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# Exploring debate skills as practical techniques to salvage the *demos*

# Esplorare le abilità di dibattito come tecniche pratiche per recuperare le *demo*

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## Abstract

Now more than ever, people who enjoy open societies must recognize democratic fragility while considering practical methods of preserving democratic governance. In this paper, I explore some of the nuances in the relationship between citizen engagement and democratic institutions. I will concentrate on educational deficiencies that occur in a liberal polity as well as address pragmatic strategies that can address the precarious positions experienced in democracies. In particular, I will address the vital skills inherent to academic debate practices. While not a panacea, I will underscore how debate activities promote invaluable life-long skills that are prerequisites for a functional *demos*.

**Keywords:** Citizenship; Political engagement; Democracy; Debate; Civic education.

## Sintesi

Ora più che mai, le persone che godono di società aperte devono riconoscere la fragilità democratica mentre prendono in considerazione metodi pratici per preservare la *governance* democratica. In questo articolo, esploro alcune delle sfumature nel rapporto tra coinvolgimento dei cittadini e istituzioni democratiche. Mi concentrerò sulle carenze educative che si verificano in una politica liberale e affronterò strategie pragmatiche che possono affrontare le posizioni precarie vissute nelle democrazie. In particolare, affronterò le abilità vitali inerenti alle pratiche del dibattito accademico. Pur non essendo una panacea, sottolineerò come le attività di dibattito promuovano inestimabili competenze per tutta la vita che sono prerequisiti per un *demo* funzionale.

**Parole chiave:** Cittadinanza; Impegno politico; Democrazia; Dibattito; Educazione civica.

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# 1. Introduction

When we think of the concept "democracy," we often imagine people lining up to vote in elections, conversing about politics at coffee shops, and bipartisan leaders coming together for the good of the country. However, around the world we are witnessing lower voter turnouts (Solijonov, 2016), less conversations about politics in lieu of superficial chats about sports or the weather (Boyon *et al.,* 2019), and political leaders who jockey for power instead of collaborating to improve their country (Wike *et al.,* 2019). Overall, in a survey of 14 countries, Pew Research found that «aside from voting, relatively few people take part in other forms of political and civic participation» (Wike & Castillo, 2018, para. 3). Additionally, studies reveal that political polarization is not a crisis in just the United States (Jungkunz, 2021; Mounk, 2022; Pew Research Center, 2021), but it is severe globally (V-Dem Institute, 2022). Weak political engagement occurs in developed democracies (Saltmarsh & Hartley, 2011) as well as in so-called "emerging" or transitioning democracies (Coffé & van der Lippe, 2010). As a result, and not surprisingly, political polarization is intensifying, and apathy continues to grow (Carothers & O'Donohue, 2019).

More specifically, young people around the world are growing more dissatisfied with democracy and politics in general. While young people can be civically involved in various ways, they are voting less in national elections and, overall, are seemingly disengaged politically (Barrett, 2018). Indeed, after analyzing the largest global dataset available with nearly five million respondents, Foa *et al.* (2020) found that «across the globe, younger generations have become steadily more dissatisfied with democracy – not only in absolute terms, but also relative to older cohorts at comparable stages of life» (p. 1).

In our globalized world, the concepts of citizenship and democracy increasingly become more complex and contentious. Technological advances, such as the growing number of social media platforms, add even more variables to the intersection of citizenship and democracy as differing beliefs become based more and more on homogenous political messaging, information silos, and discursive incivility (Olaniran & Williams, 2020). As such, now more than ever, people who enjoy open and free societies must recognize democratic fragility while considering practical methods of preserving liberal-based governance. This, quite simply, requires citizens to be informed and to participate in their democratic polity: «Sustaining democracy or transitioning to a democracy requires citizen participation. A noted scholar on citizenship, Russell Dalton, argues that 'without public involvement in the process, democracy lacks both its legitimacy and its guiding force' (Dalton, 2009, p. 52). By its nature, democracy is constituted by civic participation» (Zompetti, 2016, p. 189). Since democracy is, by definition, a government by the people and for the people, it necessarily requires citizen engagement. Since global political engagement is waning, democracies are in jeopardy. Other elements also endanger

democracies, although this essay will focus on citizen engagement. Indeed, as Repucci and Slipowitz (2022) report, «As a lethal pandemic, economic and physical insecurity, and violent conflict ravaged the world in 2020, democracy's defenders sustained heavy new losses in their struggle against authoritarian foes, shifting the international balance in favor of tyranny» (para. 1).

