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Inclusion and Deliberative Dialogues: Exploring Outcomes of Transformative Experiences for Adolescents

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Honors Thesis

INCLUSION AND DELIBERATIVE DIALOGUES: EXPLORING OUTCOMES OF

TRANSFORMATIVE EXPERIENCES FOR ADOLESCENTS

by

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ABSTRACT

INCLUSION AND DELIBERATIVE DIALOGUES: EXPLORING OUTCOMES OF
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The purpose of this study was to explore outcomes of participating in a deliberative dialogue for adolescents. Participants attended a deliberative dialogue facilitated by the primary researcher. After the dialogue, participants completed journal prompts that asked about their experience participating in the dialogue. Results indicated that participation in the dialogues impacted adolescents' confidence and open-mindedness. Findings also indicated components of atmosphere that contributed to willingness to engage, and strategies participants can use in future conversations. Deliberative dialogues are an avenue for transformative experiences and the data from this study can help experience designers understand these types of experiences for adolescents. Findings have important implications for people who work with adolescents and those hoping to use deliberative dialogues to facilitate beneficial outcomes for various groups.

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Introduction

Project Purpose

Our community, as well as the world, is facing constant turbulence, yet we are taught from young ages to avoid controversial topics. By creating an issue guide and then facilitating a conversation about diversity and inclusion with a group of adolescents, the researcher identified positive outcomes that stem from having difficult conversations. This study used deliberative dialogues about inclusion as an avenue of exploring transformative experiences, one of the core areas within experience design.

Project Overview

Beets et al. explained that "in the current social and political climate, it is important to reflect upon what constitutes appropriate ways to engage in scholarly dialogues and consider the ramifications of failing to create an environment where individuals are willing to share ideas openly" (2020, p.1). Creating such an environment can be a useful way to help people engage in difficult conversations about important issues. The National Issues Forums Institute (NIFI) created a format to facilitate these important conversations: deliberative dialogues.

The National Coalition for Dialogue and Deliberation described dialogues as a process that "allows people, usually in small groups, to share their perspectives and experiences with one another about difficult issues we tend to just debate or avoid entirely. ...Dialogue is not about winning an argument or coming to an agreement, but about understanding and learning. Dialogue dispels stereotypes, builds trust, and enables people to be open to perspectives that are

very different from their own. Dialogue can, and often does, lead to both personal and collaborative action" (2011). Deliberative dialogues are an opportunity to help people engage in conversations that help them challenge and consider their own viewpoints as they talk with others about their perspectives and experiences and can consequently be transformative experiences.

Deliberative dialogues may be a process through which transformative experience occur and, as such, are of interest to experience designers and those seeking to facilitate transformative experiences for people in a variety of settings. Often transformative experiences may lead to radically new values, beliefs, and most important, new behaviors (Rossman et al., 2019). Those new behaviors are what the researcher hypothesized the deliberative dialogue would facilitate for the participants. One group that may be particularly impacted by these conversations are adolescents, considering one of the primary developmental tasks at this life stage is identity formation and development.

The past few years have given rise to increased conflict, which has been evident in the increase in various forms of bigotry and discrimination (Albright & Hurd, 2019). There has been an increase in polarization around political issues in recent years (Boxell, Gentzkow, & Shapiro, 2021), which has filtered down into communities, families, and social networks such that people are experiencing a breakdown in communication and inability to get along with family members, friends, colleagues, and neighbors. Researchers from a variety of fields have identified a "corrosive lack of civility" (Bowman, 2020) and "empathy deficit (Hall & Leary, 2020).

Adolescence is a critical period of life for civic development, as well as a time of quickly expanding capacities, development of autonomy, and identity exploration (Middaugh et al., 2017). Since little research has been done regarding the outcomes of deliberative dialogues, the researcher wanted to explore the experience of adolescents participating in a deliberative dialogue. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to explore outcomes related to open-mindedness and confidence of participating in a deliberative dialogue for adolescents.

Methods

Sample

This study was conducted with 18 participants, ranging in age from 14 years old to 18 years old. There were 14 female-identifying participants and four male-identifying participants. Each of the participants live in Utah County, Utah and attend public junior high or high schools. Six of the participants are in 9th grade, four of the participants are in 11th grade, and eight of the participants are in 12th grade.

Participant Recruitment

To recruit participants the researcher used convenience and snowball sampling. The researcher had two adolescent contacts at the beginning of the study. The researcher gave the contacts the study information and the contacts shared the study information with other adolescents that they knew. The contacts gathered email addresses and passed them along to the researcher. The researcher then emailed each of the interested potential participants to further explain the study, pass out the permission forms, and set a date and time for the deliberative dialogue.

