

DELIBERATIVE DEMOCRACY IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE EDUCATION IN THE USA

Anna Petrosyan

Yerevan High School after H. Galstyan № 83

Democratic education recognizes the importance of empowering citizens to make educational policy and restrains the choices that they make among policies. This obligates and authorizes teachers to use curriculum and practices that support the intellectual and emotional preconditions for democratic deliberation: students recognizing their common interests and reconsidering individual interests in relation to understanding the interests of others.

Key words: higher education, dialogue, deliberation, deliberative democracy, educational program, educational policy.

Introduction

The article aims to contribute to the important discussion about the role of deliberative democracy in English - language education. Deliberative democracy primarily involves democratic participation, inclusive dialogue, public reasoning and deliberation, and collaborative social and political decision-making. I examine both using pedagogy that engages deliberative democracy in process, ipso facto attractive teaching, and advancing deliberative democracy as a valuable goal in English - language education. I focus on it and coursework directly related to it rather than other subfields within education (such as educational psychology or educational administration) because I believe the training of future teachers will have the most direct impact on their practice of democracy in the classroom and thereby the perpetuation of a healthy democracy.

Deliberative Democracy and Education

The evaluation of educational policies unavoidably assumes some stance toward stakeholder participation and, along with this, some stance toward democratic decision making. The deliberative democratic approach to evaluation is grounded in deliberative democratic theory, which adopts a relatively strong stance toward stakeholder participation.

Deliberative democratic theory emphasizes developing political practices and institutions that mitigate power imbalances among citizens so as to permit their free and equal participation. A necessary feature of practices and institutions that satisfy this idea is that the procedures are designed to engage participants in genuine deliberation, motivated by the goal of fostering the common good, rather than engaging them in strategic bargaining, motivated by the goal of maximizing their perceived self-interests (Cohen 1999:67-91; Rawls 1999:93-141).

The article aims to contribute to the important discussion about the role of deliberative democracy in English-language education. Deliberative democracy primarily involves democratic participation, inclusive dialogue, public reasoning and deliberation, and collaborative social and political decision-making. I examine both using pedagogy that engages deliberative democracy in process, ipso facto attractive teaching, and advancing delibera-

tive democracy as a valuable goal in English-language education. I focus on it and coursework directly related to it rather than other subfields within education (such as educational psychology or educational administration) because I believe the training of future teachers will have the most direct impact on their practice of democracy in the classroom and thereby the perpetuation of a healthy democracy.

I begin by looking at current changes in society that have reshaped student goals, educational responsibility, and the main concern of democracy within higher education. I emphasize these changes to issue a call for a radical obligation to deliberative democracy both in practice and in theory, as a means and an end. In this section, I expand on the designation of deliberative democracy and the skills necessary to fulfilling it as they relate to the goals of English-language education. I close by turning to exemplary programs in English-language education and showcasing some smaller steps toward incorporating democratic practices and assignments, including forms of social justice and service learning initiatives, into various schools of education. Finally, I expand on those ideas in order to invite other institutions to join these efforts and to point toward hopeful avenues for progress.

Recent changes in life, as well as changes within the field of education in particular, have made teaching the arts of deliberative democracy in teacher education programs even more important. In America, in 2004, many professors of education and practicing teachers turned to President Bush for a guiding vision of democracy in education. Unfortunately, his address to the educational community in *Phi Delta Kappan*, entitled “The Essential Work of Democracy,” only mentioned democracy once in its opening and never referred to it again. Instead, he touted the success of No Child Left Behind for making schools a safe place that leads the world in a technology driven economy (Bush 2004:114-121). These comments are quite aggravating to many teachers who have struggled to reclaim the democratic voice that has been stripped from them in current accountability policy-making and in the climate of educational standardization (Stitzlein et al 2007:139-155).

Over the past century, colleges of education and public Kindergarten-12th grade schools have upheld a tenuous and changing commitment to democracy. Many contemporary colleges of education trace their roots to normal colleges established at the end of the nineteenth century. Normal colleges were the first widespread centers for teaching training. Most adopted nurturing models of student-centered teaching influenced by the European philosophies of Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi, Johann Friedrich Herbart, and Friedrich Froebel. These philosophies were made rigorous and incorporated into mass teacher training through American educational theorist and superintendent Horace Mann. It was also Mann who made the first major push toward democracy in English-language education by explicitly calling for future teachers to cultivate the abilities of consensus building, universal communication, community participation, and moral and civic virtues in youth so that future generations of active citizens could be ensured.

Competing notions of good education further emphasized the structural components of democracy by rigorously schooling children in the history of American rights and civic responsibilities. The work of John Dewey, the most significant educational philosopher in American history, valued the structural knowledge of government and civic virtues, but emphasized the cultural components of living democracy well. Dewey promoted community-based learning where knowledge comes about through working together to solve social problems. This process often entails self-reflection and changing one’s own habits to

meet the demands of living communally. As we will see, Dewey's longstanding ideas of democracy are closely aligned with deliberative democracy.

