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Danielle Lake

Key to teaching democratic thinking is actively engaging in the practice; and this, the article contends, is best facilitated by an experiential learning model where students are actively using, testing, and transforming not only the materials of the course, but also their own theories and experiences. Educators hoping to inspire democratic virtues and actions should also create and foster opportunities for community-building within the classroom by having students take more ownership for the class. This experiential process of learning disrupts the hierarchical theory-to-practice model traditionally implemented, reinforcing the value of an experiential and iterative practice of reflective engagement. In addition, such classes cannot neglect critical reflection and discussion of issues of power and oppression since democratic deliberation is at its core about engaging *with* others. To the extent that the traditional philosophic model limits the ways in which we come to understand one another's positionality, we must seek to open valuable spaces for not simply thinking democratically, but also feeling and acting through a democratic spirit.

Key Words: **democratic deliberation, diversity, dialogue, integration, experiential learning, community.**

"There is nothing merely academic about how we think and what we teach. Those who seek to legitimate domination know that" (Minnich, 2005, p. 21).

The following article argues that teaching effective democratic thinking and action for an engaged citizenry requires that we create and foster opportunities for community-building within the classroom and for students to take more ownership in the class. Key to teaching democratic thinking is actively engaging in the practice; and this, I argue, is best facilitated by

an experiential learning model where students are actively using, testing, and transforming not only the materials of the course, but also their own theories and experiences. The article engages David Kolb's work on experiential learning, a "process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience" (2003, p. 38). Experiential learning in this context is *active* learning; learning applicable to "everyday life" (Kolb, 2003, p. 36). This form of learning is well-suited to the cultivation of democratic thinking and action. Indeed, since democratic thinking requires openness to criticisms and the re-envisioning of our commitments, it calls for an iterative process of engagement with the problems of life. It also, the reader will see, calls for the development of certain virtues in our students, virtues like humility and sympathy as well as courage and tenacity.[i]

In contrast to the recommendations in this article, top-down, exclusionary, theory-driven classroom practices–disconnected from on-the-ground experiences–are still all-too common. These all-too-common practices foster the type of thinking that makes future collaborative and deliberative endeavors across epistemological, ethical, and political divides *more* difficult. This article suggests instead that educators should help students foster habits of dialogue and a commitment to problem-solving as a collaborative and iterative process. In addition, I argue that critical reflection and discussion of issues of power and oppression are essential to teaching democratic thinking, since this work is at its core about engaging *with* others. These insights are derived from both research on experiential learning and democratic deliberation as well as from reflections on the process of putting the research to the test in an upper-division undergraduate interdisciplinary course, entitled *Dialogue, Integration, and Action*, taught in the fall of 2012.[ii]

This interdisciplinary course engaged students in both the theory and practice of dialogue through personal reflection, integration, and action. For instance, the penultimate assignment required student to design and facilitate their own "hybrid" deliberative event within the broader campus community. Given this larger project, students researched, practiced, and analyzed a number of different deliberative processes, formats, and tools throughout the semester. This initial commitment to a broad range of deliberative processes widened students' deliberative repertoire, encouraging a creative and co-generative planning process that more intentionally employed a wide-range of deliberative practices. The exploration of various deliberative designs along with the creation and implementation of their own deliberative event provided students with a set of "real world" tools likely to be of use in their future personal, professional, and civic endeavors.

Dialogue, Integration, and Action is a requirement for Liberal Studies majors at Grand Valley State University (GVSU),[iii] a public university committed to combining the ideals of liberal education with practical, professional learning. While Liberal Studies majors take a common set of core courses (of which *Dialogue, Integration, and Action* is one), they also take part in the creation of their own program of study by selecting courses from across the university curriculum. These self-selected courses contribute to the building of a unique and interdisciplinary plan-of-study for each student.[iv] Thus, *Dialogue, Integration, and Action* is one

of the few common courses all students within the major are required to complete. In it, students explore both the practice and theory of dialogue as well as the relationship between democracy and dialogue. For the purposes of this course, then, dialogue is understood as a means of fostering mutual understanding, of "making sense with one another…[as] a transactional process that has no products but does have crucial effects," as Elizabeth K. Minnich said (2005, p. 4). Though, in engaging the other two elements of the course–integration and action–dialogue here was also consistently about fostering collaborative action (or the potential for it). Clearly aligned with the university's mission to combine the liberal arts with professional skill sets, the course requires students to develop skills of dialogue as a relational art for their personal, professional, and civic lives. As the reader will see, the success or failure of this course relied very heavily on the students themselves. In democratic fashion, it took shared narrative and deep faculty-to-student partnership to co-create the following insights.

Most fundamentally, students in this course went through an iterative, experiential process, during which time they (1) reflected on the value of and problems with the course content; (2) considered in groups how they could use that content; and then (3) put their ideas into action; (4) reflected on the outcomes of their efforts; and (5) used insights learned to revise their initial efforts so they could act again and reflect-again (synthesizing their learning). Employing John Dewey and David Kolb's experiential learning strategies levied the basic methods of inquiry as a means for reminding students (and the instructor) to both *begin* in and with the situation at hand and to *turn back* to that situation to judge the value of the conclusions generated. According to Dewey, separating our educational practices from the social milieu "encourages irresponsibility" and a disregard of the social consequences (LW 12: 483). As a scholar of Dewey, Minnich (2005) extends his insights, concluding that educating through collaborative, experiential, and iterative practices helps to reawaken our "capacity to think and act responsively, responsibly, appropriately and respectfully in relation to anything and anyone we encounter" (p. 34). With this model in mind, I argue for an interactionist, experiential pedagogy, rejecting the exclusivity of strict empiricism and strict rationalism. Instead, the process recommended to educators in these pages encourages students to explore both how abstract concepts impact concrete experiences as well as how experiences come to shape the positions they (and we) take.