Convenience sampling is a sufficient way to recruit for a hard-to-reach sample and involves "selecting a sample based on time, money, location, availability of respondents, and so on" (Merriam, 2009, p.79). Snowball, chain, or network sampling is a common form of purposeful sampling. This strategy involves "locating a few key participants who easily meet the criteria you have established for participation in the study" (Merriam, 2009, p.79). "By asking a number of people who else to talk with, the snowball gets bigger and bigger and

you accumulate new information-rich cases" (Patton, 2002, p.237). Using a combination of these two types of purposeful sampling helped the researcher identify 18 adolescents willing to participate that live within 20 miles of the research taking place.

The participants were incentivized to participate by being offered a $15 Amazon gift card at the end of the study. The researcher explained to the participants that they would be emailed an electronic gift card once the participant submitted their anonymous journal entry and told the researcher it was submitted. The researcher discussed the incentive with each of the two key participants and concluded that it was sufficient for the time and effort involved in participating in the research project.

Data Collection Procedures

Dialogue Preparation

As part of the project the primary researcher developed and designed a six-page issue guide (see Appendix i) about increasing inclusion in schools. This issue guide was modeled after the issue guides published by the National Issues Forums Institute (NIFI). The researcher used lessons and resources from Brigham Young University's class *Experiences in Diversity & Inclusion* to help create this guide. Additionally, the researcher had the guide reviewed by various published faculty at Brigham Young University, other university students who took the *Experiences in Diversity & Inclusion* class, and multiple adolescents (who were the intended target-audience for the guide). The researcher revised the guide according to the advice received from these three groups of people and then had the guides printed to reflect the format of NIFI's guides.

The researcher decided on five questions to ask the participants as part of their reflection process after their participation in the dialogue. The researcher sought the advice of published qualitative researchers at Brigham Young University to ensure the questions being asked would allow the participants to share reactions about their experiences during the dialogue with the researcher. The researcher planned for these participant journal responses to be the text used in the text analysis portion of the research project. The five questions the participants were asked are included in Table 1.

Table 1

Participant Journal Entry Questions

Question 1: Describe your experience participating in the deliberative dialogue. What did you enjoy about it? What was hard/uncomfortable? How did you feel during it?
Question 2: With friends or in classes, how comfortable do you usually feel sharing your opinions? Or do you usually keep your opinions to yourself? What impacts your willingness to share?
Question 3: Did this conversation make you more willing to share your opinions with others? Why or why not?
Question 4: Describe a time that, during the discussion, a participant said something that helped you think about the issue from a different perspective.
Question 5: In the future how can you use strategies from the deliberative dialogue to consider different perspectives?

The researcher created an anonymous Qualtrics survey that could be sent out to each of the participants via email. Each question allowed for a forced unlimited text response. This means the participants had to write something for each of the questions but could write as much or as little as they wanted.

Dialogue Participant Experience

When the participants arrived at the location of the dialogue, they were instructed to turn in their permission forms to the researcher, write their names on a nametag, and take a seat at the table. At each of the three dialogues the researcher had snacks available to aid in creating a comfortable atmosphere and told each of the participants they were welcome to eat what they wanted. Additionally, each of the dialogues were held while the participants and the researcher sat in a circle around a central table to facilitate equality amongst the participants. On the table in front of each chair was an issue guide, a pen, and a water bottle.

Two of the three dialogues were held on Brigham Young University campus, where the researcher attends school, and a convenient location near where each of the participants reside. The third dialogue was held in a central location near the homes of the participants.

Once all the participants arrived and chose a seat the researcher introduced herself and invited each of the participants to introduce themselves. Next, the facilitator introduced the process and format of deliberative dialogues and thanked the participants for their willingness to engage in the dialogue. The researcher went through the "ground rules" established by NIFI for creating a positive and productive deliberative dialogue. These ground rules include:

1. Focus on options presented in the dialogue

2. All options are considered fairly

3. Everyone participates and no one dominates the conversation

4. Create an open and respectful atmosphere

Once the dialogue was explained and the ground rules were discussed, the researcher used the issue guide to introduce the topic of the dialogue the participants would be discussing (inclusion in schools). Then, the dialogue began. The dialogue starts with each participant sharing their personal stake (how this topic has affected their lives and their initial reaction to engaging in the discussion that day). Next, equal time is given for the participants to consider the potential benefits and drawbacks of each option within the issue guide. If the participants did not speak up about their thoughts, the researcher probed the discussion by asking questions to specific participants. Finally, the dialogue ended with the researcher facilitating a discussion about common ground for action. This is when the participants reflected on their discourse and decided where they all agreed that action needs to be taken. The researcher documented what the participants decided was an area that each of the participants could see and comment on. The dialogues each lasted between 45 minutes to 1 hour before the participants were excused.

