

HIGHER EDUCATION EXCHANGE



2018

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The *Higher Education Exchange* is founded on a thought articulated by Thomas Jefferson in 1820:

I know no safe depository of the ultimate powers of the society but the people themselves; and if we think them not enlightened enough to exercise their control with a wholesome discretion, the remedy is not to take it from them, but to inform their discretion by education.

In the tradition of Jefferson, the *Higher Education Exchange* agrees that a central goal of higher education is to help make democracy possible by preparing citizens for public life. The *Higher Education Exchange* is part of a movement to strengthen higher education's democratic mission and foster a more democratic culture throughout American society. Working in this tradition, the *Higher Education Exchange* publishes case studies, analyses, news, and ideas about efforts within higher education to develop more democratic societies.

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A Note of Appreciation

David Brown has not just been an editor of *HEX* since 1994. He is also its cocreator, together with former Kettering Foundation program officer Deborah Witte. The *Higher Education Exchange*, as readers will know, is a publication whose purpose is to facilitate a conversation in higher education about the role of academe in democracy, particularly the role of students as actors and producers.

David was ideal as an editor of the journal because he brought to the work an astonishing breadth of experience, both inside and outside the academy: from serving as deputy mayor of New York City under Mayor Ed Koch to teaching at Yale's School of Management and New School's Milano Graduate School, and serving as president of Blackburn College. His perceptive insights were evident in the interviews he conducted, which were regularly published in *HEX*. And he undoubtedly drew on what he learned from the *Exchange* in his own books, including *The Real Change-Makers: Why Government is Not the Problem or the Solution* and *America's Culture of Professionalism: Past, Present, and Prospects*.

His most recent contribution to Kettering's work has been to help launch a new initiative in higher education to cultivate a greater civic and democratic understanding of professionalism. We are deeply appreciative of David's many contributions to this journal and to Kettering's research. We are pleased to have Derek Barker, who is leading Kettering's studies of democracy and higher education, continue on as coeditor of the journal. And we welcome Alex Lovit as coeditor; he is leading Kettering's research on teaching deliberative democracy through historic decisions.

David Mathews

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LEARNING TO TEACH DEMOCRACY

An Interview with Nicholas Longo and Marshalita Sims Peterson

In this interview, two scholars, Nicholas V. Longo and Marshalita Sims Peterson, discuss their learning process in the use of deliberation to enhance academic learning of college students—what they call “deliberative pedagogy.” In this process, they participated in research exchanges at Kettering, where they shared and reflected upon their practices with a cohort of other scholars engaged in similar experiments. We think their stories exemplify the type of learning and network building that occurs in Kettering research exchanges.

Barker: Nick, tell us about yourself and some of your early involvements with Kettering.

Longo: I was immersed in local politics even before I went away to college to formally study political science. But like so many young people, I became disillusioned with the way politics was taught and practiced on campus and in our national scene. This was the mid-1990s, a time of deep divisions and polarization in our politics—which have only gotten worse in the two decades since. At the same time, I felt like too many of my courses were too narrowly academic and detached from the world.

Yet Providence College (where I was a student and am now a professor) was just launching a new program focused on “public and community service.” The program brought me outside the “bubble” of the college campus as I began to do work in collaboration with members of the broader Providence community through community-based learning courses. I helped to coordinate an afterschool program at a local middle school, and learned more from that experience about the issues of educational policy, student achievement, and public leadership than anything I was learning in the classroom.

These experiences were transformative for me. And they set the trajectory of my future work that soon thereafter brought me to the Kettering Foundation. Community-based learning allowed me to connect my studies with real-world engagement and then begin to envision how I could continue trying to lead what Parker Palmer describes in *A Hidden Wholeness* as “an undivided life” as a civic professional.

