THE IMPACT OF DELIBERATIVE PEDAGOGIES ON THE CIVIC COMPETENCES AND VALUES OF YOUNGSTERS IN ROMANIA.

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Abstract: A key ingredient of a liberal democratic polity is an active, informed and involved citizenry, endorsed by democratic values and civic and political participation. In this context, education is thought to play an important role in socializing youngsters for citizenship and civic participation. (Dewey, 1997; Nie et al. 1996; Niemi and Junn 1998; Gutmann 1999) Research revealed that classes with discussions, debates, and deliberations, with a climate open to exchanging ideas, encourage students' civic knowledge, competence or participation. (Morse, 2005; Strachan, 2006; Harriger and McMillan, 2007; Campbell, 2008) The current paper focuses on assessing the impact of discussions and deliberations (as teaching methods) on students' civic values and competences, but mostly on tolerance and empathy. In addition, the research embraces a broader conceptualization of democratic education, comprising not only the civic education classes but also other classes, where teachers transmit civic and democratic values through teaching. The study used a quasi-experimental research design, with a sample of 82 students, from three classrooms (7th, 8th and 9th) in three different schools. The treatment was applied during one semester. The –pre and –post tests were implemented through a questionnaire, comprising measures for civism, including empathy or tolerance. In order to have a more in-depth analysis, focus groups with students and interviews with teachers were conducted. The results confirm the proposed hypothesis. Indeed, students exposed to deliberative pedagogies increased their level of tolerance towards other groups, empathy or social trust. In addition, when describing their understanding of democracy, they valued more helping the others, than the principle of majority rule.

Keywords: youth, democracy, deliberative pedagogies, civic education, tolerance

One of the most important elements in a democracy is to have an active, informed and involved citizenry, endorsed by democratic values and civic and political participation. In this sense, a devotion to democratic values together with the active participation help construct and maintain the bond between citizens and the political system they are part of. Still, democracies benefit from a diverse range of mechanisms and agents by which the process of political socialization takes place. (Greenberg, 2009) Citizens' learning about fundamental democratic institutions and procedures, about practicing tolerance for the inherent diversity of democratic contexts, their encouragement for actual involvement in civic or political matters are challenging tasks in virtually any context. A whole range of socialization agents (families, schools, media, peer groups, political elites etc.) exert their combined influence in developing citizens' democratic values and civic skills, within an ongoing process of education for citizenship. Indeed, in democratic societies, education is thought to play an important role in socializing for citizenship and civic participation. (Dewey, 1997; Nie et al. 1996; Niemi and Junn 1998; Gutmann 1999)

The issue is even more stringent in the context of newly established democracies, as it is the case with post-communist countries. In such contexts, the rearrangement of the institutions and channels that link citizens to the state brings along a need for changes at the level of citizens' attitudes and participatory behavior. Whereas remnants of the former establishment are more likely to affect adult population - already socialized within a non-

democratic context - younger generations have a better chance to acquire democratic values and to learn participatory behaviors against a background yet un-altered by the experience of authoritarianism. (Howard, 2003; Sapiro, 2004)

This is particularly relevant in terms of research and potential intervention as adolescence represents an important period for the formation and internalization of participatory habits (Dawson and Prewitt, 1969; Hooghe, 2004; Campbell 2006). Although definitely placed under the umbrella of family influence, young people are heavily exposed to schools as a crucial arena of learning about their place in society. (Niemi and Junn 1998; Badescu and Radu 2009; Andolina et al. cited in Gordon and Taft 2011) With regard to youth then, schools become one of the most relevant socialization agents, that exerts its influence on the one hand through transmitting political knowledge and civic attitudes and on the other hand through encouraging participation, involvement and a critical stance on issues.

Turning from theoretical expectations about the absorption of democratic attitudes among youth, to the actual empirical reality, we often meet a lack of congruence between the two. The Romanian context, on which the current project concentrates, illustrates this situation. Romanians teenagers' scores on cross-national studies of youth's civic education and political values support this statement. For instance, CivEd 1999, a study on eight-grade students in 28 countries, placed Romania close to the very bottom of the rankings in terms of civic attitudes and knowledge (only Colombian students scored, on average, in statistical terms, significantly lower than Romanian students).