Accordingly, this article is divided into three sections. The first, Working Within: Creating Classroom Community, provides a series of recommendations for fostering community within the classroom while also highlighting the research on the usefulness *and* dangers of this work (dangers of suppressing difference, silencing, and exclusion). After exploring recommendations for, and the value of, fostering democracy in the classroom, the article argues in section two, Experiential Learning: From Classroom to Community, that these goals are best met through an experiential learning model: encouraging us to put our democratic ideals to the test in an iterative and reflective process of learning-by-doing. The research on these practices is briefly detailed and recommendations are given. For instance, experiential learning encourages a move out of the classroom into the "real" world where, in the course examined, students

developed and facilitated deliberative events of their own. Finally, section three, Limitations and Future Endeavors, highlights lessons learned and next steps for educators hoping to foster democratic thinking *and* action for an engaged citizenry.

Working Within: Creating Classroom Community

According to the students, the type of work this course required fostered a different classroom "vibe." The students were far more engaged with the materials, the assignments, and each other. In my estimation–and reinforced by insights from student reflections, final papers, and the research described below–the key difference came about through a drive towards experiential, collaborative transformational[v] learning that *began* with a focus on community building. For instance, one of the first collaborative projects the class accomplished was the creation of ground rules (i.e., rules for dialogue we would aspire to uphold for the duration of the class). This collective exercise forced the group to use burgeoning skills of dialogue and deliberation as we kept returning to and revising our rules throughout the semester, reflecting and refining. Interestingly, this type of practice also aligns with "the ideal of deliberative democracy" which "suggests that decisions must derive from the collective will of its members" (Button & Ryfe, 2005, p. 20). Looking back, this initial class exercise was the first step in transferring power, structure, and responsibility *of* and *for* the class *to* the class. In Minnich's (1999) words, such a practice helps us best "educate for democracy by educating *democratically*" (emphasis mine). In addition to the act of creating these guidelines, the practice of living up to and reflecting on our ground rules (through weekly reminders and opportunities for revision) was crucial.

Essentially, the *process* of creating, practicing, and revising these ground rules helped to highlight and promote deliberative virtues for fruitful exchange.[vi] Aligning with the interactionist and experiential pedagogical commitments highlighted above, students' list of ground rules began day one with their own initial insights and was then routinely scrutinized and revised in light of suggestions given in course readings and their own deliberative practices.[vii] In effect, what we were doing was fostering collective, experimental intelligence: ''the power of using past experience to shape and transform future experience." For Dewey, this work is always "constructive and creative'' (MW 11:346). This process also demonstrates Minnich's (1999) conclusion that experiential learning requires we approach thinking as a "dynamic, relational, evolving, and co-creative" process (explored in more detail below). By following and reinvisioning the rules we ourselves established, we were also able to create and then foster a learning environment where burgeoning trust promoted the openness necessary for transformative learning. For instance, the growth in student thinking can be traced through the revisioning of their rules.[viii]

This process of collaboratively creating, practicing, and refining rules of our own also definitely promoted fellowship, as did many other classroom activities requiring collaboration.[ix] In contrast, classrooms which focus on helping students explicate their own point-of-view over

time tend to reduce the likelihood of relationship and subsequently of transformative collaboration. A focus on our own views, that is, tends to foster "dialogues of the deaf" where we talk *at* and not *with* one another (Van Bueran et al., 2003, p. 207). Reflecting on her own experiences as an educator in the university classroom, Elizabeth Ellsworth (1989) comes to the same conclusion, suggesting "opportunities to know the motivations, histories, and stakes of individuals in the class should... [be] planned early in the semester" (p. 317). Additionally, general research on learning verifies that learning *in cooperation with others* leads to higher levels of achievement than do competitive or isolating educational endeavors (Johnson and Johnson, 1999; Johnson 2003).[x]

This research also demonstrates that cooperative learning fosters "shared mental models" and a flexibility that facilitates shared problem solving (Wlodkowski, 2008, p. 142); to be precise, cooperative learning fosters democratic thinking and action. Without fellowship, we are all too likely to see only our own plight, to lack sensitivity to and interest in the perspective of others. With fellowship we are more likely to see the various ethical positions involved in any moral dilemma and thus we are more likely to be open to the inherent perplexities of the situation-at-hand. Perplexity, for Dewey, was also the beginning of a more open and imaginative frame of mind from which collaboration and creativity is likely to flourish. By now, experiential learning advocate David Kolb (2008) as well as Valerie Brown and Judith Lambert (2013), have conducted substantial research both in the classroom and in the community to confirm and extend these insights. Clearly, then, requiring collaborative learning encourages fellowship within the classroom, opening space for the expansion of students' ethical and epistemological frameworks. Fellowship developed through the suppression of difference, however, is a serious concern.