Further, community engagement introduced me to a different way to think about and practice politics. I saw how the type of relationships I was developing across age, race, class, and cultural boundaries with my colleagues in the Providence community could be more productive and public. I don’t want to romanticize this experience or disregard the issues of power and

privilege in campus-community relationships. The program I was directing had a really dynamic principal who was moved halfway through the year, so it was messy and full of conflict. While I didn't have the language to articulate this at the time, I was being introduced to a different kind of politics—what David Mathews has termed “citizen politics,” where ordinary people could work across differences, together, to solve problems. And it seems this type of citizen-centered approach, which is focused on local relationships, is more relevant than ever. For example, James and Deborah Fallows' new book, *Our Towns*, contrasts the dysfunction in our national politics with the hopefulness and pragmatism of civic engagement on the local level in America's heartland, where the focus is on “practical problems a community could address”¹—an approach to civic life, they tellingly note, “that has generally escaped any outside notice.”²

These trends, however, have been at the core of the research of the Kettering Foundation for several decades.

I was introduced to Kettering's research as I became interested in finding others who were exploring more citizen-centered approaches in the late 1990s. I was inspired by the writings of leaders in this field, including Harry Boyte, Benjamin Barber, and, of course, David Mathews. I decided to go to graduate school at the University of Minnesota and work at the Center for Democracy and Citizenship (CDC), which is now housed at Augsburg College. The CDC was doing innovative work to develop a practical philosophy of “what works” to engage citizens in public life with projects like the Jane Addams School for Democracy, a contemporary settlement house with college students and recent immigrants, along with Public Achievement, a youth civic-engagement project. And the CDC was working closely with the Kettering Foundation to learn from these civic experiments. I got a chance to meet Dr. Mathews just after his book *Politics for People* was published. This provided a useful conceptual framework for the public work I was trying to do.

I stayed connected to the Kettering Foundation and its research, which deeply informed my dissertation and subsequent book *Why Community Matters*, and have been working closely with various workgroups and projects at Kettering since I finished my dissertation in 2005.

Barker: Marshalita, please tell us about the Whisenton Public Scholars and your involvement in that group.

Peterson: It was through the Whisenton Public Scholars program that I became acquainted with the Kettering Foundation more than ten years ago. The Whisenton Public Scholars program began in 1998 and is a collaboration

of Joffre T. Whisenton and Associates, the Kettering Foundation, and participating higher education professionals. The program works primarily with faculty and administrators from institutions with a mission to serve minority communities (such as Historically Black Colleges and Universities, Hispanic-Serving Institutions, and Tribal Colleges and Universities). Many of these institutions have maintained close ties to their communities and focus on developing student engagement. The two-year Public Scholars program encourages scholars to explore aspects of citizen-centered democracy and public deliberation, including naming and framing issues and weighing trade-offs and tensions, as well as community decision-making, action, and learning.

The Whisenton Public Scholars partnership focuses on extending Kettering's research on public deliberation into minority-serving institutions. It provides a distinct focus on the way students learn ideas of democratic practice, the impact of the learning, and the role of faculty and administrators who incorporate these ideas into the classroom. While in many ways the learning may be the same, there are differences in the way these historical institutions teach and engage students. The work of the Whisenton Public Scholars addresses what we might learn from these institutions as they experiment with these ideas of public discourse and citizen engagement.

My journey and involvement as a Whisenton Public Scholar began in 2007, when I served as a scholar and was also a faculty member at Spelman College. As a Whisenton Public Scholar, I had the wonderful opportunity to interact and connect with other scholars within the cohort and also connect and establish relationships with researchers, faculty/administrators, and civic innovators around the world who are committed to democratic practice, public scholarship, and public discourse.

The Whisenton Public Scholars network conducts novel research through public scholarship addressing the fundamental problems of democracy. In addition, the scholars are provided opportunities to share their research and discuss the experiences and insights through research exchanges, joint learning, and exposure to Kettering's research on the theory and practice of deliberation. These activities are actualized through a variety of experiences, such as teaching/learning seminars, curricular enhancements/modifications, dialogue, activities involving citizens of local communities, and National Issues Forums—all a result of creating space for authentic dialogue and transformative experiences in higher education and connecting campus with community.