Data collected within a survey based research on Romanian high school students in 2010 by the Soros Foundation reveal similarly disconcerting results. The data captured a diverse array of themes, from beliefs about democracy and, actual behaviors in terms of engagement in voluntary activities and associational groups, declared trust in different categories of people to aspects related to in-schools civic education teaching and encouragement of acknowledging and accepting diversity. Results reveal that youth are rather disconnected from voluntary participation, mistrustful about people. Moreover, whereas more than 90% reported that they studied civic education in school, about 65 percent admit that there is very little information they actually can recollect from such classes.

In addition, a recent research on a service-learning program in Romania (IMPACT), implemented by New Horizons Foundation recommends explicitly the need of an educational effort towards developing and encouraging the civic attitudes in youth. Participating in non-formal activities, the majority of the young students become more concerned with the social problems, they observe the needs of their community, or simply are able to get out of their shell and understand the problems people around the confront with.

Literature review

While we acknowledge that such results at the level of youth attitudes and behaviors may be the result of a complex interplay of family and school influence, in this research my focus is on the formative potential of school. Among the chief concerns of school socialization studies is finding whether civic participation of youth in the early years of their development as citizens results in long lasting effects. Indeed, an important body of literature considers early socialization as a critically important determinant of later behavior – habits,

skills and attitudes affecting civic participation that are formed in the period of youth persist into adulthood. (Nie et al 1996; Campbell 2006) Moreover, Youniss et al. (1997) reveal in his study that the effects of participation in extracurricular activities, participation in community-based projects and membership in youth organizations during adolescence are visible much later at the level of adult life membership in groups, civic engagement and other forms of political behavior.

Still, the most difficult and conflicting concern about school as a civic socializing arena is based on the understanding of the precise process through which civic socialization occurs in this context. The vast literature, treating this issue, focuses mainly on assessing the effects of either school or classroom climate on youth civic socialization.

A closer analysis of the studies focusing on the role of school educational experiences on political engagement among adolescents reveals two directions of inquiry. The first examines participation in extra-curricular activities as a pathway for civic and political participation in adulthood (Beck and Jennings, 1982; Hanks, 1981; McFarland and Thomas, 2006; Verba et al., 1995). A more recent line of research examines the impact that service learning programs (where adolescents perform community service as a class or graduation requirement) have on the level of political involvement of those engaged in them (Billig, 2000; Galston, 2003; Niemi et al., 2000; Walker, 2002). Indeed, within the range of activities expected to build the adolescents' civicness –at the level of both attitudes and behavior - participation in service learning has captured a great deal of attention.

The image offered by the literature on service learning and its effects on youth is mixed, preventing one from arriving at definite conclusions. The more pessimistic studies find either negligible effects of service learning on civic responsibility, or effects which are not sufficiently enduring to have a significant impact later in life. (cf. Galston, 2001). Other studies reassert what has been found initially with respect to classical civic education, the fact that service learning is more effective during the late years of high school (Melchior et al, 1999). In their comparative assessment of the effects of service learning and community service, Astin et al. (2000) reveal that service-learning programs have a positive impact on: academic achievement, values, self-efficacy, leadership, career plans and plans to participate in further service after college, with the most significant effects found on academic performance and on values.

A second vast category of literature moves the focus from the general context of school, towards the classroom and the interactions between students and teachers as a better predictor for acquiring democratic values and civic behavior. Much of this new trend is based on a reevaluation of John Dewey's influential work on the role of education for democracy. Therefore, civic and political socialization should not be limited to teaching facts about politics; instead, the process must focus to a much greater extent on the interactive development of relevant social and cognitive skills (Freyberg-Inan and Cristescu, 2006). For Bonwell and Eison (1991); this new focus means that students should be engaged in the entire process of learning, focusing on the development of abilities and not only on transmitting information.