After each of the dialogues, the researcher emailed a link to the participants with the Qualtrics survey. The researcher reminded the participants that the responses were anonymous and therefore they could feel comfortable being completely honest as they reflected on their experiences. The responses needed to be submitted within three days (72 hours) of participating in the

dialogue. Participants were told to contact the researcher following the submission of their individual responses to secure their $15 Amazon gift card. This process was efficient while still allowing the participants anonymity and reward for participation.

Data Analysis

Participants attended one of three deliberative dialogues that were facilitated by the primary researcher. After the dialogue the participants completed journal prompts that asked them about their experience participating in the dialogue.

The researcher read the text (submitted journal responses from the participants) and isolated instances where participants discussed benefits or limitations of the deliberative dialogue activity. Incidences were analyzed within case and across-case. The qualitative data was analyzed using the steps of qualitative data analysis as described by Merriam (2009). Participant journals were analyzed using inductive analysis and constant comparison (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000).

The following analysis steps were conducted. First, general categories were constructed through open coding. Next, the open codes were grouped together through axial (Corbin & Strauss, 2007) and analytical coding (Merriam, 2009). Analytical coding goes beyond descriptive coding and comes from "interpretation and reflection on meaning" (Richards, 2005, p.94). After the codes were grouped together in clusters, the clusters were named, and themes were developed.

Data Trustworthiness, Credibility, and Internal Validity

"Internal validity deals with the question of how research findings match reality" (Merriam, 2009, p.213). The researcher used the various methods detailed below to ensure that the findings are credible given the data presented (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

First, the researcher used the strategy of adequate engagement in data collection. This means the researcher is trying to get as close as possible to participants' "understanding of the phenomenon" (Merriam, 2009). To achieve adequate engagement in data collection, the researcher held multiple dialogues and engaged with the participants for an extended period of time. Additionally, the researcher found the number of participants adequate when data saturation was reached – seeing or hearing the same things repeatedly when collecting the data (Merriam, 2009).

Audit Trail

The researcher used the audit trail method suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1985). This involves keeping a record of every portion of the research project, including recruitment emails, notes during the dialogues, correspondence with participants, and logs kept while coding the data. While "we cannot expect others to replicate our account, the best we can do is explain how we arrived at our results" (Dey, 1993, p.251). Richards (2005) explains that "good qualitative research gets much of its claim to validity from the researcher's ability to show convincingly how they got there, and how they built confidence that this was the best account possible" (p.143).

Rich, Thick Description

To enhance transferability, the researcher used rich, thick description to describe the context and sample. This is a "phrase coined by the philosopher Gilbert Tyle (1949) and applied to ethnographic research by Geertz (1973)" (Maxwell, 2005, p.116). Rich, thick description refers to "a description of the setting and participants of the study, as well as a detailed description of the findings with adequate evidence presented in the form of quotes from participant interviews, field notes, and documents" (Merriam, 2009, p.227). When applied, rich, thick description is used so other researchers are able to assess similarity between study, procedures, and other contexts.

Researcher Reflexivity

To further ensure data validity, the researcher participated in researcher reflexivity, which involves "critical self-reflection by the researcher regarding assumptions, worldview, biases, theoretical orientation, and relationship to the study that may affect the investigation" (Merriam, 2009, p.229). Through this process, the researcher discovered ways in which validity could have been harmed but wasn't due to anonymity of participant responses.

Participant Memo/Journaling

Using journal prompts is an appropriate method to assess the participants' experience participating in the dialogues due to the time for reflection that occurred through the writing process. Participant memoing/journaling has been found to be an effective way for participants to reflect on experiences in a variety of settings (Merriam, 2009).

Member Checks

Finally, the researcher ensured the themes were representative of the experiences of the participants by using member checks. Also called respondent validation, this process involves the researcher requesting feedback from participants on emerging findings (Merriam, 2009). Maxwell (2005) explained that "this is the single most important way of ruling out the possibility of misinterpreting the meaning of what participants say and do and the perspective they have on what is going on, as well as being an important way of identifying your own biases and misunderstandings of what you observed" (p.111). Engaging in member checks calls for the researcher to take their "preliminary analysis back to some of the participants and ask whether their interpretation 'rings true.' Although [the researcher] may have used different words, participants should be able to recognize their experience in the in the interpretation or suggest some fine-tuning to better capture their perspectives" (Merriam, 2009, p.217).

Once the researcher identified four main themes and the attached sub-themes from the data, the researcher asked three of the participants if they felt the themes captured the conversations and experiences for them and their peers. Each of the participants responded with a resounding 'yes.' One of the participants explained, "I agree with all of this. I really think that the dialogue increased our open mindedness. I think we all left with a new perspective and think about [the topic] differently." The participants felt the topics and themes accurately reflected their experience participating in the dialogue and the outcomes they gained through the experience.

