Deliberative Practices as Pedagogy and Tool for the Civic Engagement of Political Science Students

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David Matthews (2015, p23) sees deliberation as a necessary tool for students to learn “what is their role in a democracy and how they make a difference in their communities and countries”. It is an experience through which students become active participants in public life and realize that politics is not something that only politicians do. Political science departments, especially, have as one of their objectives to create engaged citizens (Battistoni 2015). Our paper maps the deliberative experiences used in political science courses and reported across universities in the United States and Europe. We see that deliberative forums used in classes have four objectives: to involve students in public life, to improve the quality of teaching techniques, to improve student knowledge and to formulate grievances during student protests. The achievement of these objectives are affected by two factors: the level of public involvement and the students’ perceived efficiency. These two factors intersected create a typology of deliberative practices in political science classes. The scope of this mapping exercise is to highlight the diversity of deliberative pedagogies used in political science classes and suggest that the public impact of deliberation affects its success as a teaching method.
Introduction

Why study deliberative pedagogy?

David Matthews (2015) sees deliberation in higher education as necessary for students to learn what is “their role in a democracy and how they make a difference in their communities and their countries”. It is an experience through which students become active participants in public life and realize that “politics was no longer seen as something only politicians do”.

During our classes we have tried used debate as a tool for learning that there is a diversity of opinions on issues on topics such as the political rights of migrants or the introduction of compulsory voting that were successful in getting students involved. On the topic of living conditions in student dorms, we organized with my colleagues a deliberative experiment that brought together students and professors from different faculties. This exercise had several beneficial effects in the sense that it made us realize that students from different faculties have common challenges. Dryzek (2010) and others claim that deliberation is not only a tool for decision-making but is a learning tool for a democratic way of thinking especially in terms of framing an issue.

Much of the literature of deliberation in the classroom is focused on case studies. These studies are informative and highlight the diverse methodologies used by political science professors. Because of this diversity it is extremely difficult to address comparative accounts of deliberative practices in the classroom. This paper fills this gap by trying to
map some of the experiences teachers of politics shared in published articles. The articles are distributed in four types of deliberative practices that take into account public involvement and student perception.

The richness of deliberative experiments in the US targeted the problems related the lower civic engagement of generation X. According to a study (Kiessa 2007) funded by the Kettering Foundation the millennial generation is more civically engaged especially at the local level. They prefer inclusive discussions on public issues. The next section proposes a theoretical framework that maps the deliberative forums used in US universities and other countries.

There are two theoretical frameworks according to which deliberative pedagogy can be understood. The first comes from the participatory theory and second comes from the learning outcomes research. Carcasson (2015) considers deliberative pedagogy as a teaching philosophy that prepares students for the public life that is challenged by what he calls “wicked problems”. He evaluates deliberative pedagogies by using Sam Kaner’s model of participatory decision making (2007) that focuses on three stages of decision making: divergent thinking, working through divergence (or what Kaner called groan zone) and convergent thinking.

He identifies the areas in which the university offers opportunities for divergent opinions to be expressed, for working through them and converge to opinions that allow public action. These practices generate sets of skills that are important for students to deal with the wicked problems they face in society. Carcasson notices that most universities in the US do not follow the classical Greek model of civic engagement and practical research but follow the German banking knowledge that emphasizes compartmentalization of research and science. He considers that overspecialization is an impediment for learning to solve societal problems.

According to the participatory theory the university seems to be an ideal environment to learn participatory decision-making. There are certain dangers that one has to be aware about: false polarization, false consensus, and paralysis by analysis.
Examples of divergent thinking usage on campus are numerous. Students are exposed to a broad variety of opinions, learn different perspectives and deliver presentations. Students often use an adversarial argumentation and picking up cases that support their argumentation and this is according to the author a sign of minimal divergent thinking. The second stage is minimally present in American colleges and there is no emphasis of interdisciplinarity. The third stage looks at reaching a common decision is often not followed by action. Most convergent thinking ends up in conversation for the sake of conversation. Another challenge is set by too much open mindedness and the idea that there is no single solution to any problem.

