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Deliberative Facilitation in the Classroom

The Interplay of Facilitative Technique and Design to Make Space for Democracy

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Abstract

Widespread global interest and adoption of deliberative democracy approaches to reinvigorate citizenship and policymaking in an era of democratic crisis/decline has been mirrored by increasing interest in deliberation in schools, both as an approach to pedagogy and student empowerment and as a training ground for deliberative citizenship. In school deliberation, as in other settings, a key and sometimes neglected element of high-quality deliberation is facilitation. Facilitation can help to establish and maintain deliberative norms, assist participants to deliberate productively, and enable collective goals. By participating in facilitated deliberation, students can develop awareness, skills, and voice that empower them to engage with democracy, in school and beyond. This article draws on our experience as scholar/practitioners running a Deliberation in Schools program in Australia to explore challenges and strategies for deliberative facilitation. The challenges we discuss are power, inequality, diversity of expression and knowledge, and disagreement and these are discussed in the general context of inclusiveness. We highlight two facets of deliberative facilitation—technique and design—that are important for dealing with these challenges and increasing inclusion in school deliberation and in democratic deliberation more generally.

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Introduction

DELIBERATIVE DEMOCRACY IS a normative theory of democracy that emphasizes the role of citizens' engagement in opinion formation and policymaking. It has attracted growing interest in democracies across the world in recent decades. Deliberation is a transformative process where citizens exchange knowledge, experience, and

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reasons; listen and learn from one another; examine diverse information and interests; and develop collective positions, often revising their own views in the process. This transformative process is, ideally, expected to produce various democratic consequences, including legitimate decisions about controversial political questions, citizens' mutual understanding across difference, and the development of participants' democratic capacities (Bächtiger et al., 2018; Dryzek, 2010). Importantly, the deliberative quality of such transformative processes is often underpinned by the role of facilitators. Although under-studied (Landwehr, 2014; Moore, 2012), theoretical and empirical research is accumulating, indicating that facilitation guided by deliberative norms can make participants less hostile and more open-minded, and avoid polarization, thereby promoting authentic, inclusive, and consequential deliberation (Mansbridge et al., 2006; Moore, 2012; Quick & Sandfort, 2014; Sandfort & Quick, 2017; Strandberg et al., 2019).

The central topic of this article is the role of facilitators, not in public deliberation but in classroom deliberation. A growing number of practical applications of deliberative theories to citizenship and democratic education exist (Luskin et al., 2007; see also, Hess & McAvoy, 2015; Nishiyama, 2021; Samuelsson & Bøyum, 2015; Schaffer et al., 2017). These demonstrate the potential of deliberation to enrich pedagogy and student experience and point to classrooms as a training ground for deliberation among current and future citizens. Despite the growing attention on classroom deliberation and the role of facilitators in public deliberation, little is known about the role of facilitators in deliberation in the classroom. Some scholars, such as Hess (2009) and Journell (2017), have conducted empirical study on the role of teachers as facilitators, dispelling the myth of neutrality of the teacher in classroom deliberation by empirically unpacking how and why teachers should disclose their political views strategically. This article extends their study by considering facilitation not only by teachers but also by external facilitators in classroom deliberation and offers two new perspectives, drawing on the findings of a *Deliberation in Schools* pilot project.

First, while existing study frames the difficulty of facilitation of classroom deliberation in terms of power, this article draws on a more inductive study and argues that the difficulty is derived from more than power issues, although we acknowledge that power is still one of its key aspects. Our focus is on *internal* inclusiveness, or the extent to which all participants are enabled to have an equal voice in deliberation (Young, 2000). We focus on the internal dimension because classroom deliberation does not involve inviting or recruiting participants. Moreover, internal inclusiveness is important in school contexts because of its potential to mitigate patterns of social and political exclusion and inequality that can be reinforced/exacerbated during school years. The challenges to inclusiveness that we identify from our work as facilitators in the classroom are: power, inequality, diversity of expression and knowledge, and disagreement. Second, as a solution to these difficulties, conventional research tends to focus on improving the individual facilitator's technique, but our

suggestion, generated from our grounded experience in dealing with these challenges in the classroom, is to reconsider facilitation as involving two facets: facilitation as *technique* and facilitation as *design*. A practical as well as conceptual analysis of these two facets can assist deliberative practitioners to (re)design more inclusive deliberative practices in the classroom. Moreover, as all the challenges described are familiar and relevant in deliberation outside the classroom (e.g., Curato et al., 2019), we expect that this conceptualization will be useful to deliberative scholars and practitioners generally.

The opening section provides an overview of research on public deliberation and deliberative facilitation. Then, our *Deliberation in Schools* project is introduced by situating it in relation to recent developments in classroom deliberation. Building upon our experiences in classrooms, we describe four challenges, with suggestions and strategies for overcoming them. The focus in this paper is on our action research as deliberative practitioners and our reflections on deliberative facilitation, rather than on student responses and outcomes. We end by describing the two facets of deliberative facilitation—technique and design—in the context of the challenges.

Deliberative Norms and Deliberative Facilitators

Ideally, deliberation ought to involve authentic communication, that is, processes that “induce reflection upon preferences in noncoercive fashion and involve communicating in terms that those who do not share one's point of view can find meaningful and accept” (Dryzek, 2010, p. 10). By enabling citizens to communicate in an authentic manner, it is expected that deliberation produces specific democratic consequences, ranging from legitimate decision-making or policy influence to creation of a foundation of mutual learning among previously hostile citizens.

