Learning to Disagree

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Context: polarization(s)
Analisis: perspectives on disagreement
Discusion: perspectives on disagreement
Alternative: agonism and meaningful disagreement?

More questions than answers…

Polarization

Context

Polarizations

- **Multi-polarized world→** "bipolar" world, globalised, multi-polarized (e.g. war in Ukraine).

- **Culture wars→** "single-issue" politics, constant "culture battles".

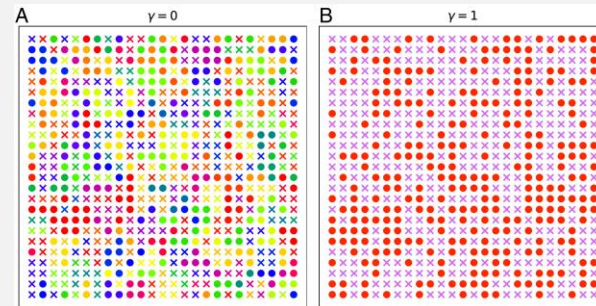Photo by Malvestida on Unsplash

Photo by John Cameron on Unsplash

Photo by Waldemar Brandt on Unsplash

Polarizations

- **Fragmented society** (e.g. social media) and atomization **atomization** (eco chambers hypothesis).
- **Bipolar society** (sorting hypothesis)
- Both hypothesis

The Guardian (2016)
https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/oct/12/neoliberalism-creating-loneliness-wrenching-society-apart

Törnberg, P. (2022). How digital media drive affective polarization through partisan sorting. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, *119*(42), e2207159119.

Polarisation might not be a consequence of too much disagreement but the lack of **meaningful oppositional encounters** leading to a situation of radical isolation.

Hannah Arendt alerted us of how radical isolation would led to the "end of the common world" if

"men have become entirely private, that is, they have been deprived of seeing and hearing others, of being seen and being heard by them." (2018, p. 58).

Polarizations

Different schools of thought agree that there is a need of expanding manifestations and expressions of disagreement beyond deliberationso citizens across partisan lines might encounter each other.

- the predominance of deliberation and/or argumentation trouble equal participation, and lead to the discrimination of already marginalised groups (e.g. Mouffe, 2013).

- "discussion and deliberation increasingly take place between those who think similarly and not between those who think differently" (Rosa, 2022, p. 26). We need other spaces of interaction.

- Deliberation requires an extensive network of cultural practices "preserved from generation to generation only thanks to customary patterns of political socialisation and institutionalised patterns of political education" (Habermas, 2022, p. 154).

Habermas, J. (2022). Reflections and hypotheses on a further structural transformation of the political public sphere. *Theory, Culture & Society*, *39*(4), 145-171.
Mouffe, C. (2013). Agonistics. London: Verso
Rosa, H. (2022). Social media filters and resonances: Democracy and the contemporary public sphere. *Theory, Culture & Society*, *39*(4), 17-35.

Approaches to disagreement in citizenship education

Analysis

How can citizenship and democratic education respond to **polarization trends**? (macro-scale considerations)

Disagreement is a key issue within citizenship and democratic education (micro-scale practices).

How do citizenship educators approach disagreement?

Analysis

- Rational approach

- Critical approach

- Deliberative approach

Analysis

Rational approach

- Enlightenment's tradition (e.g. Kant)

- Disagreement is a consequence of **lack of knowledge**

- Teachers ought to facilitate that students learn **knowledge and develop critical thinking skills**

- Disagreement as a **pedagogical tool** directed to generate knowledge and skills (e.g. contrasting evidences, digital literacy)

Rational approach

Analysis

"Evaluating Evidence" Rubric

Rubric level	Description
Mastery	Student argues the post does not provide strong evidence and questions the source of the post (e.g., we don't know anything about the author of the post) and/or the source of the photograph (e.g., we don't know where the photo was taken).
Emerging	Student argues that the post does not provide strong evidence, but the explanation does not consider the source of the post or the source of the photograph, or the explanation is incomplete.
Beginning	Student argues that the post provides strong evidence or uses incorrect or incoherent reasoning.