For these reasons, creating a sense of community requires special attention to–and awareness of–power within the classroom. I therefore suggest democratic community building requires the co-development of participatory virtues. In this course, students engaged in online and in-class dialogues, crafting and re-crafting a list of virtues they felt were essential to promoting equitable deliberations. Virtues listed by students consistently included: courage (to speak up), compassion, and curiosity, as well as humility (to openly listen), patience and generosity (to collaborate across differences), and, finally, commitment (to see the process through). Students sought to hold both themselves and one another to these virtues through reflecting on and analyzing their own and other dialogic practices.[xi] Various practices facilitated the work of crafting and enacting such virtues, practices like the creation and revisioning of ground rules already mentioned, the opportunity for story-telling (requiring the courage to speak honestly and the patience to listen openly), the semester-long collaborative efforts and group projects (requiring a certain amount of humility and commitment), and the shared struggle to engage in a dialogue that confronts difficult issues of power and oppression (requiring courage and compassion). Minnich pursued just such a model in her own teaching, highlighting the need for "egalitarian relationality." Here, "cooperation among equals... is the natural as well as the best kind of relation" (1999).[xii] Echoing Minnich and building on Kolb's work, Brown and Lambert (2013) argue that we must maximize and celebrate diversity, in place of reducing it. In

fact, these researchers conclude that appreciating difference is best done by fostering "mutual trust, mutual respect, an inclusive language, [and] an open mind" (p. 29). The virtues discovered and practiced by students above, and highlighted by our scholars, help to make the possibility of equitably integrating across difference more likely.

A classroom, by its very nature, *should* be a place of exposure to difference and transformation. On this front, *Dialogue, Integration, and Action* was fairly diverse across sex, age, class, and ability of students,[xiii] but not very diverse across categories of race and ethnicity. Developing fellowship, based on varying levels of difference in the classroom, can helpfully ground transformational learning by encouraging us to *embrace* the ideological and cultural differences present in place of *reducing* them, an important practice for living within a pluralist society. In this course, for example, the depth of fellowship between students encouraged a more honest and rigorous discussion of traditionally divisive and explosive topics across ideological, generational, and political differences. One way to encourage fellowship can be pursued by asking students to discuss issues about which they care deeply; in my experience, this type of sharing opened students to one another without reducing the differences in the room. While students were often slightly uncomfortable about sharing in this way, everyone spoke sincerely and eloquently about social issues that had affected us deeply (from obesity, to child abuse, to environmental justice, to women's rights). As Freema Elbaz-Luwisch (2004) noted, through her experiences teaching in an Israeli classroom amidst immense violence, we cannot engage genuinely in dialogue when we ignore our "lived experiences," our feelings, our "vulnerability and anger," and "the body that carries these feelings and experiences" (p. 9, 13).[xiv] Building on the research of Kolb and corroborating these claims, Brown and Lambert's (2013) extensive research suggests transformational learning is most likely to occur when we begin in and with our values, recognizing the views present in place of reducing them (p. 15). This experience, in line with the research, clearly verifies the value of building fellowship within the classroom.

In contrast, when educators begin in and with "the facts"–presented as indisputable, absolute, and universal–they promote homogeneity and work to conceal difference, enforcing a false "harmony." Ellsworth (1989) rightly notes that the "collective struggle" to learn together must start "from an acknowledgement that 'unity'–interpersonal, personal, and political–is necessarily fragmentary, unstable, not given, but chosen and struggled for" (p. 315).[xv] The diverse perspectives in the room cannot be captured through purely rational discourse. There are always different stories, perspectives, and agendas (p. 303). Perspectives–including those of the instructor–are inherently limited, representing one side of an issue (p. 305).[xvi] Fostering opportunities for personal narrative, then, helps to make these insights more apparent, opening us to the views of others, and thus igniting opportunities for growth and transformation.[xvii] Undergoing transformational learning across our differences requires that we also embrace the tension that results from working within those differences (instead of avoiding that tension).

In truth, because students were asked to reflect on their own thinking and discuss issues of oppression, this course was a consistent source of minor stress and discomfort. From the intense focus on and practice of dialogue,[xviii] to the pressure of co-creating and redesigning deliberative events of their own, students were able to discover and reveal something of their internal selves. For example, the two-part presentation and dialogue facilitation put the class into different contexts–in the classroom and with the wider community–from which they presented and then facilitated dialogue on challenging and controversial issues of social justice (focusing, for instance, on ethical issues surrounding capitalism and democracy, impartiality and group politics). This deliberative event required students to not only review and integrate different deliberative design strategies and facilitation tools (described in detail later), but to also research and present on a social justice issue, and to facilitate a dialogue that engaged attendees' personal stories; that actively sought out diverse and conflicting perspectives; and that required the exploration of action-plans for addressing the injustices identified. In general, the dual process of creating, presenting, and facilitating a deliberative event in teams (of three-to-four) along with the process of receiving wide-ranging feedback from the instructor and their fellow classmates, from which to re-design and re-present in a more open and public format, became a rite of passage that culminated in a potent synthesis of their experiences and insights. These deliberative events tended to induce various levels of stress, foster team creativity, and end in a positive sense of accomplishment. It is important to note that this experiential process of learning disrupted the hierarchical theory-to-practice model traditionally implemented, reinforcing the value of an iterative, continuous practice of reflection and engagement. While much research still needs to be done on what situations most foster transformational learning, current research confirms that situations of moderate stress and positive emotion tend to reinforce student learning (Zull, 2002). This course verified these research findings. Shared events which add a level of emotional intensity to the class's activities tend to reduce the social distance between us, increasing the level of intimacy and, by doing so, foster community.