Results

Through data analysis, four themes emerged from the data:

1. Participation in the dialogue increased participants' open-mindedness

2. Participation in the dialogue increased participants' perception of confidence

3. Atmosphere influences participants' willingness to engage in the dialogue

4. Participants acquired skills and motivation to use in future conversations

Each of the four themes had the following sub-themes:

1. Participation in the dialogue increased participants' open-mindedness

    a. Dialogue provided an opportunity to consider new perspectives and hear differing viewpoints

    b. Participants developed new insights from listening to the perspectives of others

    c. Through the dialogue, participants gained respect for new perspectives

2. Participation in the dialogue increased participants' perception of confidence

    a. Participation in the dialogue increased participants' willingness to share opinions with others

3. Atmosphere influences participants' willingness to engage in the dialogue

    a. A comfortable atmosphere was crucial to help the adolescents participate

    i. Factors that contributed to comfortable atmosphere include honest, safe-space, calm, inclusive, comfortable, relaxed, positive atmosphere, and respectful

  b. Participants' willingness to share is context and content dependent

    i. Factors that facilitate engagement include time to think, not forcing opinions, having calm disagreements, and feeling heard. Participants are more likely to share when they are confident in their opinions

    ii. Factors that detract from engagement include fear of peer judgement due to unpopular opinions and feeling insecure about their opinions

  c. The dialogue format helped create a comfortable atmosphere

4. Participants acquired skills and motivation to use in future conversations

  a. Participants identified strategies from the format of the dialogue they can use in their everyday lives

  b. Participants gained motivation to consider new perspectives and increase open-mindedness

  The overall theme that emerged from the data is the following: Adolescents' participation in the deliberative dialogue helped them to consider and gain respect for new perspectives, develop new insights, and identify strategies from the dialogue they can apply in their lives. The dialogue created an atmosphere that encouraged participants to share their opinions and listen to others.

Quotes from the participants' journals illustrate the themes and sub-themes presented above and will be listed in Table 2.

Table 2

Participant Responses Associated with Theme #1

Theme #1: Participation in the dialogue increased participants' open-mindedness
Sub-theme A: Dialogue provided an opportunity to consider new perspectives and hear differing viewpoints
- I felt like we were able to have a good conversation about topics that needed to be talked about, but also that I hadn't really thought of before   - The dialogue made me more aware of different opinions
Sub-theme B: Participants developed new insights from listening to the perspectives of others
- This conversation helped me realize that everyone is unique   - I hadn't ever thought about that before, but right as he said it, it made so much sense   - It made me realize that everyone learns and experiences things differently
Sub-theme C: Through the dialogue, participants gained respect for new perspectives

- A participant brought up a very valid issue, just one that I forget is an issue. It helped me to remember to be open minded and look at all sides of an idea
- It really helped me see how that struggle has been for him and how much I didn't understand about him before
- This discussion helped with understanding other people and their opinions

Table 3

Participant Responses Associated with Theme #2

Theme #2: Participation in the dialogue increased participants' perception of confidence
Sub-theme A: Participation in the dialogue increased participants' willingness to share opinions with others
- Sometimes it's hard for me to share my opinion because I'm afraid of being judged, but with the dialogue yesterday it was easy to share   - It made me more willing to share my opinions with friends and other people   - It made me more willing to share my opinions because I felt very accepted with everything that I was saying. It helped me realize the more I share, the more we can continue to change things

Table 4

Participant Responses Associated with Theme #3

Theme #3: Atmosphere influences participants' willingness to engage in the dialogue

Sub-theme A: A comfortable atmosphere was crucial to help the adolescents participate

- I really enjoyed how inclusive the conversation was. I felt really comfortable sharing my thoughts
- I was comfortable because I felt respected
- It was nice to have a safe, stress-free space to talk about subjects that can be uncomfortable but don't have to be
- It was an environment where all of us felt comfortable to talk without being judged

Sub-theme B: Participants' willingness to share is context and content dependent

- The environment I am in effects my willingness to share
- I feel generally safe sharing my opinions in a group of friends. However, in the classroom I rarely if ever share my opinions in fear of judgement of my classmates
- I tend to share a lot in class, but with friends it can be harder to share my opinions

- If there's time for me to think about what I want to say then I can come up with something and feel more comfortable sharing
- If I have an opinion I'd like to share I usually keep quieter if it's an opinion that most people wouldn't agree with, mainly because I'm afraid to be judged

Sub-theme C: The dialogue format helped create a comfortable atmosphere

- I enjoyed that we all had time to share our opinions if we would like to
- Having a set time for each thing we talked about helped the conversation stay productive and keep moving
- I liked how at the end we talked about what we all agreed on throughout the discussion

