

STUDENTS AT THE HELM:

**a systematic review
on students' roles
in **DELIBERATION**
on controversial issues**

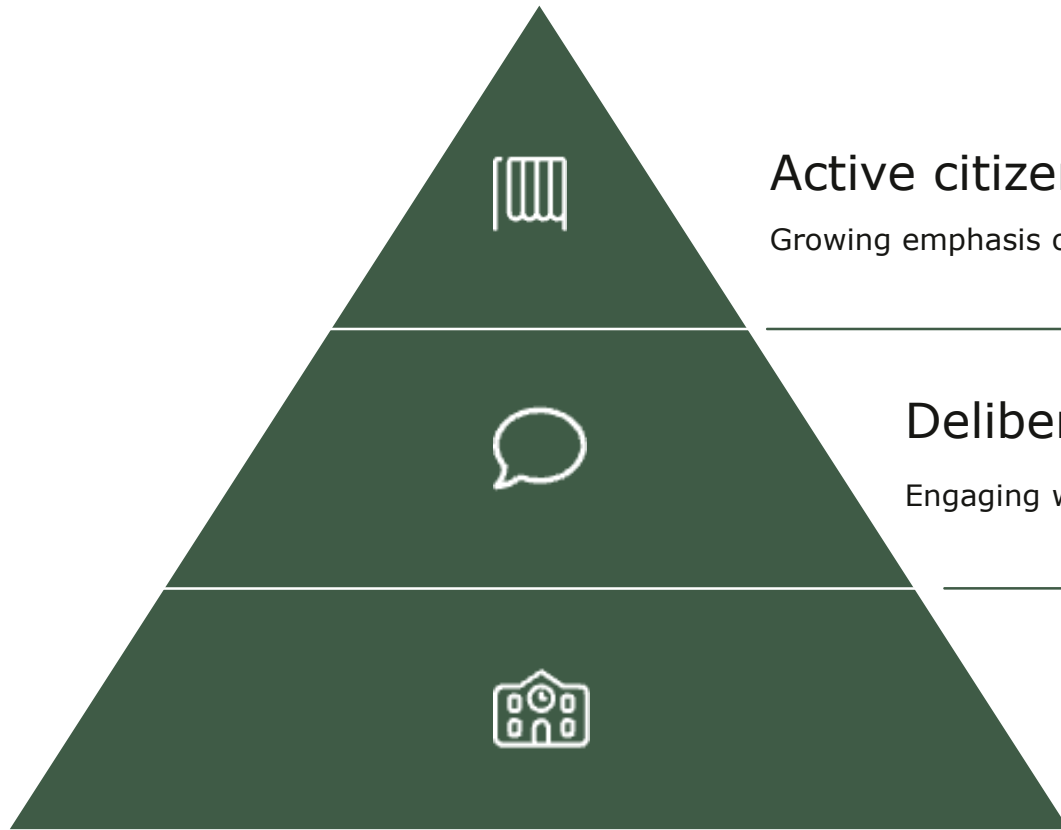


SES
School voor
Educatieve Studies

Miette Plessers, Jetske Strijbos, Elke Emmers
Hasselt University

►► **UHASSELT**

Citizenship education



Active citizenship education

Growing emphasis on active role of students as citizens

Deliberative democratic education

Engaging with public issues through deliberation (Sant, 2019)

Educational foundation

Schools teach essential deliberative competences
(Samuelsson and Bøyum, 2015)

Teaching students

how to **deliberate** on **controversial issues** in **schools**

Teaching students

how to **deliberate** on controversial issues in schools

Weighing and reflecting

different voices and perspectives

- › substantiated with reasons
- › seeking for shared meaning and decisions

(Bächtiger, 2018; Englund, 2015; Samuelsson and Bøyum, 2015)

Teaching students

how to deliberate on controversial issues in schools

Open-ended issues

- › With competing views
- › Socio-political
- › Related to personal beliefs

(McAvoy and Hess, 2013; Niemeyer et al., 2024)

Teaching students

how to **deliberate** on **controversial issues** in **schools**

As **unique** settings
to practice deliberation
thanks to **classroom diversity**

(Englund, 2015; Hess, 2009)

Teaching students

how to **deliberate** on **controversial issues** in **schools**

And

take an active role

take **responsibility**

Student responsibility

- › for the shared meaning and decisions
- › for their own thinking and talking
- › or the process with their peers

Beyond participation and agency → commitment

(Coelho and Menezes, 2021; Heid et al., 2023; Mameli et al., 2020)

Teaching students

how to **deliberate** on **controversial issues** in **schools**

And

take an active role

take **responsibility**

Teacher **authority**

(Buzelli and Johnston, 2001; Englund, 2006)



Research questions

RQ1

How is student responsibility
in deliberation on controversial issues
conceptualized?

RQ2

What **teacher strategies**
foster student responsibility
in deliberation on controversial issues?