Reflecting back, I thus found the following to be essential practices for creating community in the classroom. First, co-generate a learning environment where risk is rewarded with enriched dialogue, where tension and conflict are brought out in the open and transformation is indeed a real possibility. Second, give the students an ownership stake in the class. Third, by doing so, encourage a more level power structure in the classroom. Finally, incorporate emotionally charged events or dialogues of various types into the pedagogical structure of the class. Given a learning environment where risk-taking is rewarded and where there is co-ownership[xix] over the course, the inclusion of emotion can decrease the social distance among students, increasing the level of trust and intimacy.[xx] Verifying the research highlighted above, engaging narrative and emotion (in place of avoiding it), and encouraging partial co-ownership of the course and its direction (in place of imposing the entire structure on students), opened a space for more honest and sincere dialogue, and fostered an environment where integrative and transformational learning took place.

Experiential Learning: From Classroom to Community

Throughout, the course sought to employ an experiential learning model where engagement in the practice of deliberation was combined with critical reflection on both the process and the students' own engagement in it. The course did this in a number of ways, including in-class facilitation and the use of facilitation tools; the creation and revisioning of ground rules and participatory virtues; "in-class" and "out-of-class" dialogues (encouraging the practice of dialogue in students' "real lives"); written reflections on their efforts, along with online discussion boards. Given that the culminating team project required student teams to create their own deliberative events, the semester began by exposing students to a number of deliberative processes, formats, and tools. Students, for instance, researched and weighed the merits of town hall meetings, National Issues forums (NIF), Consensus Conferences, Planning Cells, citizen juries, online dialogues, as well as participatory policy analyses and action research. Various organizations were studied including AmericaSpeaks, meetup.org, Moveon.org, and e-thePeople.org. Hybrid deliberative designs were also intentionally explored to give students insight into weaving various aspects of these design formats into their own deliberative event. The wide-array of deliberative designs explored in *The Deliberative Democracy Handbook* combined with in-class practice of facilitation tools like T-charts[xxi], Decision Matrixes[xxii], Force-field Analyses[xxiii], Bridge Building[xxiv], Mind Mapping, Zig-Zag Decision Making[xxv], and others,[xxvi] made the design and implementation of student-led dialogue events a rich, substantive learning experience. As Archon Fung (2006) notes, it is advisable to expose students to a variety of deliberative formats because it leaves them with a "richer menu of options for different designs and assessments" (p. 232), a menu of options then available to them in the creation of their own deliberative event and in their future personal, professional, and civic endeavors. I suggest it is also advisable to give students the chance to explore and practice various facilitation tools because many are designed to encourage both more legitimate and equitable deliberations as well as the integration of diverse ideas for possible future action. In this way, routine exposure to how various groups meet, discuss, and address shared problems, combined with the practice of designing and implementing a series of deliberative processes of their own prepared students to not simply think more democratically, but to *act* democratically. Combining course readings[xxvii] and practices with critiques about the dangers of various deliberative formats and processes from Iris Marion Young and Cass Sunstein encouraged students to be attentive to the dangers of "internal exclusion" (Young, 2000, p. 55), silencing, and group think.[xxviii]

In fact, these critiques highlighted for us serious concerns about polarizing and exclusionary deliberative processes, processes intended to give the appearance of democratic consensus, but which instead tend to silence dissent. Given these legitimate critiques, a particularly important goal of the course was the development of a more keen awareness of the power structures both within our greater society *and* our various deliberative bodies.[xxix] For these reasons, the class attempted to engage power critically in two ways; first through addressing issues of silencing, of internal exclusion,[xxx] and of the value and problems associated with greeting, rhetoric and narrative, and second through struggling to decipher what role emotion

should play in deliberation.[xxxi] These activities and the goals behind them align with recommendations from a number of scholars. According to Minnich (2005), for instance, understanding power "requires us to remain critical of the conventions, concepts, and theories–right along with laws and policies–that preshape realities for us" (p. 34). Similarly, Young (2012) argues we must push for a de-centered view of deliberative democracy. Given that deliberative theory is often not critical enough of how discourse can reinforce oppressive conditions, this work is essential for helping students cast a more critical eye on current deliberative practices as well as their own deliberative design.[xxxii] On this note, scholars Parker Palmer and David Kolb, among others, were also engaged throughout the course because they offer a more holistic understanding of dialogue, education, and growth, one born out of ways-of-knowing that go beyond the rational and intellectual, into the relational. For instance, Palmer's *Healing the Heart of Democracy* (2011) opens a role for compassion in justice, reconceptualizing standard models of rational deliberation, pushing us to embrace the possibility for creativity in tension and thus to embrace a model where power is shared *with* others, not exerted *over* others. To the extent that many traditional, authoritative models silence some voices and limit the ways in which we can come to understand one another's positionality, these authors opened valuable spaces for the class to not simply think democratically, but also feel and act through a democratic spirit.

Behind both these scholars' recommendations–and behind the pedagogy of the course more generally–lies American philosopher John Dewey. Dewey's scholarship focused heavily on developing a method for cooperative social action which is inclusive of its citizenry, widely-publicized, and self-critical.[xxxiii] According to Dewey, experiential education turns both our successes and our failures into grounds for learning and growth (MW 14:11). It is the method Dewey recommends for how we should respond to uncertainty, contingency, high stakes, and pluralism. Building on Dewey's foundational works, Kolb's decades-long research confirms that transformational learning happens when a full cycle of learning is completed: when feelings are engaged, critical observation and reflection on the situation occur, creative possible consequences are debated and, most importantly–and most often absent in higher education–*actions* follow. Research verifies that knowledge is not well received passively; instead, it is best reconstructed through experience, through active engagement and critical dialogic inquiry.[xxxiv] And, in truth, using the classroom to simply talk of abstract theory (even if Critical Theory) when disconnected from on-the-ground reality can be dangerous (Ellsworth, 1989, p. 300). Put simply, the course and the research verify that going beyond critical reflection by putting the ideas from the class into action encourages transformational change. The student-led dialogue project further illustrates this conclusion and is thus detailed below.

