborative discussion, the class could change the type of artistic performance chosen to one of the three alternatives presented or even propose a new type of performance. Interestingly, in most cases, students changed the decision through deliberative discussion and suggested new options, mixing together the presented artistic styles or creating new ones.

At the end of the process, the instructor asked the students, "What do you think is different when you are voting [aggregation of individual pre-deliberative preferences] and when you are discussing to make a collective decision?" Instructors wrote down the answers and explanations offered by students. Afterward, a banner listing six advantages of deliberation—following the classic article by Cooke (2000)[3]—was presented to the entire class. The effort was to motivate students to discuss their own answers, identifying relevant advantages that they had not thought of or giving practical examples. This workshop served as a heuristic device to clarify the benefits of deliberation, as a distinctive practice for collective decision-making, in formal or informal situations.

Workshop 2 and Workshop 3 were designed to allow students to become familiar with and reflect on the Seven Pillars of Deliberation: respect, justification, equality, inclusion, noncoercion, reciprocity, and reflexivity. In Workshop 2, a banner listing these principles,[4] containing a brief description of each one, was displayed in front of the classroom. The students were divided into five groups, and each group was assigned to produce a banner focusing on a single normative principle (justification, respect, reciprocity, inclusion, and noncoercion) to provide the definition and real-life exemplifications. Furthermore, one student from each group was asked to collect suggestions or exchange information with other groups. The set of five banners were then exhibited for collective discussions (about each pillar) involving the whole class. Workshop 2, thus, provided students with the opportunity to examine in detail the value of each deliberative norm, as well as discuss what a principle means in a real-life discussion and some overlaps between them.

It is important to note that the peer-to-peer methodological approach has the advantage of involving all students in the classroom, rather than just a highly motivated few (Bulut, 2019; Mazur & Watkins, 2010; Schell & Butler, 2018). Workshop activities can be used for exploring the precise definition of deliberative norms (for example, the political concept according to a certain

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3   The banner "Why is deliberation important?" contained the following information: 1. People feel that decisions are fairer if all opinions are heard and considered. 2. When discussing constructively, people get to know new points of view to find better or more creative solutions, compared to situations in which they think alone or just vote on what should or should not be done. 3. Decisions tend to be more democratic, as people have participated in choices that affect themselves. 4. Decisions tend to be more effective because people exchange knowledge to avoid mistakes. 5. People feel more responsible to collaborate and cooperate when they have participated in discussions and are co-responsible for decision-making; 6. The practice of constructive dialogue helps people to become more participative and aware that they can modify and improve problematic situations.

4   The banner presented Seven Pillars of Deliberation with the following information: respect—be considerate of others and their opinions; justification—explain your preferences in detail; equality—everybody can participate irrespective of their differences; inclusion—include people and opinions who are generally not given a hearing; noncoercion—don't intimidate people and help everybody to express themselves freely; reciprocity—listen and answer what others say; reflexivity—be open to change your own opinions and reflect about the reasons why others think differently.

thinker), the application of a principle in different situations, and other topics that might be of the educator's interest. Proponents of peer-to-peer learning argue that this method is particularly effective for communicating through the learner's own language or perspectives (Freire, 1996, 2000; Topping, 2005). This is because teachers and instructors can suffer from "expertise bias" and, therefore, lose the ability to capture problems faced by beginning students.

Another benefit of peer-to-peer learning is the possibility to accommodate complex questioning processes (Arneback & Englund, 2020; Bulut, 2019; Mazur & Watkins, 2010). Often, the questions raised by students become very complex or difficult to answer. In our Workshop 2, for example, students raised the question that there was no easy way to move from deliberative principles to application, and the different principles and behaviors could overlap (or even be necessary) to achieve democratic discussions. In this situation, the instructor can use the complex inquiries to motivate groups of students to search for more information and find more satisfactory and qualified answers.

Games and Playful Learning Approach (Performance of Deliberative and Nondeliberative Roles)

Conventional teaching is often criticized for the risk of becoming unintentionally obscure, covered in hermetic language (Bulut, 2019; Freire, 1996, 2000; Garside, 1996; Latimer & Hempson, 2012; Mazur & Hilborn, 1997; Shaffer et al. 2017). The higher position of authority—where the teacher plays the central role of delivering or "transmitting knowledge"—has several interactional effects, and the examples offered by a professional teacher can become unproductive (Bennett, et al., 2010; Englund, 2011, 2016; Mazur & Watkins, 2010; McInerney, 2009). In this sense, teaching deliberation can easily be understood as an attempt to "teach good manners." This is particularly risky when the discussion involves sensitive issues, such as experiences of exclusion, oppression, discrimination, or violence. The educator or instructor may express exclusionary beliefs, while students can become defensive or resistant or focus excessively on counterexamples.