However, critics question whether authentic communication *alone* is enough to produce democratic consequences. Sunstein (2000) argued that deliberation may foster polarization and produce extreme opinions if like-minded groups deliberate together. Karpowitz and Mendelberg (2014) empirically demonstrated how male-centric forms of communication dominate deliberation and oppress women. To enable authentic deliberation, therefore, deliberation should also be inclusive. Opportunities should be created for the voices of all affected individuals to be heard and considered. Inclusive deliberation involves promoting mutual respect among participants so that individuals, including those from marginalized groups, can be recognized as legitimate participants. Young (2000) rightly summarized problems associated with authentic communication and suggested that as well as external inclusion (giving inclusive access to a deliberative process), attention should be given to internal inclusion, which requires removing structural, social, and cultural barriers preventing people from being recognized and heard within the process of deliberation.

Because it is difficult for citizens alone to realize authentic and inclusive deliberation, skilled and trained facilitators play a key

role. Facilitation (or moderation)¹ is often mentioned as part of the “deliberative package” (along with provision of information and discussion rules), but the role of facilitation is rarely studied empirically or theoretically (Moore, 2012; Escobar, 2019). Broadly, the term “facilitators” refers to individuals who help groups “increase effectiveness by improving [their] process and structure” (Schwarz, 2002, p. 5) and support people “to do their best thinking” (Kaner, 2014, p. 32). While the normative view of authentic deliberation requires non-coerciveness during deliberation (Dryzek, 2000), facilitators are the only individuals who are allowed to exert some sort of legitimated coercion during deliberation to improve the process and help to realize deliberative norms. For example, facilitators may direct which participants talk and listen, politely interrupt, or challenge participants’ talk if it is irrelevant to the topic in question or it harms other participants and are often involved in deciding how and when to conclude deliberation (Dillard, 2013; Moore, 2012). In many deliberative forums, the role of facilitators is critical because “without facilitation, deliberative talk risks backsliding into discussions where citizens listen without contesting reasons or fail to reach a needed outcome” (Dillard, 2013, p. 218).

Evidence gained from the few empirical studies that exist demonstrates how a facilitator contributes to inclusive deliberative quality. Fishkin’s (2009) study on deliberative polling shows how facilitators assisted all participants to express their view equally and to be heard even in difficult settings (e.g., divided society, virtual deliberation, European-wide deliberative forum) (ch. 6). Furthermore, facilitators play a role in creating a good and inclusive atmosphere during deliberation by facilitating various forms of communication, including joking, laughter, and so forth (see also Mansbridge et al., 2006). They bring care and an invitation to care (Marks & Russell, 2015). Strandberg et al. (2019) also drew on their empirical study of online deliberation and concluded that the presence of skilled facilitators makes a significant contribution to avoiding groupthink even if the deliberating group consists of like-minded people.

Despite the growing attention to facilitators, understanding what constitutes inclusive facilitation remains an open question. As a starting point for thinking about this, Dillard (2013) suggested three classifications of facilitators in deliberative forums: passive, involved, and moderate facilitators. *Passive* facilitators employ a hands-off and uninvolved approach to facilitation. This type of facilitator attempts to avoid interventions (e.g., summarizing opinions) during deliberation as much as possible in order to avoid

creating power imbalances between participants and facilitators. In contrast, *involved* facilitators engage in various forms of interventions throughout deliberation. Unlike passive facilitators, involved facilitators have “control over how deliberation happens” (p. 225) by asking various questions, interpreting opinions of participants, or even using devil’s advocate responses to enable participants to see things from multiple angles. *Moderate* facilitators use a mixture of passive and involved facilitation. Moderate facilitators play a role as quasi-participants, yet they participate in deliberation only by asking questions to elicit content or by employing a specific intervention (e.g., asking talkative participants to listen to what others say) to ensure the authenticity and inclusiveness of deliberation. It is certainly true that different contexts require different forms of facilitation (Quick & Sandfort, 2014; Sandfort & Quick, 2017). However, while Dillard’s typology is a useful starting point for thinking about deliberative facilitation, it doesn’t reflect the complex, dynamic, and responsive nature of facilitation in practice. For example, when deliberation is practiced with vulnerable individuals (e.g., disaster victims, refugees), these participants often need a space for expressing their feelings and emotions and being heard without interruption. In such contexts, the role that facilitators need to play is the passive facilitator who creates a safe space and builds and sustains trustful relationships with participants. Some vulnerable participants, such as children, may need a more involved approach to encourage them to speak up and participate equally.

Facilitation is, therefore, a jazzy and improvisational work (Escobar, 2019). Facilitators initially design for a level of involvement and intervention appropriate to the objectives and features of the setting but ultimately put themselves in conversation with the changing situation. They constantly modulate their interventions to create a space in which participants work together according to shared norms of communication (Kaner, 2014).

Deliberation in Schools

Over the past decade, research has unpacked various pedagogical impacts of deliberation in the classroom. For example, applying Fishkin’s (2009) deliberative polling to high school settings, Luskin and his colleagues (2007) investigated how classroom deliberation effects an increase in students’ knowledge, willingness to participate in various public activities, trust in government, and tolerance of difference. Hess and McAvoy (2015) made a case for positive relationships between students’ experience of classroom deliberation and an increase in interest in the 2008 U.S. presidential election.