Notions of deliberative democracy were first made significantly explicit in colleges of education following the publication of Gutmann and Thompson's book *Democracy and Disagreement* in 1996. This book generated excitement and interest in more theoretical circles of English-language education (primarily the Philosophy of Education Society, where clarifications, applications, and criticisms have been regularly voiced over the last decade) and worked its way into the scholarship of the American Educational Research Association president Lorraine McDonnell.

The work of Jurgen Habermas sustained some theoretical intrigue in English-language education and within the American Educational Studies Association, but also has only played out in limited ways in colleges of education. Unfortunately, few proposals for application have made their way into college classrooms, perhaps in part because more practice-oriented scholars have not sufficiently differentiated deliberative democracy from more generalist calls for "democratic education," nor have they put the notion into practice-application language. It seems then that professors of education have failed to fulfill the promise Gutman and Thompson see in schools as the most important institution for making democracy deliberative, outside of government (Gutman and Thompson 1996: 359).

Nonetheless, some hope lies in the superb collection of essays by leading scholars (John Goodlad, Walter Feinberg, Henry Giroux, and others) in democratic education which appeared in the most recent issue of *The Journal of Educational Controversy* entitled "Schooling as if Democracy Matters." (Kasprisin, Lorraine 2008). This collection considers recent changes to democracy, explores the place of democracy in the education of teachers, and envisions a laboratory model of democratic education. It offers the kinds of insight necessary for initiating larger conversations about both theoretical and practical applications of deliberative democracy in English-language education.

The process and goal of deliberative democracy in English-language education programs may help professors, community members, and K-12 schools deal with the recent changes in U.S. culture and in education in particular. Recent studies, such as the 2006 work of Michael McDevitt, confirm the effectiveness of deliberative education approaches for enhancing community-based learning, confidence in self-expression, knowledge of political issues, ability to validate opinions, civility between people with different views, and political conviction (McDevitt and Kioussis 2006:247-264). English-language education programs that adopt deliberative democracy as their guiding framework are likely to instill civic knowledge and virtues. These will not only serve the current world through producing active, informed and engaged citizens, but also will lead to a generation of teachers who cultivate the same characteristics in the children of America.

This challenges schools to prepare students for citizenship in a deliberative democracy, to develop their capacity to understand different perspectives, to communicate their understandings, and to engage in the give-and-take of moral argument with the goal of working toward making mutually justifiable decisions (Gutmann & Thompson 2004).

Overt discussions of democracy within universities that house English-language education programs are also changing. It was only about a decade ago that nearly five hundred university presidents called for more emphasis on the values and skills of democracy. Aligned with that appeal, many mission statements for colleges of education once highlighted the importance of developing democratic citizens. I surveyed the mission state-

ments of many of the top ranked education programs and in almost all cases no longer found reference to democracy or citizenship. Instead, there is a new emphasis on highly-qualified teachers with precise abilities to apply content knowledge through scientifically based teaching approaches. At the extreme end, most threatening to democracy, are education programs housed at places like the University of Phoenix. Note how their executive chairman John Sperling describes the aim of the university: “This is a corporation, not a social entity. Coming here is not a rite of passage. We are not trying to develop students’ value systems or go in for that ‘expand their minds’ bullshit” (Hasseler 2006).

As disheartening as statements like this might be for the development of democratic ways of living and self-reflection, there are aspects of this comment that relate to the changing spirit of students as well. While situations vary based on location and type of university, colleges of education are, for the most part, being populated by larger numbers of students who are increasingly individualistic and out for their own gain. Some engage in community service, for example, but often for their own rewards as a resume enhancer, rather than to truly engage in a public effort. Relatedly, students increasingly see college as a pathway to a high paying career and therefore only want the barebones of what is going to get them a good job, rather than civics learning which they don’t see as related or important. In this light, it could be argued that colleges now are serving less of a public role and more of a satisfaction of private desires. Increasingly, students believe that college classes should be about “hard” and scholarly material, rather than moral or civic learning, programs. The status of both of these, however, is limited as larger and larger numbers of students are older students who commute to campus and are therefore not present for much of the civically-enriching life offered at many universities.

As anecdotally reported by many professors of education, English-language education majors seem to be especially driven by the practical. They want to know exactly what they can do in their future classrooms when it comes to teaching content. Some professors convey that their students see talking about democracy as neither helpful nor applicable. It seems that only when issues of democracy are directly tied to specific problems or issues that teachers will definitely and regularly confront in their teaching that they will engage in such areas (Apple 2008:64-72). Students’ disinterest in learning about or through democracy is further exacerbated by the fact that they are seldom asked about their capacity to teach democratic skills during job interviews, unless they are becoming social studies teachers. Even those education programs who do manage to teach democratically and appease student demands for practical application by teaching content through deliberative democracy are still met with the complaint that this approach takes much longer than traditional content delivery methods and would not be practical for future teachers who must teach under the time constraints of No Child Left Behind.