This student-designed and led dialogue project was to some extent intended to encourage students to synthesize their efforts in the course, and, as a result, it required they begin their event with a brief presentation on issues of deliberation and diversity. Students were advised to make the content of their event "real" and "pressing" for attendees in order to facilitate the integration of ideas from the dialogue and any subsequent changes in attendees' future actions. Following Kolb's (2003) recommendations on transformational learning, student

events were required to not simply ground the theories they explicated from our course readings in the discussion of concrete experience, they were also required to encourage reflective observation on these situations, and active experimentation (p. 30). For example, Young's (1990) recommendation that city life is valuable not least because it offers us vital interaction with a wide-range of diverse others was explored by engaging in city life more directly (p. 226-256). For some students, this meant they rode the city bus for the first time, others sat for a time in the city center or visited venues they had previously never explored. I suggest that encouraging deliberation that results in direct action has a greater potential to bridge the gap between the deliberative democratic participant and the activist, helping students to see a role for invited and uninvited public engagement on our collective problems.

Also building on the work of Kolb (2003), all student-led deliberative events were crafted with student-developed learning objectives in mind. While each group developed different questions for dialogue, all questions were designed to:

- Seek out personal narratives/stories on the topic;
- Elicit different perspectives on the issue/problem;
- Require the exploration of possible solutions/ways to meliorate the issue; and
- Encourage the consideration of future actions (personal and societal).

All events were also assessed via a student-designed survey filled out by deliberative participants.[xxxv] Every survey assessed whether participants felt:

- Facilitators presented the material clearly and were knowledgeable on the topic;
- Whether they themselves came away with new and different perspectives on the issue; and
- Whether they felt they could apply what they learned in their own life.

Such consistent questions track for genuine learning as well as the potential to put this learning into practice in attendees' "real" life. All surveys also assessed the demographics of attendees, asking about their gender, race, and living status. Beyond these general similarities, surveys were individualized to meet the needs of each event. For instance, every group developed one-to-three "Engaging Questions" for participants to answer. These questions most frequently asked participants to reflect on what they learned, on how they might apply what they learned, or on whether they gained a greater sense of civic responsibility and engagement. The results of these surveys were then synthesized by students and presented to our class in order to foster further reflection on the outcomes of the event: encouraging the interactionist, experiential learning advocated for in this article. Attendee responses were overwhelmingly positive. Almost all participants agreed or strongly agreed the programs were well presented, noted they are now aware of perspectives beyond their own, and said they planned to apply what they learned in their own lives.

These student-developed and led deliberative events also encouraged students to focus on the potential transformative power of thinking with their fellow-classmates and event participants. This can be seen through the topic and structure of their events, with titles like: "Changing the Lens: Reclaiming the Meaning of Difference," "The Ethics of Place: City Life and Community," and "Deliberative Democracy: Taking Action for Social Justice." The later student-designed event, for instance, listed the following objectives as essential:

- Foster awareness of how oppression limits access within the current system;
- Discuss what an inclusive politics might look like and how it relates to deliberative democracy; and
- Practice active listening and discuss its role in promoting social justice.

This group of students asked participants to seriously consider how we might find or even create opportunities to influence public policy and grounded the discussion with concrete examples of how others have done so in the past. They also asked participants to consider how respecting difference fosters personal transformation and social justice. The group built a "round circle" discussion into their process, asking every participant to speak from their own experience, share a narrative that was important to them, and then reflect on the possibilities within such a group process. Similarly, "The Ethics of Place" student-designed deliberative event asked participants to brainstorm about what might make various communities ideal, the role of difference within these communities, and possible alternatives to our current community models. They employed very real and current examples to ground the seriousness of these issues by, for example, exploring the various struggles that the cities of Detroit and Cleveland have faced in recent decades. All deliberative events also encouraged participants to consider possible solutions to the problems they confronted, working to move deliberators beyond simply describing (or complaining about) these issues towards actively considering how to effectively address them. In the end, I suggest dialogues not neglect the co-consideration of possible future actions because–given the social problems we now confront–collaborating across difference is going to be essential to meliorating these problems.

Given that many deliberative events today engage not just deliberative participants, but also various experts and facilitators, the role of both the expert and facilitator–and the nature of power in relation to their role–was also explored. Exploring the role of facilitator was a particularly important endeavor since students were asked to take on this role a number of times throughout the semester[xxxvi] and, I hope, may pursue such a role when confronting a long list of social problems ahead.[xxxvii] Asking students to take on the role of facilitator is also valuable because research shows both that the facilitator's personal views often can and do shape the deliberative outcome and that facilitators, on the other hand, can counteract biases stemming from social inequities.[xxxviii] At the very least, this means facilitators need to be aware of the potential for bias, power imbalances, and inequities beforehand. Since it is fairly rare that our collective social problems are resolved by experts alone, there is a vital and open space for our citizenry to fill. When confronting shared, complex problems we really only have a few options: we can add to the problem, we can do nothing, we can compete, or we can

collaborate (or some combination of these). Collaboration is the only strategy which overtly attempts to develop power *with* others and is thus more likely to get us beyond blockages caused by isolation and competition.[xxxix]

