



FACILITATION OF DELIBERATION  
IN THE CLASSROOM:  
**The Interplay of Facilitative Technique and  
Design to Increase Inclusiveness**

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## FACILITATION OF DELIBERATION IN THE CLASSROOM: The Interplay of Facilitative Technique and Design to Increase Inclusiveness

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## ABSTRACT

Widespread global interest and adoption of deliberative democracy approaches to reinvigorate citizenship and policy making in an era of democratic crisis/decline has been mirrored by increasing interest in deliberation in schools, both as an approach to pedagogy and student empowerment, and as a training ground for deliberative citizenship. In school deliberation, as in other settings, a key and sometimes neglected element of high-quality deliberation is facilitation. Facilitation can help to establish and maintain deliberative norms, as well as assisting participants to deliberate productively and achieve collective goals. This article draws on our experience as scholar/practitioners running a Deliberation in Schools program in Australia to explore challenges and strategies for deliberative facilitation. The challenges we discuss are power, inequality, diversity and boundaries, disagreement and integration and these are discussed in the general context of inclusiveness. We highlight two facets of deliberative facilitation – technique and design – which are important for dealing with these challenges and increasing inclusion in school deliberation and in democratic deliberation more generally.

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## INTRODUCTION

Deliberative democracy is a normative theory of democracy, which situates citizens' communicative engagements in making rationally motivated consensus and opinion formation through reason-exchange and listening at the heart of democratic legitimacy. Since the "deliberative turn" (Dryzek, 2000) in political theory in the 1990s, we have been witnessing growth in theoretical as well as practical research on public deliberation in many countries (see Bächtiger et al., 2018a). In conjunction with this growth in the academy, there has been an upswelling of interest in and support for public deliberation in democracies across the world. Researchers, practitioners, policy makers, and civil society organisations have been involved, often jointly, in designing a range of forums and processes, from deliberative mini-publics (Grönlund, Bächtiger & Setälä, 2015) to citizens' assemblies (Farrell et al, 2019; Caluwaerts & Reuchamps, 2015) to online deliberation (Strandberg & Grönlund, 2012).

Deliberation is a transformative process where citizens exchange reasons, learn from one another, examine diverse information and interests and develop collective positions, often revising their own views in the process. This transformative process is, ideally, expected to produce various democratic consequences, including making legitimate decisions about controversial political questions, facilitating citizens' mutual understanding across difference, and developing participants' democratic capacities (Bächtiger et al., 2018b; Dryzek, 2010). Importantly, the deliberative quality of such transformative processes is often underpinned by the role of facilitators. Theoretical and empirical

research has indicated that facilitation guided by deliberative norms can make participants less hostile and more open-minded, and avoid polarisation, thereby promoting authentic, inclusive, and consequential deliberation (Kara, 2013; Mansbridge et al., 2006; Moore, 2012; Quick & Sandford 2014; Sandford & Quick, 2017; Strandberg et al., 2017).

The central topic of this article is the role of facilitators, not in public deliberation but *in classroom deliberation*. Echoed by the growing number of deliberative democracy practices in the real world, there are various examples of the practical application of deliberative theories to citizenship and democratic education (Luskin et al., 2007; see also, Hess & McAvoy, 2015; Samuelsson & Bøyum, 2015; Schaffer et al., 2016). This work focuses on the potential of deliberation to enrich pedagogy and student experience, but also on classrooms as a training ground for practicing deliberation among current and future citizens. Despite the growing attention to classroom deliberation and growing recognition of the significant role of facilitators in public deliberation, little is known about the role of facilitators in deliberation in the classroom. This article seeks to fill this gap, drawing on a *Deliberation in Schools* project, a pilot program conducted in two public schools in the Australian Capital Territory by a team of researchers and practitioners of deliberative democracy.

In outlining our experiences of classroom deliberation in these schools, this article considers a number of challenges that reduce the inclusiveness of classroom deliberation. Our focus is particularly on ‘internal’ inclusiveness or the extent to which all participants are enabled to have an equal voice in deliberation. We focus on the internal dimension because classroom deliberation does not involve inviting or recruiting participants. Moreover, internal inclusiveness is important in school contexts because of its potential to mitigate patterns of social exclusion that can be established during school years. The challenges to inclusiveness that we identify from our work as facilitators in the classroom are: power, inequality boundaries, disagreement, and integration. Our suggestion, generated from our grounded experience in dealing with these challenges in the classroom, is to reconsider facilitation as involving two facets: facilitation as *technique* and facilitation as *design*. A practical as well as conceptual analysis of these two facets can assist deliberative practitioners to (re)design more inclusive deliberative practices in the classroom. Moreover, as all of the challenges described are familiar and relevant in deliberation outside the classroom (e.g. Curato, Hammond, & Min, 2019), we expect that this conceptualisation will be useful to deliberative scholars and practitioners generally.

The opening section provides an overview of research on public deliberation and deliberative facilitation. Then, our *Deliberation in Schools* project is introduced by situating it in relation to recent developments in classroom deliberation. Building upon our experiences in classrooms, five challenges we experienced are described, with suggestions and strategies for overcoming them. Finally, we describe the two facets of deliberative facilitation – technique and design – in the context of these challenges.

