This paper is taken from

Creating Communities: Local, National and Global
Selected papers from the fourteenth Conference of the
Children's Identity and Citizenship in Europe
Academic Network

London: CiCe 2012

CiCe
Institute for Policy Studies in Education
London Metropolitan University
166 – 220 Holloway Road
London N7 8DB
UK

This paper does not necessarily represent the views of the CiCe Network.

Deliberative debate as a procedure of citizenship education and community building

Elżbieta Wesołowska and Andrzej Sołoma
Warmia and Mazury University in Olsztyn (Poland)

Abstract

One idea of how to train young people in citizenship skills and help them develop their identity in heterogeneous societies stems from the concept of deliberative democracy. This ideological perspective claims that social controversies both on local and national level should be resolved by means of deliberative debates. This model of deliberation was developed by Amy Gutmann and Denis Thompson (based on works of Jürgen Habermas and John Rawls). Advocates of deliberative debates claim that participants in such discussions develop crucial citizenship skills like involvement and interest in community problems, autonomy and activity, and the ability to debate, argue and cooperate with opponents. Deliberation should, then, result in agreements that combine multiple perspectives and address the 'common good.' The problem, however, is that deliberative debate puts high requirements on participants as far as their cognitive, emotional and social functioning is concerned. This paper presents some empirical data that suggests the feasibility of deliberative debates and the positive outcomes it may have for real life conditions. The paper concludes with examples of the successful implementation of deliberative debates within the context of the formal educational system.

1. Introduction

Concepts of deliberative democracy and deliberative debates

During the last two decades the concept of deliberative democracy has gained significant interdisciplinary interest in social science. This ideological perspective claims that social controversies both on local and national level should be resolved by means of deliberative debates. It is opposed to adversary democracy model as described by Jane Mansbridge (1983), according to which decisions are made by voting with majority rule or bargaining of interests groups. Adversary model seems to be most typical and prevalent nowadays.

The reason for growing interest in the idea of deliberative democracy is that it includes advice about how to improve the functioning of present democratic systems. This improvement can be done through dissemination of deliberative debates as procedures for decision making and conflict resolution in various levels of social life. Advocates of this idea claim that deliberative debate should bring various beneficial results such as: handling moral disagreements and controversial issues; promoting "public good" perspective; increasing legitimacy of collectively made decisions; fostering democratic values and citizenship; and, teaching participation in the political system. Detailed descriptions of the deliberation outcomes and benefits can be found for example in

Fishkin and Luskin (1999). Deliberative debates can also create methods and procedures train citizenship skills in young people and help them develop their identity in heterogeneous society in a way that would contribute to community building (not differentiation or hostility to out groups).

What is deliberative debate?

One model of deliberative debate was developed by Amy Gutmann and Denis Thompson (1996) based on works of Jürgen Habermas (1984) and John Rawls (1999). According to that model, deliberation is a group process of searching for an agreement through discussion which should be characterized by the following requirements.

1. The individuals participate in a discussion free from any external pressures and their status in the debate is equal.
2. Participants treat each other ant their views with respect
3. The participants try to collectively analyze the controversial issue and work out a commonly accepted agreement.
4. During the analysis the participants openly express their positions on the issue, make proposals and present their justifications.
5. While justifying the proposals the participants should obey two principles: the reciprocity principle and the publicity principle.
   a. The reciprocity principle means that the participants should refer to reasons and regulations which the other disputants are able to understand and possibly accept.
   b. The publicity principle assumes that the debate takes place in an open forum and because of that the speakers should employ reasons which can potentially be accepted by a pluralistic audience. It excludes the use of justifications which are discriminating or offensive.
6. The deliberative search for agreement should employ the following mechanisms:
   a. The consideration of controversial issues from the 'public good' perspective. This means efforts to overcome the perspective of particular interests of the involved sides.
   b. The disclosure of basic assumptions, convictions, values or concerns underlying the proposals.