Table 5

Participant Responses Associated with Theme #4

Theme #4: Participants acquired skills and motivation to use in future conversations

Sub-theme A: Participants identified strategies from the format of the dialogue they can use in their everyday lives

- Thinking before speaking is really the most important thing and most of the time there are issues because people push that aside
- In order for changes to be made, we have to share our opinions
- I can practice listening more carefully to others and being more empathetic
- I can be less concerned about what people think about my opinions and make sure I am doing a good job listening to what others are saying

Sub-theme B: Participants gained motivation to consider new perspectives and increase open-mindedness

- If I have conversations with people in the future and they have a different opinion then I can be respectful and then it can turn into a discussion instead of a debate
- It made me realize that opinions can be shared in an educational way rather than just fighting over what we believe to be right

- To take a moment and see things from the other person's perspective. More often than not we all have the tendency to not have the patience to see the other side, but it's important to try and see their perspective
- I could end every sentence with, 'I could be wrong though' during a discussion

Discussion

Discussion of Findings

The participants showed an increase in open-mindedness after their participation in the deliberative dialogues. The Cambridge English Dictionary defines open-mindedness as, "the quality of being willing to consider ideas and opinions that are new or different from your own" (2022). Through the journal responses, the researcher found the participants more willing to listen to others' opinions and experiences, and even consider their own opinions to be wrong. Because adolescence is a critical period of life for civic development, as well as a time of quickly expanding capacities, development of autonomy, and identity exploration, this increase in open-mindedness could lead to life-long changes (Middaugh et al., 2017).

The researcher found, through the participant journals, that many adolescents lack willingness to share thoughts, ideas, and opinions due to fear of peer judgement. This is not the only example of this type of fear to stop adolescent behavior. Flink et al. (2013) found that fear of negative judgements/gossiping was a barrier to receiving help among Turkish and Moroccan adolescents. Adolescents care what others think of them, and that concern changes their actions.

Participation in the deliberative dialogue seemed to be a catalyst in adolescents being willing to speak up and share their opinions. Of the 18 participants, 15 replied in the affirmative to the question, "did this conversation make you more willing to share your opinions with others?" For the three participants that did not respond in the affirmative, they each shared that they

were comfortable sharing their opinions before the dialogue began. Each of the participants further explained that participating in the dialogue made them more willing to share their opinions with others because it gave them practice speaking up in a non-confrontational and non-judgmental environment.

The researcher found that the dialogue's atmosphere increased the participants' willingness to engage. This atmosphere included factors the participants described as open, honest, calm, inclusive, and having a safe, positive, and respectful environment. The dialogue itself helped to create these feelings by establishing ground rules at the beginning, sitting in a circle, letting everyone participate in the conversation, having a facilitator lead and open up the floor to discussion, and setting time limits that helped the conversation move forward and not stall. NIFI explained that this type of dialogue "dispels stereotypes, builds trust, and enables people to be open to perspectives that are very different from their own" (2011). The researcher found this to be true in this study. Considering that many adolescents do not engage in difficult discussions due to fear of peer judgement, the dialogue format and skills are a way to help them gain confidence to engage in these discussions. This is an important finding for people who work with adolescents in a variety of settings who can use this information to increase the engagement in difficult conversations.

As a result of engaging in the dialogue, the participants developed skills to use in future conversations, and motivation to implement those skills. In their journal entries, the participants explained that they would like to create the comfortable atmosphere that surrounded the dialogue and carry that over to future conversations about difficult topics. Additionally, many of the participants

discussed that they would like to improve their listening skills because they felt listened to throughout the dialogue. Listening is assumed to be critical within interpersonal communication (Morreale et al., 1998) and is considered foundational in establishing collaborative relationships (Bailey, 2001). Adolescence is a crucial time to learn, practice, and develop these listening skills.

The conversations that provide opportunities for adolescents to practice critical listening skills don't come up often naturally in society in typical conversations. The typical communication pattern that people are in, including adolescents, is that people listen to respond. This format helps develop the communication skill of listening to understand. This way of communicating is beneficial for adolescents to learn at an early age in order to effectively use it throughout their lives. Understanding that deliberative dialogues provide this opportunity for adolescents to increase and practice their listening skills is vital for anyone that works closely with adolescents.