## DELIBERATIVE NORMS AND DELIBERATIVE FACILITATORS

Deliberation is a specific form of communication that is differentiated from discussion or debate. While, generally speaking, discussion and debate are characterised by participants justifying their own positions and criticising their opponents’ views, deliberation focuses more on the collaborative and reflective processes of communication where citizens listen to each other’s opinions and review or revise their opinion in response. Ideally, deliberation ought to be an authentic communication. By authentic, we refer to processes that “induce reflection upon preferences in noncoercive fashion and involve communicating in terms that those who do not share one’s point of view can find meaningful

and accept” (Dryzek, 2010, p. 10). By enabling citizens to communicate in an authentic manner, it is expected that deliberation produces specific democratic consequences, ranging from legitimate decision-making or policy influence to creation of a foundation of mutual-learning among previously hostile citizens (see, Kanra, 2016). Informed by deliberative theory, a range of deliberative innovations has developed, including Deliberative Polling®, citizens juries, consensus conferences, citizens’ assemblies, and participatory budgeting (see, Grönlund et al., 2015). Democratic contributions of these innovations have been demonstrated empirically (e.g. Gastil & Levine, 2005; Fishkin, 2009).

However, critics question whether authentic communication alone is enough to produce democratic consequences. For example, Sunstein (2000) argues that deliberation may foster polarisation and produce extreme opinions if like-minded groups deliberate together. Sanders (1997) also cautions that deliberation and its hyper-rationalism may prioritise the communication of majority groups over minorities. In particular, Karpowitz and Mendelberg (2014) empirically demonstrate how male-centric forms of communication dominate deliberation and oppress women. To enable authentic deliberation, therefore, deliberation should also be *inclusive*. Opportunities should be created for the voices of all affected individuals to be heard and considered. Inclusive deliberation involves promoting mutual respect among participants so that individuals, including those from marginalised groups, can be recognised as legitimate participants. Iris Young (2000) rightly summarises problems associated with authentic communication and suggests that as well as external inclusion (giving inclusive access to a deliberative process), attention should be given to internal inclusion, which requires removing structural, social, and cultural barriers preventing people from being recognised and heard within the process of deliberation.

Surely, as Mansbridge and colleagues (2012, p.1) indicate, there is no perfect deliberative forum in the real world that achieves all deliberative norms at once. Having said that, it is normatively expected that deliberative forums should be structured and designed to be as deliberative as possible (Bächtiger et al., 2018b). If it is difficult for citizens alone to realise authentic and inclusive deliberation, skilled and trained facilitators play a key role. Broadly, the term “facilitators” refers to individuals who help groups “increase effectiveness by improving [their] process and structure” (Schwarz, p.5) and support people “to do their best thinking” (Kaner, p.32). While the normative view of authentic deliberation requires non-coerciveness during deliberation (Dryzek, 2000), facilitators are the only individuals who are allowed to exert some sort of legitimated coercion during deliberation to improve the process and help to realise deliberative norms. For example, facilitators engage in various interventions, such as directing which participants talk and listen, politely interrupting or challenging participants’ talk if it is not relevant to the topic in question or it harms other participants, guiding citizens to achieve goals and outcomes within time constraints, and deciding how and when to conclude deliberation (see Dillard, 2013; Moore, 2012). Some researchers have observed facilitators dominating deliberative processes due to their deliberative authority (Mansbridge et al., 2006), indicating that this legitimated coercion is not without its problems. However, in many deliberative forums, the role of facilitators is nonetheless critical because “without facilitation, deliberative talk risks backsliding into discussions where citizens listen without contesting reasons or fail to reach a needed outcome” (Dillard, 2013, p. 218).

Evidence gained from empirical studies demonstrates how a facilitator contributes to inclusive deliberative quality. Fishkin’s 2009 study on Deliberative Polling® shows how facilitators assisted all participants to express their view equally and to be heard even in difficult settings (e.g. divided society, virtual deliberation, European-wide deliberative forum) (Fishkin, 2009, Ch. 6). Furthermore, facilitators play a role in creating a good and inclusive atmosphere during deliberation by facilitating various forms of communication, including joking, laughter, and so forth (see also Mansbridge, et al., 2006). They bring care, and an invitation to care (Marks & Russell, 2015). Strandberg, Himmerloos

and Grönlund (2019) also draw on their empirical study of online deliberation and conclude that the presence of skilled facilitators makes a significant contribution to avoiding groupthink even if the deliberating group consists of like-minded people.

Despite the growing attention to facilitators, understanding what constitutes inclusive facilitation is controversial. As one of the starting points to think about this, Dillard (2013) suggests three classifications of facilitators in deliberative forums – passive, involved, and moderate facilitators. *Passive* facilitators employ a hands-off and uninvolved approach to facilitation. This type of facilitator attempts to avoid interventions (e.g. summarising opinions) during deliberation as much as possible in order to avoid creating power imbalances between participants and facilitators. In contrast, *involved* facilitators engage in various forms of interventions throughout deliberation. Unlike passive facilitators, involved facilitators have “control over how deliberation happens” (ibid, p. 225) by asking various questions, interpreting opinions of participants, or even using devil’s advocate responses to enable participants to see things from multiple angles. Moderate facilitators use a mixture of passive and involved facilitation. *Moderate* facilitators play a role as quasi-participants, yet they participate in deliberation only by asking questions to elicit content or by employing a specific intervention (e.g. asking talkative participants to listen to what others say) to ensure the authenticity and inclusiveness of deliberation. It would be fair to say that different contexts require different forms of facilitation (Quick & Sandfort, 2014; Sandfort & Quick, 2017) and this is why understanding good facilitation is not straightforward. For example, when deliberation is practiced with vulnerable individuals (e.g. disaster victims, refugees), these participants often need a space for expressing their feelings and emotions and being heard without interruption. In such contexts, the role that facilitators need to play is the passive facilitator who creates a safe space and builds and sustains trustful relationships with participants. On the other hand, some vulnerable participants, such as children, may need a more involved approach to encourage them to speak up and participate (Nishiyama, 2018a).