According to the predictions of the model the agreement can be reached through one of the following mechanisms:

1. The participants during the discussion discover that there is similarity of believes and values underlying the different articulated proposals (they learn that the opponents deep inside actually share some believes).
2. "economizing on moral disagreement", means that disputants work out an organizational solution which can be accepted by individuals holding different worldviews

3. "The moral accommodation" involves such changes in the cognitive structures of the participants which admit that the opposite moral option is equally valid as one's own.

As we can see from the description of the model both the procedure of searching for an agreement and the outcomes of the search promote beneficial results for democratic society. Advocates of deliberative debates claim that participants in such discussions develop crucial citizenship skills such as involvement and interest in community problems, ability to discuss, argue and cooperate with opponents, autonomy and activity. Deliberative debate is also important in heterogeneous society because it might address identity problems of young people, such as what values are important to me, which life style do I choose and why? Also, some studies indicate that the method used in discussions on the choice of profession in high school contributes to the development of entrepreneurship in countries undergoing economic transformation (Sołoma 2003).

Deliberative debate as described puts high requirements on the participants as far as their cognitive, emotional and social functioning is concerned. The participants should be aware of their positions on issue under discussion, be able to provide justifications, arguments for their stance, express opinion in public, and be willing to listen to conflicting viewpoints and open to reconsider individual points of view (Rosenberg, 2003; Scheufele, Hardy and Wang 2006). Numerous other requirements could be enumerated. This raises an important crucial question: Would it be possible to arrange circumstances fostering a deliberative debate in a group of ordinary citizens? Observations of real life show that people difficulty with reaching a decision through discussion especially when they have ideologically opposite views.

2. Feasibility of deliberative debates in real life conditions

The research questions about the feasibility of implementing deliberative debates and their outcomes in real life conditions were investigated with the project "Psychological prerequisities and consequences of deliberative functioning in political groups" carried by the team of psychologist in Warsaw. The main part of the research included 20 small group discussions (facilitated by a trained psychologist). The groups consisted of parents of school-aged children. They were asked to workout an outline sex-education programme for polish public schools. Some of the topics were highly controversial in Poland: namely how to present problems of contraceptives and abortion to the youngsters. The answers to such question may challenge the individual value system and worldviews which constitute the core of identity. We carefully arranged the situation of a discussion, precisely formulated the task for the group in order to foster cooperation, set rules of the discussion meant to induce critical analysis of the problem on one hand and collective search for solution for 'public good' on the other. Before and after the discussions the participants filled-in questionnaires testing their attitudes and some individual predispositions. More details of the project can be found in Wesołowska (2007, 2010) and Reykowski (2006).

Research results

Did we manage to create conditions fostering a deliberative debate?

In our 20 discussion groups 99 differences of opinions were articulated on a public forum. 35 of them were ideological controversies (such as 'how the problems of contraception and abortion should be presented to the youngsters'). In such cases we could observe a collision of Catholic Church and liberal perspectives. The remaining 64 differences of opinions concerned organizational problems (such as 'what formal qualification should the sex-education teacher have' or 'at what age should the children start this education'). Although cases when the discussion met all the criteria of an ideal deliberation were rare, in general the whole procedure turned out to be quite successful. Common group recommendations (which mean agreement was reached) were arrived at for 92% of organizational issues and for 85% of ideological issues. Some of the solutions worked out by 'ordinary citizens' even deserved to be called 'integrative' because they incorporated different ideological perspectives by referring them to more general, universal values (such as 'tolerance for diversity', 'freedom of choice', 'value of human life').

It means we managed to create conditions that fostered successful search for agreement in the groups of ordinary citizens who met for the first time to discuss highly controversial, delicate issue on which society's opinions are divided and even political elites (who are the most experienced in discussing) have difficulties in solving. Another result that could be used in favour of deliberation is that some significant changes in disputants attitudes to conflict solving were observed. Namely in some of the groups after the discussion the support for cooperative strategy of conflict resolution increased. We also observed some decline in acceptance of 'confrontation' strategy (open rejection of different perspective) and decrease in approval of 'egocentric strategy' (attempts to force one's own point of view on the opponent).

