I think the main thing my kids learn in my school is “how to do school.” They learn very little about what really matters in life.

In deliberation, people explore complex issues, beginning with what they hold most dear and sharing their personal experiences with a given issue. They must listen to one another, consider diverse perspectives, explore unbiased facts, test ideas, weigh options, and balance inherent trade-offs to find where various interests overlap for a shared solution. In classrooms where teachers use deliberation, students learn to think critically, work through differences, and interact with people who may or may not share their point of view. Teaching through deliberation provides students with the skills and abilities to work with others as citizens to claim a better future for their communities.

Stacie Molnar-Main’s Deliberation in the Classroom is a pioneering work, bringing to life the stories of teachers and students who learn and practice a kind of politics that goes beyond the polarized, demonizing, Manichean one that dominates public life today. She shows the challenges of making deliberative politics—organized around citizens and their capacities—work in schools, which are often based on very different dynamics and focus narrowly on tests and individual achievement. But she also shows the power, excitement, and appeal of such citizen politics. The book appears just when we need it the most.

Harry Boyte
Senior Scholar in Public Work Philosophy
Sabo Center for Democracy and Citizenship
Augsburg College

Teachers who read this terrific book will walk away with ample ideas of how to support deliberative practices with their students. Stacie Molnar-Main draws on teachers’ authentic experiences fostering deliberation to deliver a clear and inspirational picture of what classroom-based dialogue can be. Youth need more opportunities to thoughtfully and collaboratively grapple with real-life issues, and this book serves an important role in this mission.

Shira Eve Epstein
Associate Professor
The City College of New York (CUNY)
DELIBERATION
IN THE CLASSROOM
FOSTERING CRITICAL THINKING, COMMUNITY, AND CITIZENSHIP IN SCHOOLS

Stacie Molnar-Main
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Deliberation in the Classroom would not have been possible without the generosity and support of many people. Educators who use deliberation and support one another’s experimentation with the practice contributed to the insights I share here, and have been a constant source of inspiration to me and to one another. This book is a testament to the passion and dedication of educators like Joseph Leavy, Carmela Leonardi, Nicole Mulholland, Deborah Francis, Jon Lodge, Lori McGarry, Donnan Stoicovy, Robert Furmanek, Deb Poveromo, JohnMark Edwards, Zakiya Jenkins, Jessica Wedgeworth, Peggy Sparks, Curtis Sparks, Jacqueline Jackson, Kevin Kreig, Sarah Schneck, Tolea Kamm-Peissig, John Greenwood, Susan Miller, Carol Lee Pyfer, Phil Kane, Ken Donovan, James Gilmartin, Michael D’Innocenza, Bernie Stein, David Huitt, Yannabah Lewis, Karen Schmidt, Simon Spelling, Barry McNealy, Brenda Guyton, Ronnie McCallum, William Medlock, Jerry Strickland, Elkin Terry Jack, John Sampson, Janice Christian, Sher’ron Hardwick, Paul Hoomes, Jerry Ingram, Wilena McCarter, Tracey Williams, Gregory Fields, Linda Givan, Tasha Gray, Latoya Posey, Christopher McCauley, Gerald Ott, and Cristina Alfaro.

I owe a debt of gratitude to the teachers and mentors who helped to cultivate my passion for civic learning and deliberation. Harris Sokoloff and Rick Battistoni were early mentors as I explored methods and practices for engaging young people as citizens in their schools and communities. Later, David Mathews taught me about community politics, and modeled the type of inquiring, listening, and learning citizenship that deliberation can engender, and Myrna Shure helped me recognize that very young children can practice deliberation if we are committed to teaching social problem solving as a developmental activity.