Dillard’s classification of passive, moderate and involved facilitation, and discussion of deliberative facilitation generally, tend to focus on deliberative norms, strategies and tools, and different forms of “talk”, but ignore the role of facilitators in influencing the structure of deliberation through deliberative designs. By these, we do not refer to the macro- or meta-designs, such as deliberative polling, citizens juries, National Issues Forums and so forth, but to the micro-designs that are tools of trade for facilitators. With these, a facilitator can mediate deliberation as much with a template, a set of post-it notes, or a structured activity, as by discursive strategies or talk. Much general facilitation theory and practice focuses on this role in providing structure for group process and discussion and using this to encourage participants to take responsibility for the group’s work (Weisbord & Janoff, 2007). Such facilitation involves observing process aspects, including the extent to which deliberative norms are being followed, and to intervene, sometimes through forms of talk, but sometimes by changing the structure of the activity, when this is required. The facilitator also provides participants with designs, tools and skills to manage their own process and helps to create a space in which participants work together according to shared norms of communication (Kaner, 2014).

## DELIBERATION IN SCHOOLS

Deliberation is practiced not only in the public sphere but also in classrooms. Over the past decade, much research has unpacked various pedagogical impacts of deliberation in the classroom. For example, Luskin and his colleagues (2007) applied James Fishkin’s idea of Deliberative Polling® to high school settings. By comparing students’ knowledge about trade policy and foreign policy in the US before and after deliberation in the classroom, Luskin and his colleagues

investigated how classroom deliberation effects an increase in students' knowledge, willingness to participate in various public activities, trust in government, and tolerance of difference. Hess and McAvoy (2015) make a case for positive relationships between students' experience of classroom deliberation and an increase in interest in the 2008 US presidential election. Nishiyama (2018b) empirically showed that classroom deliberation can provide students with a first step to participate in democratic activities in public spaces by bridging their everyday experiences, school lives, and public activities.

Unfortunately, even though classroom deliberation receives attention from scholars and practitioners alike, little is known about the role of facilitators. Thus far, several studies have responded to questions about the authenticity of classroom deliberation (e.g. How can students engage in a reflective reason-exchange?; e.g. Molnar-Main, 2017) and the consequentiality of classroom deliberation (What sort of deliberative capacities do students learn from classroom deliberation? How does classroom deliberation enable students' out-of-school participation?; Luskin et al., 2007; Nishiyama, 2018b). However, key questions regarding inclusive facilitation in classroom deliberation are left hanging, such as "How can facilitation enable deliberative norms and behaviours in the context of a diversity of styles, experiences and abilities in the classroom?" "Can classroom deliberation be facilitated by teachers or are external facilitators necessary?", and "What skills and considerations would teachers and/or facilitators need to facilitate classroom deliberation in a more inclusive way?"

Our Deliberation in Schools project was driven by these questions. The pilot program aimed to introduce deliberation into actual classroom settings to consider challenges and opportunities for classroom deliberation. Working with students (Year 5 and Year 11) and teachers in two public schools in the Australian Capital Territory (Ainslie Primary School and Hawker College), we conducted 10 deliberative sessions in total. In each school we ran five 1.5-2 hour sessions over one term, focusing on topics selected from the Australian Curriculum and skills relating to the General Capabilities (ACARA, 2014). The core questions we deliberated on together were "How can we make the school better?" (Ainslie Primary School) and "Is Australia a peaceful nation?" (Hawker College). During the sessions, the authors served as facilitators.

## METHOD

During the program, the authors carried out an inductive interpretive study intended to reflectively examine our own lived experience and to understand challenges and required skills for effective deliberative facilitators in the classroom. The core idea of interpretive study is to approach specific knowledge and meanings of experiences embedded within a particular context through deep observations (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2012). Interpretive study allows a researcher themselves to act in a contextual, contingent, and uncertain research field and then to engage in a deep interaction with research participants. Interpretive study is particularly appropriate for the program as it allowed the authors to inductively identify and construct a framework to interpret their own lived experiences as facilitators in the classroom.

Grounded in interpretive methodology, the authors engaged in a learning-by-doing approach to classroom deliberation, a type of action research (Stringer, 2014). Unlike the hypothesis-testing that applies pre-existing theories, plans, and solutions to the study of a specific phenomenon or system, action research involves iterative cycles of planning, acting and reflecting, which integrate study of the phenomenon with intervention in it and further study of the results. In this project, our action research involved designing an initial plan, collaborating with teachers and students to implement it,

examining and reflecting on our experiences, finding ways to improve our practice, and repeating the cycle.

The research/action process was divided into three recursive phases. In the first phase (or what action researchers call “Plan”), we reviewed key literature on deliberative pedagogy, deliberation in the classroom, and democratic education to start designing our deliberative intervention. We drew on this review and on our own practical experience and expertise as a practitioner of deliberation in schools (Nishiyama), a deliberative practitioner and facilitator (Russell), and a teacher (Chalaye) in a series of regular research meetings to write a proposal and make an initial version of our deliberative curriculum. We then organised project meetings with key actors (teachers, school principal, research colleagues) to refine our design in response to curriculum and learning needs and to develop a collaborative relationship with the teachers prior to implementing our project in each school.

In the next phase (or what action researchers call “Action”), we conducted 5 deliberative sessions at each of two schools: Ainslie Primary School (Year 5 students, aged 10-11 years) and Hawker College (Year 11 students, aged 16 – 17 years), working with teachers. To augment our own reflections on our practice experience, we asked volunteers to act as observers (and timekeepers). Before and during the deliberative practice, we sometimes changed our curriculum design flexibly in response to students’ situations, advice from teachers and observers, and other issues that arose.