This warning heralds and requires a closer look at how educators can do their part in preserving democracy. As such, I will first explore the relationship between political engagement and citizenship. For an active and sustaining *demos*, citizens must participate in various ways. Next, I briefly describe the importance of this relationship, noting how an engaged citizenry is vital for a vibrant democracy. A waning of citizen participation, or swelling fractionalization, invites tyranny, authoritarianism, or fascism. While outlining the causes and consequences of citizen apathy and polarization are not new, a candid discussion of practical ideas to address these issues offers us new possibilities. Too often cultural and political critics drag us into skepticism, cynicism, and despair. Instead, in this essay, I offer hope to overcome the threats to democracy that we currently face by focusing on argumentation and debate pedagogy.

## 2. Fragility of Democracy

As Canadian theorist and activist Margaret Atwood exclaims, «The fabric of democracy is always fragile everywhere because it depends on the will of citizens to protect it, and when they become scared, when it becomes dangerous for them to defend it, it can go very quickly» (qtd. in Pradhan, 2022, para. 12). Several recent examples reveal the precarity of democracy, although this is certainly not an exhaustive list. For instance, the American January 6th, 2021 insurrection (Repucci & Slipowitz, 2022), corrupt elections in Kenya (Bottin & Creedon, 2022), Bolsonaro in Brazil (Lonoño & Darlington, 2018), the military in Myanmar (Goldman, 2022), war in Ukraine, and the 2007 rigged elections in Nigeria (Herskovits, 2007) all demonstrate the various ways democracies can crumble. Additionally, the jeopardy democracies face emanates from a number of different factors – Chinese economic adventurism, Russian disinformation campaigns, right-wing populism, the pandemic, and a host of economic pressures like high inflation and high unemployment, rising oil prices, global supply chain issues, fears of recession, etc. (Editorial Board, 2021).

Despite the threats against democracy, there are glimmers of hope. We know, for example, that if taught at young ages, citizens can develop the necessary skills to engage and preserve democracy (Winthrop, 2020). Furthermore, while voting trends have generally decreased around the world, the United States experienced «the largest total voter turnout in U.S. history and the first time more than 140 million people voted» for the 2020 presidential election (Lindsay, 2020). In fact, the youth vote increased during the 2020 American presidential election (CIRCLE, 2020b). But, as we know, the voter turnout

momentum from the 2020 election can easily stall or backslide in future elections.

The way younger generations are connecting with political issues also provides some optimism. For those that pay attention to politics, young people often communicate with each other on various social media platforms. According to Zompetti (2016), the «way youth are engaging with media on social, cultural and political issues speaks to vibrant signs of participatory democracy» (p. 192). This phenomenon can be seen from various older studies; and, given that social media use by younger generations has increased exponentially in the past few years, it is probably safe to assume that the politically conscious youth continue to maximize social media for political conversations (Bennett *et al.,* 2011; Jenkins, 2006; Palfrey & Glaser, 2008). Indeed, reports suggest that youth increased their political discussions and awareness during the COVID-19 pandemic (CIRCLE, 2020a).

But, participating in political conversations does not directly translate into engagement. Ideally, the political discourse that occurs on social media could be a barometer of awareness, motivation, and engagement if we knew that the participants were well educated about how to have meaningful conversations as well as being well education about issue content. Hence, the role of educators and proper civics instruction are absolutely crucial not only for meaningful political conversations, but also for translating those conversations into serious, impactful democratic engagement. As Zompetti (2016) argues,

> Civic education essentially entails the process whereby governments, school boards, school districts, schools themselves and individual teachers orchestrate curricula to teach students to be aware of their governments and the possible roles the students have in the proper functioning of the state. We know, for example, that teaching student-centered, participatory civic education increases political socialization, improves content knowledge for students and parents, and can provide a sense of political efficacy (Hutchens & Eveland, 2009). Especially for democracies, this sort of philosophical approach to teaching civics is crucial, since the «better educated are more likely to vote more often, to be active in their community, to be more knowledgeable about politics, and to be more politically tolerant». (Dalton, 2009, p. 39) (p. 192)

Given the importance of sustaining democracy, it is necessary to understand the critical role education plays in its vitality. Similarly, education is essential for the formation of an active citizenry.