Unfortunately, even though classroom deliberation receives attention from scholars and practitioners alike, little is known about the role of facilitators. Thus far, several studies have responded to questions about the authenticity of classroom deliberation (e.g., How can students engage in reflective reason-exchange?; e.g., Molnar-Main, 2017) and the consequentiality of classroom deliberation (What sort of deliberative capacities do students learn from classroom deliberation? How does classroom deliberation enable students’ out-of-school participation?; Luskin et al., 2007; Nishiyama, 2022). However, key questions regarding

1 Facilitation and moderation are sometimes distinguished as interventions in process (facilitation) or in content (moderation) (Lohmann & van Til, 2011). However, facilitation practitioners are aware that this distinction is blurry and not easily maintained. Process interventions often respond to developments in relation to content (e.g., drawing deliberation to a close, Moore, 2012) and content interventions (e.g., new information, questions, or challenges) are also interventions in process. As Journell (2017) has made clear, when teachers are facilitating deliberation, the idea of a “neutral” process facilitator is even harder to sustain.

inclusive facilitation in classroom deliberation are left hanging, such as “How can facilitation enable deliberative norms and behaviors in the context of a diversity of styles, experiences and abilities in the classroom?” and “What skills and considerations would teachers and/or facilitators need to facilitate classroom deliberation in a more inclusive way?”

Our Deliberation in Schools project was driven by these questions. The pilot program, run in 2018–19, aimed to introduce deliberation into actual classroom settings to consider challenges and opportunities for classroom deliberation. Working with students (years 5 and 11) and teachers in two public schools in the Australian Capital Territory (Ainslie Primary School and Hawker College), we conducted 10 deliberative sessions in total. In each school, we ran five 1.5-to-2-hour sessions over one term, focusing on topics selected from the Australian Curriculum and skills relating to the General Capabilities (ACARA, 2014). The core questions we deliberated on together were “How can we make the school better?” (Ainslie Primary School) and “Is Australia a peaceful nation?” (Hawker College).

Each author had experience of facilitating deliberation,² and we were keen to explore how our experience translated into classroom deliberation. Hence, the authors engaged in a learning-by-doing approach, a type of action research (Stringer, 2014). Action research involves iterative cycles of planning, acting, and reflecting, which integrate study of the phenomenon with intervention in it and further study of the results. The research/action process was divided into three recursive phases. In the first phase (“Plan”), we reviewed key literature to start designing our deliberative intervention. We drew on this review and on our own practical experience and expertise in a series of regular research meetings to write a proposal and make an initial version of our deliberative design. We then organized project meetings with key actors (teachers, school principal, research colleagues, including Greenwell) to refine our design in response to curriculum and learning needs and to develop a collaborative relationship with the teachers prior to implementing our project in each school.

In the next phase (“Action”), we conducted five deliberative sessions at each of two schools: Ainslie Primary School (year 5 students, aged 10–11 years) and Hawker College (year 11 students, aged 16–17 years), working with teachers. In each school, the same cohort participated in the five deliberative sessions. On days two through four, we divided students into three groups, and the authors served as facilitators of each group. For the year 5 class, each facilitator engaged with the same group throughout the three weeks. At the beginning and end of each session, we sat in a big circle to share opinions with the students. Russell was in charge of facilitating deliberation in this big circle. Class teachers observed deliberation³ and volunteers (parents, PhD student) observed and kept time in each session so that our deliberative sessions could be

2 A practitioner of deliberation in schools (Nishiyama), a deliberative practitioner and facilitator (Russell), and a former high-school teacher (Chalaye), and a current college teacher (Greenwell).

3 Occasionally, a teacher observer gave comments or directions to students during the sessions.

examined from multiple angles. During the deliberative practice, we sometimes changed our design flexibly in response to students’ responses, advice from teachers and observers, and other issues that arose.

In the final phase (“Reflection”), we organized debrief meetings after each session involving facilitators, teachers, and observers. We listened to feedback; shared stories from their observations and our own experiences, including things that had excited, surprised, or concerned us; and discussed problems, barriers, and challenges found in our practice. We took detailed notes from these meetings. This informed future design and technique. Rather than adopt particular approaches to facilitation (e.g., involved, passive, and moderate, Dillard, 2013) we put ourselves in conversation with the changing situation of the classroom (e.g., the degree to which students actively participated in our deliberative session, the relationship between students and teachers or between students), drawing on our expertise in design and technique. The debriefing meeting allowed us to examine and scrutinize our facilitation framework and strategy from multiple angles. After the debriefing meetings, we redesigned our deliberative curriculum for the next session by adding new activities (or omitting activities) in response to both content and process issues (e.g., “Let’s explore further that interesting idea that came up,” or, “How can we unearth disagreement that the students seem to be avoiding?”).

Once all planned sessions were completed, we further reflected on our lived experience. We captured our reflections in the following outputs (also receiving feedback from colleagues): (a) the project reports⁴ for each school, (b) a professional development resource submitted to the research funding organization, (c) a working paper discussing theoretical implications of our experience⁵ and (d) a public seminar presented to teachers, researchers, and a civil society group (DeliberateACT, a community of interest). We identified four key challenges of inclusive deliberative facilitation in the classroom (power, inequality, diversity, and disagreement), which are discussed in the next section.