Still, the importance of classroom environment and the cultivation of an open climate that encourages discussion (thus creating a bridge between youth and the surrounding political

events and developments) is a recurrent theme in the literature (Hess, 2004; Hess and Posselt, 2002). Thus, the recent focus of classroom climate moved towards teaching pedagogies.

The most prominent body of literature on this issue is concerned with the impact of students' critical thinking skills and abilities on their democratic values and attitudes. The pioneering study of Goodlad (1984) considered critical thinking crucial to the nurturing of a democratic citizenry. Moreover, in almost all studies on instructional procedures – discussion and dialogue play a key role (Commeyaras, 1993; Terenzini et al., 1995; Tsui, 1999, 2002; Yang and Chung, 2009) in enhancing critical thinking skills and attitudes, all of which are important ingredients of the youth democratic citizenship.

Around the same focus on debates and discussions used in teaching, the progressive education scholars advocate the so-called "deliberative pedagogies" and more specifically an "issues centered curriculum" in which students research, analyze, and discuss controversial public issues, and engage in simulations, debates, and decision-making. (Dewey, 1916; Gutmann, 1999; Strachan, 2006; Reich, 2007; Alfaro, 2008; Goodin, 2008). Bridges (1994) characterized deliberation as a collaborative group discussion that is analytical, reasonably reflective, and painstaking. It is a purposeful and serious discourse that does not rush toward a decision but rather toward careful consideration of alternative points of views and choices (Bridges, 1994). The essence of deliberation is two-fold: a. to weigh alternatives and discuss all possible courses of action related to a public problem (Parker, 2001); To focus on "What should/could we do?" toward resolving the question of the right action, rather than solving the problem (Dillon, 1994).

Browsing through the vast majority of relevant literature, one can observe the various numbers of examples and approaches. Still, a general description of these pedagogies would claim that deliberative education is comprised a set of techniques and methods that include discourse, communication and deliberation. (Claxton, 2008) The most important examples of such pedagogies include discussions (controversial public issues) (Campbell, 2008), deliberation or simulations of deliberative forums (Gastil and Dillard, 1999; Harriger and McMillan, 2007), as well as debates (Keller, Wittaker and Burke, 2001). Deliberative discussions differ from debates in that a debate keeps participants in deeply entrenched positions, whereas deliberation asks participants to listen to each other to develop a deeper understanding of alternative viewpoints (Heanue, Kranich, & Willingham, 2003).

David Campbell (2008), in his paper "Voice in the Classroom: How an Open Classroom Climate Fosters Political Engagement Among Adolescents", found out that an open classroom climate has a positive impact on adolescents' civic knowledge and appreciation of political conflict, even upon controlling for numerous individual, classroom, school, and district characteristics. In addition, an open classroom environment fosters young people's intention to be an informed voter.

Continuing a similar idea, Torney-Purta, Wilkenfeld, and Barber (2008) examine country differences in students' knowledge pertaining to human rights compared with other forms of civic knowledge, and in students' attitudes toward promoting and practicing human rights. A hierarchical linear modeling (HLM) analysis examines student-level predictors (e.g., gender and school experiences) and country-level predictors (e.g., history of democracy) of rights-related knowledge and attitudes. Students' experiences of democracy at school and

with international issues have a positive association with their knowledge of human rights. Significant gender differences also exist. Looking at rights-related attitudes, students with more knowledge of human rights, more frequent engagement with international topics, and more open class and school climates held stronger norms supporting social movement citizenship, had more positive attitudes toward immigrants' rights, and were more politically efficacious.

A rather recent study, tries to compare the effects of different pedagogies in teaching civic education. Dassonneville, Quintelier, Hooghe and Claes (2012) distinguish between formal civic education, an open classroom climate, and active learning strategies, and explore their relation with political interest, efficacy, trust, and participation. The results indicate that formal civic education (classroom instruction) and active learning strategies (school council membership and, to a lesser extent, group projects) are positively related to political attitudes and behavior. An open classroom climate, on the other hand, is significantly related to political trust. The authors conclude that there is no reason to privilege specific forms of civic education, as each form relates to different relevant political attitudes and behaviors. The analysis relies on the results from a two-year panel study among late adolescents in Belgium.

