
Democracy & Education

Education for Deliberative Democracy A Typology of Classroom Discussions

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Abstract

The theory of deliberative democracy places public deliberations at the heart of democracy. In order to participate in democratic deliberations, citizens need certain skills, attitudes, and values. Within the field of education for deliberative democracy, it is assumed that these are learned through participation in democratic deliberation. Thus, one way to educate future citizens for deliberative democracy is by constructing democratic deliberations in the classroom. In this article, four strategically chosen examples of discussions taking place inside classrooms are analyzed, in order to flesh out the abstract criteria of democratic deliberations and to create an empirically based typology of classroom discussions. In this article I also aspire to contribute to classroom practices by pointing out how teachers can steer classroom discussions toward democratic deliberation: They can use questions that open up space for disagreement, while at the same time present opportunities to reach collective conclusions.

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THE IDEA OF deliberative democracy has been widely discussed in political theory over the last two decades. It has also made an impression in the field of democratic education. Many who are interested in democratic education have started to ask how the skills and values assumed necessary for deliberative democratic participation can be taught and learned.

In a review of the field of education for deliberative democracy, Samuelsson and Bøyum (2015) argue that it is characterised by both agreement and disagreement. There is an overarching agreement that students and future citizens learn the skills and values necessary for deliberative democratic participation by partaking in deliberative discussions. Yet the field is also marked

by significant disagreements and differences in focus. The most important one is between studies viewing deliberation primarily as a political concept and studies viewing it primarily as a pedagogical concept. The first body of work starts from a theoretical conception of deliberative democracy and reasons from there toward the skills and values future citizens should develop. The second position starts with a pedagogical conception of deliberation, that is, deliberation as a classroom practice, and moves from there toward the skills and values that participation in it is expected to generate. This difference in focus and starting point only becomes a problem, however, when the pedagogical conception is not connected to the political idea of deliberative democracy. Thus, when it is argued that the pedagogical method

of deliberation fosters, for example, general social and emotional skills, it is an open question how and whether these skills are related to deliberative democracy. The result is a field in which empirical articles investigate something different than the theoretical field is arguing for and, thus, that the two bodies of studies tend to talk past each other.

The first aim of this article is to bring the more theoretical, political ideal of deliberative democracy closer to the pedagogical ideas of deliberation as a classroom practice. To do so, it is necessary to flesh out the abstract criteria of democratic deliberation with a concrete pedagogical content, without removing oneself too far from the political conception of deliberation. Using four strategically chosen examples of classroom discussions, I develop an empirically based typology (Kluge, 2000) that seeks to make salient the character of democratic deliberation taking place inside classrooms as well as to highlight the difference between democratic deliberations and discussions that appear to be deliberative in the relevant sense but that lack one or more crucial features. In this way, I strive to bridge the gap between the abstract criteria of democratic deliberations and the discussions taking place in classrooms. A second aim of the article is to contribute to classroom practices by pointing out how teachers can steer classroom discussions in the direction of democratic deliberation with the use of certain types of questions.

I begin by giving an account of the theoretical foundation of deliberative democracy, of democratic deliberations, and of the pedagogical idea of education for deliberative democracy. I then describe the empirical study on which the article is based, before presenting the typology of discussions found within the material. In this section, I also conduct a step-by-step analysis of representative examples of each type in order to show what a democratic deliberation might look like inside a classroom as well as to distinguish it from other closely related types of discussions. Finally, based upon the typology, I discuss possible implications for classroom practices in education for deliberative democracy.

Deliberative Democracy

Theories of deliberative democracy hold that the essence of democratic politics does not lie in voting and representation but in the common deliberation that underlies collective decision making (Chappell, 2012). At the core of these theories is the reason-giving requirement: Citizens and their representatives should justify to each other in a process of public deliberation the laws they impose on one another (Thompson, 2008). Whereas voting-centred views see democracy as an arena where fixed preferences and interests compete, deliberative democracy emphasises the communicative formation of will and opinion that precedes voting. In this view, democracy gets its legitimacy not through majority rule per se but through the process of giving defensible reasons, explanations, and accounts for public decisions (Held, 2006). In short, a legitimate political order is one that can be justified to all those living under its law (Chambers, 2003).

