

THE KETTERING FOUNDATION'S ANNUAL NEWSLETTER

CONNECTIONS

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2012

EDUCATING FOR DEMOCRACY

Stories of
INNOVATION
in
**HIGHER
EDUCATION**





NEW from Kettering Foundation Press

Democratizing Deliberation

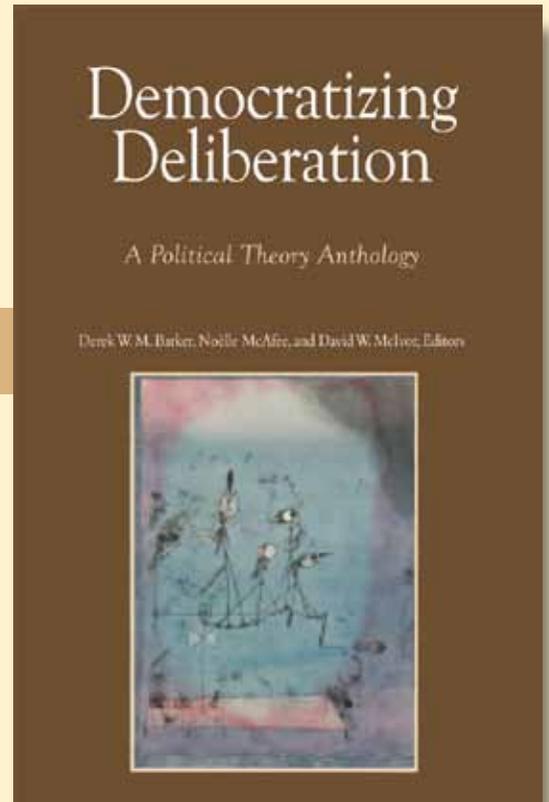
A Political Theory Anthology

Edited by Derek W. M. Barker, Noëlle McAfee, and David W. McIvor

Democratizing Deliberation brings together recent and cutting-edge political theory scholarship on deliberative democracy. The collection reframes deliberative democracy to be sensitive to the deep conflicts, multiple forms of communication, and aspirations for civic agency that characterize real public deliberation. In so doing, the book addresses many of the most common challenges to the theory and practice of deliberative democracy.

Kettering Foundation Press | 2012

\$15.95 • 184 pages • ISBN 978-0-923993-41-2



To read excerpts and purchase this book, visit www.kettering.org.

The Kettering Foundation is a nonprofit, operating foundation rooted in the American tradition of cooperative research. Kettering's primary research question is, what makes democracy work as it should? Kettering's research is distinctive because it is conducted from the perspective of citizens and focuses on what people can do collectively to address problems affecting their lives, their communities, and their nation. The foundation seeks to identify and address the challenges to making democracy work as it should through interrelated program areas that focus on citizens, communities, and institutions. The foundation collaborates with an extensive network of community groups, professional associations, researchers, scholars, and citizens around the world. Established in 1927 by inventor Charles F. Kettering, the foundation is a 501(c)(3) organization that does not make grants but engages in joint research with others. For more information about KF research and publications, see the Kettering Foundation's website at www.kettering.org.

