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Types of Democratic Deliberation: The Limits and Potential of Citizen Participation

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Scholars and political commentators have increasingly voiced concerns about the state of democracy in the West.<sup>1</sup> They point to evidence of declining citizen interest in politics, diminishing rates of political participation, increasing suspicion of politicians and governmental institutions, and the social fragmentation characteristic of large multicultural societies. In response to these concerns and on normative grounds, a number of political theorists have advocated a more deliberative form of democratic practice to supplement conventional electoral democracy. Drawing on Mill (1858/61), Dewey or Habermas (1984/7, 1996), a number of theorists, most emphasize the importance of citizen participation in policy discussions and the critical role this plays in expressing and fostering the core democratic values of autonomy, equality and a concern for the public good (e.g., Guttman and Thompson 1996, 2004; Cohen, 1996, 1997; Chambers, 1996; Benhabib, 1996, 2004; Bohman, 1997 and Dryzek, 2000). They claim that citizens brought together to deliberate public policy in a setting that emphasizes equal participation, mutual respect and reasoned argument are more likely to bridge their differences of perspective and forge a common point of view. They are also more likely to produce policy decisions that are perceived as more legitimate and are in reality more consensual, rational, and fair.

This turn to deliberation is also evident in political practice. Reliance on deliberative fora of various types is becoming an increasing reality in political life. Public policy analysts have reported numerous cases of deliberation in Europe, the United States and South America (e.g. Forester, 1999; Fung and Wright, 2001, Hajer and Wagenaar, 2003; Innes and Boehr, 2003, 2004; Fung, forthcoming, Weatherford and McDonnell, forthcoming). My own investigation of deliberative efforts in the US suggests that citizen deliberations have been central in major city, school board, county and regional decision-making in over 1000 localities over the last twenty years.

Despite this theoretical and practical interest in citizen deliberation, political scientists have only recently begun to go beyond the informal observation of particular cases to the conduct of more systematic studies of citizen's tendencies to engage in political talk (e.g., Delli Carpini et al., forthcoming), their views of deliberation (e.g., Walsh, 2004) and the impact of deliberation on participants' attitudes (e.g., Luskin, et al., 2002). However, little systematic research has focused on the quality of the exchange that occurs between citizens in deliberative settings. This is the case despite the fact that assumptions regarding the nature of that exchange are critical both to political theorists and practitioners.<sup>2</sup> According to the theory, political discussion can be considered deliberative only if it involves the reasoned consideration of participants' beliefs and preferences. It can be considered be democratic only if it is conducted in a way that preserves the autonomy and equality of the participants. Failing to be deliberative or democratic, the ensuing discussion and the policy recommendations are less likely to be consensual, rational, fair or legitimate.

My aim here is to examine the quality of citizen deliberations. I begin by offering a theoretically grounded description of how individuals actually engage one another when they are

asked to deliberate. The intent is not to offer a more elaborated description of the reasoned discourse presumed by liberal democratic theorists, but rather to characterize the different forms of discursive practices that may emerge in deliberative settings. I then use this typology to guide the analysis of the of two different citizen deliberations that were convened under conditions highly favorable to deliberation. I conclude by considering the implications of the evidence of different forms of deliberative discourse for democratic practice.

### **Types of Deliberative Discourse**

While briefly stipulating what a deliberative exchange should be like, most deliberative democratic theory focuses on the institutional context or social setting of the deliberation. The concern here is the circumstances that affect who is included in the deliberation and, once included, the extent to which they participate in a free and equal fashion. Critical attention is paid to the ways in which institutional arrangements and social status operate to exclude people from the deliberation and then to distort the discussion of those involved by highlighting the concerns of the more powerful participants and by silencing the less powerful participants or forcing their conformity. The assumption here is that insofar as power can be neutralized and constraints on participation can be removed, individuals will engage one another in a more truly democratic deliberative fashion. Allowing for some variation among theorists, most argue that the result will be a collaborative consideration of a problem or issue through the assertions of fact or value (as personal narratives or explicit claims) that are actually or potentially backed by reasons or clarified by elaborations which may then be subject to challenge, defense and revision. The assumption is that this presentation and interrogation of claims will involve the free and equal expression of personal views and a respectful consideration of others' perspectives, fairness and the common good.

While instructive, this way of characterizing deliberative discourses is limited in two related ways. On the one hand, little reference is made to evidence on how people actually deliberate. This is justified insofar as ideal deliberation is realized or at least closely approximated in real deliberations. However if it is not, a separate analysis of how people actually engage one another in deliberative settings becomes necessary. On the other hand the characterization of deliberative discourse focuses on a single kind of exchange, the kind that is both assumed and prescribed in deliberative democratic theory. If people engage one another in a different, non-normative fashion, the theory can therefore only offer a framework for negative description; it can only provide a way of describing what people are *not* doing. Consequently deliberative democratic theory currently offers little direction for addressing the different ways in which people may deliberate or for considering the implications of these different forms of deliberation for democratic practice.