Barker: Nick and Marshalita, your separate interactions with Kettering eventually led to involvement in a group of college faculty that are using

deliberation as a form of pedagogy, leading to the publication *Deliberative Pedagogy: Teaching and Learning for Democratic Engagement*. Can you tell us how this group came about, and the central finding or insight that the book represents?

Longo: One of the most significant aspects of Kettering is its role as a civic convening organization. Kettering has helped to nurture and connect a vast network of scholars, practitioners, and engaged citizens who care about “making democracy work as it should.” Marshalita is one of the talented scholars I’ve had the privilege to meet and work with through Kettering.

Beginning in fall 2011, Maxine Thomas, vice president, secretary, and general counsel at Kettering Foundation, convened a group of faculty members who were utilizing deliberative practices in the college classroom. This built upon research Thomas, John Dedrick, yourself, and others from Kettering had been conducting for many years on deliberation in higher education. The group was also intentionally global, with participants experimenting with deliberation not only in North America, but also Latin America, Europe, the Middle East, and Africa.

As we continued our conversations, we began to feel like the work we were doing was unique, even groundbreaking. We began to focus in on something we found was under-researched in the field: namely, the role of deliberation as a pedagogical practice. Over the past few decades—and building on traditions from

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much earlier—public deliberation has become more integral in domains like public policy and the political sphere, with practices like participatory budgeting getting more visibility. But less had been done in trying

to understand the role of deliberation as a pedagogical practice and how it fits with engaged learning practices, which have also been growing. We started to ask how deliberation fits with, but also expands upon, other “high-impact” practices. More specifically, we examined how deliberative approaches to teaching and learning might be part of the larger democratic mission of a college or university.

We began using the phrase “deliberative pedagogy” to capture how this was a new concept, which opened up creative possibilities. But it also had challenges. We were using two words, “deliberative” and “pedagogy,” that are often met with blank stares and confusion. So we’ve had our work cut out for

us, and this ultimately led to the desire to put together the book *Deliberative Pedagogy* with Michigan State University Press.

Barker: Yes, you might say that the deliberation piece was new to higher education conversations that took place around service learning and civic engagement, while the pedagogy piece was new for Kettering. From Kettering's perspective, we have seen deliberation as an alternative to adversarial politics. It never really occurred to us that it could also be effective in teaching academic content. However, it seems to resonate on both levels. Marshalita, what did "deliberative pedagogy" mean to you?

Peterson: I am honored to be a part of the book project *Deliberative Pedagogy*. This text presents a range of approaches utilizing deliberation as a key pedagogical practice across varied disciplines. The common factor of deliberation provided the groundwork for gathering and sharing information regarding various approaches. Involvement in the book project also provided an opportunity to interact with outstanding innovators from both Kettering and campuses around the world, such as Maxine Thomas, Nicholas Longo, Idit Manosevitch, and Timothy Shaffer.

For me, the common insight is that through shared experiences of public deliberation, faculty and students have an opportunity to explore curricular and cocurricular experiences within discipline-specific and interdisciplinary structures, as well as engage in public scholarship and creative work linked to democratic practice. Creating spaces in the curriculum for public voice and citizenship through deliberative pedagogy reinforces the concepts of collective action, campus-community connections, and civic agency.

My primary question involving deliberative pedagogy and student engagement is centered on "how" we can use pedagogical processes effectively to enhance student learning experiences such that students explore, initiate, and apply public deliberation and civic engagement during their campus years and beyond.