Scholars working in the fields of education, psychology, and group behavior have emphasized the value of games for heuristic purposes, helping students understand concepts and their practical application, deal with complex problem-solving, and enhance creativity (Ampatzidou et al., 2018; Zambrano, 2018). In the school environment, games are often used in conjunction with other strategies to motivate the active acquisition of knowledge; ludic performances are also valid for bridging hierarchical positions of authority or for dealing with sensitive issues (Crocco et al., 2018; Gordon et al., 2017; Mayer, 2009, pp. xiii, 304).

With regard to citizen participation in public consultation initiatives, Gastil emphasized the advantages of gamification particularly to improve civic engagement (Gastil, 2023; Gastil & Broghammer, 2020). The use of games is seen as useful to: (a) appeal to the basic needs of citizens; (b) promote social connection and empathy; (c) improve self-esteem and social status, and also (d) motivate the commitment of public agents (Gastil & Broghammer, 2020). Gastil has suggested that citizens, by

organizing themselves into player groups to discuss issues of public interest, can work out recommendations, based on input from government representatives and civil society organizations. The government may evaluate such recommendations whereas citizens may evaluate the government's responses (Gastil, 2023).

Our Game-Playing Workshops

In our research, we were interested in motivating young people to reflect and understand the behaviors that favor or hinder deliberation. To deliberate, people must demonstrate intellectual and emotional dispositions and skills, including listening and the ability to communicate with those with whom they disagree (Gutmann, & Thompson, 2018; Habermas, 2018; Steiner et al. 2017). Our Workshop 3 was based on a card game called Which Profile Is That? that was created by our own research team and consists of assigning deliberative and nondeliberative roles to players. This game contains cards with 20 controversial topics (each formulated as a question) and the description of a pro-argument and a counter-argument to each topic. The conflicting arguments were extracted from news media materials by our research team.

Each student randomly chooses a card containing instructions on the role to be played. On the positive side, three profiles operate constructively, performing desirable behaviors to create or sustain deliberation: (a) a person who carefully explains their opinions, preferences, or concerns in an intelligible way, taking care to be understood by others; (b) a good moderator, who helps others present their arguments, striving to include all participants or providing summaries of previously expressed justifications or demands; and (c) a person who tells stories related to the current discussion, giving good examples. On the negative side, three profiles are expected to play disruptive roles: (a) a person who talks too much, sometimes appearing arrogant or aggressive and often interrupting others; (b) a closed-minded person with fixed ideas, who does not listen to or consider other points of view and insists on repeating the same proposals, regardless of what others say during the discussion; and (c) a person who frequently tells off-topic stories, distracts the group's attention, or deviates from the topic under discussion.

The instructor or a player randomly chooses a specific discussion card and reads the conflicting arguments to trigger collective discussion. Each player is expected to perform the assigned profile role. Once the discussion is over, participants are expected to "discover" each other's profiles. After a few rounds of this game, the instructor asks students to give their opinions on the performance of positive and negative roles, their feelings, and reactions toward supportive or cooperative profiles and uncooperative or difficulty-causing profiles. Finally, the instructor asks students to make recommendations about how they can add or develop positive behaviors and avoid the undesirable ones. In this sense, this game was designed to help create open and critical reflection as to expand deliberative capabilities in a playful and dynamic way.

Authentic Discussion in Small Groups Approach

Promoting discussions in small groups is a way of experiencing deliberative practice itself. Group discussion can be defined as a cooperative activity between three or more people involved in considering (reflecting, weighing, appreciating) an issue from different points of view (Bennett et al., 2010; Fishkin, 2003, 2009; Hand & Levinson, 2012; Peruzzo et al., 2022; Shaffer et al., 2017; Steiner et al. 2017). Bringing controversial issues into classroom discussions, rather than taking them as taboos to be avoided, has been seen as beneficial for building more constructive and empathetic relationships in school contexts (Hess, 2009; Hess & Avery, 2008; Ho et al., 2017; Schuitema et al., 2018).