Another recent article by Gastil (2004) explored the development of democratic habits among students in adult civic education through the use of deliberative discussions. In his first study, Gastil used a quasi-experimental design to employ NIFstyle deliberation in one class (n = 76) and regular class activities without deliberation in another (n = 73). Students completed a survey at the end of the course to measure valuation and expectancy of political outcomes, political self-efficacy, political group efficacy, community identity, and civic duty. Participation in the deliberative discussions only significantly correlated with one political belief; group efficacy (r = -.18, p = .048). However, Gastil also suggested further research, to provide a better indication of the impact of deliberation.

To conclude, research carried from various perspectives revealed that classes with discussions, debates, and deliberation, with a climate open to expression of ideas encourage students' political interest, knowledge, competence and tolerance. (Morse, 2005; Strachan, 2006; Harriger and McMillan, 2007; Campbell, 2008)

Considering the vast literature briefly reviewed above, the current research focuses strictly on the impact of discussions and deliberations (as teaching methods) on students' civic values and competences. In this sense, the general objective of proposed research is to assess the formative effects of schools and democratic education on youth civic values and competences. Consequently, I seek to complement the narrow focus on civic education as distinct discipline taught in school, and approach school-related activities and practices in a broad understanding that includes in-classroom environment. To assess the impact of changing classroom climate, the study proposes some controlled interventions – based on deliberative pedagogies - on the practices of forming students' democratic values and civic skills. In this sense, the current study will use deliberative techniques, such as: discussing controversial issues, deliberating on finding a solution, simulations of deliberative forums...etc.

Analysis and discussion

The methodology used in the current study was collaborative action research, and involved three teachers from three different classes in both secondary and high school. The chosen classes were civic education (for the secondary school) and English (for the high school). The teachers were supported during the entire research. The research followed several stages, starting with a pre-test with a clear objective of assessing the state of the problem in the selected classes. All classes were surveyed before the implementation of the proposed pedagogies. The questionnaire aimed to measure democratic values, as well as civic attitudes. The same questionnaire was applied at the end of the semester. The second stage of the research focused on the deliberative interventions in the classroom, through either deliberative forums or discussions. Besides, in order to have a more in-depth analysis of the impact, interviews and focus groups were conducted with both students and teachers. In addition to the quantitative and qualitative research methods used, the teachers were trained to observe and assess the immediate impact on students. Consequently, the research used Reflection forms, to analyze the impact of activities on both students and teachers. Teachers were asked to briefly describe the type of activities, the reaction of students and the observed changes in students' abilities and values.

In this paper, my interest is focused on how certain civic values and abilities are developed through a semester after being socialized with deliberative pedagogies. The classrooms are selected from schools in three different cities: Cluj-Napoca (a good school in a big university city), Turda (a rather modest school in a small and poor city) and Targu-Mures (a good school in a very diverse and multicultural city). The paper measures the effects of deliberative pedagogies in both civic education classes and English classes.

One of the first things I was interested in was the assessment of students' perception of discussions and conflicts. The pre-testing shows that students are afraid of conflicts in a discussion and they prefer to give up arguing to avoid conflictual situations. In addition, they would rather spend time with people similar to them than in a diverse environment. These issues are extremely important since one of the results of deliberation is an increase in accepting diverse opinions, or diversity in general. Analyzing the post-testing, one can see that after deliberating, students realized the importance of discussion for avoiding conflicts. Moreover, the percentage of students that prefer to spend time with similar persons decreased with 11,5 %.

	Pre-test	Post-test	Difference
	Agree %	Agree %	%
It is better not to discuss some topics to avoid any conflicts	58.9	64,2	+5,3
It is better to let go your argument in a conversation to avoid upsetting the others	65.8	64,2	-1,6
I prefer to be with similar persons than with people from different groups	81.3	69,8	-11,5

Another surveyed topic was students' civic participation/interest. One can see that the most important change was in the case of voluntary work (+33,8 %). Students became more interested in helping the others.