Transformative experiences lead to radically new values, beliefs, and most important, new behaviors (Rossman et al., 2019). While reading through the participant journal responses the researcher found that the deliberative dialogue led to new behaviors (a result demonstrated in theme #4) and, therefore, acted as a transformative experience. Additionally, transformative experiences can be described as an event that leaves a lasting impact by "intensively and emotionally" provoking a person (Kirillova et al., 2017). The researcher identified these provoked emotions in the participants as they described their overall experience with phrases such as, "really comfortable," "really enjoyed," "very comfortable," "safe, stress-free," "really easy," "super interesting," "loved

participating," "felt respected," and, "very fun." Surprisingly, these adolescents used the phrases above to describe an hour-long conversation about inclusion in schools. The researcher was pleased to have received thank you notes from four of the participants who explained they were grateful they were invited to participate and would love to participate again in the future if the opportunity arises.

The researcher would like to note that there were two participants that shared in their journal responses feelings of being uncomfortable sharing during the dialogue. The feelings of discomfort are something that could be investigated further, and another study could be done about how to make those that were uncomfortable feel more comfortable during deliberative dialogues.

Additionally, although the research study was not focused on the dialogue topic (inclusion in schools), the participants explained the relevance of that topic to their everyday lives. The participants shared that the content of the dialogue was important and helpful, and multiple participants expressed interest in applying some of the ideas the group ideated into their high schools.

Implications

These findings have important implications for people who work with adolescents and people hoping to use the deliberative dialogue process to facilitate beneficial outcomes for various groups of people in a variety of settings. The findings can benefit educators seeking to understand how to increase open-mindedness and confidence in the classroom.

Students today are increasingly engaged with complex social issues. Many of the issues faced in society today are "wicked problems" (Rittel & Webber, 1973)

that do not have one right or wrong answer but consist of a complex interplay of various factors. Additionally, wicked problems are not able to be articulated straightforwardly and are impossible to solve in a simple or final way (Stony Brook University, 2022).

Working toward solutions for these problems is difficult when people argue their sides of an issue in an adversarial way rather than working toward finding common understanding and considering others' perspectives. The researcher encourages educators to use the deliberative dialogue format in the classroom to help students gain respect for new perspectives and share opinions in a non-confrontational way.

Participants shared that they especially enjoyed engaging in the dialogue because they are not usually engaging in conversations on important or difficult topics with their peers. Some of the quotes from their journal entries that illustrate this point include, "it made me think of things that I hadn't put this much thought into before," "it was super interesting to talk about things that should be discussed," "I got to give my opinions on things that were actually important," "I think it's important for inclusion to be talked about," and, "I felt like we were able to have a good conversation about topics that needed to be talked about but also that I hadn't really thought of before." People that work with adolescents should facilitate settings where adolescents can engage in conversations about important topics with their peers that they do not normally have an opportunity to discuss.

Each of these lessons can be applied to adolescents but should also be applied to young adults and adults. Increased political polarization and deeply

entrenched differences in opinions and perspectives often make it difficult for people to speak their mind respectfully, objectively evaluate their own positions, and listen to the perspectives of other people with an open mind. Freire (1968) described educational experiences based on dialogues in which people critically consider the world together. Dialogues provide an opportunity to interact with issues and each other in ways that help them consider new perspectives and become empowered to create change.

Dialogues also provide an avenue for civic engagement. As described by Ehrlich (2000), "Civic engagement means working to make a difference in the civic life of our communities and developing the combination of knowledge, skills, values, and motivation to make that difference. It means promoting the quality of life in a community, through both political and nonpolitical processes" (p.vi).

Another implication of these findings is increased empathy among participants. Empathy is a "cognitive and emotional understanding of another's experience, resulting in an emotional response that is congruent with a view that others are worthy of compassion and respect and have intrinsic worth" (Barnett & Mann, 2013, p.23). There is an "empathy deficit" in the U.S. (Hall & Leary, 2020), which manifests itself in various forms of bigotry and discrimination. Researchers have discussed various ways to build empathy; one is for people to have first-hand contact with people different from themselves (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2008). Deliberative dialogues provide an opportunity for people of all ages to engage in contact with people unlike themselves, which leads to an increase in empathy.

As far as the experience economy is considered, transformational experiences are the pinnacle of experiences (Pine & Gilmore, 2011). Transformational experiences through dialogues have not been studied for adolescents specifically. This research study provides important insights into how this process can facilitate transformative experiences for adolescents regarding the components of open-mindedness and perception of confidence. Transformative experiences include a guide—minister, counselor, friend—that helps the participants along their transformation journey (Pine & Gilmore, 2011). In the deliberative dialogue process, the dialogue facilitator acts as this guide as they encourage and provide opportunities for the adolescents to engage in the discussion. Pine and Gilmore discuss that these transformation guides or transformation elicitors can "bring about the right situation under which the proper change can occur" (2011, p.262). It is vital for the dialogue facilitator to provide a positive atmosphere that will increase the adolescents' willingness to open up to their peers. These transformative experiences are particularly meaningful as adolescents navigate the stage of identity development and formation.