On this front, the course consistently worked to foster a conscious concern about the divide between the classroom and "real life." As one student wrote: "It is far too easy to sit in a classroom and discuss social justice issues and come away with a feeling of having accomplished something… [But] there is a problem if what has been discussed remains trapped in the room… [moving] no further than the conversation itself." This led the same student to conclude that what we need most is "action-based dialogue." Under a hierarchical model, the intellectual is too often deeply disconnected from the experiential. According to Minnich, the current chasms fostered by a more hierarchical model makes it difficult to "comprehend and, so also, to justify" what is "done in the world" with what is "done in class." In contrast to this divide, many students in this course ended the class with a call for personal action. One wrote, "this class gave me the opportunity to realize that I cannot wait on someone else; I need to be the first brick in the line of dominoes." Echoing that call, another student synthesized her experience with the following declaration:

> Here in these final words, I most strongly hear the call to action, the personal responsibility to our community – to each other. We are not islands. We need each other's differences to gain new perspectives to break old assumptions, to continually strive for more, for something better. And this responsibility is not just for the reformers, for the go-getters. This responsibility is for everyone. It is for me.

As Young (2001) advises, this course studied and practiced democratic deliberation with a critical lens (p. 688); the focus on the value of, as well as the inherent dangers in, various deliberations, along with the focus on students' own narratives, passions, and values encouraged not only the development of participatory virtues and skills essential for democratic thinking and action, but also the fostering in students of a more socially conscious activism. Ultimately, courses with a focus on deliberation can gain tremendously from experiential learning–from focusing on real and immediate problems, on collaboration, and on integration. Engaging in this way provides us with a unique opportunity to help ourselves and our students cultivate the capacity for greater wisdom, a deeper sense of justice, of courage, and of a love for all (Kolb, 2003, p. 227-8).

Limitations and Future Endeavors

In the end, the goal of fostering transformational learning was sought through employing an experiential learning model where engagement in the practice of dialogue and deliberation was combined with critical reflection on both the process and one's own engagement in it.   In addition to the above recommendations, course requirements such as student-led deliberative processes along with an extensive feedback loop on those processes, data analysis, subsequent reflections, and formal written work proved valuable for the development of democratic

thinking *and* action. Such recommendations center on the notion that classroom pedagogy on democratic thinking should include the development of participatory virtues and skills in students along with a mindfulness of the dangers inherent to any deliberative process; on this note, such courses should encourage students to co-create something of their own. In the end, democratic engagement is optimally cultivated through an experiential learning model where engagement in the practice of deliberation is combined with critical reflection. Student insights along with research on transformational learning also highlighted the important role of fellowship and community-building for fostering a space where we can engage the tension inherent in difference and thus foster life-long learning. Creating a sense of community required first the development of a learning environment where risk-taking was rewarded, and second, a welcoming of diverse values, narrative and emotion into classroom dialogue, as well as a more level power structure in the classroom. Finally, my experience and research confirmed that shifting the power in the classroom is essential to the development of democratic thinking and action. This was in part done here by providing students with the opportunity to create and enforce dialogic ground rules of their own, to design and implement dialogic events of their own, and to craft syntheses of the course in a format that resonated most for them. Encouraging a democratic, co-generative learning process is especially important since effective forms of political and institutional collaboration seem to be in short supply today.

On the other hand, student-led deliberative events did not move far away from the university environment. Events were held on campus and promoted largely to university students. As a result, attendees at these events were largely freshman and sophomore students, professors, family-members, and friends. This elite space is not widely inclusive, nor is it often very diverse. We reflected, however, on the exclusiveness of invited deliberative events and the need for uninvited public space. A future goal is to co-develop deliberative events in collaboration with both students and community partners, events based in the extra-university community. Preparing students for such work in a fifteen week semester is a daunting task. Endeavors here can definitely be bolstered by conscientious efforts not to waste community partners' time and resources. On the other hand, moving students from deliberative efforts within the classroom, to creating and facilitating deliberative events with a wider audience within the university has, according to their final reflections, inspired students to seek out similar opportunities in their communities and was thus a worthwhile endeavor.

In general, even more efforts to get students to reflect on and practice the course content outside of the four-walls of the classroom would be a valuable addition to the course. That is, scaffolding even more assignments which require students to engage in various dialogic practices and use various facilitation tools would help to reinforce their value and their flaws, building the requisite skills needed to use these tools well. Additionally, finding official deliberative events in the surrounding communities for students to witness and critique would further illustrate both the merit of–and the problems inherent in–these practices. Given the initial fervor with which students affirmed the value of democratic deliberation I would also in the future put even more emphasis on the very serious critiques of such efforts given by

Sunstein, Young, and others, asking students to grapple with the value of working both within and outside of systematic power structures.

Ultimately, though, this course was far more successful than I could have imagined. The model employed in this course–with its focus on current social and structural problems, its attention to issues of power and oppression, its emphasis on values, tension and thus creativity, and its demands to collaborate across our differences–encouraged the kind of thinking and the kind of actions essential to an engaged citizenry for the world we confront ahead. In the end, I hope that in sharing what appear to be the most important aspects of this model, I can encourage the adaptation and application of any one of these practices for future courses.

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[i] According to Gregory Pappas, we best cultivate democratic thinking by learning "to habitually find some emotional zest, thrill, in facing uncertainty and contingency" (2011, p. 63).

[ii] In 2011, I had the opportunity to help design, co-facilitate, and critically reflect on a number of deliberative processes through a Michigan State University NIH supported community engagement project on the Michigan BioTrust for Health. This experience, while extremely fruitful and fairly successful, confirmed worries about a tendency towards "group think" and a lack of genuine inclusion within deliberative bodies. These concerns led me to facilitative leadership training where practical tools are engaged to combat resistance towards co-generative, creative thinking in groups. This training, along with deliberative research interests stemming from both the pragmatic tradition and more modern deliberative theorists and critics like Iris Marion Young, Archon Fung and others have together informed the majority of the deliberative pedagogy engaged here.