	Pre-test	Post-test	Difference
	Yes %	Yes %	%
Did you do any voluntary work in a hospital, elderly asylum or in a similar institution?	9,6	43,4	+33,8
Did you help anybody except your family to solve a problem?	82,2	84,9	+2,7
Did you help anybody al school with the home works?	81,1	73,6	-7,5

Before deliberation, in students' opinion, the most important characteristic of a good citizen is to respect the law (96.9%), while the least important one is to participate in political activities (28.4%). Still, when analysing the post-testing, students' opinion change and they credit more helping the poor, as a characteristic of good citizenship (+0,9%) and the voting in elections (+4,7%), as well as participating in environmental protection activities (+0,7%).

	Pre-test	Post-test	Difference
	Important and very important %		%
A good citizen should show support for the poor	85,9	86,8	+0,9
A good citizen should vote in elections	63,2	67,9	+4,7
A good citizen should respect the law	96,9	96,2	-0,7
A good citizen should involve in political activities	28,4	32,1	+3,7
A good citizen should participate in protests against the laws they consider incorrect	59,5	56,6	-2,9
A good citizen should take part in environmental protection activities	74,8	75,5	+0,7

A very important result of deliberation, as literature shows, is an increase in the level of trust. In measuring this impact, the survey looked at the levels of trust before and after participating in deliberative activities. The results were surprising, since more than 60% of the students had very little trust in any category of people, including students like them. In addition, they were extremely distrustful of Roma (67.1% of student do not trust them at all). After deliberation one can see some changes in terms of the levels of trust. Students become more trustful with foreigners (+5,1%), people with other religion (+0,9%). Romanians (+8,8%) and even with Roma (+4,8%). The results are not that surprising since during deliberations students were socialized with other students' opinions, as well as the opinions of those that are missing from the classroom.

	Pre-test	Post-test	Difference
How much do you trust …	Much %	Much %	%
other students in your school	28,8	20,8	-8,0
foreigners	2,8	7,9	+5,1
people with other religion than you	27,4	28,3	+0,9
people with other nationality than you	38,9	36,5	-2,4
Romanians	38,4	47,2	+8,8
Roma/gypsies	2,7	7,5	+4.8

Another focus of the study was directed towards the school and classroom climates, and the way students perceive this climate. What was surprising in the pre-test analysis was the fact that students generally feel encouraged to speak in classrooms, but at the same time feel that there is a gap between them and the teachers. After being socialized with deliberative pedagogies, students become more critical with their classroom climate. Consequently, one can see a high decrease in the perception that they are free to express their opinions in the classroom (-22,2%), as well as in terms of the feeling that they are encouraged to form their opinions (-17,4%).

	Pre-test	Post-test	Difference
	Agree %	Agree %	%
Students are encouraged to form their own opinions	74	56,6	-17,4
Students feel free to express their opinions in the classroom even when they have different opinions than the majority	69,4	47,2	-22,2
Teachers present more facets of the same subject when teaching	66,7	56,7	-10,0
Students do not have input in the way things are happening in school	50,7	51,9	+1,2
I feel treated correctly by my colleagues	73,2	57,7	-15,5
Students feel that are treated unfair by the teachers	66,7	84,6	+17,9

One of the most important changes that were identified after being exposed to deliberative pedagogies, was the way students see as important trait for democracy to work. After deliberation, students feel that for democracy to work, they consider that the protection of minorities is more important than the majority rule. (from 41,89% in pre-testing o 50,94% in post-testing)

As mentioned before, in order to have an in-depth analysis of the effect and impact of deliberative pedagogies in students' civic abilities and values, the pre and post survey was complemented with focus groups organized with students. In these focus groups, students were asked to assess the proposed deliberative pedagogies and to evaluate what they learnt the most from these. In terms of the general perception, most of the students mentioned that they enjoyed the proposed activities because they were interesting *"Very interesting and pleasant"* and because it was a good opportunity to talk about everyday issues: *"We were free to discuss*

and express our personal opinions, compared to other teachers where we are afraid to say anything", " *I liked the activities because we discussed about life and everyday issues"*.