A number of different theorists have contributed to the development of the theory of deliberative democracy. It has mainly developed in two branches with slightly different focuses. The

“European view,” led by Habermas, has focused on developing a macrolevel theory of deliberative democracy, while the “North American view,” influenced by Rawls’s political liberalism and primarily represented by Gutmann, Fishkin, and Cohen, has concentrated on exploring real-life examples of actual public deliberation. Despite differences in attention, however, there are some aspects of deliberative democracy that most scholars of deliberative democracy agree on. Two of them are highly relevant to this article: the essential features of a good democratic deliberation and the purpose of such deliberation.

According to Habermas, a good deliberative process is based upon “the ideal speech situation,” a communicative situation where everybody can contribute, where they have an equal voice, and where they can speak freely and honestly without internal or external deception or constraint (Chappell, 2012). According to Gutmann and Thompson (1996, 2004), it is a reason-giving process in which participants use arguments accessible to all citizens and appeal to principles that all reasonable citizens could accept. Fishkin (2009, p. 34) sees deliberation as a process where arguments offered by one perspective are answered by considerations from other perspectives and where the arguments offered are considered on their merits regardless of which participant offers them. Thus, it is possible to discern a common core in these ideals of democratic deliberation. It is a discussion in which different points of view are presented and underpinned with reasons, and participants listen respectfully to each other and reflect on other participants’ claims and arguments.

There is also a rough agreement in the field about the purpose of a democratic deliberation. It is directed toward some form of collective-will formation. This is the practical, political aspect of deliberation: The participants are in some way trying to reach an agreement on how to act (see, for example, Habermas, 1998). We may thus distinguish between deliberation in a narrow, political sense and deliberation in a wide, not necessarily political sense. This means that a discussion can be deliberative (in the wide sense) without being connected to an idea of democracy. For example, in what may be called an explorative deliberation, participants may discuss a certain claim or concept and use arguments and reasons to inquire into it, but without striving to reach a collective decision to act upon. In order for a discussion to be deliberative in the sense pertinent to deliberative democracy, it also has to involve a striving for a collective-will formation, that is, some agreement about what to do.

Despite the overarching agreement in the field, there are also disagreements. For example, what is to count as a deliberative reason? According to Gutmann and Thompson (1996), a reason has to be guided by reciprocity in order to qualify as deliberative in a democratic sense. The principle of reciprocity asks citizens to use reasons other reasonable and similarly motivated citizens could accept, even if they have different worldviews. On the other hand, theorists like Young (2000) have argued that many formulations of deliberative democracy are too narrow. She argued that by using strict criteria for what counts as deliberative, one runs the risk of excluding from democratic participation certain types of reasons, perspectives, forms of conversations, and in the end, citizens.

Therefore, reasonableness should not be restricted to specific types of reasons but rather be defined as a willingness to listen to others and to maintain an open attitude to those who try to explain to you why you are wrong (p. 24). As should be clear, this discussion is not limited to questions about reasons alone but is also related to broader questions of democratic legitimacy, inclusion, and exclusion.

Similar disagreements can be found concerning the aim of democratic deliberation. Some have argued that deliberation should aim for a deep kind of consensus, in which citizens ideally agree on the course of action as well as on the reasons for it (Chappell, 2012), while others, given the challenges of a modern, pluralistic society, have argued for a relaxed notion of consensus, in which participants agree on the course of action but not necessarily on the reasons for it. Important influences for the latter position are Rawls's (1987) notion of an "overlapping consensus," Sunstein's (1995) notion of "incomplete theorized agreements," and Gaus and Vallier's (2009) idea of "convergence."

Education for Deliberative Democracy

Deliberative democracy has been criticized for being unrealistic: People are neither willing nor capable of participating in democratic deliberations (Englund, 2007). They are, so this criticism goes, driven by self-interest and are not willing to make decisions based on the idea of the common good and/or are too irrational and emotional to be capable of listening to reasons and arguments. Hence, they stick to the beliefs they already hold rather than being open to letting them be transformed in deliberation with others.

However, even if one assumes what is already doubtful, that this is true of the current situation, this criticism is based on a static view of people as unable to learn. If future citizens are taught to participate in deliberative democracy, the likelihood that they will be capable of doing so will increase. Furthermore, if citizens were capable of participating in democratic deliberations, the possibility of successfully implementing more deliberative practices in society would also increase, as would the opportunities for citizens to co-construct democratic deliberations on their own. Therefore, an education for deliberative democracy seeks to educate future citizens to participate in and to co-construct democratic deliberations and is, thus, first and foremost interested in teaching them how to state claims, give reasons, listen to and reflect on others' arguments, and strive toward finding a solution in collaboration with other participants.