**Experiences of Deliberative Forums in Universities**

Several universities in the United States use deliberative forums, with a variety of methods, objectives and learning outcomes. In this report I am trying to map these experiences. There are four classes of objectives in which deliberative forums are put to use. These are:

1. Public involvement of students
2. Improving pedagogy
3. Improve student knowledge on issues
4. Substantiate protest activities of students

These four classes can be placed on a typology that involves two variables: the level of public involvement of students and the perceived efficiency of deliberation as a teaching tool.
A typology of deliberative forums use in higher education

The accounts of deliberative experiments that are detailed in this report can be mapped according to a typology. Typologies are intersections of two variables. Their aim, as Weber pointed out, is to understand events and experiences in the social reality. Most deliberative experiments included in this report highlight two important factors that affect deliberation: the level of public involvement and evaluation of deliberation. The level of public involvement influences the perceived efficiency of the deliberation as many studies pointed out. Furthermore, the efficiency of deliberation can trigger
different levels of public involvement during a deliberation. If students perceive that their involvement in a deliberative forum is not followed by an outcome that is from outside the campus area their willingness to get involved and evaluation of deliberation are negatively affected. Similarly a low perceived efficiency of deliberation disengages students sometimes is triggered by high public involvement. The Wake Forest experience with taking out the deliberative forum in the community had its problems that showed that public involvement in a deliberative forum might not have the perceived positive effects. Below I categorized the deliberative experiments into four types according to their goals, level of public involvement and perceived efficiency:

1. Deliberation as improving pedagogy
2. Deliberation as improving knowledge
3. Deliberation as improving community life
4. Deliberation as a form of protest

The efficiency would be evaluated by how students, who in this case are the citizens that are involved in deliberation, perceive the usefulness of this manner of addressing community problems. The perception of efficiency is the most difficult to observe. We use what is found in the articles on students perceptions about the experience of deliberation. Because most experiments are run by the researchers themselves there is a bias in reporting and influence positive outcomes and omit failure.

It is an empirical question which type is better for transforming students into engaging citizens that is not addressed in this report. These types are ideal and may not perfectly be found in reality but they shed light on the variety of goals deliberation is used for.

**Deliberation as Improving Pedagogy**

Daniel O’Connell and Robert McKenzie (1995) remarked that college is the best place to create what they called a “deliberative citizenry”. Political science classrooms seem to be the ideal place for deliberative forums. Bob McKenzie used in his political science
course the deliberative forums as a pedagogical tool. The aim of the course was to infuse the habits of civic participation and public effectiveness in the minds of the students. McKenzie made use of the National Issues Forum (NIF). The Kettering Foundation and the Public Agenda Foundation created the NFI and since 1981 they prepared issue books on Immigration, Juvenile Violence and Contested Values in Schools. The objectives of the course were:

1. Acquire political knowledge
2. Acquire learning skills
3. Be able to evaluate and acquire information about public policies
4. Makes political choices

This course combined a reflective dimension with a practical one. For the reflective part, students had to write essays on their deliberative experiences. Each class consisted of a deliberative discussion about political experiences and what is politics. The practical part consisted of several steps. First, students participated in a forum called “Politics for the 21st century”. Next they learn to frame an issue book. Finally students had to moderate and evaluate three issue forums. This method was recommended by Bob McKenzie for students to be civically literate and acquire political competence in evaluating public issues.

Cherie Strachan (2006) considers that the political science discipline is intertwined with learning the skills required for democratic citizenship. One of the ways in which these skills can be strengthened is through improving deliberative communication skills. Colby et al. (2003) observe that that democratic citizenship encompasses effective communication, efficient work with people that are different and people organizing skills. Although the argument that the effective citizenship is improved by deliberative communication skills its impact in higher education is only recently assessed. Most educational practices focus on formal education that is dominated by liberal political theory and not so much by communitarian political theory.