In the final phase (or what action researchers call “Reflection”), we organised a de-brief meeting immediately after each session in order to listen to feedback from observers and teachers; share stories from our observations and experiences, including things that had excited, surprised or concerned us; and discuss problems, barriers, and challenges found in our practice. Based on this project meeting, we redesigned our deliberative curriculum for the next session by adding new activities (or omitting activities) in response to both content and process issues (e.g. “let’s explore further that interesting idea that came up”, or “How can we unearth disagreement that the students seem to be avoiding?”). At the end of each pilot, we wrote a project report for further reflection and communication of our results.<sup>1</sup>

Once all planned practices were completed, the authors further reflected on our lived experience of the program. To add depth to our interpretation, our findings were shared and discussed with teachers, other researchers, our colleagues through a seminar, and a civil society group (Deliberate ACT – a community of interest) through a public presentation. Through this process we identified 5 key challenges of inclusive deliberative facilitation in the classroom (Power, Inequality, Diversity and Boundaries, Disagreement, and Integration), which will be discussed in the next section.

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<sup>1</sup> Ainslie School Report:

<https://www.governanceinstitute.edu.au/magma/media/upload/ckeditor/files/Ainslie%20Report%20Fin.pdf>

Hawker College Report:

<https://www.governanceinstitute.edu.au/magma/media/upload/ckeditor/files/Delib%20in%20Schools%20Hawker%20Report.pdf>



## FIVE CHALLENGES FOR INCLUSIVE FACILITATION IN CLASSROOM DELIBERATION

### Power

A key challenge for deliberation is power imbalance, which can be immense in a context of a divided or unequal group or society (Maia et al. 2017; Dryzek 2003). Most relevant in a school context is the existing power imbalance between teachers and students. Such power imbalance may vary across schools, cultures, time, and individual teachers. Teachers often - if not always - have some level of power over students. This power is, among others, administrative (e.g. teachers mark student work, meet with parents), authoritative (teachers have authority in relation to knowledge), and normative (teachers police norms of communication and behaviour in the classroom). However, students are not powerless, they too have some level of power over teachers, notably through their judgement of the quality of teaching methods or their class behaviour. All this is to say that power is not simply a vertical and unilateral mechanism from teachers to students. Instead, it is often a negotiation of authority between teachers and students.

We focus on these three aspects of teacher-related power: administrative, authoritative, and normative. We encountered the first form of power, administrative power, during all phases of the pilot. In most of our meetings with the teachers, the question of the curriculum and the school's requirements were mentioned. The administrative role of schools and teachers is largely evaluation centred: a mark must be generated from activities. While this mark is important in the school system, it tends to restrain the deliberative capacity of the group and individual students by limiting the students in their behaviour and expression while they focus on the mark and judgement from teachers. We have also noticed a second form of power: authoritative power, exemplified by teachers' focus on content. The permanent focus on content from teachers contrasted and sometimes conflicted with our focus on deliberative processes, as focussing on content tended to restrain options potentially explored through deliberative activities. The focus on content was reinforced by teachers' desire to draw knowledge from authoritative literature on the topic (e.g. about peace) and to connect this with the administrative requirements described above. This situation relates to another core challenge for deliberation: What is the role of expertise (or scientific literature) in deliberation? In a broad sense, expertise always plays a role in deliberation, but the classroom setting can be problematic as it tends to position students as learners (lacking expertise) rather than deliberators (citizen-experts). Finally, the third form of power we observed was normative. For instance, the teacher in the primary school distinguished "important" or "realistic" propositions to make the school better from "random" options. These norms sometimes reflect societal norms (typically "adult" versus "children") in the classroom and can limit creative options and discussions.

In a classroom setting, power can rarely be completely neutralised, but it can be mitigated so that authentic deliberation between equal participants can occur. Multiple strategies can be used to mitigate power issues. We have talked openly with the teachers about these issues and negotiated the conditions of deliberative activities from an early phase of the pilot (during the design). We have constantly aimed at articulating the teacher's requirements in terms of content with our (deliberative) procedural norms and ideals. At the same time, as facilitators, we sought to intervene in power imbalances, by remaining open to all ideas (however 'random') and encouraging diverse forms of expression (normative power), by seeking to draw on students' lived experience and perspectives (authoritative power), and by making classes flexible and responsive to students (administrative power).

## Inequality

As already discussed, inclusion is key for effective deliberation (Young, 2000; Dryzek, 2009; Schneiderhan & Khan, 2008) but it often represents a major challenge because of inequality, for example in relation to gender, race, social position, culture or mental health, or, particularly relevant in schools, in terms of knowledge or expression. During the pilot program, we experienced some challenges to genuine inclusion. These challenges were all expressions of some form of inequality related to gender, developmental disorder, mental health, social environment, disposition, emotional reaction, and discourse. Exclusion on the basis of gender was illustrated in a discussion we conducted on gender discrimination as a source of conflict in Australian society. Male students did not admit that gender discrimination was as significant as female students were claiming. Such distrust based on gender could lead to polarisation between males and females, which fragments the group and the quality and authenticity of the discussion. Exclusion can also be on the basis of psychological and social norms of communication. Some students exhibited developmental “disabilities”.<sup>2</sup> These students found it extremely difficult to speak in public or in front of someone that they did not trust. While such situations can be challenging for inclusive deliberation, they can also be an opportunity to explore different forms of expression such as written, acted, or artistic expressions. The third type of challenge, related to emotions, is about the emotional trouble experienced by many students while discussing specific issues. Some students mentioned that they regularly experience “anxiety”, “fear” or “discomfort” when they are asked to speak in public. Such emotional discomfort can undermine inclusion as only students who are self-confident participate. Exclusion can also relate to discourses, or the type of knowledge and arguments that the group considered relevant, salient or “rational”. For example, in relation to the gender discrimination discussion, some students argued that only “scientific” and numerical indicators (‘stats’) could reveal the truth about gender discrimination. In doing so, they dismissed opinions, arguments or emotions that were based on lived experiences of female students, who experience everyday forms of gender discrimination. This also demonstrates how the different challenges to inclusion can be interrelated and cumulative and create significant barriers to communication.