Summarizing the results presented above, we can state that it is possible for people of different views to come to agreement through the means of discussion in appropriately arranged conditions and what is even more they might acquire some important democratic attitudes. If deliberation sounds so promising we are inclined to ask 'could schools teach or form a habit of a deliberative mode of communication?' Perhaps we should think of schools as places where children not only acquire basic factual knowledge about the physical environment and sometimes about different social environments but also as places where an individual encounters different and colliding worldviews and is given the chance to reconsider his/her own, developing more mature identity?

3. Possibilities for implementing deliberative debates in the formal educational system

Can the schools be sites for deliberative communication? There are many theoretical arguments that suggest a positive answer to this question.

- Every child has both the right and obligation to participate in educational system. As a result different family values, attitudes and life styles are brought. The school becomes a place for encounter between students who come from different cultural and social environments. They pursue their individual goals in education but at the same time they need to establish some common ground, rules of cooperation and common purposes. Without doing so pupils would not be able to achieve their goals. The whole idea of deliberative democracy can be viewed as educational process, because individuals bring to discussion different perspectives, different arguments and justifications which other participants might learn.

- Schooling is the important medium for developing citizenship skills, sometimes it has to compensate for family deficit in training competences necessary for democratic participation (that might be the case for new democracies where many parents and grandparents have their experience with living under authoritarian regime and because of that have difficulties with setting examples of democratic attitudes and behaviours.

- There are arguments in the literature (review can be found in Englund, 2010) that mutual trust (crucial element of social capital) develops through extensive interactions with other individuals especially with those who belong to a different social category then oneself. Certainly such interactions should meet some normative criteria such as equal status, equal chances of participation, cooperation in reaching common goals.

Thus if we want to increase that capital we should create educational system from pre-school upwards that creates opportunities for such encounters.

- An ideal that we would like to come from educational system would be 'a deliberative person- who is reflective and responsible, open for self-correction'. Roth (2006, p.571) stated the purpose very clearly that we should understand development of democratic competence not in terms of how far young people 'acquire measurable knowledge, specific beliefs, interests, and values legitimized in relation to a majority culture within a specific nation in order to become well-informed members', but as a development of 'higher level intersubjectivity of a discursive agreement between citizens who reciprocally recognize one another as free and equal'.

- Researches in democratic countries report 'education levels have increased while political knowledge and interest have either stayed the same or even declined' and explain the phenomenon with civic education curricula 'focusing on structural and procedural facts and patriotic rituals' (Fiskin et al, 2007). 'Participating in sustained discussion of powerful questions can be both a mind expanding and community-building endeavor' (Parker and Hess, 2000).

This ideal can be approached (although probably not achieved) by incorporating deliberative debates as an educational tool, procedure or technique. Such an idea sounds

great but is easier said than done. Let's look at a few examples of practical implementation of deliberation at schools.

Example 1: *A randomized experiment in a California high school with a treatment to induce a deliberation (Fiskin et al 2007).*

Some students deliberated US foreign policy, others participated in traditional civic education curriculum and the rest received no civic education. Deliberation treatment resembled the procedure of deliberative poll designed by James Fishkin and Robert Luskin. It included the following steps:

1. first, students were provided with balanced reading materials (presenting different perspectives on the issue),
2. second, they discussed the problem in small groups and worked out questions to be asked to policy makers and experts, the discussions were moderated by a trained facilitator,
3. finally, students participated in plenary sessions with experts answering their questions .

Students who were assigned to traditional civic education treatment were given the same reading materials but no opportunity to discuss them with their classmates. Subjects in the control condition did not receive any of the above. All the experiment participants (aged 14 to 15) completed the so called 'pre-tests' and 'post-tests'. These were questionnaires surveys measuring their knowledge of the discussed issues, attitudes to that issue, political efficacy (a sense that an individual can exert influence on the political system, understanding of it's functioning and achieving individual goals within it), political interest and participation, tolerance and respect for of others' beliefs and trust in government.