The impact of deliberative forums is mixed. Gastil (1999) found not relationship between NFI and future political activity and participation in forums decreased the
perceived efficacy of collective action. These findings were explained as effects of separating the deliberative practice from political influence. Most deliberative forums focus more on the process and less on the practical outcomes. There are three negative consequences of divorcing political influence from deliberative practice:

1. Because deliberating creates social discomfort people will feel less motivated to deliberate without an outcome that is important to them
2. Those who will participate will be those with intense opinions – these is present especially when in the group there are people with no experience of collective action
3. Telling citizens that their recommendations will be sent to a public official is not enough and may actually increase the feeling of ineffectiveness of collective participation

Starting from the above limitations and ideas about the role of deliberative collective action, Strachan (2006) is set to evaluate the impact of a curriculum on oral discourse developed at the University at Albany. Similarly to McKenzie’s approach, the course started with readings and discussions. The focus of the readings revolved around ways of communication with a special emphasis on the worthiness of deliberative communication skills. The course presented the factors associated with the failing levels of participation in US from one generation to another. The next four weeks were dedicated to a practical part. Students were divided into small groups and they were asked to have a common group position on a public issue. Here the focus was not to teach students to support their own position but to learn skills of compromise and negotiation in order to arrive to a successful collective action outcome.

The second assignment was to decide upon a solution to the identified problem and convince their fellow students about a desired political solution. They had to research a plan of action and convince others of the political action they have chosen. Students had to face the problems related to convincing citizens to mobilize for collective action. The reactions of students were documented through a pre and post semester questionnaire. There was no control group used in this study. The researchers measured internal and
external efficacy but found no change. A second set of indicators used in this research encompassed attitudes toward collective participation. Attitudes towards statements such as “Working with others is the best way to get things done” did not change but generalized trust increased. Another interesting finding was that more students perceived that collective activity (with the exception of attending a local meeting and speaking out at a meeting) is efficient at the national level. Students also were less likely to engage in apolitical activities. This finding is surprising and it hid a methodological issue. The pretest was administered after leisure time period and the posttest was administered when students were very busy hence having less time to engage in apolitical activities.

Pollock, Hamann and Wilson (2011) compared the effectiveness of small class discussions to the large class discussions. They wanted to relate discussion format to student engagement. The students from a political theory class were subjected to this exercise. Their participation was not graded. First students participated in two large class discussion followed by two small class discussions. Students were divided into small groups of five students and each had to deliberate on the relationship between democracy and capitalism and discuss the freedom of speech starting from Mill’s arguments from On Liberty while the large-scale discussions targeted the Logic of Collective Action by Mancur Olson and Tocqueville’s Democracy in America. Researchers tracked gender differences, GPA, race. Following each discussion students completed a standard questionnaire distributed at the end of the discussion. They found out that small scale group discussions stimulate students to engage into discussions while discussions in the large classroom has positive effects on student satisfaction. Moreover, students from different ethnic or academic background and at different levels of academic achievement, were more prone to express an opinion in small groups. The small group settings appear to stimulate critical thinking and higher order learning.

Omelicheva and Aydeyeva (2008) are set to show the difference in learning outcomes between using traditional lecturing and debate during an introductory class in political
science. They involved 60 undergraduates divided in two classes. The researchers have selected 6 controversial topics. They used topic 1, 3 and 5 were presented as debates. The rest were presented in lecture format. At a second stage the format was switched between topics. Debating changed and lecturing was preceded by an informative session managed by a professor that presented the pros and cons of the topic. The next step consisted of organizing a debate, while the other group received a lecture where the professor presented the contrary positions and challenged them. Pre and post debate/lecture questionnaires were used to measure the effectiveness of debate. Before the debate, in order to ensure students involvement professors organized a pre debate poll of student opinions on the debated issue. The results showed that in terms of knowledge students scored higher while on comprehension, application, critical thinking (score were extremely low). Students concern about a topic increased during the debates and a greater number of students changed their opinion. None of the methods excelled in promoting student’s application and critical evaluation. Debates encouraged students to change their attitudes or to think about the issue. Deliberations surrounding the debate were especially beneficial in affecting students’ opinion. The limitations of this study include not assigning subjects randomly to the lecture versus debate treatment. The distribution of students was similar in classes and the order of administrating lectures or debates did not create biases.