Within the field of education for deliberative democracy there is a general agreement that future citizens learn the skills and values necessary for deliberative democratic participation primarily by partaking in deliberative situations, and not, for instance, by reading about deliberative democracy (Samuelsson & Bøyum, 2015). But what does this mean more concretely? The common core of democratic deliberation described so far seems too abstract to be applied directly in classrooms. Perhaps the clearest contemporary translation of deliberative democracy into a pedagogical conception is that by Englund (2006). A deliberative educative situation, according to Englund, is one in which (a) different views are confronted with one another and

arguments for them are articulated; (b) there is tolerance and respect for the concrete other, and participants listen to each other's arguments; and (c) there are elements of collective-will formation, a desire to reach consensus or a temporary agreement. Two additional criteria are also formulated, stating (d) that traditions are allowed to be questioned and (e) that deliberative communication should eventually take place without teacher control. However, according to Englund, the first three criteria represent the inner core of deliberative communication. We may summarize these as three requirements: the reason-giving requirement, the reflective requirement, and the consensus requirement. The assumption is that by participating in classroom discussions following these criteria, students will have the opportunity to practice making arguments, giving reasons, listening to others, and so on, while at the same time being part of a collective-will formation process. By partaking in deliberative educative situations, students will, it is hoped, gradually become more and more competent at democratic deliberation.

However, as shown above, there are disagreements about the precise definition of deliberative democratic criteria. Furthermore, if one assumes, as this paper does, that future citizens learn deliberative skills and values by partaking in deliberative situations, specific features of those situations become important because different interpretations have different educational implications. Will the students be encouraged to strive toward a deep or a relaxed notion of consensus? Will they learn that a deliberative reason has to be accompanied by reciprocity, or should reasonableness rather be understood as merely a willingness to listen? In one sense, this article sides with Young (2000) in leaving the concept of reason open, since it does not take a specific stand on what is to count as a reason. By leaving the reason-giving requirement, along with the other two requirements, slightly open, I argue that it is possible to bridge the gap between theories of deliberative democracy on one side and empirical research conducted in classrooms on the other without losing the essence of deliberative democracy in the process. However, as I shall return to, this openness does not stop the students themselves from adopting stricter criteria for deliberation in particular contexts.

Yet even if we are now somewhat closer to fleshing out the abstract criteria of democratic deliberation, we still need to get a more concrete idea of what a classroom discussion that satisfies the three requirements actually might look like. In order to do this, it is important to distinguish democratic deliberations from discussions that are similar but lack one or more characteristic features. Hence, the aim now is to bring the theory of deliberative democracy and the ideas from deliberation as a classroom practice closer together, by analyzing examples of classroom discussions and by developing a practically useful typology.

Empirical Study

The data for the empirical study that this article is based on was collected during the spring and autumn of 2014. The method of collection was qualitative, since the main interest was an in-depth investigation of classroom discussions. Three different schools were visited, all located on the west coast of Norway, in or just outside

one of the bigger cities in the region. I accompanied one teacher at each school for approximately two weeks, observed their classroom practices, conducted formal interviews with them, and was involved in informal conversations. The data contains samples from different grades (five, six, seven, eight, nine, and upper secondary) as well as different subjects (English, math, Norwegian, social science, and psychology). The profiles of the schools varied, with two of them being more ethnically diverse than the third. One school had a religious foundation, while the other two did not. The teachers were all interested in democracy as an educational aim, as well as in classroom discussion as a pedagogical practice. However, they were unfamiliar with the concept of deliberative democracy prior to participating in this study. Furthermore, even though the Norwegian national curriculum does include democratic competence as an explicit aim, the concept of deliberative democracy is absent. Nevertheless, as will be shown, it is fully possible that the discussions in the observed classrooms have democratic deliberative characteristics, even if the teachers were unfamiliar with the concept at the time.

The loosely structured observation guide that directed my attention during data collection was based mainly on Englund's three core criteria. Thus, I intentionally looked for discussions satisfying the reason-giving requirement, the reflective requirement, and the consensus requirement. During data analysis, a number of discussions seemed at first glance to be examples of democratic deliberations. However, upon closer analysis, significant differences between them appeared, allowing for the construction of a typology of classroom discussions relevant to education for deliberative democracy. In the following, I shall present this typology, illustrating each type with a representative example. As will be made clear, only the fourth and last is a case of democratic deliberation in the sense relevant to theories of deliberative democracy (which does not mean that the other three cannot be useful for teaching skills and values essential for deliberative democratic participation). Illustrating the first type is an example from a discussion about beauty, while the second type is exemplified by a mathematical discussion. The third type is illustrated with a discussion focusing on human rights, while the fourth and final type is exemplified by a discussion about how a class is going to work with a topic.