## 3. Political Engagement and Citizenship

When discussing Hannah Arendt's *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Stephanie DeGooyer *et al.* (2018) argue that, «Arendt knew firsthand that in order to have rights, individuals must be more than mere human beings. They must be members of a political community. Only as a citizen of a nation-state can a person enjoy legally protected rights to education, to work, to vote, to healthcare, to culture, and so on. Hence, Arendt declared that before there can be any specific civil, political, or social rights, there must be such

a thing as a 'right to have rights'» (p. 2). Indeed, it is Arendt's (1973) famous definition of citizenship as "the existence of a right to have rights" that forms the underlying premise of political engagement (pp. 296-297). As DeGooyer *et al.* (2018) continue to explain,

> Good citizenship is then much more; it is acting upon such citizenship to make public decisions; it is having the political agency to participate in the public sphere. Good citizenship is participating in public decision-making on all levels, local, regional (county), state, and federal levels - and at a bare minimum, that is voting. But good citizenship is more than just voting. According to Hannah Arendt, good citizenship is democratic self-determination - the need to have efficacy and to critically think and make decisions - and to be able to collectively deliberate on all matters affecting the public - civil and political - community. (p. 90)

Thus, in a democracy – unlike a totalitarian state – citizens do not simply enjoy individual liberties; they have an affirmative obligation to participate in government and in their communities to protect those liberties.

Political participation or engagement is related to "civic engagement," except political engagement explicitly involves political activity, whereas civic engagement could be considered less political or even non-political. For instance, Woolard (2017) differentiates the concepts such that,

> [p]olitical engagement includes direct participation in electoral politics, such as voting, participating in campaigns or political parties, contacting elected officials, running for office, and the like …. civic and political engagement are interrelated; however, civic engagement is apolitical: one can be civically engaged - working with community organizations, doing volunteer work, etc. - yet refrain from participating in electoral politics or pursuing changes in public policy. (pp. 14-15)

Since political engagement is openly political in nature, it could involve partisan alignment, such as working with a local party headquarters, campaigning for certain candidates, and so on. But political engagement does not necessarily need to be partisan. To be politically active, a citizen can vote, register others to vote, participate in protests or social movements, volunteer to help host debates between candidates in contentious races, etc.

Given that politics is a *sine qua non* for political engagement, citizens must have a basic level of political knowledge, values, and skills (Colby *et al.,* 2007). Political values can be acquired from friends, family, and media. Those influences are largely out of our control, and they can perpetuate disinformation and ideological myopia. However, political knowledge and skills can be taught, which is why it is crucial for us to explore pedagogical methods that can assist in a person's maturation in the realm of political engagement. In this way, Hauser (2004) argues that the relationship between discourse and political engagement has «a birthright: rhetoric's role in civic education. That role is not just in the public performance of political discourse but in the education of young minds that prepares them to perform their citizenship» (p. 52). In other words, we adamantly profess that rhetorical agency not

only exists, but it can also be instrumental in sustaining and promoting democratic ideals (Woolard & Zompetti, 2021, p. 127). Therefore, the dialectic of citizenship/agency with engagement/discourse formulates a direct and overlapping relationship. Understanding this relationship helps us connect the dots involving education, citizenship, agency, language, and engagement.

Thus, political engagement is simply when someone contributes to democracy, including local communities as well as national politics. According to Berkely political science professor Henry Brady (1999), political participation is «action by ordinary citizens directed toward influencing some political outcomes» (p. 737). Furthermore, Ekman and Amnå (2012) state that, «political participation refers to attempts to influence others—any powerful actors, groups or business enterprises in society—and their decisions that concern societal issues» (p. 286). As such, maintaining democracy needs citizen participation. A noted scholar on citizenship, Russell Dalton, argues that «without public involvement in the process, democracy lacks both its legitimacy and its guiding force» (Dalton, 2009, p. 53). By its nature, democracy is constituted by civic participation.

Indeed, the most basic component of democracy is that citizens play an active role in their government and communities. Notwithstanding that «no country in the world has an entirely pure form of democracy», it is still incumbent upon citizens to contribute to their political system. Therefore, political engagement «is a necessary, if not vital, component for teaching about participatory democracy» (Zompetti, 2016, p. 191). Furthermore, as educators, we must underscore how a «… developing knowledgeable, well-intentioned, competent and motivated citizens requires a systematic and concerted education programme» (Zompetti, 2016, p. 190).