"Claims on Social Media" Rubric
Question 1: Why might this tweet be a useful source?

Rubric level	Description
Mastery	Student fully explains that the tweet may be useful because it includes data from a poll conducted by a polling firm.
Emerging	Student addresses the polling data and/or the source of the polling data but does not fully explain how those elements may make the tweet useful.
Beginning	Student does not address the polling data or the source of the polling data as a reason the tweet may be useful.

Analysis

Critical theory approach

- Frankfurt school

- Disagreement is a consequence of (1) inequalities and power relations; (2) ideological distortions.

- Educators' role is to facilitate that students learn the knowledge and skills so they can recognise and change power structures.

- Disagreement is a **politico-pedagogical strategy** – it aims to identify and change power structures (e.g. critical discourses analysis, testimonies, protest actions).

Critical theory approach

Analysis

reaming or to spark further research into the topic

Power

- What sources of leadership are there?
- To what extent is there effective systems to organise people?
- Is there a fair balance of power?
- Who/what groups are the most impacted?
- How are their views included?
- Who/what groups are can make the biggest positive impact for change?

Pashby K, Sund L and Corcoran S (2019) Teaching for sustainable development through ethical global issues pedagogy: Participatory research with teachers. [Report]. Manchester Metropolitan University
https://www2.mmu.ac.uk/media/mmuacuk/content/documents/education/final-mmu-reportba-project-teaching-for-sustainable-development-through-ethical-global-issues-pedagogy.pdf
(accessed 20 January 2021), p. 26

Massip I Sabater, M. & Santisteban, A. (2019). Educant en la igualtat: XXV Audiència Pública a les noies i als nois de Barcelona.
https://ajuntament.barcelona.cat/educacio/sites/default/files/xxvaudiencia_publica_dossieralumnat.pdf

Hauríem de parlar de **diversitats de gènere** perquè...

Hauríem de parlar de **desigualtats de gènere** perquè...

Analysis

Critical theory approach

"***Testimonio***, like counternarrative more broadly, is a form of knowledge production, a verbal journey of one's experiences with injustice in the service of collective memory and political community. Counternarratives and testimonio are ways of making one's experience in the world public, not as an act of emotional labor but as a self-affirmation and an act of solidarity (Fernández, 2002; Peréz Huber, 2008)." (Gibson, 2020, p. 440)

Gibson, M. (2020). From deliberation to counter-narration: Toward a critical pedagogy for democratic citizenship. Theory & Research in Social Education, 48(3), 431-454, p. 440

Analysis

Deliberative approach

- Habermas, Rawls and Dewey

- Disagreement is a consequence of **our communication deficits**

- Disagreement is also a **pedagogical tool**, through which we generate knowledge

- Teachers' role is to facilitate that students learn the necessary communication tools to generate shared knowledge

- **Disagreement is a starting point and a pedagogical strategy** to reach consensus (e.g. controversial issues, debates)

Deliberative approach

Analysis

Aquesta és la qüestió sobre la que girarà el debat. Llegeix-la amb atenció i comença a treballar-hi, per anar-hi ben preparat/da.

Quina és la vostra postura respecte la construcció del mur?

<u>TESI:</u> Escriu en una frase quin és el teu posicionament sobre la qüestió i fes-ho sintèticament.

Jo defenso que _____
_____
_____
_____

<u>JUSTIFICACIÓ:</u> Ara és el moment de justificar la teva tesi amb arguments i exemples que hi donin suport.

    × Argument 1 _____
        _____
        _____
        _____

    × Argument 2 _____
        _____
        _____
        _____

    × Exemple 1 _____
        _____
        _____
        _____

Deliberation Steps

1. Introduction
2. Careful Reading of Text
3. Clarification
4. Presentation of Positions
5. Reversal of Positions
6. Free Discussion
7. Whole Class Debrief
8. Student Reflection

Hess, D. E., & McAvoy, P. (2014). *The political classroom: Evidence and ethics in democratic education.* Routledge.