Four Challenges for Inclusive Facilitation in Classroom Deliberation

Power

A key challenge for deliberation is power imbalance, which can be immense in a context of a divided or unequal group or society (Maia et al., 2017). Most relevant in a school context is the existing power imbalance between higher administrative authorities (e.g., principal but also external administrative bodies), teachers, parents, and of course, students. Such power imbalance may vary across schools, cultures, time, and individual teachers (Manke,

4 See, <https://www.delibdem.org/new-projects-grants-and-awards/deliberation-in-schools> and <https://www.delibdem.org/new-projects-grants-and-awards/deliberation-in-schools> (Last accessed: 4 April 2023)

5 See, <https://www.delibdem.org/working-paper-series> (Last accessed: 4 April 2023)

1997). Teachers often—if not always—have some level of power over students. This power is, among others, administrative (e.g., teachers mark student work, meet with parents); authoritative (teachers have authority in relation to knowledge); and normative (teachers police norms of communication and behavior in the classroom). However, students are not powerless; they too have some level of power over teachers, notably through their judgment of the quality of teaching methods, their class behavior, their ability to report to higher authorities (Golish & Olson, 2000), or, in a secondary setting, their capacity to choose and drop subjects. All this is to say that power is not simply a vertical and unilateral mechanism from teachers to students. Instead, it is often a negotiation of authority between administrative bodies (inside and outside the school), teachers, parents, and students. There are also power imbalances between students (and teachers etc). These are reflective of political dynamics and inequalities in society, which can be reinforced through educational policies (for example, the syphoning of funding from public to private schools in Australia (Greenwell & Bonnor, 2022; Cobb-Clark, 2011), but also through rigid, standardized assessment systems (Collins et al., 2019)).

Instead of a detailed scrutiny of every aspect of power, we focus on three aspects of teacher-related power, namely administrative, authoritative, and normative, which were prominent in our pilot project. We encountered the first form of power, administrative power, during all phases of the pilot. In most of our meetings with the teachers, the question of the curriculum and the school's requirements was mentioned. The administrative role of schools and teachers is largely focused on assessment: a grade must be generated by the activities (Black & Wiliam, 2018). While this mark is important in the school system and potentially a driver of motivation from some students, it tends to restrain the deliberative capacity of the group and individual students by constraining their behavior and expression in the face of judgment from teachers, parents, and broader education bodies that set norms of assessment. We also noticed a second form of power: authoritative power, exemplified by teachers' focus on content (Black & Wiliam 2018). The permanent focus on content by teachers contrasted and sometimes conflicted with our focus on deliberative processes, restraining the openness of deliberative explorations. The focus on content was reinforced by teachers' desire to draw knowledge from authoritative literature on the topic (e.g., about peace) and to connect this with the administrative requirements described previously. This situation relates to another core challenge for deliberation: What is the role of expertise in deliberation (Holst & Molander, 2017)? In a broad sense, expertise always plays a role in deliberation, but the classroom setting can be problematic as it tends to position students as learners (lacking expertise) rather than deliberators (citizen experts). Finally, the third form of power we observed was normative. For instance, the teacher in the primary school distinguished "important" or "realistic" propositions to make the school better from "random" options. These norms sometimes reflect societal norms (typically "adult" versus "children") in the classroom and can limit creative options and discussions. Interestingly, we also observed students policing these norms with other students.

In a classroom setting, power can rarely be completely neutralized, but it can be mitigated, using various deliberative strategies so that authentic deliberation between equal participants can occur (Curato et al., 2019). We talked openly with the teachers about these issues and negotiated the conditions of deliberative activities from an early phase of the pilot (during the design). We constantly aimed at integrating the teacher's requirements in terms of content with our (deliberative) procedural norms and ideals. At the same time, as facilitators, we sought to intervene in power imbalances that were occurring in the classroom, recognizing other forms of power imbalance over which we had no control (e.g., compulsory marking, discussed later). We did so by remaining open to all ideas (however "random") and encouraging diverse forms of expression (normative power) by seeking to draw on students' lived experience and perspectives (authoritative power) and by making classes flexible and responsive to students' perspectives (administrative power). For example, regarding marking and focusing on content, a mark was required in the Hawker pilot. To mitigate the emphasis on grading students on their performance (and impact on the quality of deliberation) in the Hawker pilot, we discussed the issue of grading with the teacher early in the design phase. We agreed that the teacher would conduct activities with the students to provide them with some content a few weeks before the pilot started. We also designed assessment based on a balance between the level and quality of students' participation in the deliberative activities and content-related criteria. To mitigate the power imbalance between students, we conducted deliberation sessions in groups of various sizes and shapes (including small groups of like-minded people when the issue being discussed was difficult).

Inequality

As already discussed, inclusion is key for effective deliberation (Dryzek, 2010; Schneiderhan & Shamus, 2008; Young, 2000), but it is challenged by multiple forms of inequality, for example, in relation to gender, race, class, as well as cultural, pedagogical, and communicative norms (Lahire, 2019). During the pilot program, we noticed various forms of inequality, which contributed to further exclude some students. For instance, exclusion based on gender is illustrated in a discussion we conducted on gender discrimination as a source of conflict in Australian society. Male students did not admit that gender discrimination was as significant as female students were claiming. Such distrust based on gender could lead to polarization between males and females, which fragments the group and the quality and authenticity of the discussion. Exclusion on the basis of communicative capacities also occurred when students experienced "anxiety," "fear," or "discomfort" in sharing opinions, leaving self-confident students the only ones "able" to participate.⁶

Finally, in relation to the gender discrimination discussion, some students argued that only "scientific" and numerical

6 Democracy often confronts an ablism challenge. Cognitive and linguistic capacities have often become central to democratic norms, leading inevitably to the exclusion of people with cognitive disability. Similar concerns were raised by Donaldson and Kymlicka (2016).

indicators (“stats”) could reveal the truth about gender discrimination. In doing so, they dismissed opinions, arguments, or emotions that were based on lived experiences of female students, who experience everyday forms of gender discrimination. This also demonstrates how the different challenges to inclusion can be interrelated and cumulative and create significant barriers to communication.