Deciding how to give voice to the teachers’ experiences was my greatest challenge. Because I was trained in academic institutions, I was inclined to write
for academic audiences. I owe thanks to Maura Casey for her expert editorial assistance in the early stages of writing this book, and to Libby Kingseed, Mindy LaBreck, Bill Muse, Etana Jacobi, John Doble, Shira Eve Epstein, and Alex Lovit for reading drafts and/or engaging in critical conversations with me. Libby’s continual presence and shepherding kept me focused on the goal of creating a piece that could be easily read and digested by the public, while helping me decide when the manuscript was ready to release. In the final stages, Joey Easton provided expert copy editing and counsel, and Laura Halsey offered an attractive design that, I think, complements and strengthens the text.

Stacie Molnar-Main
The Kettering Foundation is a nonprofit operating foundation rooted in the American tradition of cooperative research. Kettering’s primary research question is, what does it take to make democracy work as it should? Kettering’s research is distinctive in that it is conducted from the perspective of citizens and focuses on what people can do collectively to address problems that affect their lives, their communities, and their nation.

One of the problems of democracy that Kettering has identified is that many people do not pursue an active role in the decision-making life of their communities and country. They don’t see their concerns represented in the politics around them; they don’t think they can make a difference in solving their community’s problems; and sometimes they make hasty or poor decisions about what needs to be done. Few people seem to identify roles or responsibilities for citizens other than voting and obeying laws.

The research behind Deliberation in the Classroom grew out of Kettering’s recognition that the education of young people could include a space for them to learn about the kind of politics that will help them solve problems in their lives. The research focused on classroom teachers as one of the keys to educating young people about their roles as citizens in a democracy and teaching the practice of deliberative politics.

As a research foundation, Kettering works primarily through learning exchanges and other collaborative research with individuals, as well as civic organizations, communities, and institutions, who are experimenting with ways to strengthen democracy. The foundation learns by exchanging ideas and experiences from people and organizations who are trying to effect change in their own communities with insights that Kettering has collected from past exchanges.

Foreword
From the first appearance of the National Issues Forums in 1982, Kettering became aware of teachers who recognized the usefulness of both the NIF issue guides and the process of framing issues for deliberation as models for the role and work of citizens in a democracy. In 2006, the foundation began a series of learning exchanges—known as Teaching with Deliberation—with teachers interested in using deliberation with their students. Those learning exchanges, and the reports teachers and administrators produced over the past ten years, helped identify the key benefits and challenges teachers experienced when introducing deliberative practices into their classrooms, and documented teachers’ observations about the impact deliberation had on their students’ sense of themselves as democratic citizens.

*Deliberation in the Classroom* is the product of that research. Kettering believes the book’s insights, presented in terms that resonate with educators, will support both the wider use of deliberative practices and the goal of growing the number of students who recognize a role for themselves as citizens in a democracy.

Libby Kingseed, Program Officer and Archivist

Mindy LaBreck, Program Officer and Director of Administrative Services

Kettering Foundation
When I began writing this book, I could not have predicted that it would be published after one of the most polarizing presidential campaigns in recent memory. The 2016 campaign and election season have given voice to perspectives that many would rather ignore, and it has uncovered deep ideological divisions in American society. It is an opportune time to be advocating for public deliberation in schools: it is clear that Americans need ways of talking and learning about public issues—ways that can bridge divides and contribute to a more informed and engaged citizenry. Yet I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge that deliberation is only one approach to practicing the active and informed citizenship that is important to our democracy and to our schools.

*Deliberation in the Classroom* highlights the work of educators who place civic education at the heart of their work by choosing to teach their students an alternative to the divisive, zero-sum politics advanced by interest groups and portrayed in the media. These educators embrace participatory models of learning and decision making and work hard to expose students to difficult issues and varied perspectives, including unpopular and marginalized points of view. They understand that critical thinking and community building are not mutually exclusive terms, and that citizens need to learn how to talk, listen, and work with others so they can tackle complex issues that affect their communities. These teachers understand that civic education should be nonideological, pragmatic, and rooted in democracy. While it encompasses a wide range of skills and knowledge, civic education should at least provide students with the practical skills and dispositions they need to analyze information, ask questions, build arguments, express agreement and dissent, understand others, and work across divides for the common good.