The authors report that deliberation (compared to other treatments) significantly increased knowledge, efficacy, interest and civic engagement. It also had effect on formation of a more elaborated opinion on the discussed issue. It is worth keeping in mind that the deliberative treatment that produced such promising results lasted only for a couple of weeks in one course. We can envisage that implementation of deliberative procedures in other subject courses throughout the course of education would bring more visible results. One concern about spreading the deliberative procedures is that requires skilful facilitation. Leading productive classroom discussions is difficult. Can teachers be trained in leading discussions?

Example 2: *Training beginning teachers to lead discussions*

Parker and Hess (2001) shared their reflection on 'teaching *with* discussion *for* discussion'. They used discussion as an instructional strategy to help students' better understand reading material and hoped that this strategy would also prepare future teachers to lead discussion in their jobs. However, some of the future teachers who capably participated in discussion and reflected that they had no idea how to lead

discussions in their future jobs. Many people who have experience with leading discussions report it is a very difficult task and often are not satisfied with the quality of it. For these reasons Parker and Hess (2001) claim that there is need to make a discussion a curriculum objective and not only a teaching method of other subject matters. In such a curriculum, topics such as benefits, purposes, types and procedures of discussion should be included. The authors developed a typology of discussions that could be presented to pre-service teachers in order to improve their understanding and capability of discussions. The typology is a classification schema, the value of which is based on the ancient idea that taxonomic knowledge aids understanding. Typologies are not description of reality, rather they are ideal models that aid thinking and doing. Let us briefly quote the typology that Parker and Hess (2001, pp. 281- 282.) developed.

The first type of discussion called 'deliberation' aims at improving discussants' understanding of a discussed issues and reaching a decision about what 'we' should do to resolve a problem. The crucial point is the establishment of the sense of 'we the people' who make democratic decisions by the means of talking to one another. The in-put materials that the organizers of such discussion provide should include information about different alternatives related to the problem under discussion. The focus question to put at the beginning of discussion is 'what should we do?'. In short, in the typology of Parker and Hess deliberation is 'planning for the right action', 'weighting alternative courses of action'.

The second type of discussion is described as 'seminar'. The goal of it is an enlarged understanding of the resource text (or a print, a film selection, an artwork, an event, idea). The focus question is 'what does the author mean'. That is the most typical type of discussions in academic classes meant to broaden the students' horizons.

The third type the authors called 'conversation'. The main purpose of it is shaping common end for the discussing group (of course improved understanding of the situation is a necessity). The focus question is: 'what kind of people we want to be and the life we want to create in common'. The question can be made more narrow as 'what kind of classroom do we want to have'. The last one could be useful in classroom goal setting or in working out classroom rules.

The typology presented by Parker and Hess is only one example of attempts to teach effective discussions. There are plenty of other resources that could be used in 'would-be-teachers' training as well as ready-to-use class room materials for teachers (for example developed by the Kettering Foundation).

Example 3: Method of curriculum deliberation

Deliberation can be used as an effective method of a teaching curriculum development. Thomas Misco (2007) presents a detailed case study of the deliberative approach to preparing educational materials on Holocaust for the Republic of Latvia. The author explains the reason why this particular problem became the focus of his analysis (p.2): after the country regained the independence in 1991 teaching about Holocaust as it occurred in Latvia was rare due to the large number of living bystanders (who do not

help in rescuing Jews) and Nazi collaborators as well as lack of political encouragement to tackle the problem in teaching.

The application of deliberation method in a cross-cultural setting helped awaken a controversial and silenced history while attending to a wide range of social perspectives. The curriculum development project included six phases carried in the US and Republic of Latvia. It started with meetings of scholars from American and Latvia universities, representatives of Ministry of Education. In the first phase foundation, aims and organization of the project was set. In the second phase seven curriculum writes from Latvia arrived for a two weeks working period in US (as a neutral ground). Their work included negotiation of the goals and objectives of the project as well as research in US. Holocaust Memorial Museum. After that the team went back to Latvia to collect other relevant historical material. The third phase was a six-week residency in US devoted to writing the curriculum. Phase four included field testing of the curriculum in different geographical, ethnic and socioeconomic settings. In the fifth phase a national conference in the capital of Latvia was organized to inaugurate the materials and inform the public that they are available and effective. The final phase contained teacher training workshops.