Method

A systematic review, using a configurative synthesis approach

6 stages

1 – inclusion criteria

2 – search strategy

3 – study selection

4 – data extraction

5 – quality appraisal

6 – thematic synthesis

› Following PRISMA guidelines

› preregistered protocol (OSF)

(Newman and Cough, 2020; Page et al., 2021)

Method

A systematic review

6 stages

1 – inclusion criteria

Participants › teachers and students of primary or secondary education

2 – search strategy

Interventions › deliberations in class or school context on social topics

Outcomes › studies that report on student responsibility

3 – study selection

Study design › qualitative, quantitative and mixed-methods

Publication date › since 2000

4 – data extraction

Publication type › journal articles, peer-reviewed

Language › English

5 – quality appraisal

Full text › available

6 – thematic synthesis

Method

A systematic review

6 stages

1 – inclusion criteria

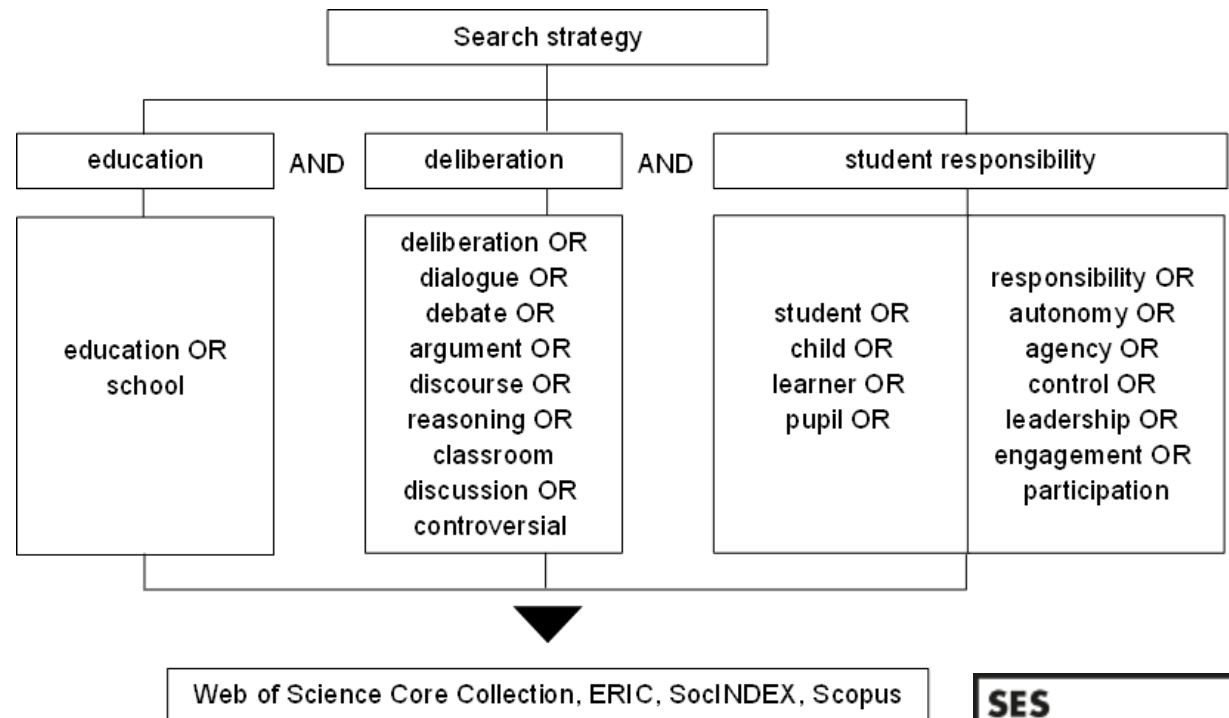
2 – search strategy

3 – study selection

4 – data extraction

5 – quality appraisal

6 – thematic synthesis



Method

A systematic review

6 stages

1 – inclusion criteria

2 – search strategy