Limitations of Study

The researcher recognizes the limitations of the study and recommends the following changes to anyone wanting to repeat the research. First, find a group of adolescents with increased racial, neurological, and gender identity diversity. This would help to ensure that the conversations and experiences of participants were representative of the adolescent population the researcher intends to study. Additionally, the researcher recommends expanding the

physical area where the adolescents live. This could prove to be difficult, as adolescents are a hard-to-reach population.

Recommendations for Future Studies

Recommendations for future studies include studying what motivates adolescents to speak up and share their opinions, and what causes insecurity regarding opinions. Another recommendation for a future study is to follow-up with these same participants in six months, 1 year, 5 years, etc. and ask if they felt the gains were long-lasting. This would transform the study into a longitudinal study about how participating in the dialogue affects adolescents over time. Additionally, another study could involve asking participants to engage in multiple deliberative dialogues over a period of time and studying the long-term effects of engagement.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to explore outcomes of participating in a deliberative dialogue for adolescents. Participants attended a deliberative dialogue facilitated by the primary researcher and completed journal prompts that asked for reactions regarding their experience engaging in the dialogue. The researcher used qualitative analysis techniques to analyze the responses, including inductive analysis and constant comparison.

Results indicated that participation in the dialogue increased participants' open-mindedness and perception of confidence. Findings also indicated the dialogue's positive atmosphere contributed to participants' willingness to engage. Finally, the participants shared strategies from the dialogue they can use in future conversations.

These findings have important implications for people who work with adolescents in schools and other settings, and those hoping to use deliberative dialogues to facilitate beneficial outcomes for various groups including adolescents, young adults, and adults. This study expanded our understanding of transformative experiences and the important role such experiences can play in identity development for adolescents. Additionally, transformative experiences can play a role in the development of the important constructs of self-confidence and open-mindedness.

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Appendix 1

Issue Guide the Researcher Created for the Deliberative Dialogue

INCLUSION IN SCHOOLS
ISSUE GUIDE FOR ADOLESCENTS

DIALOGUE FORMAT

Welcome + Introductions
Issue introduction + personal stake

Option 1: Improve Education

Option 2: Eliminate Standardized Testing

Option 3: More Representative Campus

Conclusion
Common ground for action

GROUND RULES

Focus on Options

All Options Considered Fairly

Everyone Participates

Open + Respectful Atmosphere

- 1 -

INTRO

Inclusion in education has traditionally meant making sure students with disabilities are integrated into general education classrooms to the greatest possible extent. Today, inclusion in schools means so much more than this. It means ensuring students from all backgrounds — regardless of socioeconomic status, ethnicity, race, gender, sexual orientation, household income, or ZIP code — have equitable access to education and services.

Creating a school that is truly inclusive starts in each classroom, but it must also be wider in scope. It requires specific strategies and a shift in culture that is shared and encouraged by the school administration, teachers, and students.

Just as general education long excluded students with disabilities, other groups of students have faced their own forms of exclusion and discrimination. The system once forced black students to be "separate but equal" in education, for instance.

While the laws have changed and are the foundation for ensuring inclusion at all levels of education, exclusion continues. Teachers and schools still struggle to find ways to foster an inclusive classroom with a sense of belonging for all.

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OPTION #1
IMPROVE EDUCATION

Make K-12 US history curricula more inclusive by acknowledging the contributions and experiences of immigrants and enslaved and indigenous peoples. School boards and state education departments need to reexamine how schools teach students about the roles and experiences of immigrants and enslaved and indigenous peoples in US history to provide a more accurate account of and a deeper appreciation for the contributions made by them and their descendants. Differing perspectives matter.

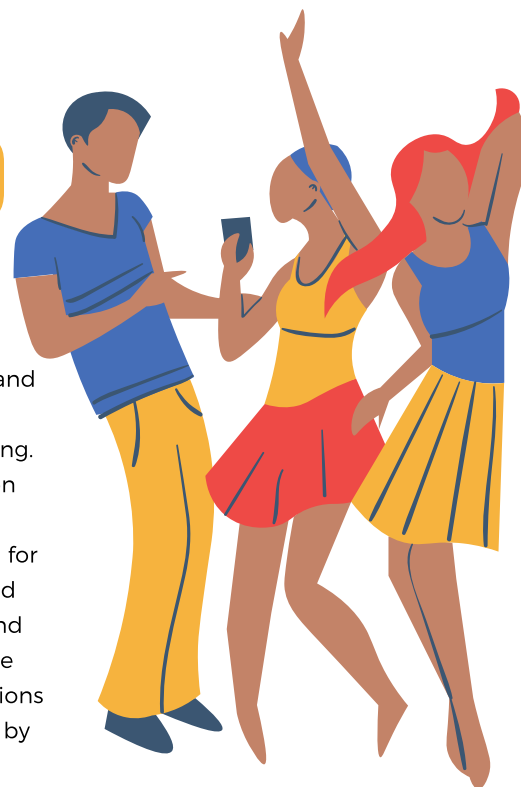| EXAMPLES OF WHAT MIGHT BE DONE	CONSEQUENCES TO CONSIDER
Update US history textbooks to include personal stories and experiences about enslaved and indigenous peoples	This could be distressing to students to hear some of the personal stories - would counseling options also need to be added?
Update all textbooks to include pictures of a diverse group of students (race, sex, ability)	This could cost a lot of money to update every single textbook in the school
Add more lessons about civil rights and women's rights to US government classes	This will require extensive retraining, and there is no way to ensure teachers will comply with mandated changes to curricula