Inclusion is a major feature of deliberation. Indeed, deliberation relies on reciprocal (mutual trust) relationships between participants and between participants and facilitators. For facilitators, inclusion is about maintaining a productive tension between group cohesion and the expression of plural, and often, unequal, voices, neither of which should undermine the other. Instead, plural cohesion, or plural inclusion should be an ideal according to which inequalities are mitigated to encourage group cohesion and expression of singular voices. In that sense, facilitators do not play a neutral role, they permanently keep in mind structural inequalities between participants, think of strategies to mitigate these inequalities, and guarantee the group cohesion so that every participants feel included in the group.

## Diversity and Boundaries

Diversity is always valued in deliberative democracy (Young, 1997). It is seen as an indicator of inclusiveness, a requirement for political legitimacy, and a key resource for fruitful deliberation. In deliberation programs in schools, classrooms are likely to have somewhat less diversity than mini-publics (because participants are not drawn from a larger population to reflect its diversity, and because they are all young), but importantly, schools programs are likely to include students who would not normally self-select to participate in activities of this kind. Classroom deliberation programs potentially provide a window on the experiences of these ‘unmotivated’ students and, by extension, of non-

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<sup>2</sup> The notion of “disability” is quite problematic as a psychological “disability” is judged in relation to typical or “normal” psychology.

participating adults (Jacquet, 2017) and their contributions to deliberation. It may provide insights to assist in bringing such disengaged people to civic deliberation and may also influence these students' future motivation to participate. Embracing and working with this diversity (in motivation) is also a key challenge.

It seems likely that motivation to participate (in the school context) is related, at least in part, to students' perceptions of their ability to speak up and contribute. Although modern schooling increasingly seeks to uncover each student's individual strengths and talents, it is clear that students do get messages about how much their contributions – how they express themselves but also their ideas – are valued.

The challenge for deliberation is therefore to work with students who have diverse styles, ways of expressing themselves, and views, in ways that are inclusive of them. Respecting diversity does not mean “accepting everything.” Some forms of expressions (e.g. insult) make deliberation less inclusive and thereby less diverse, and thus the deliberative facilitator needs to set boundaries of what is acceptable (and unacceptable). The facilitator may need to respond to what might be considered “extreme” behaviours and views. In particular, the facilitator has a primary responsibility to create a safe environment, which means protecting all participants from harm, whether physical or emotional. At the same time, the facilitator needs to be aware that s/he is thus boundary-setting and potentially gatekeeping (What is acceptable? What is reasonable?), and that this has pedagogical, and also political, implications, and affects the inclusiveness of the deliberation.

In the Ainslie pilot, we worked with a group who responded to the question “How can we make the school better?” with a suggestion of “Fanta in the bubblers!”. This led to a rapid series of suggestions, including a pool, a foampit, KFC in the canteen. As facilitators, we initially considered how we could ‘moderate’ these responses and get the kids to be more “sensible”. But we noted that the group, who had struggled to attend to some other parts of the class, became very animated during this exercise. We began to listen to their suggestions and encouraged them to explore them as they wished. We suggested that they use art to express their ideas, and they created an Unlimited Tree-house, encompassing all their “crazy” ideas in a wonderfully creative drawing (Figure. 1).



**Figure 1.** *The Unlimited Tree-house – how to make the school better (Year 5 students)*

As well as a range of creative, “blue-sky” ideas for the school, we also saw evidence of the group catering for a range of students (as well as a games room and a giant slide, they included a library and a farm) and elaborating some of their ideas to take account of down sides (a free dentist to go with the Fanta bubblers!). We also learnt a lot from this exercise about the students’ experience of school. In quite a stark and poignant way, they were expressing their frustration at not having enough fun at school, in contrast to students who find classes and regular school activities fun. They were expressing their rebellion against sensible ideas, and probably their resistance to the exercise we had set for them. Their work gave them an outlet for these frustrations, while also stimulating their creativity, and inspiring the rest of the class.

The challenge for the deliberative facilitator, then, is to work with the different styles and perspectives of the students, and to explore ‘extreme’ views or stances as resources for deliberation. What can we learn from these views? What do they tell us about the students’ experiences and lives? Can we work with these creatively or playfully? Can we harness the energy that comes from extreme views, which are often associated with resistance and rebellion? Can deliberation create opportunities for students to push boundaries in exploratory ways without unhealthy conflict and reaction? How can ‘extreme’ views help to challenge and clarify other views and perspectives, perhaps by providing opposition and argument? Taking this approach of exploring and harnessing resistance, push-back and unconventional perspectives potentially makes deliberation more inclusive of marginal individuals and groups, recognising that they may bring not only difference, but also resistance and opposition, and that this may be a reflection of their lived experience. Finding non-verbal channels for expression and voice may assist in this inclusion.

### Disagreement

Disagreement is also one of the key resources for healthy public deliberation (Young, 1997; Hess & McAvoy, 2015). While some see deliberation as useful for avoiding disagreement (in the sense of conflict), ensuring that disagreement is surfaced can be a challenge for deliberative processes. Research shows that people often refuse to participate in deliberation simply because they do not like disagreements and do not want to be criticized by others (Mutz, 2006). This issue is not unique to adult deliberation. At Hawker college, we found that many students deliberated in a “peaceful” manner to avoid disagreement. By peaceful, we mean that they did not acknowledge cultural, social and/or ideological differences but agreed or accepted each other’s opinion without criticism in order to create a “harmonious” atmosphere in the classroom. At the end of one session, we asked students, “Why do you think there was little disagreement in today’s deliberation?” and one male student answered “We wouldn’t expect to disagree, because we have similar socio-economic backgrounds and we share a lot of things in common.”