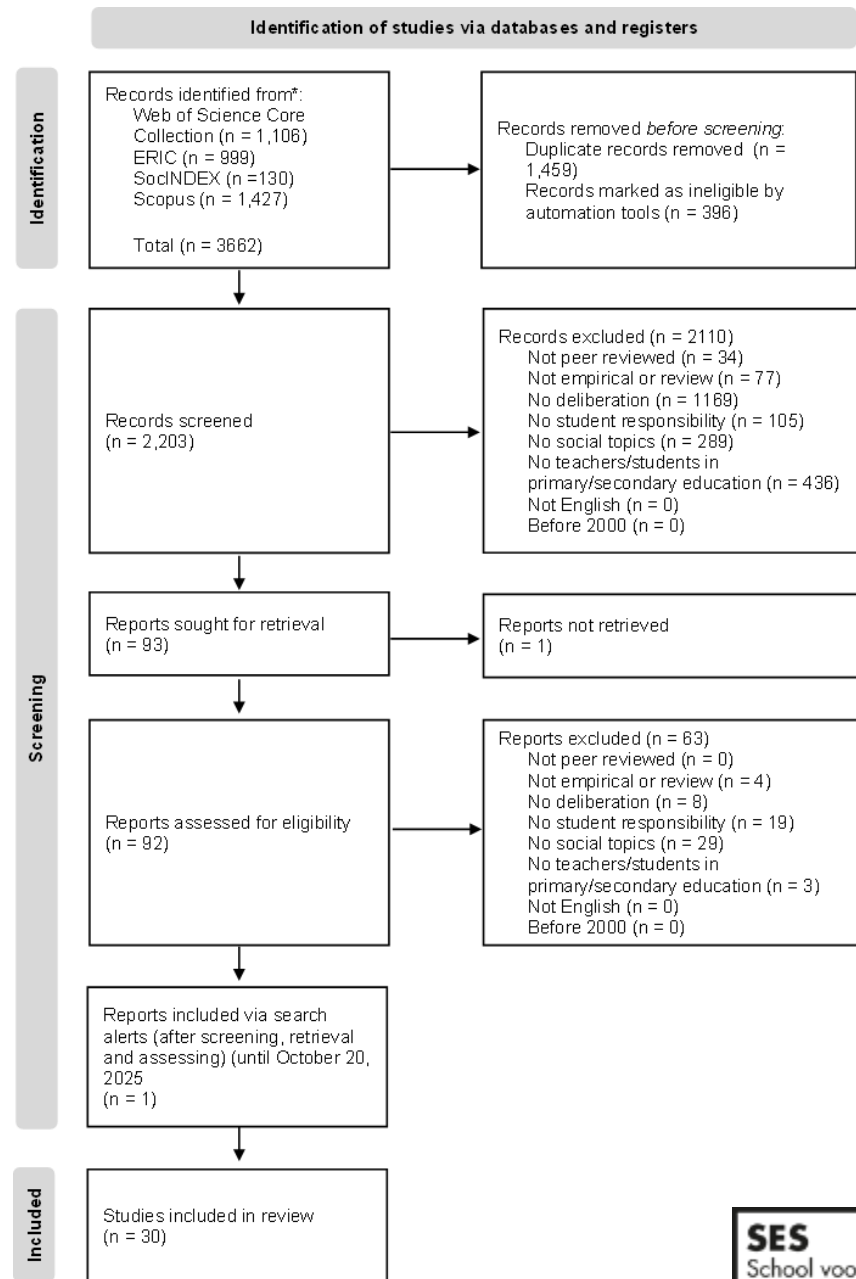
3 – study selection

4 – data extraction

5 – quality appraisal

6 – thematic synthesis

- › Using Rayyan
- › Piloted process
- › Three reviewers (10 %)
- › IRR > 0.80



Method

A systematic review

6 stages

1 – inclusion criteria

2 – search strategy

3 – study selection

4 – data extraction

2 stages

› Contextual details (extraction form)

› Findings (MAXQDA24)

5 – quality appraisal

6 – thematic synthesis

(Flemming and Noyes, 2021)

Method

A systematic review

6 stages

1 – inclusion criteria

2 – search strategy

3 – study selection

4 – data extraction

5 – quality appraisal

CASP checklist complemented with criteria from JBI checklist

6 – thematic synthesis

› 2 studies flawed

› 28 studies scored positively on at least 7 criteria

Method

A systematic review

6 stages

1 – inclusion criteria

2 – search strategy

3 – study selection

4 – data extraction

5 – quality appraisal

6 – thematic synthesis

Integrating data of included studies to create new understanding

3 stages of inductive coding

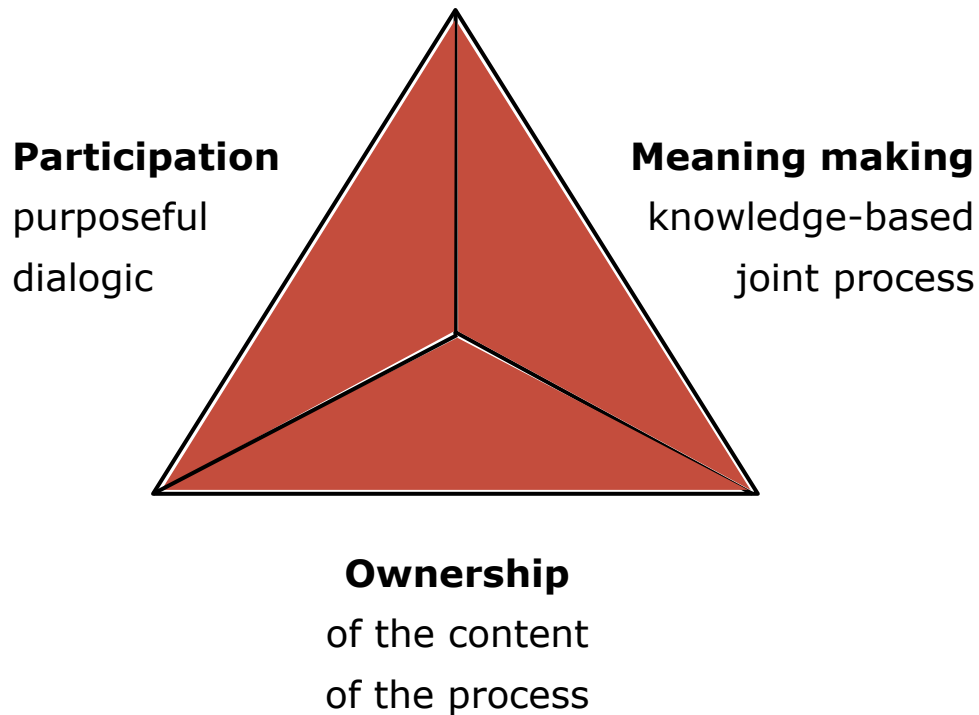
- › In vivo coding
- › Descriptive themes
- › Analytical themes