Finally, the accrediting agencies that oversee colleges of education have, also relinquished their emphases on the skills of democracy. The National Council for Accreditation of English-language education (NCATE), the largest accreditor of English-language education programs, does state that teachers should have training in the liberal arts and sciences to provide a “basis for the educator’s shared values, understandings, and responsibilities in a democracy.” They also urge colleges of education to collaborate with other schools, develop learning communities, and have governance structures between the colleges and their faculty – aspects seemingly aligned with democracy. Yet despite these claims, there is no explicit mention of or connection to democracy or citizenship in its standards for

English-language education graduates or in the criteria it uses for determining good English-language education graduates. English-language education Accreditation Council (TEAC), NCATE's largest and more progressively-perceived competitor also does not mention the need to cultivate democracy or citizenship in the English - language education programs it accredits.

Conclusion

Envisioning all of the ways that universities connect with deliberative democracy is far broader than the scope of this paper. Nonetheless, I want to highlight a few suggestions as complements to the efforts I recommend within English-language education programs. Some universities express a democratic commitment through offering centers on campus, such as the New England Center for Civic Life at Franklin Pierce College. Other universities host ongoing discussions about democracy through speakers, thought-provoking papers, and films, such as the University of New Hampshire's 2007-2008 University Dialogue on Democracy. Still others are slowly incorporating these themes through particular coursework that gets students out and participating in the community. Spellman College and several others do this through their Urban Education courses. More classes that allow students a hands-on opportunity to see and experience community work, paired with classroom discussion and debate are excellent ways to gradually introduce the deliberative democracy perspective into a college of education. Finally, colleges may consider joining forces with large national initiatives. One noteworthy example is Project 540, which has allowed over 140,000 high school students to define and deliberate their own topics of interest since 2002 (Robertson 2008:27-44).

REFERENCES

1. Apple, M.W. (2008) *Teacher Education in a Democratic Society: Learning and Teaching the Practices of Democratic Participation*. // Handbook of Research on Teacher Education. / Ed. by M. Cochran-Smith, Sh. Feiman-Nemser, D. John McIntyre, and K.E. Demers. New York: Routledge.
2. Bush, G.W. (2004) *The Essential Work of Democracy*. // Phi Delta Kappan 86, N 2.
3. Cohen, J. (1999) *Deliberation and Democratic Legitimacy*. // Deliberative Democracy, Essays on Reason and Politics. / Ed. by J. Bohman & W. Rehg. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
4. Gutmann, A. & Thompson, D. (1996) *Democracy and Disagreement*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press.
5. Gutmann, A. & Thompson, D. (2004) *Why Deliberative Democracy?* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
6. Hasseler, T. (2006) *Fomenting Dissent on Campus*. // Academe 92, N 3.
7. Kasprisin, L. (2008) *Schooling as if Democracy Matters*. // Journal of Educational Controversy 3, N 1.
8. McDevitt, M. and Spiro Kioussis. (2006) *Deliberative Learning: An Evaluative Approach to Interactive Civic Education*. // Communication Education 55, N 3.
9. Rawls, J. (1999) *The Idea of Public Reason*. // Deliberative Democracy, Essays on Reason and Politics. / Ed. by J. Bohman & W. Rehg. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

10. Robertson, E. (2008) *Teacher Education in a Democratic Society: Learning and Teaching the Practices of Democratic Participation*. // Handbook of Research on Teacher Education. Ed. by M. Cochran-Smith, Sh. Feiman-Nemser, D.J. McIntyre, and K.E. Demers. New York: Routledge.
11. Stitzlein, S.; Feinberg, W.; Greene, J. and Miron; L. (2007) *The Illinois Project for Democratic Accountability*. // Educational Studies 42, N 2.

Խորհրդակցական ժողովրդավարության դերն անգլերեն լեզվի ուսուցման մեջ Ամերիկայում

Ժողովրդավարական ուսուցման շրջանակներում կարևորվում են անձի՝ կրթական քաղաքականություն վարելու իրավունքներն ու հնարավորությունները՝ միաժամանակ սահմանափակելով դրանց ընտրությունը: Դրա շնորհիվ դասավանդողին թույլատրվում և պարտադրվում է կիրառել ուսումնական այնպիսի ծրագրեր և մեթոդներ, որոնք նպաստում են ժողովրդավարական բանավեճի համար մտավոր և հուզական նախադրյալների, ուսանողների՝ իրենց ընդհանուր շահերը ճանաչելու և վերանայելու հետաքրքրությունների առաջացմանը:

Совещательная демократия в образовании английского языка в США

Демократическое образование признает важность расширения прав и возможностей граждан сделать образовательной политики и ограничивает выбор, который они делают среди политики. Это обязывает и разрешает учителям использовать учебные программы и методы, которые поддерживают интеллектуальные и эмоциональные предпосылки для демократического обсуждения, а студентам – признавать свои общие интересы и пересмотреть отдельные интересы в отношении понимания интересов прочих лиц.