A Typology of Classroom Discussions

1. The explorative discussion.

The first type is a discussion with pervasive disagreement but with little striving toward consensus. To exemplify this, let's look at a discussion taking place in an English class in upper secondary school. Ten students and one teacher were present during the discussion, which focused on the concept of beauty. The debated questions fluctuated from "Why is beauty important?" to "Is modern art beautiful?" At first glance, this discussion seemed to be an example of a democratic deliberation, since the students were presenting different viewpoints; they seemed to listen to each other; and they seemed willing to think about each other's statements and posed replies to them. In the following short extract, the teacher and two students discussed whether people in the Middle

Ages could appreciate beauty in their everyday lives. The teacher argued that they did appreciate beauty, while the students argued the contrary.

Teacher: That doesn't mean their whole universe was deprived of beauty.

Peter: No, but he [Rembrandt] painted city citizens who were more like merchants and people that at least had housing, but I mean, throughout history most of the population have not been that well off.

Teacher: But do you think they were completely deprived of moments where [they asked,] "What are the possibilities of life?"

Peter: I wouldn't think so, but I don't think . . .

Tobias: Yeah, but we're not that . . .

Peter: [But I don't think they] woke up and stopped and felt like, "Oh, wonder what's going on. What am I doing here?" I don't think many people woke up thinking like that in the morning. I think most of them just went straight to . . .

Teacher: You guys, honestly, every day I practically wake up and it's, I mean, [laughs] "What am I doing here?"

Several students: [laugh]

Teacher: "What are the possibilities of this day?"

Tobias: Yeah, like Peter said, it wasn't any better; it was worse back then. In the big cities, if you go back a couple of hundred years, then you didn't have sewers, so what people would do? They would dump the sewage out their windows, meaning you literally had sewage running through the streets. That's not beautiful. You would wake up and: "Oh, there is sewage in the middle of the road."

This type of discussion fulfills both the reason-giving and the reflective requirements. In the example above, different claims were put forward, such as "That doesn't mean their whole universe was deprived of beauty" and "But I don't think they woke up and stopped and felt like, 'Oh, wonder what's going on. What am I doing here?'" The different claims were underpinned with arguments and reasons, for instance, "It was worse back then. In the big cities, if you go back a couple of hundred years . . . sewage [was] running through the streets . . . That's not beautiful." Furthermore, they listened to each other and responded to each other's statements: "But do you think they were completely deprived of moments where" and "Yeah, like Peter said." This shows the presence of the reason-giving and the reflective requirements. However, the consensus condition is not fulfilled. There were instances when they were responding to each other, but overall the discussion was more an exploration of differences than a construction of a common understanding and a striving for consensus. This is not irrelevant for democratic deliberation. Indeed, Parker (2006) sees it as a vital precursor to a deliberative process. It is not in itself deliberative in the sense characteristic of deliberative democracy, however, since it is not channeled toward a resolution that can be made a basis for a collective act. Therefore, this type has the characteristics of an explorative discussion rather than a democratic deliberation.

2. The problem-solving discussion.

The second type is a discussion with a clear striving for consensus but with little real disagreement. The representative example is from a mathematical discussion where 25 fifth-grade students were organized in groups of four trying to find the solution to 344 divided by 4. At first glance, this discussion seemed to be an example of democratic deliberation, because the students were discussing with each other, they listened to each other, and they seemed to collaborate. Furthermore, this discussion satisfied the condition lacking in the previous example: the consensus requirement. Each group had to come to an agreement about the answer, and they were also explicitly encouraged to discuss how to arrive at the answer (e.g., should they start by dividing 300 by 3 or by dividing 44 by something), and so they had to agree upon the calculation as well.

Markus: So, do we know the answer?

Charlotte: What is 300 divided by 4? What is 100 divided by 4?
Oh [sounds disappointed].

Erik: 20, 20 times 4 is 100.

Markus: No, 100 divided by 4 is 25.

Charlotte: 25 . . . [counting out loud by herself]

Erik: It's 20!

Markus: It's 25.

Erik: 20, 40, 60, 80, okay, fine.

Markus: 25 times . . .

Erik: Okay, 25. I said, fine.

Charlotte: But I have 20 . . .

Markus: Yes, do you understand?

Charlotte: . . . More, 100 divided by 4 is 25, so 100 . . . 25 times 3 is 75,
then [sounds happy].