(Thomas and Harden, 2008)

Results

RQ1

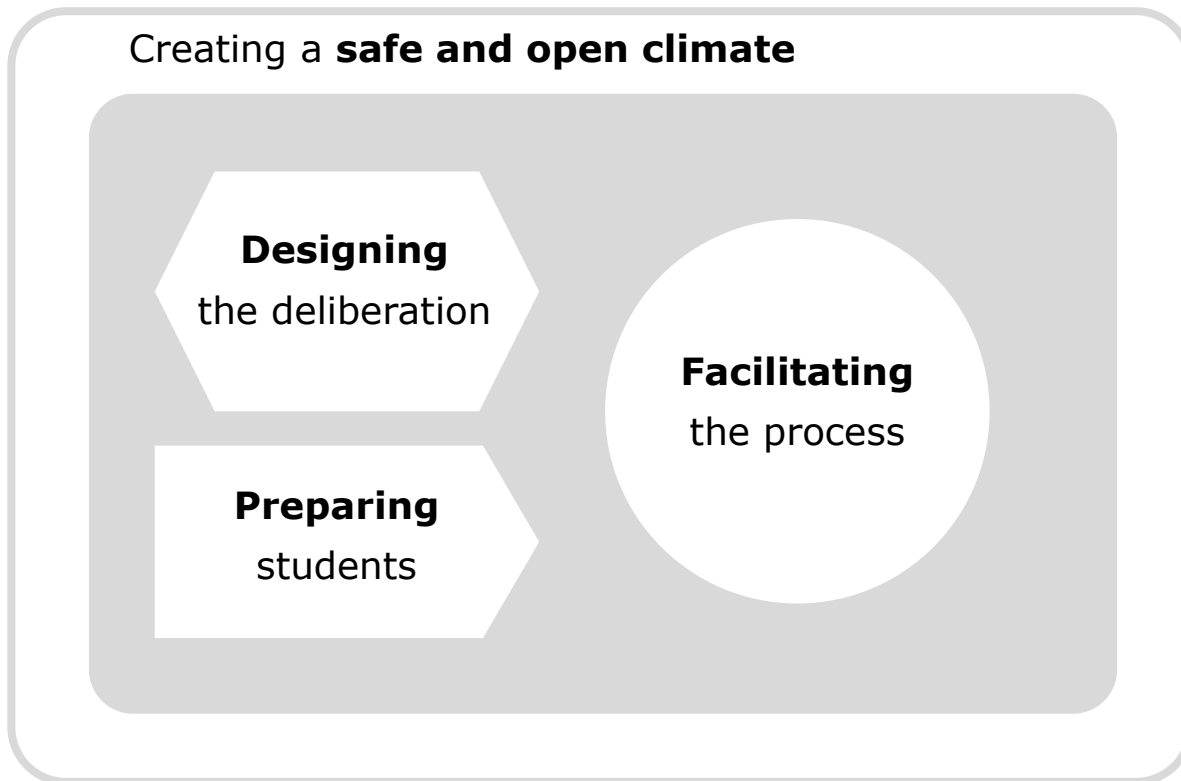
How is student responsibility
in deliberation on controversial issues
conceptualized?



Results

RQ2

What **teacher strategies** foster student responsibility in deliberation on controversial issues?



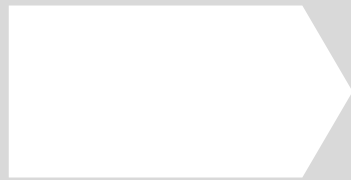
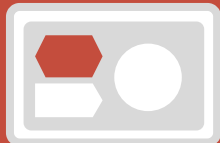
Results