I focused on the National Issues Forums (NIF) Teachers Network because I had access to this group through my participation in a learning exchange at the
Kettering Foundation. Like the teachers who are described here, I had worked with NIF-style deliberation as an educator, and began to adapt the practice over time for different groups and settings because I saw how it contributed to powerful learning and improved engagement among citizens that deliberate together. Through involvement in the learning exchange, the teachers and I had the opportunity to share experiences, resources, and discoveries, which resulted in the stories and themes reported here.

I chose to focus on teachers’ stories and practical experiences with public-issues deliberation for several reasons. First, Diana Hess, Paula McIvoy, and Walter Parker have written extensively and effectively on the theory and practice of discussion-based classrooms, ethical considerations in teaching with political issues, and the value of studying controversial public issues. In this study, I refer readers to the works of those authors and others for analyses and additional applications of discussion-based classroom techniques. There is a clear research base to guide deep work in this field, and I encourage educators to incorporate these perspectives into their reflection, planning, and practice.

Second, there is a plethora of descriptions of “effective teaching practices” that emphasize measurable outcomes, but fail to capture the significant changes that occur in classrooms and in students’ lives as a result of quality teaching. Deliberation in the Classroom supplements research on civic education, inquiry-based classrooms, and discussion-based pedagogies with rich descriptions of the type of learning experiences that matter for students’ futures and our democracy. Central to these stories are the positive relationships the teachers cultivated with their students and the supportive classroom atmosphere that undergirds meaningful civic learning. This book is a humble testimony to these dimensions of educational improvement, which are often neglected by school reformers.

Finally, I highlighted real teachers and classrooms because I wanted to provide concrete examples of how public deliberation looks, the benefits and challenges it offers, and how it has been adapted in real schools. My hope is that teachers, school administrators, and citizens might be drawn into the stories and inspired to bring deliberation to youth in their communities.
How we educate students seems to be something everyone has an opinion about. Yet if we are not actively engaged in classroom life, our sense of what is happening in schools may be limited to our own experiences or what we have seen in the media. That is why I like to listen carefully to the ways teachers, students, and parents talk about their experiences in schools. These conversations often reveal striking information about what is working in American education and where our schools may not be living up to some common ideals.

A few months before I began to write this book, I met with a group of teachers who were learning how to use historical documents from the National Archives to enrich instruction. While discussing resources and exercises they planned to use with students, the conversation took an interesting turn. The teachers began talking about what students really learn in school and how they, as teachers, struggle to make their classes relevant:

- “I think the main thing my kids learn in my school is ‘how to do school.’ They learn very little about what really matters in life,” stated a high school special education teacher.

- An Advanced Placement (AP) American history teacher lamented that his students may be prepared for college but “they are not prepared to be citizens—to understand the system and organize to make the world a better place.”

- A middle school social studies teacher noted that her students were unprepared for life because they did not know how to deal with uncertainty. “If there’s not an obvious answer, my students freeze or freak out. They say the assignment isn’t fair. They don’t persevere . . . They definitely don’t look to each other. They want me to give them the answer.”
In one way or another, all three teachers had drawn similar conclusions from their very different classroom experiences. They felt that their students were learning important information and skills in school, but that public education was failing to prepare students for a complex, uncertain, and interdependent world. Each teacher felt too tied to curricula that focused on facts and contrived experiences. All yearned for more opportunities to engage students in learning about issues that matter to them and to society.

Over the years, I have had the privilege of working with many educators who teach in very different types of schools. I have concluded that it is quite common for teachers to feel a combination of pride and frustration when reflecting on their teaching and student learning. At the root of this conflict is the tension between educators’ love for teaching—especially their interest in preparing students for life—and the realities of their job: exhausting schedules, scarce resources, and constraints on their autonomy. They wonder if they are doing enough to prepare students to become contributing citizens, but they are not sure what they can do differently.

