

John R. Dedrick, Laura Grattan, and Harris Dienstfrey, eds. *DELIBERATION & the Work of Higher Education: Innovations for the Classroom, the Campus and the Community*. Dayton, OH: Kettering Foundation Press, 2008.

Review by Eric Malm

The *deliberation* and *democratic dialogue* movements are part of a broad movement toward increasing the relevance of colleges and universities and higher education in today's society. One hundred years ago, colleges and universities were restructuring themselves to focus on academic specialties, introducing specialized departments and majors. In opposition to the "prevailing culture of hyper-professionalism" (p. 7), deliberative practice is framed as a powerful set of tools to help universities meet Boyer's charges of irrelevance. Whether couched in terms of "democracy," "values," or "community relevance," deliberation suggests that in order to be relevant, the academy must listen and participate in broader societal discussions.

Deliberation is a fabulous word, and an important (and sometimes challenging) practice. *DELIBERATION & the Work of Higher Education* is the product of a Kettering Foundation work group that focused on the role of deliberation and civic engagement on the college campus. Over a 6-year period, group members met not just to review literature and best practices, but to listen to, discuss, and reflect on the thoughts and experiences of their fellow work group members. The resulting collection of essays builds a compelling case for how integrating deliberative practices can help invigorate teaching and learning on campus, build relationships with the community, and even improve institutional metrics like enrollment, retention, and student learning. The 300-page volume contains thirteen essays in five separate sections. Each essay reflects the authors' experiences integrating democratic dialogue into their classrooms, institutions, and communities. While the essays necessarily include subjects that relate directly to one's role on campus (liberal arts, professional education, administration, community engagement, etc.), readers also gain from the richness of multiple perspectives.

Although located relatively late in the book, Douglas Walters' story of how a newly appointed dean of students worked through the challenges of implementing a curriculum focused on *democratic dialogue* provides a great introduction to the potential impact of deliberative practices on campus. It was hoped that the new curriculum would revitalize the college, improving student learning,

enrollment, and retention. Key to success was a “profound shift in the philosophy of the relationship between student and teacher. Put simply, this is a shift from an institution organized around the instructional paradigm to one organized around a learning paradigm” (p. 195). A central component of the curriculum was the inclusion of deliberative forums that allowed students to actively move through a process that took them from open discussion of a topic with the community through action. The process not only improved learning but also provided opportunities for students to practice communication, listening, and critical thinking skills within a highly relevant community context. Written from the perspective of an administrator who was new to the college, Walters’ account illustrates the power of democratic dialogue to transform an institution.

Many other essays documented the challenges and successes of incorporating dialogue into the classroom and curriculum at many levels. Particularly inspiring was Michael D’Innocenzo’s chapter “From ‘Youth Ghettos’ to Intergenerational Civic Engagement,” which described a Hofstra University initiative to expand deliberative dialogue from the college campus to a broader community of various ages, ethnicities, and economic backgrounds. This initiative used National Issues Forum books to facilitate dialogue on civic issues as a way of addressing concerns about the students’ limited exposure to other communities. This piece provides tips and suggestions for running successful intergenerational civic dialogues. Important among these are providing a chance to build dialogue skills (don’t do it just once) and providing “information and deliberative equity” (p. 26). These sessions promised to “offer a different kind of talk—which is community building.” Other authors spoke of the role of deliberative dialogue in “enhancing critical questioning” (p. 91), uncovering “a range of possible positions” (p. 98), and attempting to “awaken the spirit of civic engagement” (p. 42) in students. Some noted that while positive progress is made, “awakening” may be a tall order.

Other authors spoke of the impact that deliberation has had on their teaching styles and experiences. Focusing on a variety of courses taught over several years and at several levels, David Cooper tells an interesting personal story that helps show how deliberative practice can enhance courses on writing and public discourse. Cooper describes an important shift in his teaching style. A deliberative pedagogy forces the teacher to take risks by giving students responsibility for learning, and places the instructor in the role of “project manager,” “midwife,” or “architect.” The risks described

included students who were unfamiliar or uncomfortable with grading and fellow faculty members who questioned whether any “teaching” was taking place in the classroom. American studies professor Joni Doherty now believes that it is her “responsibility to create a deliberative environment that fosters the acquisition of knowledge and skills needed to make well-reasoned judgments about ethical issues, not to advocate for particular outcomes” (p. 79). Clearly the process of deliberation can challenge traditional roles, and have an impact on the way learning takes place.

An important theme of the book is that for education to have meaning, academics and institutions cannot ignore the moral dimensions of the issues society confronts. As David Mathews, president of the Kettering Foundation, puts it, “Deliberation doesn’t treat moral concerns as *relative*, but rather *in relation* to the other things people hold valuable by asking them to weigh the consequences of various options for action” (p. 291). Cristina Alfaro sees the deliberative process as one that develops “the discipline to keep an open mind, the willingness to stand in someone else’s shoes, the capacity to change, and the ability to work with others to make decisions for the common good” (p. 147). The challenge of setting aside biases and preconceptions is not only critical for successful participation in deliberative dialogue but is also a task that institutions of higher education must embrace if they are to take a meaningful and significant role in shaping our country’s future. *DELIBERATION* provides a meaningful contribution and an easy-to-read guide for anyone interested in incorporating the practice into their lives.

About the Reviewer

Eric Malm is an assistant professor of economics at Cabrini College in Radnor, Pennsylvania.