Markus: Yes, the answer is 70, ehm.

Charlotte: 75 and then add 11, 86.

Markus: Okay.

Charlotte: But that can't be right.

Markus: Why not?

Charlotte: Oh [sounds happy], I just counted wrong, funny.

Markus: Yes, very [pretends to be laughing].

In this example, the consensus requirement is satisfied. They arrived at a collective answer for the group, and they agreed upon the calculation. However, this agreement was not reached by a deliberative reason-giving process. They disagreed about some calculations ("20, 20 times 4 is 100;" "No, 100 divided by 4 is 25") and about the answer ("But that can't be right"; "Why not?"). However, the discussion included few instances of genuine disagreement. They disagreed, but ultimately one of them turned out to be right, and the others turned out to be wrong. In this example, there was a right answer limiting the disagreement. They could have disagreed about the best way to conduct the calculation, as encouraged by the teacher, which could have resulted in a discussion with a less obvious correct answer, but this group ended up only explaining the calculation to those not understanding it yet. Therefore, this example does not include the reason-giving requirement and the reflective requirement, essential for a democratic deliberation.

Let us pause to compare the first two types. The explorative discussion fulfills the reason-giving and the reflective requirements but not the consensus requirement. Conversely, the problem-solving discussion fulfills the consensus requirement but not the reason-giving and the reflective requirements. Put sharply, the first is too open to count as democratic deliberation, and the second is too closed.¹ Naturally, since the intention behind a typology is to enable us to see recurring patterns in a chaotic world, it has to be simplified somewhat. In reality, therefore, classroom discussions will be placed along a continuum from open to closed, with the two types looked at so far being located at opposite poles.

Note also that even if neither of the first two discussion types is deliberative in the sense pertinent to deliberative democracy, they might very well be educationally beneficial. For example, in an explorative discussion, the students can practice making statements, using arguments, and reflecting upon other's statements. In a problem-solving discussion, they can practice making decisions together using dialogue. This might be beneficial for the development of the various skills, attitudes, and values that are necessary to participate in democratic deliberation.

3. The predetermined discussion.

The third type is also a discussion reaching a conclusion, while showing few instances of disagreement. Thus, it has similarities with the problem-solving discussion, but the starting point as well as the topic of the discussion is vastly different. Fifteen students in ninth grade, one teacher, and one teacher assistant, were discussing different topics related to human rights, such as the treatment of women, the death penalty, and euthanasia, over the course of one hour and a half. The teacher initiated the classroom discussion by presenting the content of three newspaper articles, but the discussion was not limited to those stories. The teacher explained Sharia law to the students. She was interested in their thoughts about it and used the following story to get them involved in the topic.

Teacher: Has anybody heard of the two girls in India who were hanged? First they were raped, then murdered, and then hanged.

Christian: I saw a picture.

Teacher: The two girls were casteless; do you know what that means?

Class: No.

Teacher: In India, they have a caste system, which is a way to divide society into different classes, like in England where you have upper class, middle class, and working class. You can't move from one class to another, not really, anyway, so you are stuck in the one you were born into. In India, you can be casteless, and these two girls were casteless. Two of the persons involved in this crime were police. This was not the first time something like this happened in India in recent years. Do you remember the girl on the bus who wasn't allowed off when

¹ This has, of course, partly to do with the subject matter, mathematics, but note that in other cases, perhaps more so in higher education, a discussion about mathematics could certainly satisfy the reason-giving requirement.

she wanted to and, instead, was brought farther along just to get raped by a group of men?

Class is silent.

Teacher: In India, it has become an attitude that girls are fair game. What do you think about this?

Class is silent.

Teacher [with a little more urgency in her voice]: You agree that rape is a bad thing?

Adrian: I think we all agree that rape is a bad thing.

At first glance, the topic seems ripe for democratic deliberation. How should women be treated in modern society? How should the raping of women be dealt with? What legal system should be the foundation for a nation? The ensuing discussion, however, lived up neither to the expectations of the teacher nor to those of the democratic theorist. A democratic deliberation includes the consensus condition, but the problem in this type of discussion is that consensus is already there from the start, and not something to strive for: “I think we all agree that rape is a bad thing,” as Adrian said. The case of the Indian girls is both shocking and challenging; it might incite students to political action, but it does not generate a genuine deliberation. The dialogue is not one where different views are confronted with each other in order to collectively find the best argument. Rather, the only argument is: Rape is a horrible thing—there are no competing viewpoints. Surprisingly, therefore, this example has similar characteristics to the problem-solving discussion: The conclusion was preordained, and there was no real discussion. The statement put forward by the teacher—“You agree that rape is a bad thing?”—was intended to get the discussion going, but it was obvious that it was not really up for discussion. Thus, this example also includes few instances of the reason-giving requirement and the reflective requirement.