From a meta-30,000 foot perspective, recognizing and understanding the relationship between these concepts reveals a lacuna for possible pedagogical opportunities. In other words, the complexity of these elements and their relationships with each other can make the prospects for a useful educational moment challenging. Once an opening is located, however, teachers can avail themselves of the unique moment when students can experience the importance of engagement along with each student's ability to participate in the electoral process as well as to meaningfully contribute to the overall *demos*. For example, in a survey of electoral data from 14 countries, Wike and Castillo (2018) note how in «11 countries, people with higher levels of education are more likely to say they could be motivated to take political action on free speech issues» (para. 12-13). Hence, educating citizens appears to be a vital component for sustaining democracy.

If educating citizens is important for their relative engagement in politics – whether such engagement is local, state-based or on the national scale – then it seems reasonable to conclude that such political engagement is crucial for maintaining democracy. Simply put, «an engaged citizenry is often considered a sign of a healthy democracy. High levels of

political and civic participation increase the likelihood that the voices of ordinary citizens will be heard in important debates, and they confer a degree of legitimacy on democratic institutions» (Wike & Castillo, 2018, para. 1). People often overlook how democracy as a governing philosophy is distinct from, yet related to, how democracy relies on the perceived legitimacy and trustworthiness of democratic institutions.

What lies at the nexus of democratic knowledge acquisition and discursive praxis is an understanding of the complexity and didactic options available to students (and instructors), especially regarding their individual agency and subjectivity. This understanding is absolutely critical for a functioning democracy: «Of course, participating in governance can occur in different capacities, but citizens must be engaged in order for democracy to survive» (Zompetti, 2016, pp. 189-190). This synergistic relationship between democracy and argumentation theory and practice is well established (Rehg, 2002; van Eemeren, 2002; Blair, 2006; Williams & Young, 2006). These scholars describe how knowledge of argument is the *sine qua non* for effective deliberation, information (news) processing, and critical decision making, such as informed voting. Political engagement provides agency for democracy; however, effective and sustained civic engagement by citizens requires not simply motivation on the part of citizens, but also skills and, specifically, skills in argumentation. Those vital skills are what I turn to next.

## 4. The Value of Debate Education

There are many ways to teach civics, social studies, history, and politics. All techniques have their advantages and disadvantages, but one method in particular has yielded maximum impact with few drawbacks. Debate – with its different variations and formats – offers us a proven and effective process to teach valuable and life-long democratic knowledge and skills. This is not the place to detail all of the benefits of debate pedagogy, but understanding its usefulness as a general didactic method is important for us to realize as we discuss its utility for citizen political engagement.

As I have already noted, to sustain a vibrant democracy, citizens must have the requisite knowledge, values, and skills in order to meaningfully engage politically. Various methods of teaching and acquiring sufficient political knowledge exist, and those methods should be carefully chosen and implemented depending on the subject matter of a course, what (if any) previous knowledge exists with the students, and consideration of students' life goals so that knowledge acquisition can best suit their needs. Similarly, developing political values depends on many variables, not the least of which is the influence from the student's friends, family, peers, social media groups, etc.

As educators, however, we are in a unique position to help promote the knowledge and skills necessary for an active citizenry (Bartenan, 1998; Brand, 2000; Brownlee, 1978; Derryberry, 1998; Morris, 2011;

Williams *et al.,* 2001). Argumentation, debate, civic education, civic engagement, and democracy all have strong theoretical connections, as previous work demonstrates (Mitchell, 1998; Mitchell, 2000; Williams, 2008; Zompetti & Williams, 2007, 2008; Zompetti, 2006; Zompetti, 2016). These scholars note how argument training fosters critical thinking and efficacy in advocacy and agency, which translate into greater engagement and democratic participation. Moreover, some empirical studies document how debate promotes civic engagement (Farmer, 2014; Freeman & Rogers, 2013; Grace, 2011; Rogers *et al.,* 2017), as well as fosters vital critical thinking skills (Kuyper, 2011; Lux, 2014; Rogers, 2002; 2005; Rowland, 1995; Williams *et al.,* 2001). In fact, in the only longitudinal study of its kind, Rogers *et al*. (2017) report that,

> For the past 18 years, the data confirms that the positive outcomes of debate participation are significant and persistent for the study group. They include: greater political and social awareness; a stronger commitment to, belief in and willingness to take an active part in the process of socio-political change; an increased awareness of and tolerance for intercultural differences; a deeper understanding and respect for a personal code of ethics and the proper evaluation of argument and evidence; and stronger behavioral coping mechanisms which resulted in healthier personality profiles. (p. 17)

Additionally, many scholars have connected debate training with civic education, especially concerning effective debate teaching in improving educational outcomes among underserved and at-risk students in Urban Debate Leagues (Cridland-Hughes, 2011; Hall, 2006; Wade, 1998; Winkler, 2010/2011) and Georgia's Freedom School, where there is anecdotal evidence of debate training supporting effective civic engagement (Panetta, 2018). As such, «[w]hen instructors use pedagogical strategies expressly dedicated to the promotion of civic engagement, they can have a significant effect on the development of students' values, behaviors, efficacy, and commitment to engaged citizenship» (Jacoby, 2009, p. 97).