Pagès, J. et al. (GREDICS). Exiliats, refugiats, desplaçats. Seqüència didàctica. https://ddd.uab.cat/record/201438?ln=ca

Approaches to disagreement

Disagreement is used as a pedagogical strategy with three purposes:
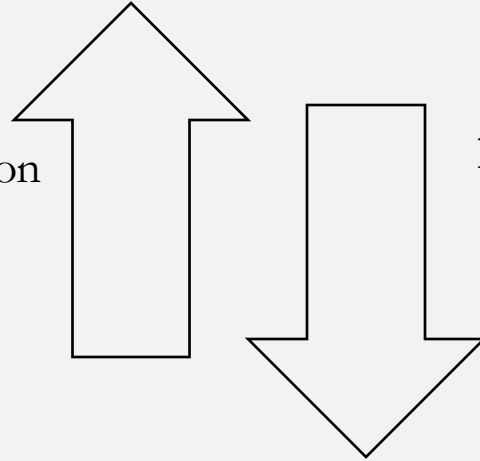
Discussion

- Epistemic purposes
  - To 'find' knowledge
  - To 'create' knowledge
- Communicative purposes
  - To reach consensus
  - To convince
- Political purposes
  - To change reality

Disagreement is a **starting point** that leads to:

Discussion

Escalade

- Critic

- Competition

- Protest

- …

Deescalate

- Compromise

- Collaboration

- Retreat

- …

Implicitly, these pedagogical strategies reproduce an understanding that **disagreement is a problem**.

Disagreement is **seen as a deficit** of:

- Knowledge deficit

- Communication deficit

- Power deficit

Discussion

Discussion

Disagreement is associated with:

- **Personal deficits**: angriness, insecurity, discomfort, etc.

- **Social deficits**: violence, destruction, authoritarianism.

Education perpetuates **two responses to disagreement**: fight or flight.

Discussion

Disagreement is associated with interactions that are:

- **Verbal**.

- **Confrontational**.

Education perpetuates that **engaging disagreement** can only be conversational.

The way we think of disagreement might be helpful for epistemic, communicative and some political purposes. But **are they helpful in a context of polarisation**?

Education might intentionally reproduce polarisation:

- aversion to disagreement

- Silences

- A single form of 'appropriate' disagreement

Discussion

Agonism, meaningful disagreement and education

Agonism and meaningful disagreement

In my research, I try to think how education for democratic citizenship can help us to:

- **Normalise** meaningful disagreement

- **Diversify** the ways we meaningfully disagree

An agonistic alternative

The **term agon** refers to a ritualised and non-violent form of conflict/disagreement where disagreements are explicit, public and require mutual respect among adversaries.

In education, agonist authors (e.g. Ruitenberg, 2009; Tryggvason and Mårdh, 2019; Knight Abowitz and Mamlok, 2020, Sant et al, 2021) have thought about ways of ==**normalising political disagreement**== in schools and classrooms.

Disagreement here functions as a starting point, a pedagogical strategy but also **as a purpose in itself**.

An agonistic alternative

Sant, E., McDonnell, J., Pashby, K., & Menendez Alvarez-Hevia, D. (2020). Pedagogies of agonistic democracy and citizenship education. Education, Citizenship and Social Justice, 1746197920962373.

Getting to an agreement: what shall we do with statues?

The following activities will explore the teaching of deliberative controversial issues as a way of promoting the values of democracy, justice, and equality. The activity has three purposes:

1. Identify, consider and reflect on the particularities of controversial issues as a teaching method;
2. Experience some of the complexities of the values of democracy, justice, and equality;
3. Consider different perspectives;
4. Practise situations of disagreement and processes to reach consensus.