As in the two previous examples, there are aspects relevant to future democratic participation that students could learn from taking part in this discussion. For example, the students could gain insight into existing injustices and acquire knowledge about human rights, and perhaps they could be stimulated to engage politically with the treated issue. Yet the topic of this article is whether they participated in democratic deliberations in order to practice giving reasons, listening to and reflecting upon other points of view, and at the same time striving to reach a collective conclusion, and in this case they did not.

4. Democratic deliberation.

Right after the attempted discussion in the former section, the teacher asked the students how they would like to continue working with the topic. This question instantly turned the classroom into a forum for democratic deliberation.

Teacher: How would you like to continue working with this topic? Because I think it is that interesting that we should continue with it. How would you like to approach it? I can see that not everybody has participated equally, and some of you haven't participated at all.

Christian: Two teams and two sides in a debate, where one side is for and the other is against.

Teacher: A formal debate, a debate society, okay. That could be a good thing to have on your CV as well. For example, in the USA that is a pretty big deal.

Adrian: In the USA, math teams are also a big thing, but we don't have to do those just because of that.

Teacher: But if we have two teams debating, do you have to believe the side you are on, or can you just pretend? Can you go into that role just for the sake of the debate?

Adrian: We have to be assigned the different positions.

Christian: If it is going to be a good discussion, it has to be something you stand for.

Adrian: You can argue a case even if you don't personally believe it or agree with their arguments. You can always have pros and cons, understand them, and use them in order to disprove the other side. For example, if you are going to discuss rape, one side can say, “The way she dressed was the reason,” while the other side could answer, “That shouldn't matter—you are not supposed to be raped anyway,” et cetera. In that way, you can use the arguments to disprove the other side.

Christian: I think everybody has similar opinions in here anyway.

Adrian: It could be a good exercise, to participate in a debate even if you're just assigned a position, to argue in favor of something even if you don't personally agree with that point of view.

Teacher: A defense lawyer, for example, he is supposed to do everything in his power to win, use evidence, find loopholes, et cetera, in order to get his client free, because that is his job. Do you have to go into a debate with emotions, or can you keep them out of it and be strictly analytical?

Adrian: Everybody has a price.

Teacher: But I'm thinking that maybe not everybody is equally comfortable participating in a debate. Some of you are shy, some of you will shut down, and some of you are disinterested. [She turns toward a group of girls sitting in the front who have been quiet the whole time.] What do you think?

Sara: I don't know; it's difficult to say what you think, to express your opinion.

Teacher: Would it be easier to write it down?

Sara: Yes, that would be better.

Adrian: I would rather have the debate.

Teacher: In a debate, it is very important that everybody feels comfortable in order for them to participate. Take you [addresses Adrian], for example—not to point any fingers, but you are pretty straightforward with your opinions, and that is your right, but that can make other people insecure, shut down, and shy away from expressing their opinion.

Andrea: A debate is fine as long as the topic isn't controversial.

Teacher: So, as long as the topic isn't too controversial, it would be fine? So, what kind of topic would you like?

Adrian: Pensions, minimum wages.

Teacher: Remember [referring to a point made earlier], not every senior citizen has an easy ride just because they get a pension from the state. If we are going to discuss something like

pensions, you have to have the whole picture, and I don't think we have that, so that will be too difficult a topic.

Teacher assistant: What about school? You can discuss how long pupils should have to be at school, how much homework they should have, et cetera.

Class: Yes!

In this example, three different smaller discussions were taking place: how to continue working with the topic; whether students should be assigned to sides randomly, or whether they need to believe what they are arguing for; and what the topic of the debate should be. All of them fulfil the three requirements for democratic deliberation.

Let us start by looking at the reason-giving requirement. In the discussion about how to work with the topic, two different points of views were presented, one in favor of a classroom debate and another in favor of writing down ideas individually. Both positions were underpinned with reasons, such as "That a formal debate is a pretty big deal in the United States" and "It could be a good exercise, to participate in a debate" on one side, and "Not everybody is equally comfortable participating in debates" and "It's difficult to say what you think" on the other. In the discussion of whether they should be assigned to sides randomly in the debate or should choose the side they support, different points of views were also presented, as well as different reasons for those positions: "If it is going to be a good discussion, it has to be something you stand for" and "You can argue a case even if you don't personally believe it or agree with their arguments." In the discussion concerning the topic of the debate, different suggestions, such as pensions and minimum wages, were put forth. An argument was presented against both of them: "If we are going to discuss something like pensions, you have to have the whole picture, and I don't think we have that." This shows the presence of a reason-giving process.