Designing the deliberation

*Connecting students
to the issue*

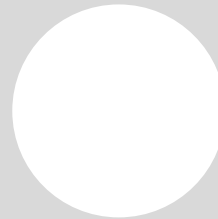
*Organizing the
deliberation*



Preparing students

Building knowledge

Sharing ideas

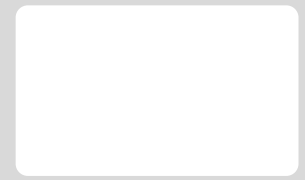


Facilitating the process

Questioning

Modeling

Scaffolding



Creating a safe and open climate

Acknowledging

Teacher agency

*Respectful
communication*

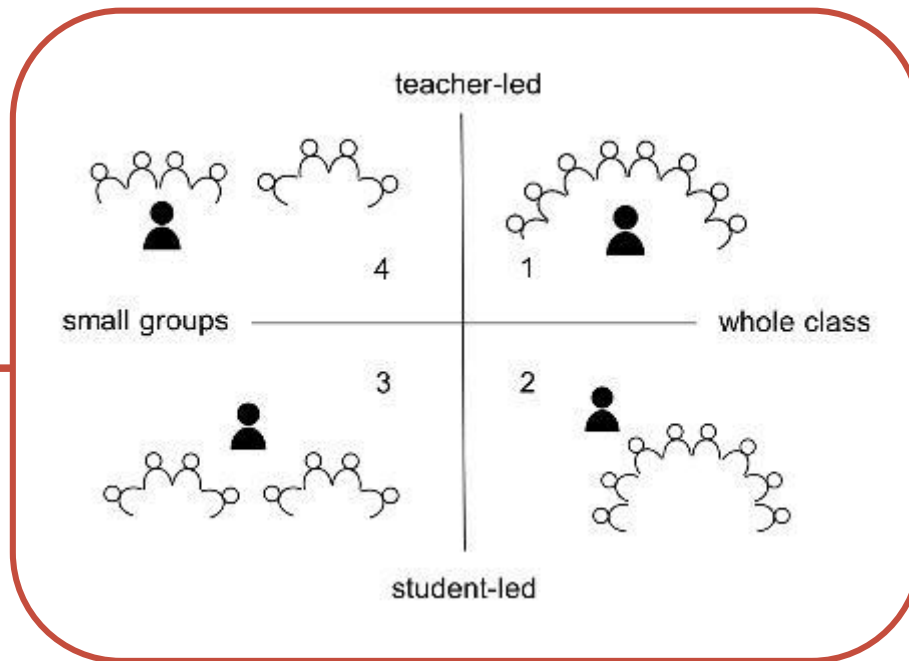
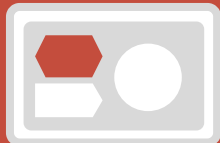


Results

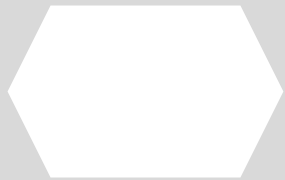
Designing the deliberation

*Connecting students
to the issue*

*Organizing the
deliberation*



Results



Designing the deliberation

*Connecting students
to the issue*

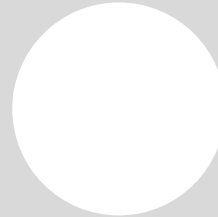
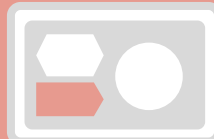
*Organizing the
deliberation*