**Deliberation as improving knowledge**

Latimer and Hempson (2012) used deliberation as a tool for classroom learning. The authors addressed the problem of lack of students engagement by studying the effects of deliberation on civic engagement, political knowledge and having opinions on policies. They consider that political science can promote student efficacy and civic engagement. They adopted a modified version of the Deliberative Polling process used by Fishkin. They define deliberation as “a normative political theory that presupposes
rational communicative behavior and participation in government on the part of its citizens.”

They use the Deliberative Polls methodology: The select randomly a representative sample and invited to participate into a one or two day deliberative polling. Participants receive briefing materials that show pros and cons of a set of policy proposals. Then participants discuss with experts and decision makers the set of questions that was developed through discussions in small groups with moderators. Then citizens are asked again the original questions. Students from two political science classes were involved in the deliberative polling. As topic they selected political economy. Two groups of students were selected. The treatment group benefitted from the deliberative poll while the control group received a lecture about the topic. Pre and post experiment surveys were applied that tested the political and civic engagement. The students in the treatment group were provided with the information and had to read the texts until the next class and then the instructor told them that they will be divided into small groups and will be informed about how the discussion will work. Each group had to discuss the different points of view presented and at the end they have to formulate a question to the expert a question upon which they all agree. Students were given 45 minutes to discuss the issues and elaborate a question. The instructor acted as a moderator and tried to make sure that each opinion is heard and that students discuss the materials. After the questions were discussed the students completed the post survey. The topic selected was about the impact of Walmart on the local economy. The control group received the review materials and they were told to read them for the next class. And the lecture included answers from the questions that were included in the text. At the end of the lecture two questions were asked after that students completed the post survey.

The results showed that participation in deliberative polling increased their awareness about the issues, accumulate more knowledge and increased projected levels of engagement. The classroom could be used as a place where indifference and apathy can be reduced through deliberative polling. This research provided a tool for active learning
and civic engagement of students moreover deliberative methods led to opinion change of students.
The survey contained 19 questions on economy and policy based statements concerning Wal-Mart, plus six questions concerning anticipated engagement on campus and community. They used Likert-scales. There were knowledge questions about Wal mart in the form of true false statements.

Trudeau (2003) concentrated on the effect of reading and discussion before class meetings to improve learning. He used Internet forums to generate discussions about topics such as cynicism of political life. Interestingly he considered that pre class discussion facilitate improved in class discussions and higher student learning achievements. Students were presented with several topics that were strictly related to the reading assignments. 48 hours prior to class students had to react and discuss the topic proposed by the professor. Their contribution was graded. The research showed that involving students in discussion forums on the topic to be discussed before the class significantly improved discussions in class.

**Deliberation as Improving Community Life**

**The Wake Forest research on deliberation**

This is a four years project that included experiments that were meant to test the efficiency of the deliberative practices in a campus setting in Wake Forest liberal arts University. 30 students were included in this study.

**Defining the problem**

The study started from identifying the alienation of the public from politics. The alienation process was especially visible at youth showing that especially students display a low level of interest in politics or do not participate in elections. Secondly the authors wished to test the positive effect of deliberation on public issues. Their research design had three questions:

1. How the college life impacts students civic engagement
2. Whether students that deliberate consider that they have different roles as citizens compared to students that did not experienced deliberation
3. What is the effect of the locus of deliberation? Does it mater for students whether it takes place in the classroom, on campus with other students or with other people in the community

The research design
30 students were selected from the entering class They were interviewed when they joined the first year seminar named “Deliberative Democracy” beginning and later they participated in focus groups during their four years stay. The second group was randomly selected and included students that did not benefit from the deliberative democracy seminar but were from the same cohort. They were also interviewed and participated in subsequent years focus groups. During the students second year another group of student was interviewed. They were, nor benefiting neither from the deliberation seminar, nor from the same class cohort but they have been involved in a deliberative forum organized by the democracy fellows (students benefiting from the deliberative seminar in the first year). The democracy fellows were selected from 60 applications respecting a balanced mixture of socio demographics and liberal and conservative attitudes and previous high school engagement.