Here I adopt a structural pragmatic view of cognition and communication. Consequently I view meaning-making as a purposive, constructive activity that has both subjective and inter-subjective dimensions. I also assume this constructive activity may be realized in different ways, each of which produces its characteristic understandings and discourses (Rosenberg, 2002, 2003). This view yields a distinctive understanding of communication, one that suggests that communication may take qualitatively different forms thereby producing structurally different ways of coordinating the exchange between participants and different possibilities for the kinds of meanings they can inter-subjectively construct. Three types of communication or deliberation are described below: (1) concretely anchored, conventional discourse, (2) co-operative discourse and (3) collaborative, reconstructive discourse.

**Table 1**  
**Types of Discourse**

	<b>Conventional</b>	<b>Cooperative</b>	<b>Collaborative</b>
<b>Aim of discourse</b>	1. Choose correct course of action. 2. Maintain conventional social relationships	Reach agreement on the meaning and value of first order (conventional) claims in order to make effective and desirable decisions.	1. Choose correct action 2. Use deliberation as an opportunity for a basis for a collaborative (re-)construction of meaning, selves & community
<b>Mode of coordination</b>	Shared experience and cultural conventions delimit the causal or categorical connections among <i>speech acts</i> .	Co-operative expression of <i>perspectives</i> through reasoned argument involving reference to shared foundational assumptions.	Complementary, caring engagement of <i>communicative strategies</i> to illuminate forms of subjectivity & inter-subjectivity
<b>Rules of Social Interaction</b>	Specific rules of polite and civil behavior as they pertain to particular social roles and status.	Specific rules negotiated with reference to general principles of fair and effective participation	Self-reflective, negotiated management of the discourse to meet complementary needs of creating and sustaining (a) collaboration and the social reality of the group and (b) subjectivity and the personal reality of the self.
<b>Rules of conversational relevance</b>	Address specific topic of conversation or, secondarily, address remarks of prior speakers.	Complementary, other oriented contribution to the definition/explanation of the subject matter being addressed.	
<b>Quality of meaning constructed</b>	Shared representation based on common cultural definitions or exposure to similar objective experience.	Common meaning based on agreement regarding place of propositional claims in their systemic context (objective, social and personal).	A collaborative interaction between different ways of constructing meaning without reducing their difference.
<b>Criteria of successful communication</b>	1. Leads to effective and/or normatively appropriate action. 2. Speech acts follow one another according to social convention & participants follow role prescriptions.	1. Individual participants engage in critical self-reflection of specific beliefs 2. There is reasoned discussion of related claims with reference to a shared understanding of what is true, right and authentic.	1) Integrity of self is expressed and its limits engaged. 2) Differences in how people construct meaning are recognized and engaged. 3) Community sustained while fostering fragmentation.

While focusing on the different forms which discourse may take, it is important to note that I am not suggesting that a given deliberation will take a single form. To the contrary, I assume that at different moments in the deliberation, different types of discourses are likely to emerge. The form of discourse may change over time with a shift in the subject matter or in the orientation of the participants. Additionally, different forms of discourse may be operative simultaneously when subsets of participants address the same topic in qualitatively different ways.

### **I. Conventional, concretely anchored discourse**

**The aims of discourse.** Conventional discourse is oriented by two distinct goals. The first goal is to determine the nature of the problem and how to address it effectively. This involves identifying the

defining attributes of the problem, establishing the operative causes and their concrete effects, considering possible interventions and determining the relative value of their different outcomes. The second goal is to regulate the social interaction between the participants according to prevailing social conventions of civility and politeness. The aim here is to insure that the discourse follows rather specific, concrete prescriptions regarding who speaks in what way when.

**The formal qualities of the discourse.** The basic unit of conventional discourse is a speech act. This consists of a commonly recognized use of an utterance for a commonly understood specific purpose (e.g., representing a particular objective experience to others or evoking a particular response from them). The relationship between speech acts is regulated by conventional rules of association that link particular speech acts causally, categorically or normatively in specific and concrete ways. Structured in this way, conventional discourse is organized around specific concrete topics. The topic may be a particular focal actor, object, action or series of actions. To be relevant, a speech act must be linked to the concrete topic by expressing causal (e.g. refer to a prior cause or consequent effect of the topic) categorical (e.g. refer to other concrete aspects of the topic) associations that conforms to shared experience or accepted social conventions or definitions. The conversational result is a loosely related set of claims or elaborations that bear on a single topic. At the same time, conventional discourse is organized according to concrete rules of politeness and civility. They regulate the relationship between a particular actor, speech act and the action that must follow from it. The concern here is who can make a particular speech act when and who must say or do what in response. Conventional discourse thus implicates the particulars of participants' normative values, their personal identities and their social connection to one another. As a result, a violation of these social rules of discourse may readily evoke the feelings, fears, commitments and consequently the hostility of those involved.