However, well-informed, inclusive, and respectful discussions are not easy to achieve, and efforts or planned strategies are needed to prepare the ground for this type of constructive engagement. For example, Bickmore and Parker (2014) have observed that even when teachers seek to promote discussions about controversial political topics, there is a tendency to favor detached, emotionless exchanges rather than meaningful effort to process disagreements over conflicting topics. When using a deliberative facilitation approach in an experiment with secondary school students, Nishiyama and colleagues observed an adverse attitude to disagreement, as participants accepted others' opinions just to maintain harmony in the classroom (Nishiyama et al., 2023; see also Samuelson, 2016). According to these authors, this attitude can impede authentic engagement with each other's points of view and block the will to deliberate. They suggest that facilitators should encourage productive conflict, deconstructing the view that disagreements are negative or harmful to friendship in the class, and showing how disagreements can promote mutual understanding (Nishiyama et al., 2023, pp. 7–8). When dealing with sensitive issues, Lo (2017, p. 8) emphasized the value of "teaching students to harness their political emotions, navigate political conflicts, and negotiate actionable solutions, agonistic deliberation has the potential to empower students to engage with the conflict of differences that exist in a pluralistic society." The requirements of the deliberative model become central in these situations.

Deliberative theory strongly directs our attention to behaviors and attitudes that must be pursued during democratic discussion practices. In this sense, it is important to provide space and build conditions, through incentives and methods for constructive discussions. This also means considering how power-based interactions or other obstacles can be practically addressed and how suboptimal conditions can be compensated for. As described in the first section, there is a voluminous literature on citizen assemblies that indicates how authentic discussions can be constructed for deliberative exchanges, including moderation, provision of information, and group composition, among other characteristics (Fishkin, 2009; Gastil, 2018; Gastil & Knobloch 2020; Maia, 2023; Reuchamps et al., 2023).

Different methods can be employed for moderation, and the style adopted is a crucial factor that affects group exchanges and results. The facilitator can play a neutral role, presenting only the topic to be discussed and monitoring the discussion time (Reuchamps et al., 2023, Steiner et al. 2017), or the moderator can actively participate, being responsible for coordinating shifts of communicative interventions or encouraging participation (Fishkin, 2009; Knobloch et al. 2013). The effort to achieve a more egalitarian group composition (such as to compensate for social inequalities or status asymmetries) is significant in motivating respectful interactions between participants (Gerber et al., 2016; Karpowitz & Mendelberg, 2014). Offering plural information to participants is relevant to increase knowledge gain, to expand perspectives and the repertoire of acceptable justifications, and also to make more qualified recommendations (Fishkin, 2003, 2009; Reuchamps et al., 2023; Strandberg & Grönlund, 2014). In some initiatives, no prior information is provided to participants to allow researchers to observe the flow of discussions more spontaneously (Maia, 2017; Steiner et al., 2017; Ugarriza & Caluwaerts, 2014). It is also important to reflect on the role of moderation to provide a safe environment for marginalized students, being careful to avoid different sorts of harm that may arise during interactions, by not validating injustices (Journell, 2023).

Our Authentic Small-Group Discussion Workshops

In our experiment, Workshop 4 was designed to engage students in discussions about controversial political issues. The topics previously chosen by the students were quota policy, affirmative action, and the right to abortion, from a broader list of controversial political issues. Our research team carefully extracted pro and con arguments from media material, presenting opposing positions (with conflicting values or preferences) in a balanced proportion. Small groups composed of 8 to 12 participants were organized. To stimulate group discussion, the facilitator read two arguments supporting and two arguments challenging the policy in question. In this dynamic, we used visual cues to remind students of the norms of deliberation—the banner on the Seven Pillars of Deliberation (used in Workshop 2) was hung on the classroom wall. The images of the six characters from the game Which Profile Is That? (used in Workshop 3) were displayed within the circle of discussion participants. Students were instructed to signal to each other, using visual cues, whether a participant's attitudes were visibly helping or hindering deliberative engagement (i.e., playing deliberative or nondeliberative roles). This workshop sought to motivate students to be more aware of communicative attitudes while participating in discussions about controversial real-world issues.

Deliberative discussions, as a dynamic interpersonal interaction, are inseparable from broader social relations, positions, and situational conditions. Our basic expectation was that teaching deliberation would have a positive impact on students and somehow mitigate inequalities. If successful, students in the treatment group would demonstrate greater motivation and be better able to behave more deliberately in real discussion situations when compared to the control group. As already pointed out, observing the effects of our workshops on students' practical behaviors (increase in justifications to support their positions; display of stories more focused on the topic under discussion compared to off-topic stories; increase in respect; and more participatory involvement), we compared the First and Second

Discussion Events (see Figure 1) in the treatment and control groups. In our experimental investigation, moderation was neutral because the facilitator did not intervene. No prior information was provided to participants to allow the discussion to flow freely.

