

# CONNECTIONS

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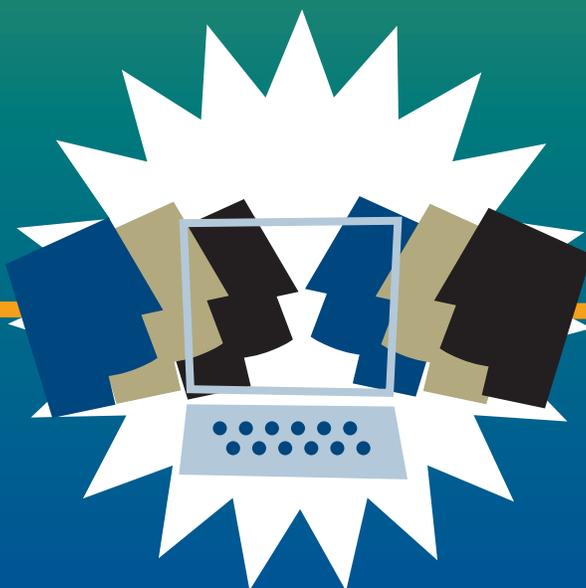


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patory, and justice-oriented citizens in the not too distant future. These practices are embedded in the concept of deliberation, and informed adults could help to teach them to the youth.

Sowing the Seed of Deliberation (SSD) project is an attempt to increase the capacity of youth leaders in secondary schools in Nigeria on democracy and democratic practices.

Drawing heavily from the ideas and ideals of the Kettering Foundation, the National Issues Forums Institute, the David Mathews Center for Civic Life, and several reports from developmental partners on deliberation and National Issues Forums in the classroom, a three-day experimental workshop on the Sowing the Seed of Deliberation project was organized between April 28 and 30, 2009, in Nigeria. The workshop, which had in attendance 15 youth leaders from 8 secondary schools, was first and foremost used as an experiment to find out the best approach to the planning and eventual implementation of the SSD project later in the year, taking into consideration the contextual framework in Nigeria.

The three-day workshop engaged these youth leaders on the six basic democratic practices as spelt out in David Mathews' *Reclaiming Public Education by Reclaiming Our Democracy*. To explore the students' understanding of these democratic practices, a group discussion on the meaning of democracy, politics, and decision making was carried out. At the end of this interactive session, it was observed that students' understanding of democracy and politics has been negatively affected by the information they are getting from the media, teachers and parents, and the behavior of professional politicians. It was obvious that students have been spoon-fed only with what David Mathews usually refers to as "politics-as-usual," and they are only familiar with "institutional democracy." One student drew the attention of other participants to the recently concluded re-run governorship election in Ekiti State, which was marred by violence and ballot rigging. To this student, politics is a dirty game and democracy is the government by the selfish few, for the wicked few.

# Effects of Deliberation on Secondary School Students: The Experimental Sowing the Seed of Deliberation Project in Nigeria

By Moshood Folorunsho

Since Nigeria's return to democracy in 1999, it has been observed that there is a continuing decline in civic knowledge, engagement, and participation among young people. This portends a great danger to the nascent democratic setting because young people have the numerical strength and energy that can make or mar the development of democracy anywhere in the world. More so, they are the future of the country and therefore need to be adequately equipped for the present and the future challenges of democratic life.

Making democracy work as it should in Nigeria requires, among other things, inculcating basic democratic practices in the youth, especially secondary school students before they graduate on to colleges and universities. The practices, which are some of the activities citizens should engage in to properly govern themselves, would definitely turn the youth into informed, responsible, partici-

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## The Experimental Sowing the Seed of Deliberation Project in Nigeria

Another participant viewed politics as the best money-making venture in the country. He believed people are into politics just to make money and serve their selfish interests. To him, democracy is making the poor, poorer and the rich, richer. Another participant gave the classical definition of institutional democracy as taught by their government teacher: "Democracy is a political system, a type of institutional arrangement for arriving at political legislative and administrative decisions. It is a system by which the individual acquires the power to participate in decision making by means of a competitive struggle for the people's vote." This girl gave approximately 13 elements of institutional democracy, 2 of which qualify as elements of the "different kind of democracy" that Kettering Foundation advocates. These two elements are citizens' involvement in decision making and civic education.

Most of the students have "participated" in decision making in schools as mere spectators and observers, rubber-stamping predetermined decisions by school authorities and teachers. The most interesting experience came from a 16-year-old participant who is a member of Red Cross Society and a Time Keeper at his school. "In my school, we have Students Representatives Council (SRC) that regularly meets with the school authority on many issues affecting the school. . . . Though there are some issues the school authority does not discuss with the SRC, it makes the students part of the decision-making body in the school." The boy was asked how SRC is constituted. He responded by saying, "SRC is constituted by the Principal. . . . SRC members are nominated by the teachers, and a majority of the members are school prefects." All of them are decision makers in their school clubs, but they make decisions through opinion polls, voting, debate, oratory prowess, and interviews.

It is widely believed that the school environment is a microcosm of the larger society where decisions on topical issues, especially those that are affecting the youth, are made on a daily basis, and can provide a good space for the experi-

mentation of democracy and democratic practices among the students. Thus, this space can be created within the classroom, outside the classroom, or both. And, it should be noted that deliberation in the classroom and deliberation outside the classroom could be used to complement one another.

The SSD project may lack resources and capacity to timely cope with the initial intricacies and idiosyncrasies of teachers and school authorities in adopting deliberation/NIF in the classroom, hence it will explore the strengths and the opportunities of the outside-the-classroom activities, especially through the existing school clubs. It is hoped that with time, the effect on the students within the school club activities will snowball into the classrooms.