Preparing All Students for Civic Life

Deliberation in the Classroom is written for educators and parents who care about public education and are looking for ways to make learning more relevant to all students, including those who are disengaged from school. It is a book for citizens who are concerned about political polarization in America and who want the next generation to be prepared to participate effectively in solving the big problems of the day. And it is a story of teachers doing public work by bringing public issues into their classrooms and engaging students in public deliberation about what should be done.

Before I describe more fully what public deliberation is, I want to introduce you to two teachers who use it. Jim Gilmartin and Sarah Schneck teach in very different types of schools. Yet they are both clear about what motivates them to use deliberation in the classroom.
Gilmartin chairs the social studies department and coordinates the International Baccalaureate program in the West Islip School District on Long Island. He is creative, energetic, and passionate about his work. That may be why Gilmartin makes a point of modeling teaching practices that help others get excited about learning. This is not always an easy task. Because most West Islip students are from middle-income families and are bound for college, the school focuses on preparing its students for the New York Regents Exams and college entrance tests. This reality can make it difficult to justify the use of any teaching practice that does not produce measurable results. Nevertheless, after ten years of working with deliberation, West Islip teachers and school leaders remain committed to infusing deliberation into the K-12 curriculum. Gilmartin says the school district is committed to deliberation because it changes how students think, write, and understand their roles in society. Students learn how to be critical thinkers, analyze sources, and identify biases, while also learning how to “disagree without being unlikable.” These skills will help them succeed in college, in their careers, and in a global society.

Sarah Schneck teaches at the Enrich, Excel, Achieve Learning Academy (EEA), a public charter school in Wausau, Wisconsin. EEA focuses on youth who have
not succeeded in a traditional school setting. Schneck’s students include teen parents, students who have been truant, and youth facing other serious challenges. Most of the students come from low-income families. Schneck would be the first to tell you the term “at-risk” does not adequately describe her kids. Aside from their very different individual histories, Schneck’s students, like Gilmartin’s, are diverse in other ways. Some are disruptive. Some are shy. Some are animated. Some are depressed. Some are struggling academically; others are not. All of them will be able to vote someday, and will live and work in communities with others.

Schneck believes it is impossible for teachers to really teach kids without understanding what students need to be successful in community life. Teachers need to prepare youth to deal with complexity, to work with others, and to resolve conflict. She says, “I think we have a job, as educators, to not teach kids what to think. We need to teach them how to think.” That includes teaching students how to think with others, especially those who have different views and experiences than they do.

Gilmartin and Schneck see their work as a calling—something more than a job. They believe teachers have an obligation to students and to society. That is why they spend time preparing students for democratic citizenship as well as state tests. The type of democratic citizenship they emphasize has little to do with voting, service, or protest (although these have their place in democracy). It is a citizenship of community building, colearning, and collective action, supported by a process known as public deliberation.

**Deliberation in the Classroom**

Public deliberation is a form of discussion used by many communities to engage diverse groups of citizens in work to address community problems. In the classroom, deliberation is a learning process that has six key characteristics:

1. The focus or topic of learning is an issue of significance to individuals and society.

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\[\text{12}\]
2. The learning is highly interactive and discussion based.
3. Teachers and students share responsibility for learning.
4. The process emphasizes weighing options or deciding.
5. Multiple perspectives, including marginalized views, are given balanced consideration.\(^5\)
6. Students are treated as citizens or decision makers, often engaging in follow-up activities related to these roles.

In classrooms where public deliberation is practiced, learners engage in inquiry about complex issues and participate in deliberative discussions. During deliberative discussions, students consider different perspectives on a social problem, identify and work through tensions related to different approaches to addressing the problem, and attempt to arrive at reasoned judgment together. In contrast to processes that encourage consensus or compromise, the goal of deliberation is not to produce complete agreement among participants. The broad goals, among other curricular goals, are to promote improved understanding of the issue, awareness of the consequences of various responses, and recognition of commonly held values that can inform future action.