Preparing students

Building knowledge

Sharing ideas

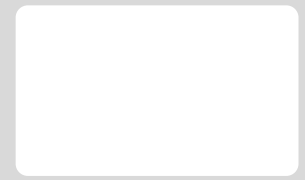


Facilitating the process

Questioning

Modeling

Scaffolding



Creating a safe and open climate

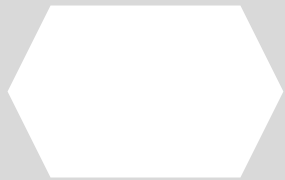
Acknowledging

Teacher agency

*Respectful
communication*



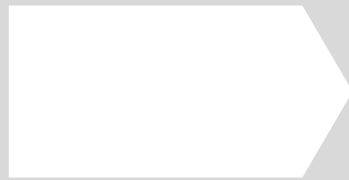
Results



Designing the deliberation

*Connecting students
to the issue*

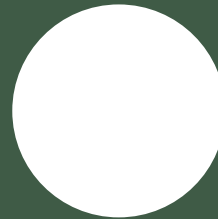
*Organizing the
deliberation*



Preparing students

Building knowledge

Sharing ideas

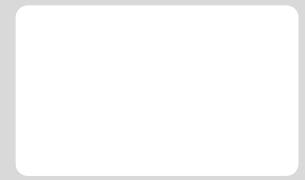


Facilitating the process

Questioning

Modeling

Scaffolding



Creating a safe and open climate

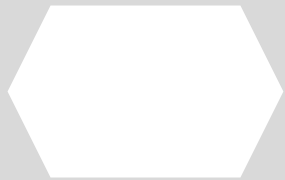
Acknowledging

Teacher agency

*Respectful
communication*



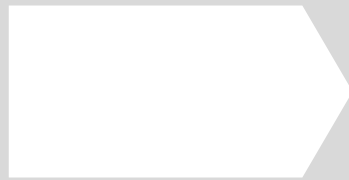
Results



Designing the deliberation

*Connecting students
to the issue*

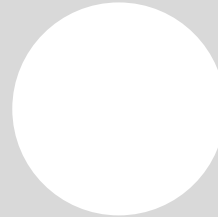
*Organizing the
deliberation*



Preparing students

Building knowledge

Sharing ideas

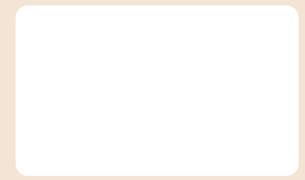


Facilitating the process

Questioning

Modeling

Scaffolding



Creating a safe and open climate

Acknowledging

Teacher agency

*Respectful
communication*



Discussion

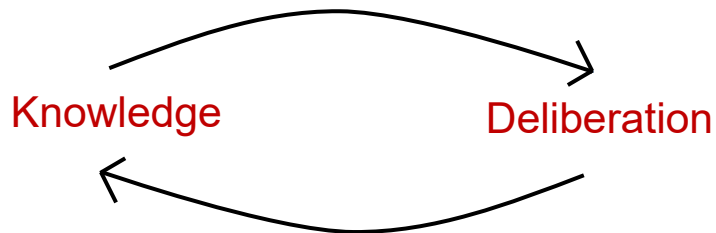
Student responsibility

- > Outcome
- > Process

Oriented to oneself

Oriented to others

Student responsibility is relational



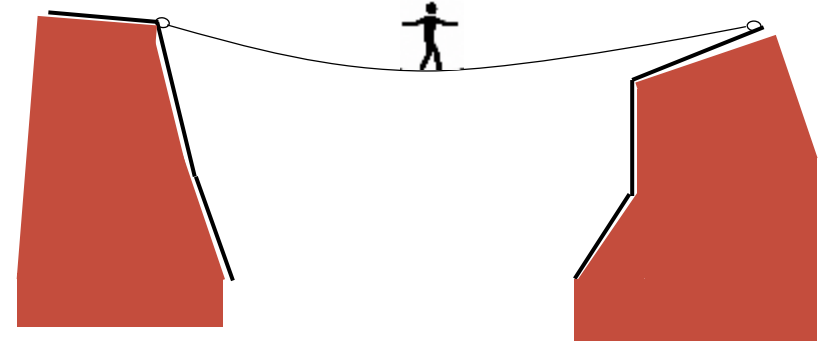
Deliberation is a balancing act

Teacher authority
before | during

Student responsibility

Students' *emotional*
connectedness

Emotional safe climate



Questions? Feedback? Suggestions?