It was from this background that being a school prefect and member of a school club became the criteria for participating in the three-day experimental workshop on the SSD project. It is also hoped that these youth leaders will become the seed of deliberation that will eventually germinate into informed and responsible citizens and grow into participatory, committed, and justice-oriented citizens in the future.

The session on the naming and framing of *The Rising Costs of Access to Secondary Education in Nigeria* and the test deliberative forum on the developed issue map enlightened the students about what David Mathews refers to as "citizens politics" in his book, *Politics for People*. They were engaged in a unique way of talking, making decisions, and acting together. Though the entire process was time consuming and somewhat tedious, they all agreed that the session improved their understanding of the issue. It must be noted that the involvement of the

participants in extracurricular activities through their various clubs influenced their level of understanding and the rate at which they grasped the concept.

For sustainability of the project and stimulation of students' interests in democratic practices, the participants desired to incorporate deliberation into the activities of their various clubs. They all showed a significant level of commitment through workshop assignments and various group work. In order to monitor their activities and their progress, an Internet account was opened for every participant—for

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some of them, this was the first direct encounter with a computer and the Internet.

At the beginning of the workshop, it was observed that the participants have a certain level of civic knowledge and engagement through their involvement in extracurricular activities, but their participation in the workshop further developed this capacity. They are more informed and committed. Because all of them will still be in secondary school during the next year, there will be enough time to carry out an impact assessment and determine how responsible and participatory they have become before graduating on to colleges and universities.

*Moshood Folorunsho works with Educare Trust and Youth Center in Nigeria. He was a Kettering Civil Society Fellow from February to July 2009. He can be reached at educaretrust@hotmail.com.*

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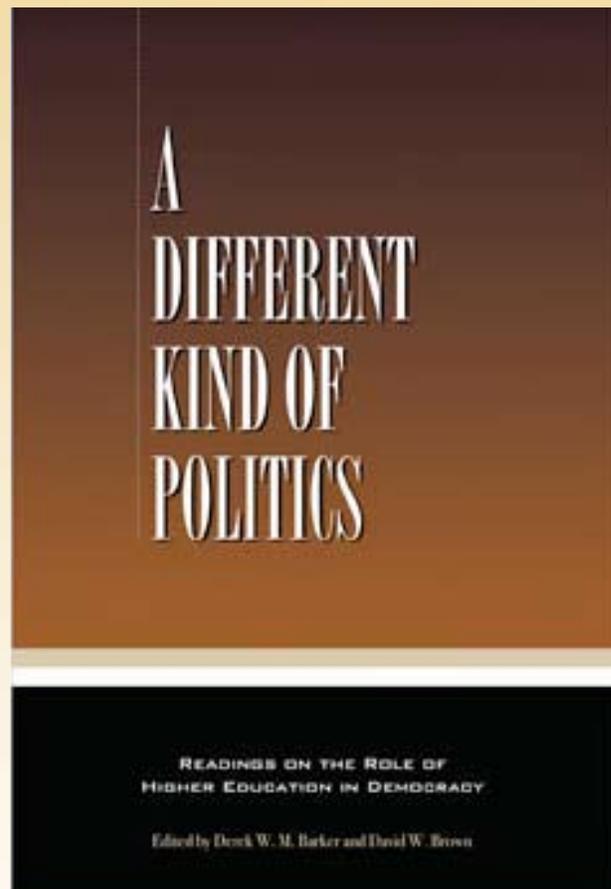
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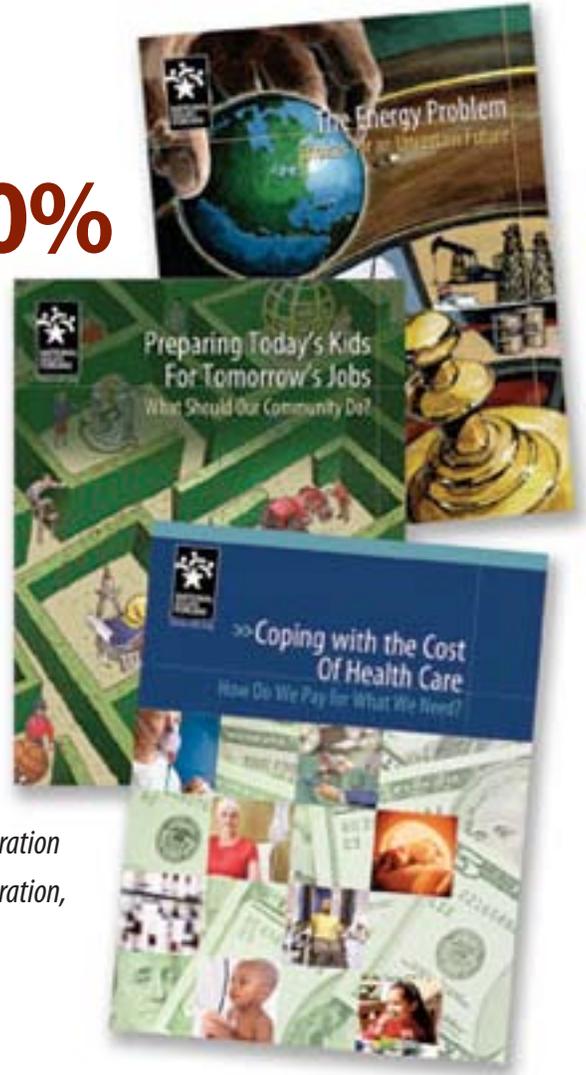
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The foundation today continues in that tradition. The objective of the research now is to study what helps democracy work as it should. Six major Kettering programs are designed to shed light on what is required to strengthen public life.

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