Inclusion is a major feature of deliberation. Indeed, deliberation relies on reciprocal (mutual trust) relationships between participants and between participants and facilitators. For facilitators, inclusion is about maintaining a productive tension between group cohesion and the expression of plural and, often, unequal voices, neither of which should undermine the other. For example, norms that promote some means of communication (e.g., speaking) and not others (e.g., writing) tend to exacerbate inequalities between those who are proficient in those means and those who are not. Rather, the fact that members of a group have different communication skills should be seen as an opportunity to explore different forms of expression such as writing, play, or art and to encourage mutual listening across differences. In that sense, facilitators do not play a neutral role—they permanently keep in mind inequalities between participants and think of strategies to mitigate these inequalities, while seeking to build group cohesion so that every participant can feel included in the group. In the pilot, we designed activities based on speaking, writing, art, and movement and intervened in group dynamics (especially using small groups) to promote inclusive participation.

Diversity of Expression and Knowledge

Diversity is seen as an indicator of inclusiveness, a requirement for political legitimacy, and a key resource for fruitful deliberation (Curato et al., 2017). In deliberation programs in schools, classrooms are likely to have somewhat less diversity than mini-publics (because participants are not drawn from a larger population to reflect its diversity, and because they are all young), but importantly, schools programs are likely to include students who would not normally self-select to participate in activities of this kind. Classroom deliberation programs potentially provide a window on the experiences of these “unmotivated” students and, by extension, of non-participating adults (Jacquet, 2017) and their contributions to deliberation. It may provide insights to assist in bringing such disengaged people to civic deliberation and may also influence these students’ future motivation to participate. Embracing and working with this diversity, in terms of motivation and mode of expression, is a key challenge. Another key challenge for diversity is the extent to which different forms of knowledge are considered acceptable and/or valuable in the classroom.

Regarding the former challenge (motivation and modes of expression), it seems likely that motivation to participate is related, at least in part, to students’ perceptions of their ability to influence the design and content of their learning. Although contemporary schooling increasingly seeks to uncover each student’s individual strengths and talents, it is clear that students do get messages about how much their contributions—how they express themselves but also their ideas—are valued. The challenge for deliberation is,

therefore, to work with students who have diverse styles, ways of expressing themselves, and views, in ways that are inclusive of them. Building on our discussion of diverse communication in the previous section, respecting diversity does not mean “accepting everything.” Some forms of expression (e.g., insult) are by nature exclusive. The deliberative facilitator thus needs to set boundaries on what is acceptable and respond to what might be considered “extreme” behaviors and views (Moore, 2012) to create a “safe” environment. At the same time, the facilitator needs to be aware that they are setting boundaries and are potentially gatekeeping (What is acceptable? What is reasonable?) and that this has pedagogical and power implications, and affects the inclusiveness of the deliberation.

In the Ainslie pilot, we worked with a group who responded to the question “How can we make the school better?” with a suggestion of “Fanta in the bubblers!” This led to a rapid series of suggestions, including a pool, a foam pit, and KFC in the cafeteria. As facilitators, we initially considered how we could “moderate” these responses and get the kids to be more “sensible.” However, we noted that the group, who had struggled to attend to some other parts of the class, became very animated during this exercise. We began to listen to their suggestions and encouraged them to explore them as they wished. We suggested that they use art to express their ideas, and they created an Unlimited Tree House, encompassing all their “crazy” ideas in a wonderfully creative drawing (Figure 1).

As well as a range of creative “blue sky” ideas for the school, we also saw evidence of the group catering to a range of students (as well as a games room and a giant slide, they included a library and a farm) and elaborating some of their ideas to take account of downsides (a free dentist to go with the Fanta fountains!). The challenge for the deliberative facilitator, then, is to work with the different styles and perspectives of the students and to explore “extreme” views or stances as resources for deliberation (Moore, 2012). What can we learn from these views? What do they tell us about the students’ experiences and lives? Can we work with these creatively or playfully, exploring resistance and boundaries? Taking this approach of exploring and harnessing resistance, push-back, and unconventional perspectives potentially makes deliberation more inclusive of marginal individuals and groups, recognizing that they may bring not only difference but also resistance and opposition and that this may be a reflection of their lived experience. Finding nonverbal channels for expression and voice may assist in this inclusion.

Once again, this was exemplified in the discussion of gender discrimination during the Hawker pilot, particularly when the female students’ lived experiences were contrasted with the quantitative evidence the male students were focusing on. This case also gave indications of how deliberation can overcome this challenge. We used different designs to explore these issues. First was a “fishbowl” discussion, in which a small inner circle of volunteers had a discussion, with a facilitator, and the remaining students observed from an outer circle. Those who volunteer for the inner circle are often the most outspoken, but being observed tends to moderate their expressions and improve turn-taking and



Figure 1. The Unlimited Tree House—How to Make the School Better (Year 5 Students)

listening, as does facilitation. Issues arising from this were explored in the next session in small-group work, including short discussions in single-gender groups followed by facilitated discussion when these groups came together, with sticky notes to capture ideas. This iterative approach, in which the structure and facilitation were focused on exploring different sides, encouraged openness and a shift away from a debate on the issue. Although male students challenged the significance of the issue by speaking of statistics and evidence, they became more open to listening to the female students' experiences as the activity unfolded. The structured process allowed girls to speak passionately about their personal experiences and allowed boys to also voice their views on the topic. It was significant that they were not silenced by their lack of personal experience of discrimination and were able to express scepticism and consider the issue at a broader political level. At the same time, the deliberative atmosphere required that each listen respectfully. This seemed to create a space where male students were able to engage, listen, and learn from females' experiences, while both could think about the issue systemically. While the female students might initially have been irritated by the males' reactions, most of the group seemed to appreciate getting to discuss this important issue together. Ideally, in a deliberative process, personal accounts can be heard alongside more general commentaries and evidence in ways that give each space and respect and encourage mutual learning and exploration. This also

allows young people to explore their own personal connection and response to each issue discussed in class while recognizing their relation to others (Dawson, 2019). Individuals do not have to "be right" about the issue, or win arguments—they can engage together in mutual learning and emerge with a plurality of different, but hopefully better informed, views.