Activity thre

Sant, E., et al. (2021). Promoting democracy in schools. promoting-democracy-in-schools-(English-version)_0.pdf (mmu.ac.uk)

Meaningful disagreement

Diversify practices of disagreement:

- In my work, I have reviewed 304 publications (2018-2022) focus on theoretically considering or/and empirically examining interpersonal encounters, which are both adversarial and somehow beneficial.

- A range of concepts (e.g. agonistic politics, productive controversy, constructive argument) developed across a wide range of disciplines (e.g. sociology, philosophy, geography, education, computer science, psychology).

- **Meaningful disagreement** as an interpersonal public encounter, face-to-face or online, where there is an engaged, passionate, potentially transformative, and peaceful clash of (op)positions over public issues.

Meaningful disagreement

Agonistic disagreement requires:

- Shared time and space

- Some 'prior' agreement (it can change)

- Publicness

- Embodied contact

- Responding to otherness

- Permeability and contingency of who, how, what

- Playfulness

What other form of pedagogically enacted agonistic disagreements can we envision?

Meaningful disagreement

Jóvenes interviniendo el mural de Movimientos Sociales en 3er Foro de Derechos Humanos: Colegio Tibabuyes Universal

Caballero Dávila, L. F. (2017). Hacia una pedagogía de la memoria, el desacuerdo y el acontecimiento: El caso de la galería de la memoria "somos protagonistas de la historia" del Colegio IED Tibabuyes Universal. Revista Cambios y Permanencias, 8(2), 1109-1124

Meaningful disagreement

Challenges to the agonistic alternative
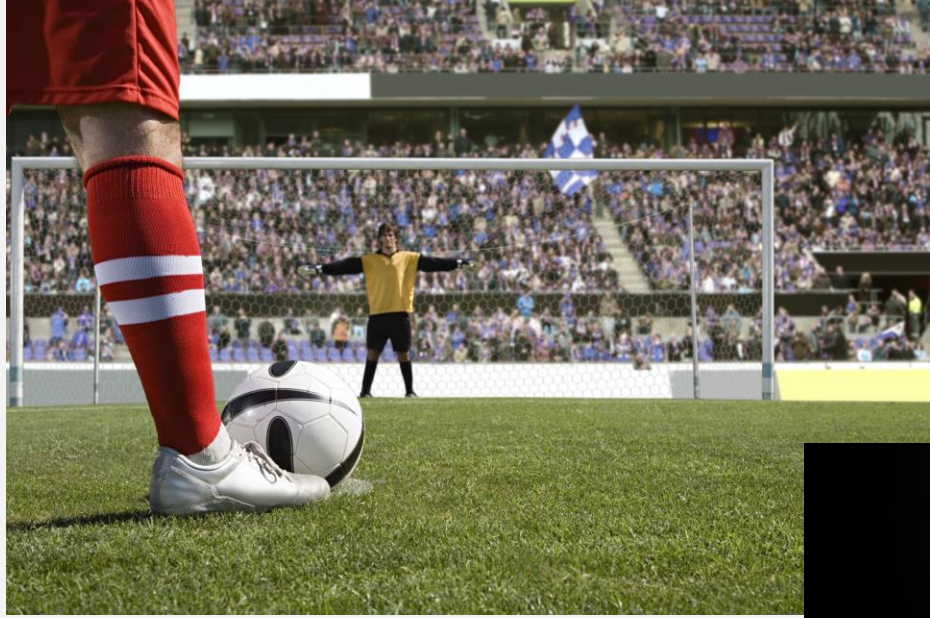
Challenges:

Against common-sense of what education and citizenship education is about?

We are embedded in **polarisation contexts**. Education is not only an "instrument" to tackle polarisation but education functions as an identity-marker, a context, or a topic over which political disagreement takes place.

And how do we **prepare teachers** for this?

Some reflections

- *How can citizenship education help us to normalise/diversify the way we meaningfully disagree?*
- *What are the challenges for teachers and teacher educators to do so?*
- *How do we tackle polarisation/atomization without neglecting other key challenges?*

Thank You

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