Maso (p.10) reports that 'the use of curriculum deliberation resulted in a number of positive outcomes for democratic citizenship, including accurate and inviting lessons, broaching controversial issues, the use of democratic teaching strategies and the subjection of beliefs and attitudes to reconsideration, which can help reduce prejudice, intolerance, and racist attitudes'.

4. Conclusion

Creating democratic communities requires from the citizens the ability to discuss and make judgments about controversial issues and contemporary public concerns. In such discussions multiple social perspectives should be taken into account of equal status basis and the solution worked out should address divergent social needs attempting to find or create some common ground (or perspective). The procedure of deliberative debate seems to be one idea how to accomplish such goals. The empirical data presented in the paper indicate that:

- Deliberative debate is feasible in appropriately arranged conditions (requires external support) and helpful in working out and agreement in ideologically contentious issues,
- Deliberative debate can be used in formal education system as a teaching method that fosters crucial citizen skills.
- Teachers can be trained more effectively to lead classroom discussions (theoretical reflection on different types of discussions, their, objectives and input materials can be useful in this respect).
- Use of deliberation method in curriculum development helps in working out ways of handling controversial topics and silenced histories.

References

Englund, T. (2010) The potential of education for creating mutual trust: schools as sites for deliberation. *Educational Philosophy and Theory,* doi:10.1111/j.1469-5812.2009.00594.x retrieved 20 April 2012.

Fishkin, J.S. and Luskin, R.C. (1999) Bringing deliberation to the democratic dialog: the NIC and beyond, in McCombs, M. (ed) *A poll with a human face: the national convention experiment in political communication*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Earlbaum

Gutmann, A. and Thompson, D. (1996) *Democracy and disagreement*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press

Habermas, J. (1984/1987) *The theory of communicative action*, vol 1 and 2. Boston, MA: Beacon Press

Luskin, R.C., Fishkin J.S., Malhorta N. and Siu A. (2007). *Deliberation in the schools:a way of enhancing civic engagement.* Paper presented at the Conference of the European Consortium for Political Research, Pisa, Italy. Unpublished manuscript

Mansbridge, J. (1983) *Beyond adversary democracy*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press

Misco, T. (2007) Using curriculum deliberation to address controversial issues: developing Holocaust education curriculum for Latvian schools. *International Journal of Education Policy and Leadership* 2, 7. Retrieved 12 April 2012 from http:// www.ijepl.org

Parker, W.C. and Hess, D. (2001) Teaching with and for discussion. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 17, 273- 289

Reykowski, J. (2006) Deliberative democracy and 'human nature': an empirical approach. Political Psychology. 27,3, pp. 323-346

Rosenberg, S.W. (2003) Reason, communicative competence and democratic deliberation: do citizens have the capacities to effectively participate in deliberative decision making? Unpublished manuscript.

Roth, K. (2006) Deliberation in national and post-national education. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*.38, 5, pp.569-589

Scheufele, D.A., Hardy B.W. and Wang Z. (2006) Defining deliberation: key determinants and distinct dimensions. Paper presented at annual meeting of the International Communication Association, New York

Sołoma, A. (2003) Businesswoman- olsztyńskie kobiety sukcesu [Businesswoman – women of success in Olsztyn], in Jarco, J. (ed), *Prace Naukowe Akademii Ekonomicznej we Wrocławiu*, 8, 1008, pp.478-488

Wesołowska, E. (2007) Social processes of antagonizm and synergy in deliberating groups. *Swiss Political Science Review*.13, 4, pp.663-681.

Wesołowska, E. (2010) *Deliberatywne rozwiązywanie konfliktów wartości. Wielość drógdo porozumienia. [Deliberative solving of worldview conflicts. Multiple ways to agreement*.] Olsztyn: Warmia and Mazury University Press