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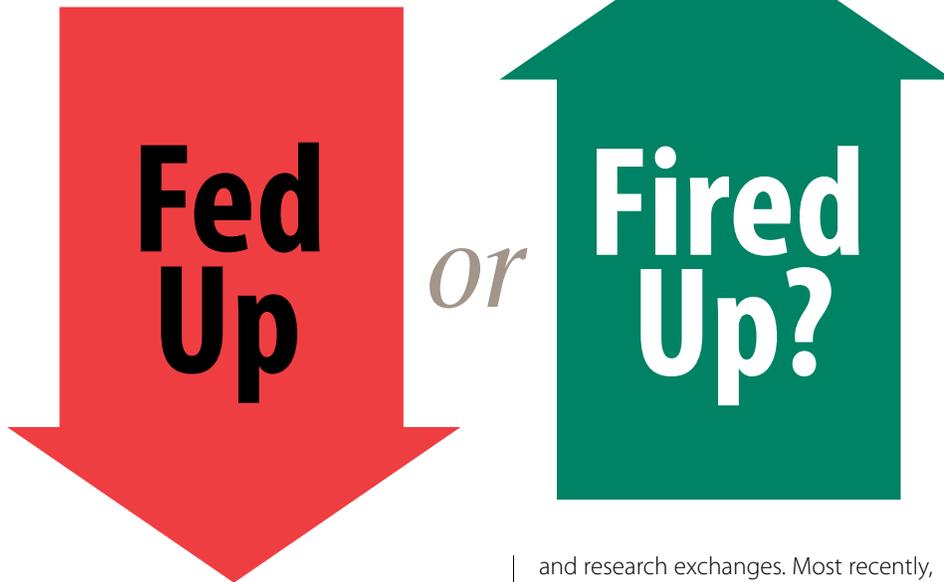
CONNECTIONS

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College Students and Politics:



*Jack Becker,
Danielle Desjardins,
Dwitiya Jawher Neethi,
and Alice Diebel*

A key underlying assumption of efforts to renew the civic mission of higher education is that young people want to play a more active role in politics. Do efforts to engage students in working with communities and expose them to dialogue and deliberation resonate with their concerns? Or are students more concerned with preparing for careers and participating in social activities? The Kettering Foundation is addressing these questions through a series of collaborative studies

and research exchanges. Most recently, Kettering program officer Alice Diebel convened 15 college students from a variety of academic institutions in the College Students and the Future of Democracy research exchange at Kettering's 2011 Deliberative Democracy Exchange. These students were all involved in programs,

centers, or institutes in the academy that focus on civic engagement, including deliberation on national public policy issues, as part of their education and practice. These students have a strong sense of the value of civic engagement, which stands in contrast to the prevailing view of students as apathetic toward politics.

The students' research exchange draws upon two previous studies on the political attitudes of college students that were done in collaboration with the Kettering Foundation. A 1993 Harwood Group study, *College Students Talk Politics*, found that students were extremely pessimistic about politics and their own political education. However, the study concluded that they were not apathetic so much as frustrated: "When the discussion about the practice of politics is changed slightly, the students we interviewed talk about a different kind of politics—one based on people coming together to find ways to talk and act on problems." Updating this research in 2008, *Millennials Talk Politics*, a study by the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Education (CIRCLE), found a similar phenomenon. The Millennials study revealed that students born after 1985 seem to be involved in direct service



College Students and Politics

but are ambivalent about formal politics. They dislike polarized debates and seek public dialogue about issues, but they do not see many opportunities for authentic civic learning. They are also suspicious of information supplied by the news media and rely on friends and family as filters. Despite their ambivalence toward politics-as-usual, the CIRCLE study found that Millennials are more engaged than previous generations and are eager to discuss public issues. The Harwood and CIRCLE focus-group research suggests that challenging and innovative civic experiences might make a difference in the agency of these young people.

The group of students who gathered for the Kettering research exchange shares their generation's suspicions of politics-as-usual, but they have developed the civic muscle to tackle difficult conversations and political concerns. While the students in the exchange may not be typical, their exposure to civic education suggests that students with practical experience in deliberative democracy are more open to political engagement. Their experiences also suggest that the academy is an important place for preparing citizens who feel responsible for the work of democracy. Here are the perspectives of some of the participants.

The Problems Students Are Concerned About

Although many students and college campuses remain isolated from the community, most students who met at the Kettering research exchange sense that an important shift is taking place. Students discussed the processes they use to engage their communities through ethically and productively building partnerships and relationships, moving away from a focus on volunteerism towards dialogue and more personal engagement.