In conjunction with the recommendation for debate, discussion and dialogue, an environment where students can explore controversial issues is a crucial element to any civic education programme (Hess, 2009; Hess, 2011). Examining controversial problems is the very nature of democracy. As Hess (2011) argues, «A democracy without controversial issues is like an ocean without fish or a symphony without sound. Discussing controversies about the nature of the public good and how to achieve it is essential if we are to educate for democracy» (p. 69). Discussing them provides a "firm understanding of democratic debate" so that students can "confront differences" by formulating and refuting important arguments on the issues (Youniss, 2011, p. 100). Indeed, disagreement and contention lie at the heart of democratic participation – not everyone agrees, or will agree, on everything. The key to a functional democracy, then, is for the citizen-participants to know how to converse about such disagreements, how to learn from them, and how to achieve mutually beneficial common ground.

In fact, we know that when debate and discussion have been used with civic education, civic knowledge, skills, and a sense of efficacy have been improved (Youniss, 2011). We know that debate and dialogue help foster a student-centered form of education. We also know that debate, dialogue, and discussion enable students to see multiple perspectives, while learning skills of advocacy (Zompetti, 2016, p. 200).

In effect, debate provides a unique experience for students to learn a variety of important skills while simultaneously boosting their content knowledge about controversial, political issues. Debating bestows these competences in a manner unlike any other pedagogical technique. Since many may be unfamiliar with how debate generates these proficiencies, the following passage is worth quoting at length:

> There are different formats for debating, but any of them can yield positive results when coupled with civic education. Debate essentially takes a topic of controversy, requires students to research the topic, and then asks the students to give speeches either proposing or opposing a position regarding the topic. After supporting or opposing the position, students then need to "flip sides" and become advocates from the opposite perspective. This encourages critical thinking and allows students to see issues from a diversity of viewpoints. During the process, students also improve their civic knowledge through research. They also improve their civic advocacy skills by presenting arguments either for or against a certain side. As Ryan (2006) reports, «Designing introductory civics courses that allow for student participation in debate activities on a regular basis (weekly, bi-weekly) exposes students to new ideas and helps them develop positive critical thinking habits. Students are exposed to new - and often hotly contested - propositions, and they learn the habit of evaluating numerous competing claims or sides to arguments» (p. 387). (Zompetti, 2016, p. 200)

In conjunction with this process, debate is grounded in five core learning objectives for «a citizenry trained in the skills of advocacy», which are requisite skills for democratic engagement: «1) Learn to recognize and avoid arguments of coercion, 2) Learn to research and reflect on civic issues of importance, 3) Learn to be impassioned by means of reason to issues at hand, 4) Learn to prepare and deliver effective arguments about the issue, [and] 5) Learn to refute oppositional claims and sustain credibility» (Zompetti, 2016, p. 177).

A prime example of how debate and argument training promote valuable civic learning and vital democracy skills is the catastrophic shooting that occurred at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida, in 2018. After the tragedy, many of the students who survived engaged in activism to change gun laws. The student voices commanded a nationwide audience and changed the overall conversation about guns in the United States. According to Canadian attorney, Dahlia Lithwick (2018), the students are successful because of a «system-wide debate program that teaches extemporaneous speaking from an early age. Every middle and high school in the district has a forensics and public-speaking program». Combined with broader education in civics, «extracurricular education – … one

that focuses on skills beyond standardized testing and rankings – creates passionate citizens who are spring-loaded for citizenship» (para. 9). The civic engagement and activism of these students are testaments to their debate training and civic education: «The fact that these students feel empowered to take a stand on their own behalf is a testament to the value of educating young people on their rights and responsibilities as citizens in a democracy, as well as teaching them how to exercise the power of active citizenship» (Graham & Weingarten, 2018, p. 5). Specifically, it was their debate and forensics training that developed the advocacy skills that prepared them to lobby against the tremendous influence of the gun lobby (Abowitz & Mamlok, 2019).