Disagreement

Disagreement is also one of the key resources for healthy public deliberation (Hess & McAvoy, 2015). While some see deliberation as useful for avoiding disagreement, ensuring that disagreement is surfaced can be a challenge for deliberative processes (Boswell, 2021). Research has shown that people often refuse to participate in deliberation simply because they do not like disagreements and do not want to be criticized by others (Mutz, 2006). This issue is not unique to adult deliberation. At Hawker College, we found that many students deliberated in a "peaceful" manner to avoid disagreement, that is, they did not acknowledge cultural, social, and/or ideological differences but agreed or accepted each other's opinions without criticism in order to create a "harmonious" atmosphere in the classroom. Some students showed a degree of reticence or unwillingness to acknowledge the validity of personal perspectives. One reason for this may be that the question ("Is Australia a peaceful nation?") was, in part, empirical and extended beyond the lived experience of the participants. However, deliberative design and techniques were successfully employed to increase the range of "valid" arguments.

On the face of it, deliberation without disagreement is one indicator of students' mutual respect and listening. However, this kind of listening may detract from the quality of deliberation because when students intentionally avoid disagreement, they are less likely to listen deeply to what other students say. As Dobson (2014) indicated, such listening is "cataphatic" listening, in which listeners tend to "read everything in terms of prefigured categories" (or pre-existing views) (p. 67). From the facilitator's point of view, cataphatic listening is highly problematic because students are not engaging with each other's views, exchanging reasons, or reflecting on their differences. They are essentially pretending to deliberate together, rather than engaging in authentic, inclusive, and consequential deliberation.

While facilitators need to ameliorate unproductive conflict, they also need to find ways to encourage and explore disagreement for productive deliberation. In the classroom, this should be done with sensitivity to the different communicative norms of students, some of whom may be strongly conflict averse while others may be "looking for a fight." Framing disagreement as an opportunity for learning and using it to demonstrate the ambiguous and value-laden nature of complex topics (there is no "right" answer) may allow students to engage with disagreement with curiosity rather than seeing it as personal attack.

In the pilot, we designed an activity for visually identifying areas of disagreement after a debriefing meeting where we discussed students' disagreement-averse attitude. In the debriefing meeting, we shared a sense that our aim was neither to force students to engage in disagreement nor to discourage it. Instead,

we created a design to “nudge” them to engage with disagreement. We then hypothesized that students may become more willing to engage with their disagreement and understand each other if they recognize what they exactly (dis)agree with each other about. Thus, we created a so-called visualizing disagreement work that consisted of four steps:

- **Topic Selection:** We select a controversial question or claim that could generate student disagreement (Is Australia a peaceful society?).
- **Reflection:** Students think about the question or claim and, working individually or in small groups, write down their opinions and reasons on sticky notes (e.g., I agree that Australia is a peaceful society because . . .).
- **Collective Disagreement Exercise:** The facilitator prepares a worksheet on butchers’ paper that has three sections (see Figure 2): Agreement A (positive), Agreement B (negative), and Disagreement. Students share and consider each other’s opinions and underlying reasons. For each Post-it, if everyone agrees, the note is placed in Agreement A (for positive opinions, e.g., “Australia is a peace society because . . .”) or Agreement B (for negative opinions, e.g., “Australia is not a peace society because . . .”). If there is disagreement about the opinion, the note is placed in the Disagreement section.
- **Deliberation:** From the worksheet and with help from the facilitator, students select a particular topic where there is disagreement (strong and clear but not too divisive). They then form two groups with opposing perspectives but including some “neutral” students who have not made up their minds. These neutral students listen to the arguments of the opposing students. Then the groups come together, led by the neutral students, and consider (1) the degree to

which they can accept each other’s opinion and (2) whether there is common ground. They are then encouraged to express a group position, which may be a consensus, a compromise, or an explanation of the disagreement.

In this example, we were neither strictly involved nor passive facilitators: in terms of technique, we simply encouraged their opinions, but our design work for visualizing disagreement served as a facilitative enabler of students’ disagreement recognition. This design work can create a deliberation structure where students with disagreement-averse attitude can visually share the degree to which they disagree with each other, notice their differences (and commonalities) and draw otherwise unarticulated opinions from their recognition of differences and disagreements. Even though, as mentioned, students initially assumed that disagreements run the risk of collapsing harmony and friendship in their classroom, the work enabled them to learn this was a wrong assumption and rather disagreement fostered their further engagement in deliberation and mutual understanding.

Inclusive Deliberative Facilitation as Technique and Design

As we have seen, while facilitators are expected to provide the discursive framework/scaffold within which citizens can engage in inclusive and productive dialogue and deliberation (Dillard, 2013), there are many challenges for facilitators to address such expectations. Thus, we need to rethink two questions: What is the role of facilitators in classroom deliberation? What is inclusive facilitation? We asked these questions on a regular basis during our action research and acknowledged the limitation of each individual’s facilitative technique for addressing these questions. Thus, it became clear that there are two key aspects of facilitation for inclusive deliberation: technique and design. Both are important, and they are usually used in concert to provide a discursive framework for deliberative work.