Teachers can use deliberation in the classroom in many different ways to meet a range of objectives. This book presents stories of educators who use deliberation to support teaching and learning about contemporary issues. It describes how others use deliberation to enrich their teaching of historic decisions, and provides examples of how teachers use deliberation to teach communication, critical thinking, and noncognitive skills like empathy. Students, in turn, show improvements in their abilities to think, talk, and write about complex ideas and controversial topics, and develop a deeper awareness of their roles as citizens of a democracy.

“I think we have a job, as educators, to not teach kids what to think. We need to teach them how to think.” - Sarah Schneck
Education and the Public Good

There are many reasons why American youth should practice deliberation. For me, the importance of teaching students explicitly how to engage with difficult public issues was reinforced by the Charlie Hebdo attacks of January 7, 2015. On that day, Islamic extremists entered the offices of a French satirical magazine and gunned down security workers and cartoonists for their role in mocking the Prophet Muhammad. One of the victims was a Muslim. He and the attackers had all been educated in France—a country that protects free speech and espouses democratic ideals. Like many people, I doubted anything could have been done to prevent the tragedy or redirect the life course of the murderers. Extremism is insidious, and violence can seem irrational.

Then, I read a New York Times commentary written by Abdelkader Benali. In it, he described what it was like to grow up as a Muslim in a Western society. Despite having family traditions that differed from those of his peers, Benali identified with his country and felt connected to his school and classmates until a fateful day when a high school teacher muddled through a class discussion about the fatwa against Salman Rushdie. As Benali explains, the conversation occurred with little context, and the students in his class were perplexed by the notion of fatwa. As the only Muslim in the room, Benali attempted to explain the significance of insulting the Prophet within his religion. His teacher argued that it was irrational for someone to be offended by fiction: “How could using one’s imagination lead to a death sentence?” Benali grew angry and was eventually dismissed from class.

The experience in Benali’s class was the first time he really understood how extreme or separatist ideologies could take root in young people. While most teens feel “different” or outcast at times, these feelings can be reinforced or
exacerbated in schools where teachers are not skilled at facilitating conversations about controversial topics that naturally emerge in their classrooms. When these experiences coincide with a political culture in which groups of people feel mocked or suppressed, teens who feel marginalized may be at risk of disengaging with school or civil society altogether, according to Benali.

I believe Benali’s teacher had good intentions in trying to bring current events into his classroom. Students tend to be interested in discussing topics from the media, and research suggests learning improves when students are engaged. Indeed, many notable civic-education programs foster youth engagement with the news and public issues as a way of promoting civic literacy. The problem was in how Benali’s teacher approached the topic of fatwa, and how he engaged students in discussion of it. Rather than promoting learning about diverse perspectives, the teacher only allowed room in the conversation for his own opinions about the Muslim faith. Instead of empowering all students to pose questions, engage in clarifying or critical thinking, and discuss the relevance of the topic to the curriculum, some students’ voices were elevated over others, one student was alienated from his classmates and his country, and opportunities for reinforcing civic skills and academic learning were lost.

Although public issues, such as political extremism, immigration, and other topics, can provide a rich and motivating context for student learning, this example demonstrates why some teachers want to avoid these issues, not discuss them with their students, and stay focused on the planned curriculum. Others feel they don’t have time, or the expertise, to address such complicated topics in their classroom. Still, many teachers have a sense that current events and public issues present teachable moments and opportunities for enduring lessons to be learned. They want to know how to facilitate and frame conversations to ensure that students are learning the intended academic content and skills while also being exposed to differing perspectives and gaining insight about citizenship and challenges to democracy.

The educators I describe here, including Gilmartin and Schneck, are committed to engaging students with public issues and teaching students how to discuss challenging topics with civility and a critical lens. They are less interested in directing students
Deliberation in the Classroom describes the experiences of some of the teachers in the NIF Teachers Network, and what they learned from those experiences. It answers questions like, What does deliberation in the classroom look like in comparison to other forms of learning? How does it affect students, and how is learning measured? It explores how teachers are working to address students’ individual learning needs while also meeting the needs of our democracy. Finally, it describes some of the challenges educators face in teaching with deliberation, as well as the types of support communities and school leaders can provide to advance this type of teaching and reclaim the civic mission of public schools.