On the face of it, deliberation without disagreement is one indicator of students’ mutual-respect and listening. However, this kind of listening may detract from the democratic quality of deliberation because when students intentionally avoid disagreement, they are less likely to listen deeply to what other students say. As Dobson (2014, p. 67) indicates, such listening is what he calls “cataphatic” listening in which listeners tend to “read everything in terms of prefigured categories” (or pre-existing views). From the facilitator’s point of view, cataphatic listening is highly problematic because students are not engaging with each other’s views, exchanging reasons or reflecting on their differences. They are essentially pretending to deliberate together, rather than engaging in authentic, inclusive, and consequential deliberation.

While facilitators need to ameliorate unproductive conflict, they need to find ways to encourage and explore disagreement for productive deliberation. In the classroom, this needs to be done with sensitivity to the different styles

and anxieties of students, some of whom may be strongly conflict-averse, while others may be “looking for a fight”. Framing disagreement as an opportunity for learning and using it to demonstrate the ambiguous and value-laden nature of complex topics (there is no ‘right’ answer) may allow students to engage with disagreement with curiosity rather than seeing it as a personal attack.

### **Integrating Plural Knowledges**

Deliberation can involve inquiry and communication on complex topics that involve very different perspectives, power imbalances and which connect the personal with the political. Examples include gender discrimination and indigenous sovereignty. The challenge for deliberation on such topics is the integration of different forms of knowledge, including “factual” knowledge from external sources with individuals’ lived experiences, cultural understandings and worldviews. Once again, this was exemplified in the discussion of gender discrimination during the Hawker pilot, particularly when the female students’ lived experiences were contrasted with the quantitative evidence the male students were focusing on.

This case also gave indications of how deliberation can overcome this challenge. Although male students challenged the significance of the issue by speaking of statistics and evidence, they became more open to listening to the female students’ experiences as the activity unfolded. The structured process allowed girls to speak passionately about their personal experiences, but allowed boys to also voice their views on the topic. It was significant that they were not silenced by their lack of personal experience of discrimination and were able to express scepticism and consider the issue at a broader political level. At the same time, the deliberative atmosphere required that each listen respectfully. This seemed to create a space where male students were able to engage, listen and learn from females’ experiences, while both could think about the issue systemically. While the female students might initially have been irritated by the males’ reactions, most of the group seemed to appreciate getting to discuss this important issue together.

Ideally, in a deliberative process, personal accounts can be heard alongside more general commentaries and evidence, in ways that give each space and respect, and encourage mutual learning and exploration. This also allows young people to consider dimensions of structure and agency in relation to such issues, and thus to explore their own personal connection and response to it, while recognising dimensions outside of themselves. The challenge for this kind of work is to create a space where individuals can bring their lived experience as a resource and source of information, but in which all students can engage with the issue at a broader level. This requires considerable delicacy and responsiveness, as well as group commitment to deliberative norms. Individuals do not have to ‘be right’ about the issue, or win arguments, they can engage together in mutual learning, and emerge with a plurality of different, but hopefully better informed, views.

### **Inclusive Deliberative Facilitation as Technique and Design**

As we have seen, while facilitators are expected to provide the discursive framework/scaffold within which citizens can engage in inclusive and productive dialogue and deliberation (Dillard, 2013), there are many challenges for facilitators to address such expectations. Thus, we need to rethink two questions – what is the role of facilitators in classroom deliberation and what is inclusive facilitation? To consider these questions, a reflection from our action research provides here two key aspects of facilitation that help to make deliberation productive and consistent with deliberative norms: technique and design. Both are important for deliberative facilitation, and they are usually used in concert to provide a discursive framework for deliberative work.

*Technique* refers to the communicative capacities, skills and actions a facilitator brings to group communication. First and foremost, for deliberation, these include modelling deliberative norms, such as respectful listening, reflection, suspension of judgment and mutual learning. Technique also involves encouraging and supporting participants, in verbal and non-verbal ways, to engage with deliberative norms and processes. For example, a facilitator can encourage participants to justify their views, by asking ‘How do you know?’ or ‘What are your reasons?’. Facilitators can encourage listening and reflection, sometimes intervening in conversations when participants fail to listen or suggesting a period of silence for reflection.

Facilitation technique also involves observing and assessing dynamics in the group and between individuals, mediating in conflicts, encouraging balance, connecting different participants’ contributions, and pointing out areas of common ground or disagreement. Sometimes, this work requires facilitators to stand back and allow participants to deal with group dynamics, thus building trust and deliberative capacity. Judging when to intervene and when to “don’t just say something, stand there!” (Weisbord & Janoff, 2007), is a key technique for the deliberative facilitator.

Yet, technique *alone* is not enough to deal with the challenges and difficulties we described in the previous section. For example, even though teachers bring various techniques into classroom deliberation, this does not always mean that teachers’ power is minimized. Also, we focused on disagreements because our facilitation technique did not work well due to students’ strong disagreement-averse attitude. Hence, what we suggest is that “deliberative facilitation as technique” ought to be complemented and intertwined with the creation of structure for deliberation – or what we call “deliberative facilitation as design.”

*Design* refers to the development of structured activities, tools and processes which are used to facilitate deliberative communication. Facilitative designs can be used to structure conversations in the absence of a facilitator, but are normally employed by a facilitator, alongside technique, to provide further discursive scaffolding and structure the task at hand. For example, deliberative forums often involve small group work, which allows in depth conversation and opportunities for all participants to contribute. This work may be structured around a well-designed set of questions, include ways to structure or mix groups, and have a set timing. The set of questions, instructions for mixing, and the timing are all aspects of the design of this exercise and allow a productive conversation that may not be actively facilitated (the facilitator may “float” around the forum, intervening upon request or need).