The reflective requirement is also fulfilled. The students displayed the willingness to listen to and reflect upon each other's arguments and reasons. They were also willing to revise their positions based upon reasons: "A debate is fine as long as the topic isn't too controversial." Furthermore, new suggestions were also presented based upon skepticism to the original suggestions: "What about school? You can discuss how long pupils should have to be in school, how much homework they should have, et cetera." Finally, the striving for consensus is displayed explicitly when Andrea tried to formulate a compromise that all parties could live with—"A debate is fine as long as the topic isn't too controversial"—and when the whole class unanimously agreed upon the topic for that debate. Thus, all three requirements are present and satisfied. This is not to take a stand on the actual quality of the deliberation in this example, but it is nevertheless an example of a democratic deliberation taking place in a classroom.²

This example, besides being an example of a democratic deliberation, also shows the advantage of siding with Young's (2000) strategy of leaving the specific content of "reason" open. By using less strict criteria, this class was presented with the

opportunity to democratically deliberate about the criteria for a classroom debate, such as what role emotions should have, how to get everyone to participate, and whether the topic should be controversial or not. By relaxing the criteria for acceptable reasons on the theoretical level, the teacher opened up for the students themselves to discuss and negotiate the character and structure of deliberation on the practical level. Furthermore, the questions they raised were important for theories of deliberative democracy as well as for deliberative classroom practices.

In the field of deliberative democracy, the role of emotions is a highly debated topic. Leading theorists like Habermas and Gutmann are frequently being challenged and criticized for not placing enough emphasis on emotions. One such critical voice has been that of Young (2000), who has stressed that emotions should not be regarded as a flaw in people's reasonableness but instead as a tool of reasonable persuasion and judgment. The discussion about emotions has also made an impression in the field of education for deliberative democracy, where critics of the Habermasian formulation have used ideas from Mouffe and radical democracy to incorporate emotions into the formulation of deliberative democracy (Samuelsson & Bøyum, 2015).

The class also discussed whether the topic of the debate should be controversial or not. This is an important question, not least to this paper. Hess (2009), a recognized name in the field of democratic education, has been one in favor of controversial topics. She has argued, with the use of empirical studies, that students increase their political tolerance and gain a better understanding of difficult political questions by taking part in controversial discussions. These results are highly interesting, and they are of importance to anyone involved in education for democracy. However, the concern of this paper is the development of the core skills of deliberative democracy, which is not what Hess has focused on. Deliberative skills are assumed learned through practice in democratic deliberation, and in my material, as shown in examples three and four, the topic of conversation was not the decisive factor in whether a deliberative pattern of conversation was established or not.

Furthermore, in the framework of education for deliberative democracy, there might even be pedagogical reasons for postponing the use of controversial topics. A case can be made that highly controversial topics are more difficult to handle than less controversial ones. For example, with highly controversial topics, students might be very emotionally attached to one specific position (again, the question of emotions) and might be mainly interested in getting their points across. These aspects, arguably more present in controversial discussions, could present challenges for creating the desired communicative pattern of reason giving, reflection, and collective-will formation. If the discussion instead concentrated on questions less controversial and emotionally charged, a deliberative communicative pattern might be easier to establish, and then, once the students gradually became better at democratic deliberation, more difficult questions could be introduced. The point is that if students are to be educated for deliberative democracy by practicing at democratic deliberation, the primary task has to be to establish a communicative pattern of democratic deliberation—the topic of that discussion is of secondary interest.

2 For a more thorough discussion of the difference between quality of and criteria for democratic deliberation, see Thompson (2008).

The main aim of the developed typology is to aid in distinguishing democratic deliberation from other closely related types of discussions taking place in classrooms. It is worth noting, however, that there are other typologies of classroom discussions aimed at democratic education. Parker (2006), for example, distinguishes between seminars and deliberations. Seminars are used to develop and explore meanings while deliberations are used for practicing decision making. However, my claim is that a discussion has to include both aspects to qualify as a democratic deliberation. Furthermore, his typology does not provide us with a nuanced enough picture to help distinguish democratic deliberations from other closely related types of discussions. I argue that the typology presented in this paper does that to a greater extent.