**The dynamic of the discourse.** A conventional discourse is typically initiated in response to a particular problem. Something has gone wrong; an undesirable outcome has occurred or a social convention has been violated. Alternatively the discourse may be initiated in response to the demands of civility. Social convention may require that individuals initiate conversation as part of sustaining conventionally defined relations among them, for example the way friends create opportunities to talk simply for the purpose of sustaining the friendship. When the conversation begins, routinized or privately directed behavior is typically suspended.

To begin, a topic is introduced by one of the participants. Constrained by rules of relevance, the discussion will consist of a succession of contributions that are intended, in part, to describe, to explain or to evaluate the topic at hand. Often succeeding claims bear only indirectly on one another. Thus one speaker may offer a narrative or claim about an aspect of the anchoring topic and the next speaker may offer another narrative or claim that remains on topic but bears no direct concrete relationship to the prior narrative. Anchored in a common topic, but not addressing the linkages among different individuals' speech acts, the discourse produces a depiction of the topic that consists of a list of loosely associated claims and narratives.

In this context, one speaker may directly address a prior speaker's claim. Such a move may be a supportive one. This may consist of a simple affirmation of the validity of the first speaker's claim such as, "Yes, you are right." Alternatively the supportive move may involve making complementary assertions of concrete association. This may consist of providing a specific example of a general behavioral rule that has been asserted. Thus one speaker may follow another's claim that dull textbooks cause students to be bored by describing how her child had a bad textbook and subsequently became disinterested in the topic. Instead the second speaker can support the first by extending the causal chain the first asserted. Thus the second speaker may assert that textbooks bore students who then become disrespectful to their teachers. In either case, the second speaker makes a

speech act that extends and thereby reinforces the claim made in the speech act of the first. In a conventional discourse, such supportive moves not only to contribute to the analysis of the topic at hand, but they also reinforce shared beliefs and maintain a positive social connection between the participants.

A second speaker may also respond competitively. Here the causal or categorical link between actions and/or objects asserted by the first speaker is denied. This may involve a simple statement of rejection without an accompanying reason. Here there is simply a flat, "No." Alternatively, there may be a rejection of the first speaker's claim of causal, categorical or evaluative relationship by suggesting a different relationship. For example, the second speaker may assert that textbooks are not boring or that students remain interested even if the textbook is boring. This competitive exchange may be extended with more assertions that bolster the claim of one side by offering supportive examples, citing supportive authoritative dictates or emphasizing the authority of the supported speaker. In complementary fashion, one side may be diminished by offering contradictory examples of specific experience, citing contrary authoritative dictates or by pointing to the de-authorizing or de-legitimizing qualities of the opposed speaker. Except where such competitive conversation is a matter of established social convention, the discussion becomes a competition between the belief, values or identities that creates or maintains social distance or distinction between the opposed participants.

The resulting quarrel may be resolved in one of several ways. One possibility is the claims of one side dominate as the opposing side acquiesces. There is a simple assertion of truth/power by one side over another. In a group discussion, this result may reflect the weight of numbers as participants not directly involved choose sides either because they share the same view or because they wish to reinforce their social connection to one side or distance themselves from the other. A second possibility is that a relevant civility rule is asserted and the claims of the two sides are peremptorily reconciled. This may be done by simply combining the two positions (without regard to existing incompatibilities). For example, there may be a joint recognition that both parties are right, or at least partially right. Alternatively the parties may agree to simply set their argument aside. Often this is accomplished indirectly through a form of conversational repair, for example when one party makes a joke about the disagreement. In either case, conversation continues by turning to another aspect of the topic or to a different topic altogether. The third possibility is that the discourse is discontinued. Here the participants may choose to resolve the dispute by other means (e.g., a flip of the coin, recourse to an authoritative judge or physical combat) or by simply withdrawing.