Technique refers to the communicative capacities, skills and actions a facilitator brings to group communication. First and foremost, for deliberation, these include modelling deliberative norms, such as respectful listening, reflection, suspension of judgment and openness to learning. Technique also involves encouraging and supporting participants, in verbal and non-verbal ways, to engage with deliberative norms and processes. For example, a facilitator can encourage participants to justify their views by asking “How do you know?” or “What are your reasons?” Facilitators can encourage listening and reflection, sometimes intervening in conversations when participants fail to listen or suggesting a period of silence for reflection.

Facilitation technique also involves observing and assessing dynamics in the group and between individuals, mediating in conflicts, encouraging balance, reflecting and/or connecting different participants’ contributions, and pointing out areas of common ground or disagreement. Sometimes, this work requires facilitators to stand back and allow participants to deal with group dynamics, thus building trust and deliberative capacity. Judging when to intervene and when to “don’t just do something, stand there!” (Weisbord & Janoff, 2007), is a key technique for the

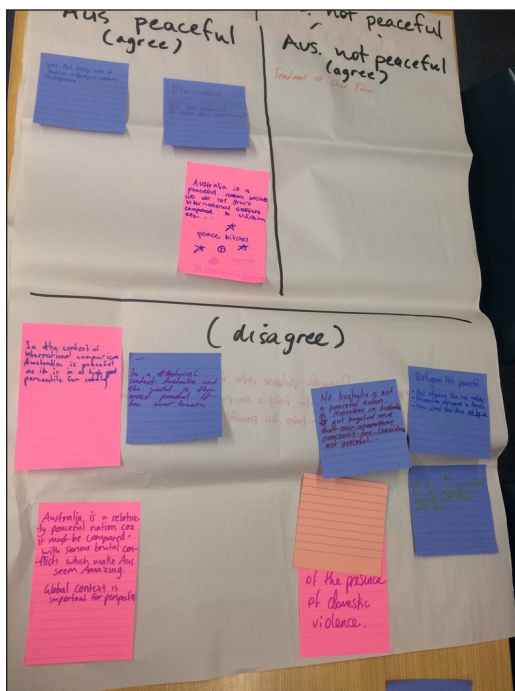


Figure 2. Design for Visualizing Disagreement (at Hawker College)

deliberative facilitator. Facilitators also need to work with tensions that inevitably arise in inclusive deliberation. We have seen some of these tensions in our study, for example the tension between group cohesion and plurality, and between respect and disagreement. We believe that the role of facilitators in “holding” these, so that they are productive tensions, is a key dimension of facilitative technique and one that requires further study.

Yet technique *alone* is not enough to deal with the challenges and difficulties we described in the previous section. For example, even though teachers bring various techniques into classroom deliberation, this does not always mean that teachers’ power is minimized. Also, we focused on disagreements because our facilitation technique did not work well due to students’ strong disagreement-averse attitude. Hence, what we suggest is that “deliberative facilitation as technique” ought to be complemented and intertwined with the creation of structure for deliberation—or what we call “deliberative facilitation as design.”

Design refers to the development of structured activities, tools, and processes that are used to facilitate deliberative communication. Facilitative designs can be used to structure conversations in the absence of a facilitator, but are normally employed by a facilitator, alongside technique, to provide further discursive scaffolding and structure to the task at hand. For example, deliberative forums often involve small-group work, which allows in-depth discussion and opportunities for all participants to contribute. This work may be structured around a well-designed set of questions, include ways to structure or mix groups, and have a set timing. The set of questions, instructions for mixing, and timing are all aspects of the design of this exercise and allow a productive conversation that may not be actively facilitated.

One of the most basic designs for deliberative forums is a set of guidelines or ground rules. In the two schools where we conducted the pilot program, we ask participants themselves to determine, through deliberative activities, what constitutes good deliberation. Considering the age of the students, we avoided academic jargon such as “deliberative norms,” instead using “communication guidelines.” We basically asked them to think about good communication and what are some of the things that are important for that. The students came up with suggestions that we collated to develop guidelines, for example: honesty, empathy, respect, body language, openness, inclusiveness, listening (Hawker College). These norms resemble ones found in deliberative democratic theory, with the interesting addition of body language (which came up at both schools). We kept the guidelines flexible during the project. Students could add to or modify the norms, and we invited the students to reflect on these norms during and after the project. Establishing guidelines with the students was a key step for building trusting relationships among the students and between the students and the facilitators. In addition, this student-centric activity created a structure for minimizing facilitators’ power because we weren’t forcing them to comply with our norms of behavior but helping them to follow their own standards of good communication. The guidelines were a reference during each project and allowed us to collectively reflect on these norms. For example, we used the guidelines in exercises in which students

reflected on their own or their colleagues’ communication. Potentially, the inclusive process of formulating deliberative guidelines could have been extended to formulation of the focus question. Given that in a school setting students don’t get to opt in to the deliberative process, a sense of ownership of the question could build motivation, including a willingness to disagree, even when this might seem confronting or challenging.