Findings
Initial investigations revealed that students mirrored the lack of sense of efficacy, and pessimism about American politics. Patriotism and optimism were quite high possibly due to the reactions in the media about the September 11 events. Students displayed a dislike of partisan politics, money and politics and felt helpless. A second step included the preferences of students about models of encouraging civic engagement. The four models for the higher education are the following:

1. traditional academic: classroom teaching
2. community service: volunteering in community and doing service learning
3. teaching democratic skills: campus and classroom activities that teach about deliberation
4. democratizing campus: making campus governance more democratic by including students in the decision making process

Students disliked the traditional model of teaching. Some who preferred it said that it allows them to choose their engagement model and enforce lazy students to learn how to become active and other criticized the lack of practicality the lies within this model. The community service model was appreciated as being a very good tool for making the deliberative skills and civic engagement at work while the teaching democratic skills model was criticized for teaching deliberation in classroom that is an isolated environment. Finally the democratizing model was welcomed by some students while other considered that a too democratic model of university decision making will prepare students to be disillusioned about the democratic decision making.

The deliberative process in classroom

Students that arrive to college have negative experiences about group decision making. It seems that it only creates distrust and see group decision making as an impediment to their individual progress. Regarding deliberative skills these have to be learned. It seems that the initial natural response in a public talk is to defend ones opinions and that the people who feel comfortable with public talk are those whose opinions are taken into account. Students acquire knowledge about topics and components of deliberation and it seems to be a socially constructed knowledge than a received one. This type of knowledge acquirement is clearly favored by students. Similarly to findings in social psychology, topics that are closed to the students’ interest stimulate deliberative discussions about politics. Diversity is a challenge in deliberative decision-making. Being exposed to contrary opinions can trigger a rejection of alternatives to protect one’s own opinion. The students at Wake Forest were homogeneous prone to premature agreements.

The seminar focused on the theory but also on the practice of deliberation. Students had to read texts on the democratic theory of citizens’ engagement and had to
participate in NIF deliberations on public education, race and ethnic tensions. After each deliberation there was debriefing about the process and how problems may be overcome. Students learned how to gather concern and frame an issue. Finally students had to write an essay about the experiences of deliberation.

The classroom constituted a fertile ground to teach and practice deliberation. Students acquired knowledge that was put to practice through forums. There were however several challenges. One of the main problems is that there is an obvious disconnect between the classroom and the real world. This creates a gap between how deliberation works in the classroom and how it functions in the real world. Thus students complained about not learning how to transfer skills in the real world. The second challenge was related to the moving from talk to action. Once they have discussed what they should do students could not identify individual actions. The third challenge is connected to teachers conflicting role between being a moderator and a teacher. A moderator has to learn how to disappear in a discussion and not to be a teacher. Fourthly, one important incentive for student engaging in deliberation is that the students’ work had to be graded. This makes some students motivated to engage simply for getting a higher grade.

In conclusion despite the challenges posed by using deliberation, the classroom proved to be a perfect environment for getting accustomed to an unfamiliar approach. Once democratic skills are developed the next step is to take this skills to practice in the real world.

*Deliberation in the Campus*

The second stage of the Wake Forest project involved the democratic fellows as facilitators of campus deliberation. In the last month of their seminar they identified issues that might lead to a campus deliberation. They followed what they learned and chose an issue that is frameable i.e. it is of broad concern for the community, it presents choices but not clear answers, it depends on a lot of people, it suggests new approaches, it was not publicly debated, it offers the benefits of public judgment to officeholders. Students chose reviving the community spirit in their university. Most
democratic fellows acted as moderators. More than 120 people participated and were divided into small groups. The most impressive result of the students’ involvement in deliberative forums is that their sense of political efficacy has dramatically improved. Compared to their colleagues democracy fellows reported a higher frequency of political involvement. Moreover the students from the campus that participated for the first time in a deliberative forum on how their university should have a stronger community spirit seemed excited by this experiment. Democracy fellows’ critical thinking abilities increased and they seemed to understand when deliberation takes place in a group. In a similar fashion students showed a tendency towards agreement. The Wake Forest bubble was considered as troubling by some of the students. The deliberation forum altered attitudes towards professors and administrators and students. They were portrayed as caring and involved. There were challenges. One of them is finding an issue that is interesting for students, professors and administrators. Several students claimed that they should not be involved in the decision-making process of the campus since there are people who are responsible to make decisions. The success of deliberation depends on the interest of administration.