## **II. Co-operative discourse**

**Aim of the discourse.** In co-operative discourse, the orienting aims of conventional discourse are reconstituted as objects of a second order discussion, one that has its own distinctive goals. One is to construct a *correct* understanding of the problem, both with regard to its elemental nature and dynamics. A critical approach is adopted toward participants' initial perceptions and specific cultural claims. The assumption is that these perceptions are likely to reflect a narrow and superficial focus. Consequently in the deliberation, an attempt is made to understand the problem better by considering both the relationship among its aspects and the relationship between the specific problem and the larger context in which it emerges. Similarly in the discussion of cultural conventions, an attempt is made to insure that the invocation of any particular cultural definition or prescription is consistent with a broader understanding of the practical or social problem in question and with other possibly relevant cultural claims that might be made.

A second goal of co-operative discourse is to construct a *shared* understanding of the problem and how it is being addressed. A tentative approach is adopted toward what is regarded as the apparent meaning of the particular claims made by the individual participants. The presumption is that different individuals may be exposed to different experiences and different aspects of the broader culture and therefore may have different frames of reference for the claims they make. As a result different people may not understand a particular claim in the same way. The result will not be so much disagreement as misunderstanding. Recognizing this, a co-operative discourse involves a good deal of mutual interpretation in an effort to generate a shared understanding of the matter at hand.

**The formal qualities of the discourse.** The basic element of a co-operative discourse is the presentation of a perspective. This involves making a propositional claim of the relationship between concrete actions and then relating that claim to other propositional claims that constitute that system of meaning in which all the related claims are embedded. The co-operative exchange of these elemental perspectives is coordinated on three bases. The first are rules of argumentation. These rules regulate how claims may be related to each other and to the objective reality (physical, social or personal) they are intended to represent. Included here is demand that claims be elaborated, explained, justified and challenged by presenting related claims (reasons) and evidence in a manner that follows the rules of logic and reliable observation. The second are fundamental assumptions regarding the general qualities of the world. These assumptions provide individuals with a common general ground to which they can refer when making specific arguments based on their different perspectives. Included here are assumptions regarding the basic organizational structure and dynamic qualities of the natural world of objects, the social world of human beings in groups and the subjective world of the self. The third basis for the coordination of discourse rests on the foundations of the second. It involves a shared understanding of the social conditions required to maintain a co-operative exchange among individuals with potentially differing perspectives. This then suggests guidelines for determining who should be included in any particular discussion and how they should interact with one another.

Structured in this way, co-operative discourse is organized around a general subject rather than a particular concrete topic. The subject of the discourse is the systemic quality of the problem and the systemic context in which the problem is understood to be embedded. To be relevant, propositional claims must be related to the objective, social or subjective context to which they refer. At any point in the discourse, only one of these contexts is likely to be emphasized while the other two are bracketed out. In this way dimensions of the discourse subject may be differentiated from one another and the discourse organized accordingly. For example, discussion may be structured so that the objective nature of the problem and the feasibility of different solutions may be considered first and a consideration of the social value of different solutions be considered second. In addition any given dimension of the problem may be internally organized by differentiating its constitutive aspects and then ordering them relative to one another. For example, the discussion of the objective dimension of the problem of education may include an attempt to differentiate different aspects of education according to administrative, teaching or student management functions and then to organize the discourse to address each of these functions in turn. Organized in this way, the different turns in the discourse are related to one another as co-operative efforts to inform, to critique and to revise different perspectives with the aim of establishing a better and shared understanding of the problem at hand. This requires attention to both the subject of the discussion and to the views of individual speakers.

**The dynamics of the discourse.** Cooperative discourse is initiated when conventional discourse fails (or is anticipated to fail). Irresolvable disagreement may emerge when participants do not refer to the same experiences, authorities or social conventions. At this point, conventional discourse may be suspended and a co-operative discourse may be initiated. Such a discourse typically

begins with an attempt to sketch the basic contours of the subject to be considered. This may include a preliminary discussion of the bases of the initial disagreement and the dimensions or aspects of the problem addressed. This may lead to initial (and revisable) agreement as to how to organize the ensuing discussion.

In the discussion, any speaker may begin to present her perspective on the subject by making a propositional claim. In so doing, she recognizes that her understanding of the meaning and value of her claim is relative to her own subjective perspective and that the listeners' perspectives may differ from her own. Consequently the speaker will anticipate possible misunderstanding and the objections that will follow from it. This attitude will be reflected in her often unprompted attempts (1) to clarify the meaning of her claim by placing it in perspective, that is relative to other claims she regards to be true or right, (2) to explore possible specific differences of experience, knowledge and preference that exist between her and the listeners, (3) to explicate her claims with reference to the listener's perspective, and (4) to validate her claims with reference to the fundamental assumptions that she and her audience share about the general nature of the objective world, social relations and persons.