A few of the proposed activities focused on identifying the students' own concerns and issues. The great majority of students declared that these were the activities they enjoyed the most, because they have very few chances for doing this: *"I liked very much the activity when we were asked to express our concerns from our personal life and not only the ones related to school and classes"*, *"I liked very much the activity when we talked about our concerns and problems. We had the opportunity to release our frustrations and to talk openly about it"*. In addition, when trying to understand why they liked these types of activities, the students mentioned that they had the feeling the teachers/instructors really listen to them, they had the feeling they could freely express their opinions: *"We were listened, while other professors simply teach us"*, *"We were encouraged to have initiatives and we could easily express our opinions"*.

When asked about what the students think they learnt during the proposed activities, the great majority responded that they learnt to be better and to be more tolerant with others: *"I learned to be better and not to bully my colleagues, and not to judge people based on the appearance and without understanding them"*. In addition, students mentioned that they learnt how to believe in themselves and most importantly how to use their imagination for solving problems " *I learned to be more confident and to express my opinion"*, *"I developed new skills for thinking about and solving a problem"*. Moreover, the students mentioned that while participating in the discussions and deliberations, they managed to improve their communication skills " *I learned to be more confident and to express my opinion"*, and in the same time they managed to find new things about their colleagues *"I learned a lot about my colleagues"*.

When interviewing teachers about their perceived effects of deliberative pedagogies on students, the answers were similar to previous results. When asked about a general evaluation of the proposed activities, one of the involved teachers answered: *"What I found very interesting was the fact that through your activities you managed to involve all kids and to determine those that usually were less involved to be more active. They felt appreciated and those kids started contributing a lot also in the other activities that I did in that class or even the extracurricular activities that I proposed. I have one very clear example"*. In addition, another teacher responded that: *"The moment you start/try a more interactive teaching strategy, automatically they are more open, they want to engage and are happy to find new things in these classes"*.

In terms of the abilities and skills that changed after being exposed to deliberative practices, one of the teachers mentioned that students learned to be more tolerant and less aggressive. Before these activities, one of the major issues identified by one teacher was that of verbal and physical violence among students. After being exposed to these new methods, based on discussions and deliberations, they realized they can solve conflicts through discussing and not necessarily through violence: *"They started to develop and consolidate certain types of competences and abilities, including the way they cooperate with each other. Some issues/problems that they had in the class were treated differently. For instance those that did any mistakes started to confess and admit them"*. Continuing the same idea, one

teacher mentioned that these methods are beneficent for school and teachers on one side and for students on the other side. Teachers are able to develop a better relation with students, they become more trustful, in the same time, students become more tolerant and consequently with less unsolved issues.

Conclusion and final remarks

After briefly analyzing the data, one can state that deliberative pedagogies are efficient developing certain civic values and abilities. In this sense, the most important changes emerge in the way students perceive and accept differences. They become more tolerant and trustful with the others, even though they are perceived as very different. In addition, one important impact that was evident in all three types of data was that of being better. Students realize the importance of being a better citizen, of helping the ones in need and valuing the rights of minorities better than the majority rule. Consequently, their definition of democracy changes from a focus on the majority towards a new focus on the minorities and the ones in need. This is a remarkable result, since most of the similar studies focus strictly on skills and abilities, forgetting about values. The study's results reveal that through socializing students with deliberative pedagogies, one can transform the students from strongly individualistic individuals to more empathetic ones.

In addition, another important result was that of gaining confidence and efficacy. Through encouraging students to express their opinions, they become more confident and trustful with their own competences. As a result, they become more civically engaged, as well as more critical of what happens around them. They are encouraged to critically assess the behaviors around them, but also to openly express their opinions and beliefs.

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