We also designed multiple icebreakers at the beginning of each deliberation, intended to create a foundation for students to engage in deliberation in a more inclusive way. Storytelling is one example—an age-old dialogue method that allows people to learn about each other and connect, finding commonalities and distinctions, and share their humanity. One general approach is to ask students to share a story of their lived experiences (e.g., family) with the group or in pairs. Some icebreakers also sought to consolidate learning and to improve group relationships; for example, we asked students to share with the group something that had impressed them about the communication of the person next to them. Introduction of movement games can also serve as deliberative designs. Students, particularly those aged around 6–10, have finite attention spans and disengage if they sit for too long and need to move to stay focused. One type of movement activity (sometimes called sociometry) involves students responding to a question by arranging themselves on a spectrum or grid in the classroom. For example, we used a line on the floor to explore “How democratic is our school?” (This was followed by “How democratic would we like it to be?”) Students chose where to stand on the line from “very democratic” to “not at all democratic.” This is a way for all students to express their views at the same time and can be used to spark further conversation. As with adults, movement can create meaning and help with learning and collaboration.

Deliberative facilitation as design can compensate for some weaknesses of deliberation as technique and vice versa. It should be emphasized again that technique and design are not dichotomous. Even if we provide a well-designed structure for deliberation, it may not work well without sensitive and sophisticated techniques for face-to-face facilitation. Likewise, even if there is a skilled facilitator, their technique alone may confront structural problems in classroom deliberation. Technique and design can work in close concert, and design work can be impromptu and responsive. For example, in facilitating a discussion in which disagreement is turning into unproductive argument, a facilitator can intervene by saying, “Let’s list the things we agree about and those we don’t,” or, “Let’s rank these ideas according to those we think would work the best.” In the ideal, design and technique complement each other to enable authentic, inclusive, and consequential deliberation. In our study, we saw examples of technique and design enabling students to express their views, respond to questions and issues on their own terms and from their lived experiences, engage constructively with disagreement, develop mutual understanding and respect, and come to agreement. In future work, we would be interested in whether these deliberative norms and behaviors persist over time.

This study has emphasized the role of external facilitators. As such, our findings have relevance to a range of deliberative forums and settings, particularly when they involve young people. A

limitation of the study is that we have not explored the role of teachers as deliberative facilitators in detail. Clearly, there are issues associated with the facilitator role for teachers, particularly in relation to power, and more research is needed to explore these. Yet we hope that our study has given teachers useful food for thought and practical guidance in adopting deliberative approaches in their pedagogy. The study has also demonstrated the value of bringing external facilitators into classrooms, an innovation that we feel deserves further attention. Our study has not investigated the impacts of our deliberative sessions on the students involved, and future study could explore longitudinal effects of such classroom deliberation on deliberative norms and behaviors, on engagement and inclusion, and on outcomes for diverse school students.

Conclusion

Facilitation is a key and often neglected aspect of quality deliberation (Moore, 2012). It does not compensate for, but supports and enables, citizens' deliberative competencies. This is as much the case for classroom deliberation as for deliberative forums. In particular, deliberative facilitation may be critical to increasing the internal inclusiveness of deliberative processes, by intervening in the social dynamics that enact and reinforce exclusion and marginalization. We have identified some of the challenges associated with the inclusive role for deliberative facilitation in the classroom. Although our discussion of these challenges comes from our work in the classroom, they are clearly also challenges for deliberation more generally. In schools, these challenges to inclusion have unique dimensions. Table 1 is a visual summary of our field experience and findings:

Drawing on our Deliberation in Schools pilot program, we explored the role of deliberative facilitation in classrooms, focusing on external facilitators. We conclude that facilitation needs to be anchored by two intertwined elements—technique and design—with each element having complementary functions in dealing with the challenges described earlier. An understanding of facilitative technique and design is important to building deliberative processes and capacities in classrooms, both in building facilitative capacities in teachers and in conceiving new roles for deliberative facilitators working with teachers. As stated, this understanding is also important for deliberation outside classrooms.

For studies of deliberation, students also represent diverse, marginalized, and politically excluded communities. Moreover, inequality and marginalization within schools often lead to processes of exclusion that persist into adulthood (Lahire, 2019). Thus, our study of the role of facilitation in building inclusiveness in deliberative processes is not important just for considering schools as an important site for deliberative democracy capacity building (and research). It is also important for developing a deeper understanding of processes of exclusion that affect the quality of deliberative processes and democracy generally and how this exclusion can be mitigated at forum and system levels. Thus, we argue that deliberative facilitation is a key element of inclusive deliberation in schools and in society, and important in maximizing their contributions to democracy.

Table 1. Challenges for Facilitation of Classroom Deliberation and Mitigating Strategies

Challenge	In the classroom	Strategies
Power	The classroom can be an exclusive space where teachers (and other adults) have explicit power over students which takes different forms (administrative, authoritative, and normative).	Deliberative facilitators can make power imbalances visible to students and teachers; they can challenge these imbalances through facilitative interventions.
Inequality	Classrooms are often conditioned by gender and cultural inequality and may create and reinforce inequality and exclusion (e.g., in relation to intellectual and class differences), which may be exacerbated by mental health problems.	Deliberative facilitators can work to maintain a productive tension between group cohesion and the expression of plural voices.
Diversity	Classrooms are home to diverse perspectives, styles and behaviors, including “extreme” ones; classrooms play a role in policing what is normal and acceptable. Diversity of knowledge and lived experience can lead to marginalization of some students.	Deliberative facilitators can encourage and explore “extreme” views in safe ways, unearthing resistance as well as difference, including by encouraging nonverbal means of expression; they can encourage the valuing of diverse knowledge and experience.
Disagreement	Young people are sensitive to conflict and criticism and may seek to conform, making disagreement, an essential ingredient of deliberation, difficult to unearth.	Deliberative facilitators can encourage exploration of disagreement as a learning opportunity and resource for deliberation.

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