When disagreement arises, discussion will focus on the justifications for claims made. This may involve critical commentary on whether a justification violates commonly accepted rules of logic, coherence and reliable observation. Alternatively the focus may be on the incompatibility of a claim or its justification with commonly accepted fundamental assumptions about the quality or dynamic of objective reality, society or personality. In either case, an attempt is made to argue the incorrectness of another's claim in terms that she is likely to accept as binding. A disagreement may also be resolved by incorporating the differing positions under a common umbrella. Here reference is made to common rules and assumptions to demonstrate that the two positions are either complementary (perhaps illuminating different aspects of the same phenomena) or equally valid. In the latter instance, the two positions are defined as different results of drawing upon the same common basic assumptions and applying the same rules of logic and observation. The result is acceptable disagreement in which the both the validity and distinctiveness of each position are acknowledged.<sup>3</sup>

Two kinds of circumstances prevent the engagement of co-operative discourse. In one case, one or more participants do not recognize or are incapable of using the basic rules of argument. In this case their contributions to the discourse will be devalued as substandard. Communication toward them may assume a pedagogical or care-taking character. Alternatively they will be excluded from the discourse or their contributions will be ignored. In the second case, one or more of the participants do not share the basic underlying assumptions of the others. This is likely when participants come from very different cultural backgrounds. Where discourse rules or foundational assumptions are not shared, the requisite common ground for co-operative discourse is lost and it reverts to a more conventional form. Given initial disagreement at this level, this may in turn lead to physical struggle to determine both the response to the present problem and the conditions of future discourse.

### **III. Collaborative discourse**

**Aims of the discourse.** While attempting to address particular problems, collaborative discourse aims to develop the psychological resources of the participants and the cultural resources available to them in the larger socio-cultural environment. This involves reflecting on their discourse itself. In this vein, the discussion of a problem is used as an opportunity to focus on the processes whereby rules of argumentation are formulated, basic assumptions regarding nature, society and individuals are defined, and the social conditions of the discourse are understood and institutionalized. Most



important, this is done in a way that considers both (a) the current capacity and the developmental potential of the particular individuals involved and (b) the current quality and transformative potential of the socio-cultural context that is structuring how those individuals are engaging one another. The objective is to foster modes of communication that not only enhance the subjective capacities and the integrity of the individuals involved, but also contribute to the flexibility and sustainability of the larger social context in which they are embedded. The goal is transformation, both personal and collective. At all times, this goal is defined and pursued relative to the particulars of the individuals involved and the socio-historical context of their discursive exchange.

**Formal qualities of the discourse.** The basic element of the discourse is a communicative strategy. It consists of an attempt to engage others in a collaborative effort to reconstruct (a) who each participant is (as a reflective subject and purposive agent), (b) how the cultural context dictates how the participants interact with one another, and (c) how these personal and cultural features of the discussion situation impact one another. This effort does not consist of a single contribution to a conversation, but a related series of contributions with a common goal. Such a communicative strategy is necessarily multi-faceted. On the one hand it has a cognitive dimension. Addressing differences in perspective, it involves offering an interpretative reconstruction of the logic whereby the claims that constitute a given perspectives are defined and related to one another. This includes giving an account of the formal qualities of both the rules used to relate claims to one another and the foundational assumptions in reference to which claims are validated. Given its transformative goals, this interpretative reconstruction also involves an attempt to explain how these structuring rules and assumptions reflect the subjective capacities of the individual speakers and the socio-culturally mediated relationship between them. On the other hand, a communicative strategy has an explicitly socio-emotional component. It seeks to lead participants to engage one another in a discussion of their personal reasoning, feelings, identities and social connections that not only affirms these critical elements of their personal and collective being, but also seeks to transform them. Consequently, these participants are rendered unusually vulnerable. In order to promote the personal security, trust and caring that a potentially transformative discourse requires, a communicative strategy necessarily includes initiatives that are intended to enhance the self-esteem, affective bonds and commitments of the individuals involved.

As the interplay of communicative strategies, a collaborative discourse consists of a joint effort typically extends across a number of discussions. Such a collaborative discourse is not structured, at least not in any static or universal sense. It does not consist of one particular way of organizing how individuals communicate and therefore does not have specific formal properties. Instead it is characterized by a structuring dynamic, one that reflects the qualities of the subjectively structured discursive strategies of particular subject-participants and of the culturally structured manner in which these participants communicate with one another. In this light, the static formal qualities of a given collaborative discourse will be the particular product of the specific individuals involved and the socio-historical setting of their interaction. At the same time, this particular formal result is understood to be unstable. The capacity for individuals to reflect on their own subjectivity as its engaged in communication with others and their ability to jointly consider the terms of their inter-subjective engagement gives collaborative discourse a developmental potential, one that may lead to a reconstruction of individuals, their community and the discourse itself.