Consequently, the skills learned by debating are life-long, transferrable skills that not only help preserve democracy, but they also encourage students to recognize they have a voice that they can use in a variety of important ways. John Meany and Kate Shuster (2003) summarize how debate facilitates training in critical thinking, advocacy, activism, and political engagement: «In democratic societies, argument is the lifeblood of politics. Citizens or their elected representatives argue all the time about how to best make policy that represents the interests of the people. These conditions mean that those who do not know how to make effective arguments are often left behind or left out, because they cannot advocate on behalf of their interests or the interests of their family, co-workers, or other groups to which they might belong. If you learn how to argue effectively and persuasively, you will be able to overcome these obstacles and become a participating citizen in the global culture of argument» (pp. 12-13). It should be noted here that Meany and Shuster (2003) are primarily discussing the utility of debate education for middle school students, which highlights how debate and argument pedagogy can occur meaningfully at various stages of student learning, ranging from late primary school, middle school, high school, and university.

## 5. Concluding Thoughts

As I have been discussing, democracy requires specialized pedagogical techniques. If we begin with the premise that the *demos* is, while not perfect, probably the best form of governance and, at the same time, its precarity requires constant vigilance, then we must carefully consider and take seriously our role in protecting and preserving it. Furthermore, any educational pursuit that attempts to promote democracy must focus on the acquisition of truthful political knowledge while also developing skills in *doing* democracy, such as advocacy, activism, and critical decision-making (Morrill, 1982). In this way, educators must have dedicated diligence as they teach young citizens to be skilled critical thinkers. One of the most effective ways of teaching critical thinking is through rhetorical practices, specifically argument and debate (Rogers *et al.,* 2017). By fostering critical thinking, educators can ensure that students critically process information so that they can effectively maintain a government for and by

the people.

The heart of democracy in general, and the teaching of democracy in particular, necessitates grappling with controversial issues. As I mentioned above, democracy by its very nature involves controversy. In a democracy, reasonable people can reasonably disagree, with the goal of locating some sort of compromise for the benefit of the *demos*. Yet, many people avoid discussing controversial issues. One obvious reason why they avoid them is because they are never taught how to discuss controversy. Additionally, many fear conversations about controversies will escalate, perhaps resulting in yelling or even physical blows. It is incumbent upon educators to find ways of teaching controversy and encouraging reasonable and meaningful dialogue about those contentious issues. Not only does our democracy require us to discuss such controversies, but failing to teach and avoiding controversies risks our students succumbing to intensified polarization. The potential that radical, fringe perspectives will be persuasive is because «children will always be political. If we teach youngsters to suppress their nascent political beliefs, and that school is not a natural place for healthy, holistic discussions, this not only leaves them vulnerable to radicalization by charismatic figures outside school but also strips them of their ability to think autonomously and deprives society of future political leaders» (Hady, 2021, para. 11).

Fortunately, civic education can occur in the curriculum of primary and secondary schooling, as well as at the university level. Additionally, civic education can exist in co-curricular or extra-curricular endeavors when youth have opportunities to learn, explore and practice civics-based issues. Curricular and extra-curricular civic instruction is vital, because «Crucial to the idea of developing civics knowledge, motivation and skills is [the] examination and discussion of controversial issues …. the premise of democracy lies in diversity of experience and ideas, meaning the controversy is intrinsic to the democratic phenomenon, and citizens must have the skills necessary to engage in meaningful and effective dialogue, including negotiation and compromise» (Zompetti, 2016, p. 190).

William Rehg (2002) has discussed the educational challenges in promoting the "transfer" of skills developed in argumentation classrooms to everyday citizen practices. One sound practice would be to incorporate argumentation perspectives into civic engagement initiatives so that rhetorical skills and democratic practices become better united in the daily habits of our students. As Dewey (1940) reminds us, the lived essence of democracy is in the daily practices and the habits of mind of its citizens.

Finally, civic education, through debate and argumentation, develops core skills that make youth profound political participants (Zompetti, 2016). These skills are vital for citizens to feel confident to participate meaningfully and for a democracy to function fully. Because democracy is an ongoing process, it needs to be reinforced and carefully maintained. Simply put, without renewal, democracy withers. Fortunately, the incorporation of argumentation and debate

training is a vital component of such civic education. For example, political classroom discussions are positively associated with interest in politics, political knowledge, and feelings of efficacy (Syvertsen *et al.,* 2007, p. 2). Notably, nearly all of the studies concerning civic education agree that activities such as debate and discussion help promote these core elements (Colby *et al.,* 2003; Galston, 2001; 2004; Rogers *et al.,* 2017).

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