While the following article references the pedagogy and scholarship behind the course design, it does not offer a systematic review of the various methods employed; instead, it seeks to argue for best practices from the course for teaching effective democratic thinking and action for an engaged citizenship. Specifically, I employ and recommend an interactionist position between theory and experience, arguing it is the process of moving between the two that is essential for life-long, transformational learning. This position is directly in line with experiential learning advocates John Dewey and David Kolb. As interactionists, both scholars reject the exclusivity of strict empiricism and strict rationalism (Kolb, 2003, p. 101; Dewey, MW 10:14). That is, they believe we must focus on how abstract concepts impact our concrete experiences as well as on how our experiences come to shape the positions we take. Ignoring the lessons derived from employing our theories on the ground is a dangerous mistake just as failing to reflect on how our theories tend to shape our reality is also often a dangerous mistake.

[iii] GVSU currently serves approximately 20,000 undergraduate students. Situated in Western Michigan, the main campus is located just outside of Grand Rapids metropolitan area in a rural farming community, with the Lake Michigan shoreline to the west.

[iv] Such a major tends to attract students seeking a unique study-plan as well as returning adult students seeking to utilize previous college experience to complete their undergraduate degree.

[v] Transformational learning requires students question "rules and boundaries, search for "new solutions" and consider different "ways of living" (Brown and Lambert, 2013, p. 3).

[vi] Philosophers Ferkany and Whyte (2011) argue that one of the most common reasons deliberations break down is because participants lack certain participatory virtues for collaborating with others under high-stakes, complex conditions. Ferkany and Whyte list virtues like "cooperativeness," "perseverance," and "epistemic humility" as essential, though not sufficient (p. 426). In truth, defensiveness of one's own views and possessiveness of one's own initial goals are fairly common in deliberative groups, especially when such groups make an effort to include a diverse range of perspectives.

[vii] Their initial class list comprised 17 rules, many of which were interrelated. For instance, this first set of rules included phrases like: "be respectful," "embrace difference," "don't make assumptions," "no targeting or isolating others," "keep the end-goal in mind," "think critically," and "remain calm," among others. After numerous revisions occurring over the length of the semester, our list of house rules was refined and, in the end, consolidated down to an essential four: (1) "listen fully"; (2) "act with courage, while remaining open to others"; (3) "respect one another by respecting our differences"; and (4) "think critically by engaging tension and digging deeper."

[viii] A reluctance to directly engage tension can be seen through their initial list of rules whereas the value of tension is highlighted as foundational in the final list. For instance, students initially created rules

indicating they were worried about being targeted by their classmates, worried about the emotional impact of our differences ("remain calm"), and worried about sharing openly ("don't make assumptions"). The final list of rules demonstrates a willingness to engage that tension; for instance, students asked one another to "act with courage" and "think critically by engaging tension and digging deeper."

[ix] *Dialogue, Integration, and Action* employed cooperative learning throughout by requiring in-class small-group activities and dialogues as well as intensive, semester long teamwork through the development and practice of student-led dialogue events.

[x] David Johnson and Roger Johnson analyzed over 100 studies verifying these results in 1995 (Johnson and Johnson); further research in 2003 analyzing over 300 diverse studies verified this same conclusion: cooperative learning is more effective.

[xi] Students can, for instance, conduct discussion audits, reviewing its content and flow for indications of engagement across differences, equality between participants, topic cohesion, adherence to class ground rules, engagement with highlighted participatory virtues, and other relevant factors.

[xii] As an undergraduate student, I, the instructor, was fortunate enough to take a one-credit course in order to study Minnich's work directly and, at the end of the semester, meet with her to discuss her scholarship. This experience was foundational to the work I have pursued since. Minnich, it was clear to me, truly embodied her scholarship. Her ability to listen and really hear what students had to say, to put herself on a more equal footing with her students, was for me a transformative educational experience.

[xiii] Students in the class ranged from freshly graduated high school students in their first college semester to returning adult students in their late fifties completing their final course for graduation. The class was comprised of five men and 14 women. Students in this course held a wide variety of professional positions: from recently unemployed, to part-time workers in the food and retail industry, to students with advanced careers in accounting and event-planning, to two small business owners.

[xiv] Elbaz-Luwisch (2004) goes on to note that her experience verifies sharing stories about our life and family can disrupt heated arguments and bring us back together so we can learn from one another (p. 16).

[xv] Referencing Dewey, Minnich also endorses this model. She says, "reciprocal connecting is consciously experienced in a relational rhythm of 'doing' and 'undergoing'" (1999, p. 4).

[xvi] The authors contend that there is no Rawlsian veil of ignorance. Our point-of-view is always partial and thus limited. Recognizing this, we must seek to expand our view ever outward through the perspectives of diverse others.

[xvii] The practice of encouraging narrative is in stark contrast to efforts still in place today to separate our values out from our daily scientific or business exercises. Expanding on the work of Dewey, Frank Fischer argues such separation encourages the development of insular, supposedly value-free theories which are dangerous because they are incomplete, leaving our values and our assumptions unexamined (Fischer, 2000, p. 71-72).

[xviii] Students were consistently asked to design, lead, participate in and reflect on different forms of discussion. For instance, they were asked to consider and research what makes various discussions "good," to practice engaging in these ways and to reflect on the outcome. In this way, students had to pay attention to the meta-conversation as well as their own contributions to the discussion.