**Dynamic of the discourse.** When co-operative discourse fails, a collaborative discourse may be initiated. Given its reconstructive and critical qualities, collaborative discourse draws heavily both on the intellectual and emotional energies of its participants, and on the social and cultural resources of the larger social groups to which they belong. It therefore requires a special commitment. As a result, a

collaborative discourse typically begins by establishing that it is in fact necessary. This may be done by referring to evidence in the prior discussion of the contested nature of basic rules of argument and foundational assumptions or the inadequacy of the social conditions of the exchange. The key here is the evident incommensurability of the ways in which different individuals are reasoning about or affectively responding to each other's contributions. This may be understood to reflect a difference in the cognitive and emotional capacities of the individuals involved or in the ways of understanding and discussing that is characteristic of the cultural groups to which those individuals belong. In either case, the conclusion drawn is that the current deliberation is being conducted in such a way that the individuality of the participants or the integrity of the group is being inadequately expressed or actively undermined. This may be confirmed by appealing to the sense of confusion, dissatisfaction or alienation of the individual participants and to the apparent conflict among the ethnic, religious or political groups to which they belong. On this basis, an explicit call will be made for the personal commitment and the open social space that collaborative discourse requires.

With its necessity and requirements established, a collaborative discussion or series of discussions may then begin. Initially this may focus on the failed attempt at co-operative discourse and thus on how the participants differ in their conception of how to arrive at a correct and shared understanding of the policy problem previously addressed. This will include both a consideration of how each participant is defining and explaining the problem and how each is responding to the other's attempt to communicate her point of view. This may include a consideration of both the cognitive and emotional dimensions of the interaction. Participants will not only attempt to expressly consider others' understandings, but also their feelings. At the same time, they will make an effort to express their own understandings and feelings to enhance their communicative and social relationship with their listeners. Following any one contribution, the interpretations offered and the emotions expressed may be addressed by other participants. This may include attempts to probe the meaning of what is being said by asking for clarifications, further elaborations or extensions of the argument in new directions. Explanations and justifications may be probed by a request to justify the account given. This attempt to assess the meaning of the views presented will eventually lead to attempts to characterize the formal or general quality of the inferential associations and foundational assumptions a given participant is making. Finally, the structure of the meanings expressed may be pragmatically linked to the cultural context of the discourse in order to show how it is shaped by and sustains social structuring forces. At issue here is the kind of interaction or discussion among participants that their broader context enables or prevents and its implications for who each participant can be in the discussion situation. This may provide the basis for cultural critique as well as personal reflection. Importantly, this collaborative effort may extend beyond boundaries of the formal deliberation by creating opportunities for participants to interact with one another in different social settings.

In the course of this collaborative discussion, differences in meaning-making will emerge more clearly and the ambiguity of apparently shared meanings will become apparent. The result will be a certain mutual lack of comprehension. Participants may recognize the relativity of their own way of understanding and the limits of their ability to properly understand or be understood by each other. This may lead to an attempt to construct an overarching frame of reference to facilitate mutual recognition and understanding of the different views being constructed and a means of purely collaborative exchange. This depends on people recognizing that while they may have different perspectives and capacities to construct perspectives, they are all sentient, thinking, feeling social beings that act on the world and connect to one another. It also requires that the participants come to recognize their own interdependence. There must be some appreciation of how each person's way of thinking/feeling (and thus the kind of person she is) depends on how people engage one another. The

resulting collaboration is a mixed attempt to forge commonalities and connections and to recognize differences and distance. This will include ongoing attempts to recognize and understand differences in how each of them is thinking, feeling and talking about the issues being discussed by place the varying ways in which different individuals are thinking in a complementary relationship with one another. These attempts may take different forms. One possibility is a pedagogical discourse predicated on a shared assumption that the individuals recognize that they share comparable potential, but that they differ in their current cognitive and emotional capacities to act and connect to one another. Another possibility is collaborative discourse predicated on a shared assumption that individuals reason and feel differently and yet are interdependent. The discourse here is oriented to creating mutually satisfying (if not fully comprehended) exchange that respects basic differences.