This shift is important because it creates a space for students to discuss common issues and concerns with other citizens. Students are interested in talking in forums with others about the problems they face in life like unemployment,



housing, education, and their futures. It's not clear that all students call these forums "deliberative" but they are getting involved in service or problem solving to improve their communities in a way that is often not connected to classes. However, much of the time service learning seems to be "on the side" for faculty and university programs, and problem solving is considered something that is done on your own time as a voluntary service for others. Within service-learning programs, it seems that faculty do not share much about their relationships with the community or about their stake in problems. Students are encouraged to either serve or solve problems for the community but are not given capacity-building skills that are imperative for citizen-student dialogue and engagement. Students in this research exchange, however, said that the problems facing their communities need to be addressed not as a service to others, but in service *with* the communities they belong to.

The students at the research exchange also indicated a growing concern with more polarizing issues that are rarely talked about constructively: abortion, immigration, race, gender, sexuality. These issues are nuanced and require much

Campus communities are often diverse and can become rich opportunities for dialogue across differences. Dialogue and deliberation, if introduced in colleges, will help students talk about these issues and develop the practical learning and capacity to address them together.

deliberation to better understand one's own views as well as the views of others. Campus communities are often diverse and can become rich opportunities for dialogue across differences. Dialogue and deliberation, if introduced in colleges, will help students talk about these issues and develop the practical learning and capacity to address them together.

In their own

WORDS:

PRACTICING POLITICS ON CAMPUS

Dwitiya Jawher Neethi

“Coming from an ethnic minority background in Bangladesh, I started asking questions at a very early age. I attended an elite private school in Bangladesh where most students came from a similar background. Asking questions outside the curriculum was not encouraged. When I came to Mount Holyoke College in South Hadley, Massachusetts, the scenario was completely different. There was deliberation everywhere—in classrooms, dining halls, and common rooms. I had the opportunity to have my questions answered and to ask many more. The process made me a much more intellectual and critical thinker. Campus environments can be transforming. We have the enthusiasm and opportunity to learn and engage. Dialogue and deliberation help us express ourselves and understand an issue better. Students recognize the college campus is their community, and we see that the tensions around human rights are evident on campus. We are learning how to develop thought-provoking conversations about such issues on campus and after we leave.”

Jack Becker

“I started college with a sense of all service without discussion; the most talk I had with my community was when we took a break from raking leaves and the homeowners brought us lemonade. Politics was previously all about elections or public hearings; I wanted nothing to do with it. And service was all about volunteer work; I was told it would look good on my résumé. I now have deeper understandings of both; I ask more questions; I am less entrenched in partisan ideas; I see where the two fit together. I’m more open-minded about such problems. Half of me is a political junkie, but I’ve been disappointed by that. I’m looking for my way in. Lots of people are looking for a way in. The Center for Public Deliberation program at Colorado State University gave people a name for something they were looking for. And it hasn’t disappointed me once.

From my experience, addressing polarizing and systemic problems eventually becomes political; that may be why many students shy away from working on them with others. But they know that their education and life experiences provide a certain entry point into the conversation and that they have a stake in their community and the problems affecting their lives. I’ve seen deliberative spaces draw students into deep engagements with others: we are the better for it.”

Danielle Desjardins

“Before coming to college, I became interested in international diplomacy and the idea that by creating a social place where citizens from diverse countries could interact and bond, international relationships could be improved. In fact, that is why I chose to attend Mount Holyoke College, a school known for international diversity and connections. Here, dialogue and deliberation techniques were offered as theory in the classroom, which has taught me to appreciate the opportunities to discuss issues so they can evolve rather than be debated. As my focus moved toward domestic politics, I began to feel that much of “politics” in America today has the reputation of partisanship, which is one-upmanship rather than an attempt at improving society. Indeed, even within the college environment where students are given the opportunity to learn about taboo issues and discuss them, students are talking to faculty and other students and not in the community outside the academy.

We need to learn how to deal with local communities ethically and productively. Community constellations are complex, made up of formal and informal organizations, nonprofit organizations, schools, and the university. Yet the university is often isolated from the community. How do we engage in the community correctly? We cannot ride in on a white horse and think we will fix everything. And so, spaces for building deliberative techniques are imperative so that students can begin to appreciate how to communicate with and act as citizens.”