miette.plessers@uhasselt.be
jetske.strijbos@uhasselt.be
elke.emmers@uhasselt.be



SES
School voor
Educatieve Studies



UHASSELT

References

- Bächtiger, A., Dryzek, J., Mansbridge, J., & Warren, M. (2018). Deliberative Democracy: an introduction. In A. Bächtiger, J. Dryzek, J. Mansbridge, & M. Warren (Eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Deliberative Democracy* (pp. 1-56). Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780198747369.001.0001>
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2021). *Thematic analysis : A practical guide*. SAGE Publications.
- Buzzelli C and Johnston B (2001) Authority, power, and morality in classroom discourse. *Teaching and Teacher Education* 17: 873–884. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0742-051X\(01\)00037-3](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0742-051X(01)00037-3)
- Coelho M and Menezes I (2021) University Social Responsibility, Service Learning, and Students' Personal, Professional, and Civic Education. *Front Psychol* 12: 617300. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.617300>
- Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (2024). *CASP checklist: For Qualitative Research*. [online] Available at: <https://casp-uk.net/>. Accessed: 11th of June 2025.
- Englund T (2006) Deliberative communication: a pragmatist proposal. *Journal of Curriculum Studies* 38(5): 503–520. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00220270600670775>
- Englund T (2015) On moral education through deliberative communication. *Journal of Curriculum Studies* 48(1): 58–76. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00220272.2015.1051119>
- Flemming K and Noyes J (2021) Qualitative Evidence Synthesis: Where Are We at? *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* 20: 1609406921993276. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406921993276>
- Heid H, Jüttler M and Kärner T (2023) Participation in the classroom as a basis for democracy education? A conceptual analysis of the concept of student participation. *Front. Polit. Sci.* 5: 1225620. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpos.2023.1225620>
- Hess, D.E. (2009). *Controversy in the classroom. The democratic power of discussion*. Routledge.
- Mameli C, Grazia V and Molinari L (2020) Agency, responsibility and equity in teacher versus student-centred school activities: A comparison between teachers' and learners' perceptions. *Journal of Educational Change* 21(2): 345–361. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10833-019-09366-y>
- McAvoy, P., & Hess, D. (2013). Classroom Deliberation in an Era of Political Polarization. *Curriculum Inquiry*, 43(1), 14-47. <https://doi.org/10.1111/curi.12000>
- Moher, D., Shamseer, L., Clarke, M., Ghersi, D., Liberati, A., Petticrew, M., Shekelle, P., Stewart, L. A., & PRISMA-P Group. (2015). Preferred reporting items for systematic review and meta-analysis protocols (PRISMA-P) 2015 statement. *Systematic Reviews*, 4(1), 9. <https://doi.org/10.1186/2046-4053-4-1>
- Newman M and Cough D (2020) Systematic Reviews in Educational Research: Methodology, Perspectives and Applications. . In: Zawacki-Richter O, Kerres M, Bedenlier S, et al. (eds) *Systematic Reviews in Educational Research: Methodology, Perspectives and Application*. Wiesbaden: Springer Fachmedien Wiesbaden, pp.3–22. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-658-27602-7_1
- Niemeyer, S., Veri, F., Dryzek, J. S., & Bächtiger, A. (2024). How Deliberation Happens: Enabling Deliberative Reason. *American Political Science Review*, 118(1), 345-362. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055423000023>
- Page, M. J., McKenzie, J. E., Bossuyt, P. M., Boutron, I., Hoffmann, T., Mulrow, C. D., Shamseer, L., Tetzlaff, J. M., Akl, E. A., Brennan, S. E., Chou, R., Glanville, J., Grimshaw, J. M., Hróbjartsson, A., Lalu, M. M., Li, T., Loder, E. W., Mayo-Wilson, E., McDonald, S., ... Moher, D. (2021). The PRISMA 2020 statement: An updated guideline for reporting systematic reviews. *BMJ*, 372, 1-9. <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.n71>
- Rethlefsen, M. L., Kirtley, S., Waffenschmidt, S., Ayala, A. P., Moher, D., Page, M. J., Koffel, J. B., PRISMA-S Group, Blunt, H., Brigham, T., Chang, S., Clark, J., Conway, A., Couban, R., De Kock, S., Farrah, K., Fehrmann, P., Foster, M., Fowler, S. A., ... Young, S. (2021). PRISMA-S: An extension to the PRISMA Statement for Reporting Literature Searches in Systematic Reviews. *Systematic Reviews*, 10(1), 39. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s13643-020-01542-z>
- Samuelsson M and Bøyum S (2015) Education for deliberative democracy: Mapping the field. *Utbildning & Demokrati – tidskrift för didaktik och utbildningspolitik* 24(1): 75–94. <https://doi.org/10.48059/uod.v24i1.1031>
- Sant, E. (2019). Democratic Education: A Theoretical Review (2006–2017). *Review of Educational Research*, 89(5), 655-696. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0034654319862493>
- Schuitema, J., Radstake, H., Van De Pol, J., & Veugelers, W. (2018). Guiding classroom discussions for democratic citizenship education. *Educational Studies*, 44(4), 377-407. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03055698.2017.1373629>
- Shamseer, L., Moher, D., Clarke, M., Ghersi, D., Liberati, A., Petticrew, M., Shekelle, P., Stewart, L. A., & the PRISMA-P Group. (2015). Preferred reporting items for systematic review and meta-analysis protocols (PRISMA-P) 2015: Elaboration and explanation. *BMJ*, 349(jan02 1), g7647-g7647. <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.g7647>
- Thomas J and Harden A (2008) Methods for the thematic synthesis of qualitative research in systematic reviews. *BMC Medical Research Methodology* 8(1): 45. <https://doi.org/10.1186/1471-2288-8-45>

References (included studies)