QUESTIONS FOR DELIBERATION

It would not be free to update every textbook, slide deck, lesson plan, and training. Where should the money come from? In your own community, what kind of tax increases or cuts in service would you support in order to pay for this endeavor?

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OPTION #2
ELIMINATE STANDARDIZED TESTING

Eliminate standardized testing and assess students through teacher evaluations of student achievement and behavior. Researchers have noted a history of racial, cultural, and socioeconomic bias in standardized testing. Specifically, in 2017, experts at the Brookings Institution analyzed racial differences in the math section of the general SAT test, using College Board population data for the nearly 1.7 million college-bound seniors. They found that the SAT questions and scoring methods reflect and reinforce racial disparities. Studies have shown that the designers of standardized tests regularly rely on questions that assume background knowledge more often held by White, middle-class students than by many minority students.

EXAMPLES OF WHAT MIGHT BE DONE	CONSEQUENCES TO CONSIDER
Update the ACT/SAT to be a more well-rounded, and less-biased test that includes more than just multiple choice questions	This will be a difficult and time-intensive endeavor that the ACT/SAT boards will have to enforce
Eliminate ACT/SAT scores as a requirement for college admissions	Standardized tests give colleges essential information about students' academic levels. We must have an impartial metric that assesses student learning and performance by various teachers
Add in other metrics to measure student performance and learning, such as creative projects and class presentations	Students and teachers are already familiar with standardized tests as a way to measure performance. Additionally, teacher evaluations can add in implicit biases

QUESTIONS FOR DELIBERATION

If we eliminate standardized tests in K-12 schools, should we eliminate them in licensing for professionals such as doctors, lawyers, and accountants? Do standardized tests have any benefits in our society?

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OPTION #3
MORE
REPRESENTATIVE
CAMPUS

Help the students to create various school-sponsored clubs, organizations, and cultural days to learn about and support historically marginalized groups. This could include the LGBTQ+ community, students of color, neurodiverse students, students with varying physical abilities, military families, and international students. As students recognize themselves in one or many of the different organizations, they may feel like they are more heard, valued, and understood. Other students, who may not identify with any of the communities listed above, can take the time to attend club activities and learn about the experiences of those different from them. These students will likely become more aware and empathetic to difficulties surrounding them and act in a way to try to include, rather than exclude, people that don't look, talk, or think like them.

EXAMPLES OF WHAT MIGHT BE DONE	CONSEQUENCES TO CONSIDER
The school district/ administration can establish various clubs to support diverse groups of students	If the clubs are initiated from the 'top-down,' they might not be as meaningful to the students
Have the students vote for new cultures and peoples they want to learn about, then create monthly cultural days in which students can try foods, listen to music, and view various art representative of that culture	This could cost a lot of money to the school to create and sponsor these cultural days
The school can offer to help students create clubs they are interested in	Some students that might join an already-existing club may not be willing to create one themselves

QUESTIONS FOR DELIBERATION

If students that aren't members of the diverse community attend the meetings, will it still be considered a safe space for members of the marginalized group to gather and discuss the challenges they are facing? Is the initiative the most crucial problem at your school? If we are limited to making just one or two changes, what should they be?

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HELPFUL DEFINITIONS

Bias
Preference or prejudice for or against something

Confirmation Bias
Using selective thinking while only looking at things that agree with your viewpoint

Diversity
Psychological, physical and social differences that occur among any and all individuals

Equality
Treating everyone the same

Equity
Working towards successful outcomes for people by treating them in ways that address their unique advantages and disadvantages

Implicit / Unconscioius Bias
Attitudes and stereotypes that affect our understanding without us realizing it

Inclusion
The act of creating involvement, environments and empowerment in which any group or individual feels welcomed and valued

Neurodiversity
The range of differences in individual brain function and behavioral traits, regarded as part of normal variation in the human population (used especially in the context of autistic spectrum disorders)

Privilege
Having an unearned benefit/advantage one receives in society by nature of identity

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