Programs Students Are Seeking

Learning in an environment that promotes dialogue and deliberation about public problems provides 21st-century skills for students: research, networking, relationship building, working with diverse populations, and critical thinking. These skills are important to active, democratically minded citizens.

During the research exchange, students mentioned that one of the difficulties in implementing this work is that it is new and uncomfortable for them. Students are often working outside the safety of campus and interacting with people with whom they often disagree. In other cases, they are being exposed to classroom discussions designed to examine controversial issues. Open classroom discussions and the opportunity to pose critical questions encourages a deliberative environment; one marked by communicating at a high level, considering other people’s perspectives, discussing values, and working through inherent trade-offs involved in making decisions in a diverse world. Students who participated in the research exchange pointed out that the role of campus faculty is vital here—to facilitate inclusiveness, help create a safe environment to discuss even the most controversial issues, and take a difficult step into the community with students. Students also said there should be groups and organizations in colleges and universities where student leaders create a platform for deliberation. These leaders must try to include as many students as possible.

Examples of programs that might address the concerns voiced during the research exchange include the National Issues Forums, a program of public deliberation on significant policy issues; the Sustained Dialogue Campus Network; or The Undiscussed, programs that tackle difficult discussion about race, religion, or other divisions. Many campuses are experimenting with programs such as “living and learning communities,” in which students take a series of courses together as a cohort, live together in dormitories, and interact in neighboring communities. Much has been done in

During the research exchange in Dayton, the students each wrote a definition of *civic engagement*. Here are their words:

Civic engagement is . . .

- questioning, openness, action, actively getting others involved.
- genuinely working every day to engage yourself and those around you in what is going on locally and globally.
- acting on opportunities where your actions will improve your own life and the life of your community.
- strong participation in all institutions in which one identifies.
- participating in the public arena about political issues that one is passionate about or thinks is important.
- collective action inspired by a sense of compassionate obligation to one's community, nation, and the world.
- the process with people coming together and, through dialogue, deliberating to address and reach resolution about community, local, statewide, or national issues.
- becoming involved meaningfully in what you are passionate about in order to advocate change and move a specific community toward greatness.
- getting a diversity of opinions to make a decision for the greater good.
- not only caring about the world we live in but also engaging in an activity to make a difference.
- when a group of people gets together to discuss, in a relatively informed fashion, issues in the community.
- more than two people talking about what is important to their self-habitat.
- people being involved with their community.
- a group of people coming together with like values.
- the starting point by which we begin to effect change in our world.

student affairs to connect students living in residence halls or participating in student clubs to dialogue and deliberation.

The students in this research exchange felt strongly that higher education must do more to bridge the gap between civic or democratic theory and civic practice. Classes that build that bridge are outside the norm. The measures of evaluation are not standard. The conversations can be uncomfortable, and students have to travel to and interact with people in unfamiliar parts of town. Why would students select such courses? Could practical and experiential civic education be more widespread? If students invite students into this work, it may be easier for professors to expand it.

Jack Becker is a research assistant at the Kettering Foundation and recent graduate with the Center for Public Deliberation and Communication Studies Department at Colorado State University. He can be reached at jbecker@kettering.org.

Danielle Desjardins is an undergraduate student of politics at Mount Holyoke College. She can be reached at desja22d@mholyoke.edu.

Dwitiya Jawher Neethi is a recent graduate and international student of politics at Mount Holyoke College.

Alice Diebel is a program officer at the Kettering Foundation. She can be reached at diebel@kettering.org.

In their own WORDS:

THREE CLOSING THOUGHTS

Jack Becker: An Invitation

“ Students are putting their good talents to work; we just hope more of them will do so by engaging in discussion of political issues. But most people don't want to be political, so perhaps we need a better phrase to capture interest. Perhaps we need to mention that you needn't be a liberal arts student or political junkie to fit in here. Some of the most gifted people I interacted with in this work studied disciplines that don't intuitively connect to political discussion and deliberative work: horticulture, business, natural resources, urban planning, biology, English, and the list goes on. Working with these people, I've learned that we all have the talent to do community work. We need students to invite others into the community; a personal invitation is a powerful gift of courage to stimulate others to join us in this work: this is yours!”