One of the most basic designs for deliberative forums is a set of guidelines or ground rules. They structure deliberation by setting expectations and standards of behaviour. They provide a tool for the facilitator to encourage people (using technique) to adopt the guidelines. One way to establish deliberative norms in our practice is to ask participants themselves to determine, through deliberative activities, what constitutes a good deliberation. In the two schools where we conducted the pilot program, we applied this method. Considering the young age of the students and the complexity of academic jargon, we decided not to use “deliberative norms”. Instead, we used “communication guidelines”. Through discussions, the students determined their deliberative norms. For instance, in Hawker College, the guideline was: honesty, empathy, respect, body language, openness, inclusiveness, listening. They established norms that are close to the ones found in deliberative democratic theory. An interesting addition was body language (which came up at both schools), which is often overlooked in deliberative theory. We kept the guidelines flexible during the project. Students could add or modify the norms and we invited the students to reflect on these norms during and after the project.

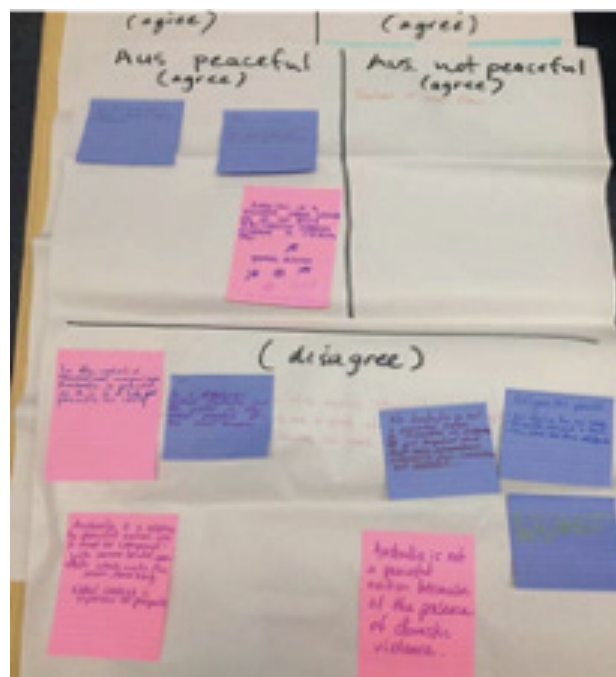
Establishing guidelines with the students was a key step for building trusting relationships among the students and between the students, teachers and the facilitators. In addition, this student-centric activity created a structure for minimising teachers' power. More importantly, the guidelines were also a reference during each project and allowed us to collectively reflect on these norms when necessary. For instance, in Hawker college, some students misinterpreted the idea of respect and openness, leading many of them to simply agree with everyone on everything. Such "impossibility of disagreement" made us and the students reflect on the guidelines and discuss the value of disagreement in the context of openness and respect. We designed activities to practice respectful and open disagreement to make sure disagreement could occur during deliberative activities.

To deal with the problem with inclusiveness, we also designed multiple icebreakers at the beginning of deliberation. As Young (2000, pp. 57-62) points out, deliberation starts before people engage in reason-exchange – it starts at the moment when participants recognise each other through greetings. Without greetings, or what Young calls public acknowledgements, deliberation may become highly contested and disrespectful and less powerful people may struggle to gain recognition during deliberation. In other words, designing icebreakers is important for creating foundations for inclusive deliberation.

Storytelling is one example of the icebreakers we designed. This is an age-old dialogue method that allows people to learn about each other and connect, finding commonalities and distinctions and share their humanity. One general approach is to ask students to share a story of their lived experiences (e.g. family) with the group or in pairs. This shares insights into family history, culture, personal values, and everyday lives. Introduction of some sort of "movement games" can also serve as deliberative designs. Some students, particularly those aged around 6-10, have finite attention spans and disengage if they sit for too long. Some students need to move to stay focused. Without structured movement activities, we may find that restless children begin to move anyway. One type of movement activity (sometimes called sociometry) involves students responding to a question by arranging themselves on a spectrum or grid in the classroom. As an ice-breaker, this can be as simple as students arranging themselves by birthdate (also a way of forming groups). Movement games can also be used as part of deliberation. For example, we used a spectrum to explore "How democratic is our school?" (followed by "How democratic would we like it to be?"). This is a way for all students to express their views at the same time and can be used to spark further conversation. As with adults, movement can create meaning and help with learning and collaboration.

We also designed a specific practice intended to cope with students' disagreement-averse attitude. The aim of the practice was to enable students to visually identify areas of disagreement. The practice consists of four steps. The first step is "Topic Selection." We selected a controversial question or claim that could generate student disagreement (e.g. Is Australia a peaceful society?). The second step is "Reflection." Students think about the selected question or claim and, working individually or in small groups, write down their opinions and reasons on post-it notes (e.g. I agree that Australia is a peaceful society because...). The third step is "Collective Disagreement Exercise." The facilitator prepares a worksheet (e.g. on butchers' paper) that has three sections (see Figure 2) – Agreement A (positive), Agreement B (negative), and Disagreement. Then, students share and consider each other's opinions and underlying reasons. For each post-it, if *everyone* agrees with a positive opinion (e.g. Australia is a peace society because...), the note is placed on the Agreement A. If *everyone* agrees with a negative opinion (e.g. Australia is not a peace society because...), the note is placed on the Agreement B. If there is disagreement about the opinion, the note is placed on the Disagreement section. The final step is "Deliberation." From the worksheet and with help from the facilitator, students select a

particular area of disagreement (where disagreement is strong, clear, but not too divisive). They then form two groups with opposing perspectives but including some “neutral” students in each group who have not made up their minds. These neutral students listen to the arguments of the opposing students. Then the groups come together, led by the neutral students, and consider (1) the degree to which they can accept each other’s opinion, and (2) whether there is common ground. They are then encouraged to express a group position, which may be a consensus or compromise, or may be an explanation of the disagreement.