Collaborative discourses are realized in different ways depending on the capacities of the particular participants involved and the particular socio-cultural context in which they are interacting. Thus issues of the meaning or value of things, the nature of persons and cultural contexts and how these factors affect one another may be addressed at different levels of reflection, with different levels of inter-subjective collaboration and with differing degrees of comfort or safety. Any kind of collaborative discourse ends when new understandings of the problem, oneself, others and the group emerge that resonate with the ways in which the individuals are thinking and how they are talking to one another. This may involve personal and social development or it may involve the construction of a complementarity that allows individuals to recognize their fundamental differences and communicate, even if only partially, across them. Alternatively, and perhaps more typically, a collaborative discourse will fail to achieve such a social integration. Instead the result is a dissensus in which the parties only achieve a clearer sense of the particularity of their own way of judging matters and a greater appreciation of the extent to which they do not understand and are not understood by others. But rather than being regarded as an anomalous or threatening state of affairs, this result is recognized to be normal and even desirable. In the latter case, the incommensurability of ways of understanding is understood as affirmation of the integrity of individuals and a resource for further creative engagement.

## Methodology

The aim of the empirical research was to discover the nature of the discourse that takes place in actual citizen deliberations. To this end, two citizen groups were convened to deliberate about the quality of K-12 education in their neighborhood. The particulars of this study and its results are presented below.

**Subject population.** The subject population includes 24 adults from Laguna Beach, California. (This is a subset of the 72 adults who volunteered to participate in the various stages of the study.) Laguna Beach is an upper middle class, largely white community of about 30,000. Participants in the study were recruited by a mailing sent to the parents of 700 children in the grammar and middle schools. Approximately one in ten of the households receiving letters responded with an intention to participate. The subject population reflected the demographics of the larger community except for gender, 2/3 of the participants were female. Approximately eighty percent of the subjects were college educated (over three times the US national average). Laguna Beach was selected as the site of the present study because it was believed to afford an environment that was unusually congenial to effective deliberation. Because of their relative wealth and education and their history of high levels of participation in community politics, it was assumed that residents of Laguna Beach would be unusually capable participants in a citizen deliberation.

**Methods and procedures.** The study combined an academic interest in analyzing the nature of citizen deliberation with a political interest in promoting citizen empowerment and practical action. Thus it was designed both to explore the nature of citizen deliberation and to encourage deliberative democracy practice in the local community. One result is that there are few issues of external validity – the deliberations included citizens who deliberated real issues of concern to them leading to policy recommendations forward to relevant policy makers.

Recognizing the potential mobilizing power of education as a political issue, a decision was made to initiate deliberations on the goals and conduct of K-12 education in the public schools of the City of Laguna Beach. Following preliminary discussions with school administrators, teachers and some parents, parents were invited to participate in a deliberation about the delivery of public education in their community. (Laguna Beach constitutes its own school district and thus is self-governing in this respect.)

The volunteers were assigned to one of two groups, each of which consisted of twelve members (as in the citizen juries of England or Australia). Assignment was largely random, but also reflected the need to convene groups that reflected subjects' individual time constraints. In the initial design, each group was to meet six times every other week. However because the participants felt they need extra time to complete their task, the groups met seven times. Each meeting lasted two hours. At the first meeting, the goals of the deliberation, to make policy recommendations and to encourage parental participation in school governance, were reiterated. The first four or five meetings were devoted largely to a discussion of current practices and a consideration of improvements or alternatives. The last two meetings were devoted to coming to consensus about recommendations to be communicated to the School Board and principals. All meetings were audio and videotaped.

Each group was led by two facilitators. One had primary responsibility and the other played a support role. The facilitators were members of the research team (three advanced Ph.D. candidates in political psychology and me). Facilitators were given specific instructions regarding how to conduct themselves during the meeting. Throughout, the lead facilitator's role was to insure conversation was civil and when necessary (which was rare) to help coordinate participant turn-taking. During the first three and half meetings, the facilitators were instructed to actively intervene in a number of ways to encourage the participants to consider their specific concerns in broader contexts. This included beginning the first meeting by asking participants to postpone the consideration of specific issues and to begin by addressing two general questions: (1) What kind of people did they want their children to be when they reached the age of eighteen? (2) What role might the schools play in reaching that goal? In addition, when the discussion provided an opening, facilitators were instructed to raise issues of justice and fairness (for example, when participants raised the possibility of greater support for either gifted or disadvantaged children) and the common good (how would this affect the neighborhood or the larger Laguna community). Facilitators were instructed to limit interventions of this kind to no more than twice a meeting. In the last three and half meetings, facilitators were told not to intervene in this fashion and thus leave the participants to address issues as they deemed appropriate.

The meetings typically began slowly as some members arrived late and initial exchanges were more social and less issue focused. The quality of the deliberations declined somewhat as members tired during the last half hour of discussion. In the desire to explore the deliberations at their best, the analysis here focused on the middle hour of each deliberative session. These middle hours were transcribed, and were analyzed by two coders. The coders were unaware both of the analysis of the other coder and the identity of the group whose deliberations they were analyzing. Their task was to divide each one-hour session into its successive segments and determine the structure of each segment (conventional discourse, co-operative discourse and collaborative discourse) and record its

length (in minutes). A segment was defined as a portion of the deliberation that was structured in the same way (e.g. conventionally) and distinguished from the next segment by a shift in structure (e.g. from conventional to co-operative).