The issue proposed in the First Discussion Event was freedom of expression and regulation of social media. In the Second Discussion Event, students were asked to make recommendations to mitigate hate speech and intolerant attacks on social media. Instead of writing individual opinions or preferences, they were asked to produce recommendations as a collective undertaking, that is, focusing on proposals that were agreed after collective discussion. In pedagogical terms, engagement in authentic discussions that involve critical considerations in small groups is expected to enhance participants' self-confidence and practical agency. When the discussion evolves as a cooperative deliberative activity, this practice also helps to foster or confirm participants' sense of political autonomy in a democratic context.

An Integrated Perspective

The pedagogical concerns for teaching and training deliberation are multifaceted and often require distinct methodological tools. We developed an integrated approach based on peer learning, games, and authentic small-group discussions on controversial political topics. Cooperative dialogue and horizontal peer discussions follow a similar assumption that learning is a process that is based on persons' own understanding, observations, and experiences of everyday life. Educators and instructors are expected to provide resources, incentives, and methods for more active learning, including opportunities for young people to explore various problem-solving options, testing their own viewpoints as they try to understand the views and experiences of others.

We believe a combination of methods is important for several reasons. First, pedagogical strategies do not constitute a direct path to clearly detailed objectives. These strategies include actions designed to develop specific skills, as well as dynamic interactions in the classroom. In line with dialogue-based models and critical pedagogy, meaningful learning emerges when participants have the opportunity to articulate their own views and modify them in interaction with others, listening to new ideas, considerations, or criticisms to actively restructure knowledge. Peer-to-peer and horizontal learning happened across most of our workshops, requiring students to search for more qualified information and cooperative responses. Games and playful performances have the special benefit of helping students become more critically aware of positive and disruptive behaviors for democratic communication while also dealing with their own emotions, achievements, and difficulties more openly, in post-game discussions. Authentic discussions, in turn, help students understand their practical experiences, bringing sensitive issues to the table while listening to others, considering other policy choices or alternatives, and focusing on interactions toward resolution.

Second, an integrated approach seems important because learning and acting in a deliberative manner require a complex combination of cognitive and emotional dispositions and capacities. Our workshops were designed to allow students to participate in different ways: exercising their voice and developing the ability to get more actively involved in discussions about controversial political issues; talking about their own personal characteristics and emotions in small-group dynamics; and reflecting and developing an ability to listen to others or make an effort to include disinterested participants. The realities and experiences in school environments involve socially and historically based factors and contingent processes that are too diverse for us to rely on a single method of teaching and training deliberation. The proposed methods—peer learning, games, and authentic discussions in small groups—present different benefits for active learning, which can complement each other. Thus, a combination of methods that can be used flexibly at different stages of learning will likely give us a better chance of success for our intended purposes when compared to a single method.

Third, in this regard, an integrated approach seems relevant for dealing with the complexity that deliberative theory helps us to grasp. Despite all their limitations, the methods help researchers and practitioners to construct situations that seek to approach deliberative conditions. With normative principles in mind, we feel pressured to find suitable designs, to address perceived obstacles or deficiencies, and to build incentives or strategies to transform environments in the desired direction. Experimental or quasi-experimental research, while difficult to manage, is useful for constructing comparative studies by selecting variables (discussion topics, group composition, teaching model styles, for example) or factors for careful consideration. Just as it is interesting or advisable to adopt integrated approaches to teaching deliberation, more research is needed to observe and appropriately measure this approach's effects at different times or in multiple cases.

Conclusion

This article drew on deliberative theory and reviewed a range of initiatives and empirical studies to encourage young people to understand and participate in democratic communication. We claim that deliberative theory, as it is based on a set of principles and values, makes us more aware of the different dimensions and skills that must be pursued in educational programs. Although a single method is limited to dealing with the full complexity of deliberative theory (translating it into practice and specific actions), a combination of methods—(a) peer learning, (b) games and performative activities, and (c) authentic discussions in small groups—interspersed with each other provides more complete approaches. It is perhaps not redundant to emphasize that specific educational programs and methods to be implemented and expanded in various educational contexts must constantly adapt to changes in participants and socioeconomic conditions, surrounding environments, and the types of conflict at play in society. Comparing experiences systematically and devising a combination of methods in different social and cultural contexts seem worth pursuing in the future, in educational settings and beyond.

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