**Figure 2.** Design for Visualising Disagreement (at Hawker College)

This design work can contribute to creating a deliberation structure where students with disagreement-averse attitude can visually share the degree to which they disagree with each other, notice their differences and draw otherwise unarticulated opinions from their recognition of differences and disagreements.

Deliberative facilitation as design can compensate for some weaknesses of deliberation as technique and vice versa. It should be emphasized again that this does not mean deliberative facilitation as technique and deliberative facilitation as design are dichotomous. Even if we provide a well-designed structure for deliberation, it may not work well without sensitive and sophisticated techniques for face-to-face facilitation. Likewise, even if there is a skilled facilitator, their technique alone may confront structural problems in classroom deliberation. Technique and design can work in close concert, and design work can be impromptu and responsive. For example, in facilitating a discussion in which disagreement is turning into unproductive argument, a facilitator can intervene by saying ‘Let’s list the things we agree about, and those we don’t’, or ‘Let’s rank these ideas according to which we think would work the best’. Ideally, design and technique should be complementary in that weaknesses of each can be augmented by the other to enable authentic, inclusive and consequential deliberation.



## CONCLUSION

Facilitation is a key and often neglected aspect of quality deliberation (Moore, 2012). It does not compensate for, but supports and enables, citizens' deliberative competencies. This is as much the case for classroom deliberation as for deliberative forums. In particular, deliberative facilitation may be critical to increasing the internal inclusiveness of deliberative processes, by intervening in the social dynamics that enact and reinforce exclusion and marginalization. We have identified some of the challenges associated with the inclusive role for deliberative facilitation in the classroom. They include power, inequality, diversity and boundaries, disagreement, and integration. Although our discussion of these challenges comes from our work in the classroom, they are clearly also challenges for deliberation more generally. In schools, these challenges to inclusion have unique dimensions:

- **Power** - the classroom can be an exclusive space where teachers (and other adults) have explicit power over students which takes different forms (administrative, authoritative and normative);
- **Inequality** - classrooms are often conditioned by gender and cultural inequality and may create and reinforce inequality and exclusion (e.g. in relation to intellectual and class differences), which may be exacerbated by mental health problems
- **Diversity and boundaries** - classrooms are home to diverse perspectives, styles and behaviours, including "extreme" ones, but also play a role in policing what is normal and acceptable;
- **Disagreement** - young people are sensitive to conflict and criticism and may seek to conform, making disagreement, an essential ingredient of deliberation, difficult to unearth;
- **Integration** - students' lived experiences are sometimes disregarded in political discussions, especially marginalized students. The relationship between lived experience and expert knowledge may be different for young people than adults, for example, they may be more conscious of lived experience but may give more authority to expert knowledge.

For more inclusive deliberative facilitation, there are a number of strategies and considerations we have identified to overcome these challenges.

- **Power** – deliberative facilitators can make power imbalances visible to students and teachers; they can challenge these imbalances through facilitative interventions
- **Inequality** – deliberative facilitators can work to maintain a productive tension between group cohesion and the expression of plural voices
- **Diversity and boundaries** – deliberative facilitators can encourage and explore "extreme" views, unearthing resistance as well as difference, including by encouraging non-verbal means of expression
- **Disagreement** – deliberative facilitators can encourage exploration of disagreement as a learning opportunity and resource for deliberation
- **Integration** – deliberative facilitators need to create a space in which lived experience can be heard and valued alongside external information and "facts", with different types of knowledge and information explored to enrich understanding.

Drawing on our Deliberation in Schools pilot program, we conclude that facilitation needs to be anchored by two intertwined elements – technique and design – with each element having complementary functions in dealing with the challenges above.

As Bächtiger and Parkinson (2019, Ch. 3) point out, there is a controversy over whether citizens have deliberative competencies, but the presence of skilled facilitators can help citizens deliberate effectively, even if they do not have “perfect” deliberative competencies. Moreover, the experience of effective deliberation, especially when well facilitated, can serve to build deliberative norms and practices among citizens (Strandberg & Gronlund, 2012). Thus, the idea of deliberative facilitation, and an understanding of its nature and quality, is relevant not only to understanding what is going on in citizen deliberation forums, but also to considering how deliberative competencies and capacities can be built in society. Our focus on schools gets to this issue of capacity building for deliberative democracy. We are interested in the roles of deliberation in schools in empowering students’ political agency and therefore citizenship (by promoting genuine inclusiveness and giving students a sense that their voices matter) and in building deliberative norms and practices (reflection, mutual respect, listening, justification, shared learning) in young people. If these norms and competencies are sustained as students develop into adults, they provide resources to improve deliberative quality not only in structured deliberative forums, but in deliberative systems more generally (Dryzek, 2010; Mansbridge, et al., 2012). Note that we do not regard school students merely as ‘future citizens’. As they have demonstrated in recent years, young people are politically-engaged actors in their own right; they are a key part of democracy.

For studies of deliberation, students also represent diverse, marginalised and politically excluded communities. Moreover, inequality and marginalization within schools often lead to processes of exclusion that persist into adulthood (Lahire 2009; 2019). Thus, our study of the role of facilitation in building inclusiveness in deliberative processes is not only important for considering schools as an important site for deliberative democracy capacity building (and research). It is also important for developing a deeper understanding of processes of exclusion that affect the quality of deliberative processes generally and how this exclusion can be mitigated at forum and system levels. Thus, we argue that deliberative facilitation is a key element of successful deliberation in schools and in society, and important in maximizing their contributions to democracy.

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