[xix] Consistent with the focus on a more collaborative student-to-instructor partnership, for instance, students and the instructor together crafted guidelines and recommendations for the student final synthesis of the course.

[xx] These conclusions align with both Ellsworth's and Elbaz-Luwisch's own insights. For instance, Ellsworth concludes that we need "high levels of trust and personal commitment" to one another in the class and that this can be "gained in part through social interactions" (1989, p. 316). Similarly, Elbaz-Luwisch concludes from her own work in the classroom that students are "better able to see one another as more, and less, than members of particular groups" because they engaged "with life stories that matter[ed] to them, and with curricular materials that speak of possibilities for making a difference" (2004, p. 25).

[xxi] A T-chart asks participants to visually sort their thinking into two columns, encouraging a more deliberate and comprehensive examination of the issue under discussion.

[xxii] Decision matrixes help participants evaluate possible group developed action-plans against some set of criteria before they make a decision. Particularly helpful here, such matrixes often require deliberators first develop the criteria upon which they are judging various action options.

[xxiii] Force-field analyses visually represent the forces which help the deliberators move towards a goal as well as which forces are operating against their efforts.

[xxiv] Once a goal is identified by deliberators, bridge building facilitates the exploration of how to get to that goal from where participants are currently at, effectively building a visual bridge from the current reality to the future goal.

[xxv] Zig-Zag decision-making moves deliberators through a systematic process for coming to a decision. In this process, the deliberators consider their collective knowledge about the situation under discussion, as well as the possibilities for moving forward, the likely consequences of various options and how their decision will impact others.

[xxvi] Students were studying and practicing a long list of facilitation tools beyond those mentioned. Others include well-known and oft-used tools like brainstorming, anonymous voting, and round-robining as well as relatively less well-known tools like paired comparisons and gradients of agreement.

[xxvii] Students read a fairly wide variety of work from *The Deliberative Democracy Handbook*, Iris Marion Young, David Kolb, Jane Addams, Valerie Brown, and Parker Palmer, among others. These readings allowed them to explore the theories and practices behind deliberative democracy, its critiques, and suggestions for reconsidering how we approach deliberation with others. These authors also helped students see more clearly why democratic deliberation is essential for meliorating many of our public problems today.

[xxviii] These critiques brought awareness to the false assumption, noted by Ellsworth, that "all members have equal opportunity to speak" when engaging in dialogic practices. These critiques also serve to remind students that not "all members respect other members' rights to speak and feel safe to speak" (1989, p. 314).

[xxix] As many critics note, such power structures also tend to shape the make-up of the deliberative bodies themselves. Most often citizen deliberations overrepresent the already civically inclined. These issues were addressed within the classroom as well: highlighting how various recruitment practices seek to counter-act such problems but also the role uninvited publics might play in this process.

[xxx] Deliberative events are sometimes used as a cover for legitimate consent. By formally including a diverse range of participants they can give the appearance of representation, but through the use of power within the deliberative group some voices can be easily silenced, dismissed, or ignored.

[xxxi] Young argues greeting (formal acknowledgment of everyone at the table), rhetoric and narrative are all essential to inclusive deliberative practices. We must, she argues, value different ways of knowing and different ways of communicating (2000, p. 54-81).

xxxii As Young argued in 2001, democratic deliberative theory should understand itself as a "*critical theory*" used to expose problems with practices of deliberation and to examine the legitimacy of those practices (p. 688). Too many deliberative theorists seem to assume discourse is "innocent" (p. 686), free from cultural distortions when it is often heavily laden with bias, unquestioned norms, and assumptions which perpetuate instead of alleviate inequality.

xxxiii Dewey argued, for instance, that our collective decisions must be "subject to constant and well-equipped observation of the consequences they entail when acted upon, and subject to ready and flexible revision in the light of observed consequences" (LW 2:362).

xxxiv See Kolb (2003) and Ferkany and Whyte (2011).

xxxv The IRB determined the student evaluative surveys to fall under exemption one: normal classroom activity and evaluations and thus not covered research. Students also signed a student work release form agreeing to share insights from their collaborative work and synthesis papers in future research efforts.

xxxvi All students took on the role of facilitator a number of times in class as well as in preparation for their own deliberative event.

xxxvii This is not to say that the role of the deliberative participant should be ignored however. In truth, no matter how carefully thought-out the structural design of a deliberative process, if participants do not come to the table ready and willing to cooperate and persevere, open to the possibility that they could be mistaken and *yet* confident enough to risk voicing dissent, it is unlikely the outcome will be wildly successful nor that it would fairly represent the group.xxxvii A number of strategies recommended in these pages work to counteract or reduce the likelihood of such problems, including: the fostering of fellowship and community, the use of ground rules and facilitation tools, the inclusion of narrative and emotion, and the development of certain dialogic habits built through not only studying, but practicing dialogue in a collaborative, reflective and iterative manner. Ellsworth rightfully worries that what individuals are willing to say is very much dependent on "the energy they... have for the struggle on a particular day" as well as "conscious and unconscious assessments of the power relations and safety of the situation." In truth, what gets voiced is often "the product of highly complex strategizing for the visibility that speech gives without giving up the safety of silence" (1989, p. 313). The above practices work as a counter-force to these external pressures and are thus essential to helping students craft dialogues more likely to accurately represent the diversity of views present in the room.

xxxviii See Fischer (1993).

xxxix As Young notes, in capitalist countries today most of us only rarely participate in making many of the decisions that affect our lives (1990, p. 49).