In facilitating the "how," my work in deliberative pedagogy and civic education focuses on opportunities for institutions of higher education and communities to connect and commit to the public work of democratic practice. This includes four primary areas of my work: (1) support of faculty/administration in higher education utilizing deliberative pedagogy for civic engagement and deliberative practices; (2) student development through deliberative pedagogy and utilization of a train-the-trainer model for engaged learning experiences encompassing deliberative dialogue, public voice, and civic education; (3) holding deliberative forums using issue guides published

by the National Issues Forums Institute; and (4) creating spaces for public voice by connecting institutions and communities through deliberative dialogue. I have found deliberative dialogue to be essential and transformative as students explore processes for learning, navigate communal approaches for addressing issues, consider multiple perspectives, weigh trade-offs, make sound judgments, assess challenges, engage in communal decision-making, recognize citizen assets, and align the work of citizens for collective action.

I am ever mindful, however, that civic innovation, social problem solving, the scholarship of engagement, and curricular enhancements, as well as addressing the civic-engagement movement in higher education, are not easy;

I have found deliberative dialogue to be essential and transformative.

these practices require systemic work and problem solving. *Deliberative Pedagogy* provides insights about how to support,

assess, and enhance learning experiences for students while acknowledging that deliberation and deliberative pedagogy in higher education represent a continuum of engagement with the community.

Barker: I am guessing that neither of you had much interest in, or perhaps even awareness of, *deliberation* prior to your involvement with Kettering. Can you tell us about how involvement with Kettering has affected your understanding of democracy in general, and deliberation in particular?

Longo: Myles Horton, the cofounder of the Highlander Folk School in Tennessee, observed that belief in a democratic society means creating spaces for education that are democratic. That, for me, is a simple, yet profound, idea about the connection between education and democracy. And it's an area where higher education is particularly hypocritical: with mission statements and pronouncements about the importance of educating democratic citizens, and yet too little done to put these lofty democratic ideals into practice.

I saw this firsthand when I worked on a national civic-engagement campaign for Campus Compact, which allowed me to talk with college students on campuses across the US. My takeaway from this experience was that college students learned most about democracy by how it is practiced—or more often, not practiced—on campus. Kettering's research on this topic came to similar conclusions when they studied college student perceptions of politics (first with *College Students Talk Politics* in 1993, conducted by the Harwood Institute, and then again with *Millennials Talk Politics* in 2006,

conducted in collaboration with CIRCLE). And so, if we care about the future of democracy, we can't just talk about it or research it as an abstract idea. We need to put democracy into practice.

Recognizing the importance of developing these democratic practices in education is at the core of what I have learned from my involvement with the Kettering Foundation. And this insight is why my introduction to deliberation was so profound. The work of the Kettering Foundation helps to understand, build, and strengthen an ecosystem of democracy, with a citizen-centered democracy network across the world. And the practice of deliberation is a sort of lifeblood that flows through the system. Connecting this lifeblood to the multitude of educative institutions (formal and informal) is vital work that the Kettering network has inspired me to be part of.

Peterson: My experiences involving the concept of deliberation can actually be captured in three phases of my career: as a student at Spelman College, faculty member at Spelman College (and Whisenton Public Scholar of the Kettering Foundation), and my current role as a researcher/consultant.

My initial involvement and exposure began many years ago—not in a formalized manner, but through imbedded experiences as a student at Spelman College in Atlanta, my alma mater. I vividly recall the impact of Spelman's ideals and core values of intellectual engagement, leadership, public voice, social awareness, and community involvement.

I was exposed to aspects of deliberation through these experiences (not in

Myles Horton observed that belief in a democratic society means creating spaces for education that are democratic.

the terminology of academe at that particular time, but nonetheless, empowering experiences of engagement). I was guided and positively encouraged to explore leadership, do research within and outside of my academic discipline, speak up and speak out, take action regarding social issues, and pursue opportunities to support, serve, and collaborate with the community—which all touch on deliberation and democratic practice.

The next phase of my interest in, and awareness of, deliberation involves my serving as a faculty member and chair of the Teacher Education Department at Spelman. As a faculty member, I sought to incorporate the key tenets of the Spelman ideals into course experiences. I guided and trained my students to use their public voice, develop their leadership skills, and engage with the

community to support and empower the collective voices of others in addressing common issues.