In conclusion, the deliberative experiment in campus increased students’ sense of efficacy. They put aside cynicism, talked to their pears and attempted to influence and involve decision makers. Deliberation ultimately created avenues for civic action.

*Deliberation in the community*

At this stage students tried to break the Wake Forest Bubble by engaging with the community in Winston-Salem. In the US students are not motivated to get engaged in the community that surrounds their campus. Students view themselves as transient and they are unwilling to get involved into their host community. Most students show up and service learning activities but they only are trying to get through. Most student community involvement revolves around service learning. The Wake Forest research focused on the communication between the campus and community. Many universities are quite slow in engaging into conversations between themselves and their community (Thomas 2003) and universities tend to see themselves as experts not partners.
Students did some research and identified urban sprawl as one problem facing the Winston-Salem community. Then they met with community leaders and engaged in conversations with citizens. Finally they drafted and issue book and trained moderators and organized a 50 person deliberative forum. At the beginning a short film was displayed and attendees were broken into four groups. The experiences of the fellows were mixed. Some have said that their viewpoints have been broadened by the deliberation while others have seen this experiment as disempowering. First it was difficult to gather a representative community. Those that attended were affluent, white and highly educated. Students did not think that it would be so difficult to gather people and raise people’s interest about urban sprawling. The complexity of the issue, the low interest of the community in urban sprawling, the inherent problems related to moderating, teachers’ involvement in the concern gathering and students feeling supervised by professors.

Students’ experience with getting out of their comfort zones was recognized as valuables. They have learned a lot about urban sprawl and expanded their critical thinking. Yet the administrative and planning skills failed to measure up to the task. Students had preconceived notions what the community thought about them and professors were faced with a moral dilemma whether they should leave students to fail their planning of the deliberative meeting or get involved and acquire the objective. The Wake Forest study ended with a set of interviews and surveys that compared students that went through the deliberative seminar and those that did not. Both groups showed the same level of interest in national politics and surprisingly they started to consider talk as a type of political action. The differences between the two groups were high. Democracy Fellows had more knowledge of the democratic process they had a more sophisticated assessment of the problems surrounding their political system. They considered deliberation as a participatory act, as an opportunity to listen to the other. They viewed politics as dialogue or less self-interest.

Deliberation as Protest
Hammer (2016) studies deliberative forums that are linked with social movements in Hungary. A loose network of students called HAHA and an Occupy Universities group created an online platform as well as forums and group discussions around the governments’ initiatives on higher education. These forums give a sense of empowerment to students and give continuity to the protest actions. For students it feels that their protest actions such as occupying a university give them a sense that democracy has meaning. They used the forums for conflict resolutions. Social movements are a diverse group, with voices that are often in dissonance. For instance football supporters groups in Hungary wanted to take over the student forum but with the help of an inclusive forum setting these conflicts could be introduced as a topic of discussion among opposing groups. Some problems were not solved and students felt at times powerless. But they found out a way to get involved in public life and created what Hammer called a “discursive community”. This is a wonderful example in which students addressed public problems on their own by combining sit-ins with deliberative forums.

Conclusions
The deliberative forums used in the classroom are wonderful opportunities for students to engage in difficult discussions without engaging in adversarial talks. Students greatly appreciated classes where they had the chance to engage in moderated discussions about important topics. This paper aimed at presenting a typology that maps out deliberative experiences in the political science classrooms. The four types although not exhaustive they are able to incorporate several other deliberative experiments. One strong limitation of this mapping exercise is the difficulty in finding reports on student perceived efficiency of the experiments in which they were involved. Even so we have noticed that experiments with a practical outcome such as the Wake forest experiment have a powerful impact on students’ civic skills. It is our aim to incorporate more deliberate experiments in our mapping exercise and learn from the problems, failures and successes of using deliberation in the classroom.
References


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