Dwitiya Jawher Neethi: A Caution

“ Deliberation should be encouraged, but it must be remembered that the point of the deliberation is not to convince the other party about your belief. The goal is not to solve or correct—it is to discuss and listen intently. A key time to start such engagement is in college, and colleges have a responsibility to create such an environment.”

Danielle Desjardins: A Question

“ It is important for students to learn skills and practice and gain the confidence to establish a dialogue with other citizens outside of the academic environment. But then, learning how to communicate across age, education, and other perceived markers of difference is equally crucial to successful community problem solving. Students are actively seeking, and universities have the resources to offer, skills, and tools that allow them to ask not only 'How can I contribute?' but also 'How can we work together to solve this problem?' ”



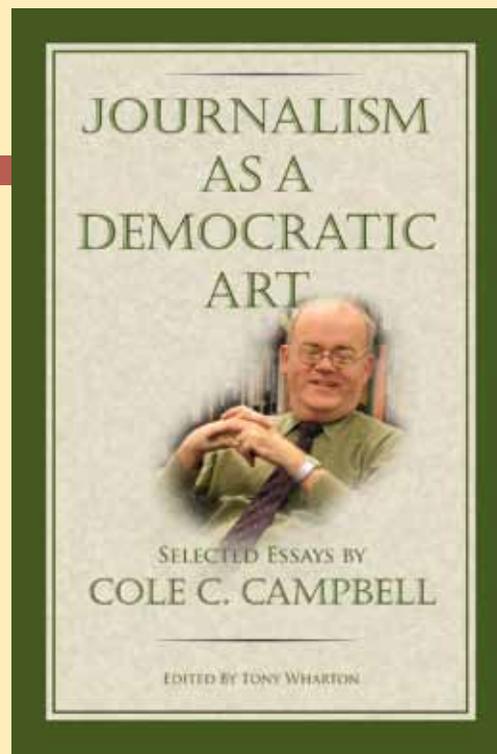
NEW from Kettering

Journalism as a Democratic Art: Selected Essays **by Cole C. Campbell**

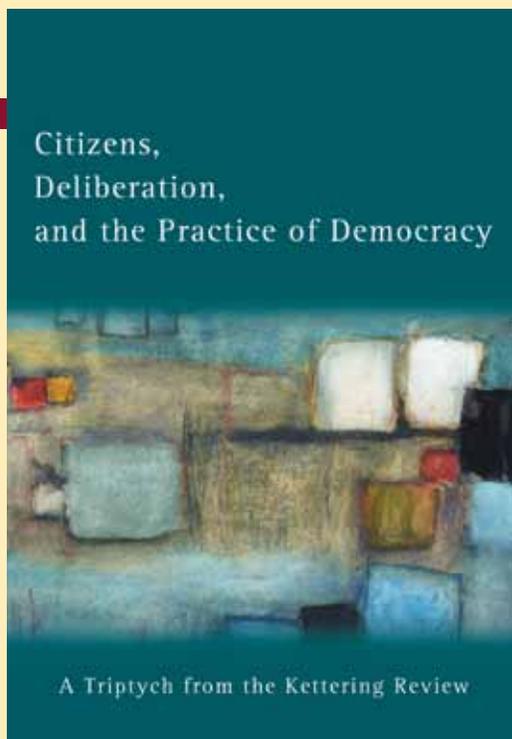
Edited by Tony Wharton

Journalism as a Democratic Art expresses at its heart Cole Campbell's belief that "people expect the press to help their communities solve problems." As one-time editor of the Virginian-Pilot in Norfolk, Virginia, and then the Post-Dispatch in St. Louis, Missouri, Campbell worked to align his profession with that belief, often facing considerable resistance from other journalists.