Practical Implications: Turning Classroom Discussions into Democratic Deliberations

The examples analyzed in the previous section represent different types of discussions. At first glance, a number of the discussions found in the material appeared to be examples of democratic deliberation. However, upon closer examination, these could be placed along a continuum from open (disagreement) to closed (consensus). On one side are discussions with pervasive disagreement but few instances of striving toward consensus (the explorative type), and on the other side are discussions with a clear notion of consensus but few instances of genuine disagreement (the problem-solving type and the predetermined type). These discussions do not satisfy the three requirements for democratic deliberations. Yet located in between these two poles are discussions that do satisfy them: democratic deliberations.

The different types of discussions do not just have different characteristics but are also structured around different types of questions. The explorative discussion, on one hand, is structured around an open question, such as “Did they appreciate beauty in the Middle Ages?” It has many open parameters, allowing the students to genuinely disagree and to present different viewpoints and perspectives. At the same time, it has several subjective, diffuse, and abstract parameters, making it difficult to strive for consensus. For example, what does it mean to appreciate beauty, and is it possible to know if people in the Middle Ages appreciated beauty or not? The problem-solving discussion and the predetermined discussion, on the other hand, are structured around closed questions. The mathematical question “What is 344 divided by 4?” is directed toward a conclusion: finding the answer to the mathematical problem. However, this question has a correct answer, which makes it difficult to disagree. The discussion concerning human rights has a predetermined conclusion, namely, that rape is bad. This point of view is not up for discussion, and the students have few opportunities to disagree. A closed question directs the discussion toward a conclusion, an essential aspect of a democratic deliberation, but since that conclusion is predetermined, it makes it difficult to disagree. The democratic deliberation is placed in between these outer positions. It is structured around a question open enough to allow for genuine disagreement but at the same time closed enough to clearly direct the discussion toward a conclusion.

The clearest example of the importance of the question asked is when the ninth-grade class moved from a predetermined discussion about human rights to a democratic deliberation about how to work with a topic. The two discussions took place in the same classroom, in the same class, involving the same teacher and the same students. The one condition that changed was the question asked. By changing the question, the teacher turned the predetermined discussion into a democratic deliberation. By using a question that was open enough to allow for an actual disagreement (but not so open that it got difficult to come to a conclusion) and at the same time closed enough to allow for striving toward consensus (but not so closed that it got difficult to disagree on the matter), she steered the discussion in the direction of a democratic deliberation.

This is, however, a highly contextual matter. A question directing one classroom discussion toward a democratic deliberation does not have to do the same in another classroom or at another time. Thus, finding a question with the right balance is up to the person (teacher) leading the discussion and is dependent on a number of contextual factors. It is important to emphasize, however, that finding the right question is only one of many factors contributing to the construction of democratic deliberation in classrooms and will not on its own turn every classroom discussion into a perfect democratic deliberation. Furthermore, even if patterns of democratic deliberation appear, it does not guarantee that every student participates, since there are many different reasons for why students could be left out. Thus, there are numerous obstacles in constructing deliberative democratic patterns of conversation in classrooms, and even if one succeeds at that, getting everyone involved might still be a challenge. The question of involving everyone is important in an educational sense. It is also, however, a question relevant for deliberative democracy in a wider sense. There may be contextual and structural factors required for a deliberation to fully qualify as democratic, as, for example, being at a certain level of equality, inclusion, and nondiscrimination in general. These questions are important and worthy of further discussion and investigation. In this article, however, the focus has been narrower, and in that context, finding a question with the right balance is arguably a crucial factor for constructing democratic deliberations in classrooms.

Conclusion

There are different ways of theorizing deliberative democracy, but scholars within the field agree upon the core of it: a reason-based public deliberation focused on reaching a collective decision. Therefore, an education for deliberative democracy is first and foremost interested in teaching future citizens how to state arguments, underpin them with reasons, listen to and reflect upon what others are saying, while striving to reach a collective conclusion with the other participants. Based upon the pedagogical idea that deliberative democratic skills are learned through participation in democratic deliberations, I have in this article attempted to flesh out the abstract criteria of democratic deliberation. By creating an empirically based typology, I have shown what a democratic deliberation might look like inside a classroom, as well as distinguished it from other closely related types of discussions. Based upon this typology, I have also discussed possible

implications for classroom practices. The conclusion is that by posing a question that gives students the possibility to disagree on the matter, while at the same time giving them the opportunity to reach a collective conclusion, it is possible to steer classroom discussions in the direction of democratic deliberation.

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