The teachers have been a part of a professional development network focused on using deliberation in the K-12 classroom. The network, known as the National Issues Forums (NIF) Teachers Network, was convened by local partners in four communities: Birmingham, Alabama; Wausau, Wisconsin; Long Island, New York; and State College, Pennsylvania. As part of this network, teachers worked with colleagues to integrate deliberation into their classrooms using resources published by the National Issues Forums Institute (NIFI).

Deliberation in the Classroom describes the experiences of some of the teachers in the NIF Teachers Network, and what they learned from those experiences. It answers questions like, What does deliberation in the classroom look like in comparison to other forms of learning? How does it affect students, and how is learning measured? It explores how teachers are working to address students’ individual learning needs while also meeting the needs of our democracy. Finally, it describes some of the challenges educators face in teaching with deliberation, as well as the types of support communities and school leaders can provide to advance this type of teaching and reclaim the civic mission of public schools.
I especially enjoyed writing this piece for Stacie’s book because I have a personal connection to the subject. I come from a family of teachers: my grandfather, both of my parents, an aunt and an uncle, my cousins, and on to the next generation. When I was a college student, my goal was to be a history teacher. I earned a PhD from Columbia University with that in mind. And when I took my first job after graduation, even though it was in university administration, I insisted on teaching at least one history class. I continued to teach every year until I left academe for the job I have now at a research foundation, Kettering. My colleagues there say that I still try to find a way to teach. I am not sure whether that is a compliment or a complaint, but I take it as a compliment.

Teaching is the most rewarding and the most challenging thing I’ve ever done—with the exception of having to grade papers, which I haven’t found so rewarding. Teaching demands every bit of imagination and creativity that I can muster in trying to engage students and young research assistants, who are not always as interested in history as I am.

Teachers have to keep searching for better ways to teach. Deliberation in the Classroom is about a group of teachers and what they have found so far in their search, which has revolutionized their classes. They want to share what they are doing and, if you are interested, they want you to join them in an experimental approach to teaching that could help revitalize the classroom. The classroom has become burdened by too much emphasis on testing, by well-intentioned but misguided attempts to use quantitative measures for things that are quintessentially qualitative, and by an overabundance of bureaucratic rigidity, standardization, and lack of autonomy. Worst of all, many teachers say they are afraid to experiment because they will be penalized for failing. That’s tragic because innovation requires learning from failures—learning to “fail intelligently,” which was one of the mantras of the inventor Charles Kettering.
This book tells the stories of teachers who are helping young people learn how to live among, and work with, others who aren’t like them, and who may not particularly care for them. Their students learn how to deal with conflicting points of view, and how to make good choices together that will shape their future and the future of the places where they will live and pursue their careers. Although in different fields, all of these teachers have been engaging their students in making collective decisions to combat problems they face now and will face when they graduate. They are teaching Living 101. The issues students grapple with in their classes are about what they should or shouldn’t do as a student body, as members of a community, as citizens. These “should” questions are normative; there is not one certain, objective answer that will suit everyone. Facts are important, yet there are no experts on normative questions. Dealing constructively with them requires dealing with differences of opinions, which are inescapable. And this requires that students exercise their faculty for judgment. Judgment arises from the deliberative thinking that is used in making sound decisions on normative issues.

In the classes described in these pages, students have serious work to do. They aren’t on the sidelines watching; they are leading the deliberative decision making in their classes. They have to work their way through tough-to-make choices, not to the point where everyone agrees, but to the point where the class has identified ways of moving forward on a problem, ways that most everyone can live with even if they aren’t fully satisfied. That’s a key to democratic problem solving in a diverse society.