Campbell's essays address a variety of subjects, including a partly finished dictionary for journalists; timely essays written in the months after Hurricane Katrina and 9/11; and an interview by Jay Rosen, longtime professor of journalism at New York University.



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Citizens, Deliberation, and the Practice of Democracy: A Triptych from the Kettering Review

Citizens, Deliberation, and the Practice of Democracy brings together writing by 19 leading thinkers on the contemporary challenges of democracy. These provocative essays, first published in three issues of the Kettering Review to celebrate 25 years of the National Issues Forums, challenge readers to rethink conventional notions of democracy, public deliberation, and citizenship.

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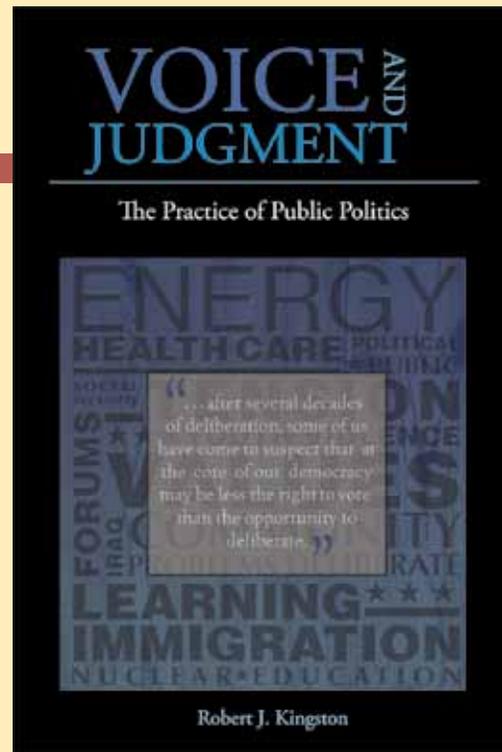
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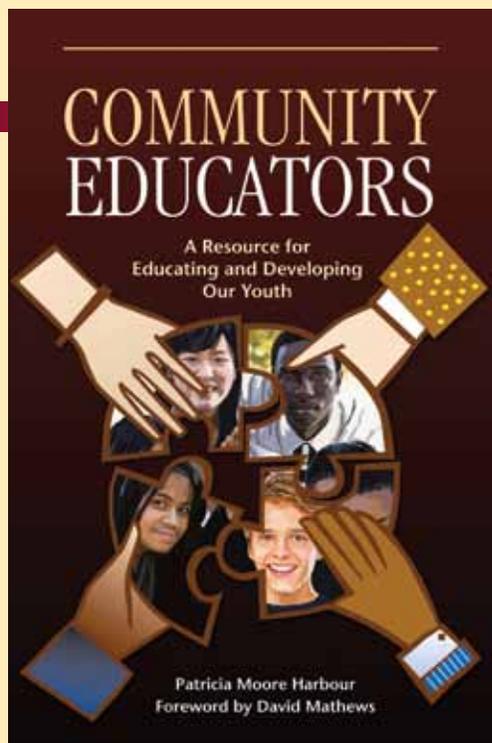
Voice and Judgment: The Practice of Public Politics

By Robert J. Kingston

"We are victims of argument and instruments, from time to time, of circumstance or the influence of others' whims. Our civic movement, however, is from a state of anxiety, puzzlement, blame, defensiveness, or anger, toward the place where contraries meet, where unavoidable tensions remind us that no life is lived without risk . . . or collaboration. A deliberative public begins with opinions but shares experiences; it recognizes shared concerns or 'values' in unexpected, sometimes unfamiliar circumstances; it responds to the divisive with restraint. . . . Public deliberation reveals not a verdict but the making of a 'public,' the formulation of a public will that can be described and put to use."



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Community Educators: A Resource For Educating and Developing Our Youth

By Patricia Moore Harbour

Community Educators asserts that the relationship between education, community, and democracy are inseparable and illustrates that education is broader than just schooling. Current thinking about education is challenged and reveals how the public participates in the education and development of youth. This book is a call for action and responsibility—both individual and collective—to transform education beyond simply reforming schools.

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