- Bhurekeni J (2022) Enacting Environmental Ethics Education for Wildlife Conservation using an Afrophilic 'Philosophy for Children' approach. *Southern African Journal of Environmental Education* 38: 23–42. <https://doi.org/10.4314/sajee.v38i1.02>
- Bossér U, Lundin M, Lindahl M, et al. (2015) Challenges Faced by Teachers Implementing Socio-Scientific Issues as Core Elements in Their Classroom Practices. *European Journal of Science and Mathematics Education* 3(2): 159–176. <https://doi.org/10.30935/scimath/9429>
- Brice L (2002) Deliberative Discourse Enacted: Task, Text, and Talk. 30(1): 66–87. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00933104.2002.10473179>
- Byrne J, Ideland M, Malmberg C, et al. (2014) Climate Change and Everyday Life: Repertoires children use to negotiate a socio-scientific issue. 36(9): 1491–1509. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09500693.2014.891159>
- Cassidy C and Christie D (2013) Philosophy with children: Talking, thinking and learning together. 183(8): 1072–1083. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03004430.2013.773509>
- Conrad J (2020) Navigating identity as a controversial issue: One teacher's disclosure for critical empathic reasoning. *THEORY AND RESEARCH IN SOCIAL EDUCATION* 48(2): 211–243. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00933104.2019.1679687>
- Cook V and Warwick P (2023) Realising student voice through dialogic engagement with a microblogging tool. *EDUCATION 3-13* 51(1): 156–170. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03004279.2021.1955947>
- Edwards-Groves C and Hardy I (2013) "Well, that was an intellectual dialogue!": How a whole-school focus on improvement shifts the substantive nature of classroom talk. *English Teaching: Practice and Critique* 12(2): 116–136
- García-Milà M, Miralda-Banda A, Luna J, et al. (2021) Change in classroom dialogicity to promote cultural literacy across educational levels. 13(11). <https://doi.org/10.3390/su13116410>
- Gronostay D (2019) To argue or not to argue? The role of personality traits, argumentativeness, epistemological beliefs and assigned positions for students' participation in controversial political classroom discussions. *Unterrichtswissenschaft* 47(1): 117–135. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s42010-018-00033-4>
- Gutierrez SB (2021) Teacher's dialogic prompts that scaffold students' participation in classroom argumentation: A case of a biology teacher. *Asia Pacific Journal of Educators and Education* 36(1): 59–73. <https://doi.org/10.21315/apjee2021.36.1.4>
- Isler NK, Gosen MN and Willemsen A (2024) Hypothetical situations as a pedagogical resource in social studies and history lessons at primary school. *International Journal of Educational Research* 125. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijer.2024.102315>
- Kerawalla L, Petrou M and Scanlon E (2013) Talk Factory: Supporting 'exploratory talk' around an interactive whiteboard in primary school science plenaries. *Technology, Pedagogy and Education* 22(1): 89–102. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1475939X.2012.745049>
- Levy BLM, Collet-Gildard L and Owenby TC (2017) Generating Dynamic Democratic Discussions: An Analysis of Teaching with U.S. Presidential Debates. *Social Studies* 108(2): 39–54. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00377996.2016.1266594>
- Mameli C, Mazzoni E and Molinari L (2015) Patterns of Discursive Interactions in Primary Classrooms: An Application of Social Network Analysis. *Research Papers in Education* 30(5): 546–566. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02671522.2015.1027727>
- Nishiyama K (2023) Creating counter-publics through deliberation in the classroom: The case of philosophy for children. *EDUCATION CITIZENSHIP AND SOCIAL JUSTICE* 18(2): 115–130. <https://doi.org/10.1177/17461979211061801>
- Reffhaug MBA, Andersson-Bakken E and Jegstad KM (2024) Supporting Primary Students' Critical Thinking in Whole-Class Conversations about Sustainability Issues. *Environmental Education Research* 30(10): 1840–1855. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13504622.2024.2309584>
- Savitz RS, Cridland-Hughes S and Gazioglu M (2021) Debate as a tool to develop disciplinary practices and student agency. *Teaching and Teacher Education* 102. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2021.103341>
- Schuitema J, Radstake H, Van De Pol J, et al. (2018) Guiding classroom discussions for democratic citizenship education. *Educational Studies* 44(4): 377–407. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03055698.2017.1373629>
- Sedlacek M and Sedova K (2017) How many are talking? The role of collectivity in dialogic teaching. *International Journal of Educational Research* 85: 99–108. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijer.2017.07.001>
- Segal A, Pollak I and Lefstein A (2017) Democracy, Voice and Dialogic Pedagogy: The Struggle to Be Heard and Heeded. *Language and Education* 31(1): 6–25. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09500782.2016.1230124>
- Sherry MB (2014) Indirect Challenges and Provocative Paraphrases: Using Cultural Conflict-Talk Practices to Promote Students' Dialogic Participation in Whole-Class Discussions. *Research in the Teaching of English* 49(2): 141–167. <https://doi.org/10.58680/rte201426161>
- Steffensen L, Johnsen-Høines M and Hauge KH (2023) Using Inquiry-Based Dialogues to Explore Controversial Climate Change Issues with Secondary Students: An Example from Norway. *Educational Philosophy and Theory* 55(10): 1181–1192. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131857.2022.2144221>
- Teo P (2016) Exploring the dialogic space in teaching: A study of teacher talk in the pre-university classroom in Singapore. *Teaching and Teacher Education* 56: 47–60. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2016.01.019>
- Topping KJ and Trickey S (2014) The role of dialog in philosophy for children. *International Journal of Educational Research* 63: 69–78. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijer.2013.01.002>
- van der Meij S, Gosen M and Willemsen A (2024) 'Yes? I have no idea': teacher turns containing epistemic disclaimers in upper primary school whole-class discussions. *Classroom Discourse* 15(1): 1–23. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19463014.2022.2103008>
- Vrikki M, Chatzianastasi M, Kourea L, et al. (2025) Initial implementation of a cultural literacy learning programme for students with disabilities in inclusive classrooms. *Pedagogy, Culture & Society*. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/14681366.2025.2530448>. 1–21. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14681366.2025.2530448>
- Wansink BGJ, Mol H, Kortekaas J, et al. (2023) Discussing controversial issues in the classroom: Exploring students' safety perceptions and their willingness to participate. *Teaching and Teacher Education* 125. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2023.104044>