The teachers described here teach what has been called “choice work” by some, and deliberative decision making by others. Whatever the term, the goal is to get young people to use the part of their brains that helps them make the best possible decisions when faced with the uncertainty that is part of life at any age. In some classes, teachers use contemporary issues like dealing with violence in the school and community. In other classes, the deliberations are on historical decisions, perhaps going as far back as the question of whether to become an independent country. Teachers are introducing history, not as inevitability, but rather as a matter of choices. Even though the issue may be historical, the students have little difficulty in recognizing the implications of what they are studying for their lives.
today. That’s a big plus in teaching. Students are learning how to think—and how to think with other people. I was particularly impressed to find that students who have difficulty relating to conventional classroom instruction often respond well in classes where they are involved in choice work.

Using choice work to teach is not a methodology or formula. Life is a series of choices—individual, professional, and collective—and in all cases, deeply personal. Having students wrestle with making difficult decisions requires teachers to step back enough for students to engage one another so that deliberation occurs. However, as the deliberations end, teachers reenter the class to guide students’ reflections on what they learned from the experience and on the implications for the subject they are studying. Some call this teaching through deliberation “deliberative pedagogy,” a term coined by university faculty members who also use choice work in their classes. There are as many types of deliberative pedagogy as there are classes because it is an experimental approach to teaching. Different issues produce different classroom deliberations and no two classrooms are the same because students differ.

Although the book only covers secondary school and one fifth-grade class, other studies show that even younger children have an aptitude for deliberating. In an experiment with students in kindergarten through second grade, a researcher, Dr. Kim Pearce, has reported that children developed “the ability to see and describe pros and cons of each choice, to think about trade-offs, and possibly even change their mind(s).”

What students learn from choice work is subject matter, but much more. They discover their own inherent powers of agency. They learn how to make a difference in their world. They know how to be citizens, not just on Election Day, but every day and everywhere collective decisions have to be made—in their organizations, on their sports teams, even in their homes with siblings. Furthermore, at a time when many Americans doubt that they can make a difference in our political system, a civics course that teaches agency, and not just how a bill is passed, is invaluable.

I hope this book will contribute to what is already happening without any central direction or external support. Teachers from different parts of the country have
created networks (loose associations) of the kind characteristic of inventors. That is, they are talking to one another and comparing experiences. As I said initially, these teachers welcome anyone who wants to join in these exchanges, which already extend beyond the United States. The National Issues Forums Institute, www.nifi.org, will be happy to direct you to these teachers.

David Mathews
President
Kettering Foundation
I think the main thing my kids learn in my school is “how to do school.” They learn very little about what really matters in life.

In deliberation, people explore complex issues, beginning with what they hold most dear and sharing their personal experiences with a given issue. They must listen to one another, consider diverse perspectives, explore unbiased facts, test ideas, weigh options, and balance inherent trade-offs to find where various interests overlap for a shared solution. In classrooms where teachers use deliberation, students learn to think critically, work through differences, and interact with people who may or may not share their point of view. Teaching through deliberation provides students with the skills and abilities to work with others as citizens to claim a better future for their communities.

PRAISE FOR DELIBERATION IN THE CLASSROOM . . .

Stacie Molnar-Main’s Deliberation in the Classroom is a pioneering work, bringing to life the stories of teachers and students who learn and practice a kind of politics that goes beyond the polarized, demonizing, Manichean one that dominates public life today. She shows the challenges of making deliberative politics—organized around citizens and their capacities—work in schools, which are often based on very different dynamics and focus narrowly on tests and individual achievement. But she also shows the power, excitement, and appeal of such citizen politics. The book appears just when we need it the most.

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Teachers who read this terrific book will walk away with ample ideas of how to support deliberative practices with their students. Stacie Molnar-Main draws on teachers’ authentic experiences fostering deliberation to deliver a clear and inspirational picture of what classroom-based dialogue can be. Youth need more opportunities to thoughtfully and collaboratively grapple with real-life issues, and this book serves an important role in this mission.

Shira Eve Epstein
Associate Professor
The City College of New York (CUNY)