I recognized that even the smallest of spaces for deliberative dialogue can have long-lasting impact and, as such, I was intentional in exposing preservice teachers to concepts of democratic practice and deliberative pedagogy. These

I recognized readily that this work is not stagnant, but rather a living, ongoing process.

experiences were imbedded in teacher education courses and included naming and framing issues and deliberative dialogue.

In addition, I engaged

students in deliberative dialogue through addressing the work of citizens, community issues, communal decision-making and communal action—all of which are essential for student involvement in shaping the future.

As a researcher and consultant, my work involving deliberative pedagogy in higher education, and that of civic education and civic agency, has continued to evolve. I recognized readily that this work is not stagnant, but rather a living, ongoing process.

This work, which has led to my enhanced focus on civic agency, also brings to mind the significance of our personal responsibility, collective responsibility, and civic relationships. I am reminded of a quote by David Mathews: “Civic relationships aren’t just with friends and neighbors; they are the pragmatic working relationships we create with anyone who is needed in order to solve the problems that threaten everyone’s well-being.”³

Barker: Nick mentioned the Myles Horton philosophy about higher education needing to do a better job of embodying the sort of democracy it hopes to see. That is something we talk about a lot at Kettering, and it’s the theme of this issue, not only in how we understand democracy, but also in how we do our work as a research foundation. Both of your stories illustrate the type of learning we try to facilitate, where Kettering, hopefully, provided some resonant and useful concepts, but you contributed your own ideas, experiences, and networks. Thank you so much for sharing your stories. In ending, would you care to elaborate or add any final thoughts?

Longo: Thank you for your many years of asking the right questions to untap the civic potential in stories and collective problem solving. This is really essential at a time when there’s growing evidence that we are in the midst of a crisis of democracy. But how colleges and universities go about addressing the problems of our democracy matters. I’m reminded that Myles

Horton aptly titled his autobiography *The Long Haul*. Building a democratic culture in higher education (or elsewhere) doesn't happen in snapshots or with one-time programs; rather, it requires a purposeful and rigorous long-term commitment to developing ideas and practices that cultivate democracy. That takes time. This kind of effort is a counterforce in a society that rewards instant gratification and commodifies the production of knowledge. My experiences engaging with the Kettering network demonstrate the power of connecting with a community of learners striving to embody the kind of democracy we wish to see. I've learned so much from these dialogues and greatly appreciate your enduring commitment to reflective practice and civic learning.

Peterson: Higher education as a “civic innovator” is a conduit for a democratic citizenry. Kettering's network is to be commended for its tremendous work in engaging higher education partners around the world in this area of research. There are various stories to share regarding aligning the work of institutions with a democratic citizenry. This ongoing task calls attention to the innovations of varied institutions, faculty/staff, and networks in higher education wherein the commitment to civic engagement and democratic practice is evident.

The capacity for higher education to be a civic innovator through deliberative pedagogy is powerful and far reaching in fostering a more democratic culture and

preparing citizens for public life. I recognize the challenges in our democracy posed by polarization, opposi-

tion to extend beyond traditional practices, exclusion of diversity (diverse thought), and fear of experimentation, but as the ultimate optimist, I am encouraged by the dedication of Kettering's partners and innovators in higher education who are committed to “making democracy work as it should” by sharing their stories. I am certainly grateful to be a part of this network of innovators—thank you.

***Higher education as a
“civic innovator” is a conduit
for a democratic citizenry.***



NOTES

- ¹ James Fallows and Deborah Fallows, *Our Towns: A 100,000-Mile Journey into the Heart of America* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2018), 402.
- ² *Ibid.*, 13.
- ³ David Mathews, *The Ecology of Democracy* (Dayton, OH: Kettering Foundation Press, 2014), xvi.

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