



## **Welcome to the Website:**

Welcome to [deliberating.org](http://deliberating.org). I'm Carolyn Pereira, the Executive Director Emeritus of the Constitutional Rights Foundation Chicago. This web site is designed to support and supplement two projects: Deliberating in a Democracy and Deliberating in a Democracy in the Americas. Deliberating in a Democracy was conducted between 2004 and 2010 with teachers in the United States and formerly communist countries. Deliberating in a Democracy in the Americas is being conducted with teachers in the United States and Latin America.

Both Deliberating in a Democracy and Deliberating in a Democracy in the Americas are joint initiatives of the Constitutional Rights foundation Chicago, the Constitutional Rights Foundation in Los Angeles, and Street Law, Inc. Each was made possible by a generous grant from the Office of Safe and Drug Free Schools in the U.S. Department of Education.

## **What is Deliberation, and Why is it Important to a Democratic Society?**

Deliberation, the core concept upon which the web site is based, is a process for public discussion to help students come to a well-reasoned decision on a controversial public issue. It includes a focused exchange of ideas and a careful analysis of multiple views while being respectful of disagreements. Where possible, students also come to agreement with others on what to do next.

In any society, people have different ideas on how public issues should be addressed. Democratic societies are based on the belief that the people as a whole



can govern themselves. The way in which citizens as well as government officials think, talk, and make judgments about public issues is critical in sustaining democracy.

Deliberation honors freedom of expression--the right to be heard and the responsibility to listen respectfully to opinions that differ from one's own.

However, deliberating civic issues—weighing opposing views, deciding difficult questions, accepting majority decisions while honoring dissent— is not natural behavior. It must be taught, developed, and practiced regularly. Unfortunately, far too few students have this opportunity in the United States or abroad.

### **How Can This Website Help Educators?**

This web site provides an introductory methodology called Structured Academic Controversy. This methodology is adapted from a procedure developed by the Johnson Brothers at the University of Minnesota. The web site also includes dozens of readings that fit into a variety of courses to help secondary teachers facilitate productive classroom discussions that shed light, not just heat. Each reading and corresponding question can be conducted in one to three classroom periods.

The readings are:

- Balanced and contain an equal number of arguments for each side
- Public policy problems that exist in the United States and abroad
- Support curricular goals for a variety of courses.
- Provide opportunities for further examination and/or civic action

The questions:



- Have more than one answer that could be well-supported
- Reflect a clear conflict between competing democratic values.
- Increase knowledge about important democratic principles.
- Are relevant for 14 to 18 year old students.
- Facilitate a healthy exchange among students

All the readings are available in English. Many of the readings have also been translated into ten additional languages.

### **What Have We Done and Accomplished?**

As part of Deliberating in a Democracy, we developed the project and materials between 2004 and 2010 in collaboration with partners in nine former Communist countries (AZ, CZ, ES, LT, MC, SB, RU, UK) and eight states (CA, CO, IL, IN, MD, NJ, SC, VA). During the course of these six years over 400 teachers participated in extended professional development. They had time to work together, reflect what their students were saying, and gain additional insight into the readings and methodology. More than 20,000 14 to 18 year old students engaged in at least three deliberations during a semester.

The six year evaluation conducted by the University of Minnesota has consistently found that teachers and students have benefited greatly from this project. Here are some highlights from the student evaluation in year six:

- I learned a lot by participating in the deliberations. (82%)



- As a result of participating in the deliberations, I developed a better understanding of the issues. (85%)
- My participation in the deliberations increased my ability to state my opinions. (75%)
- Because of my participation in the deliberations, I am more confident talking about controversial public issues with my peers. (66%)

For more information on the evaluations see the web site.

Deliberating in a Democracy recognizes how much we can all learn from each other. On behalf of all of our partners, I hope that the web site will be helpful to you and your students and that your students will develop a deliberation habit for the rest of their lives.