## Results

In the initial task of distinguishing discrete segments of discourse, coders did agree on the identification of core segments 84 % of the time. This allowed for slight variation (one or two conversational turns) in determining the specific point of initiation or determination of a segment. Where there was disagreement, coders met and common lines of demarcation were adopted. With regard to the analysis of the structure of each segment, inter-coder reliability was 92%.

From the perspective of deliberative democratic theory, the most important result of the study was the relative prominence of different forms of discourse in the deliberations. Beginning with the most demanding type, the analysis suggests that no collaborative discourse emerged in either deliberative group at any point in their deliberations. This may come as no surprise given that cultural expectations regarding a policymaking discussion would leave little room for open discussion on such matters as how individual participants constructed their understandings or how their interaction with one another was regulated by conventional rules and foundational assumptions that might be inappropriate or inadequate. The initiation of a collaborative discourse requires an explicit recognition of the failure of cooperative discourse and explicit call for a different kind of conversation. This did not occur. This evidence of no collaborative discourse in the course of seven two-hour sessions suggests that typical citizen deliberations may not perform the critical or emancipatory role that some theorists might attribute to it.

The deliberations did include some cooperative discourse, but it was unexpectedly rare. In one deliberative group there were only in two instances of a co-operative exchange and in the other there was none. The two instances mentioned combined for a total of approximately 14 minutes of the 14 hours of discourse that were coded. This was surprising for two reasons. First the participants, by the standards of the American population as a whole, had unusually high levels of formal education and income. The presumption here (and certainly one that is made in most deliberative democratic theory) is that participants of this kind have the experience and capacity to engage in co-operative discourse. Second, the group facilitators actively attempted to encourage more co-operative discourse by (a) beginning the deliberation by shifting the focus away from some specific complaints or desires to a consideration of the basic goals of education, and (b) by occasionally (twice in each of the second, third and fourth meetings) posing questions that raised broader issues of justice as fairness and the common good. Despite the presumed capacities of the participants and the encouragement of the facilitators, the deliberation about educational policy and practice was rarely co-operative.

It should be noted that certain participants did, on occasion, respond to the facilitator's initiatives or spontaneously try to steer the deliberations in the direction of a more cooperative discourse. Interestingly these initiatives were typically met with resistance. Some was overt. Other participants explicitly rejected the cooperative initiative suggesting that the conversation avoid abstract or hypothetical issues in favor of a focus on the specific concrete concerns currently being addressed. More often the resistance was more subtle. In this case, participants responded by ignoring the attempt to move to a more cooperative discourse and simply continued as they had been doing previously.

The vast majority of the deliberative discussions analyzed were clearly conventional. This was true when deciding on topics to address, discussing the nature of the problem or addressing

differences in opinion. At times, discussion would shift to a more proto-discourse, particularly when a particular group meeting was first beginning or ending. Here talk became more routinized and less clearly other oriented. However during the active policy discussion in the middle hour of each deliberation, conversational moves in this direction were infrequent. When such a move was made, its inappropriateness or irrelevance (when placed in the context of a conventional discourse) was not addressed directly. Instead other participants simply ignored the initiative and continued the discourse at the conventional level.

**Examples of types of discourse.** Here several excerpts from the deliberations are presented to illustrate the different types of discourse. The first is extracted from a longer discussion of one of the goals of education, to teach children to become competent economic actors. The excerpted exchange is conventional in several respects. First, conversational relevance requires remarks be directed toward the topic and thus produces a discussion that is organized as list of the attributes of the topic. There is no attempt to relate these aspects to one another, either conceptually or conversationally (that is by introducing a new attribute by reference to an earlier one). In this brief excerpt, the following attributes are mentioned: being able to learn, to communicate, to handle money by investing, to consider retirement, to understand health insurance and to balance a checkbook. Second, remarks are also relevant, if only in a secondary way, if they are addressed to a particular comment of an earlier speaker. This typically consists of a simple statement of support (e.g. turns 2, 9, beginning 10) a simple counterclaim (e.g., turn 7,11, 15), or an implicitly critical questioning (e.g. turn 5). These usually receive a minimal response or are simply passed by in the discussion. Third, questions of meaning are not raised. Participants do not ask one another what they mean by what they are asserting. Fourth, when reasons are offered, they are typically not addressed directly and then subjected to critical consideration.

1. Ri        The thing is an economic actor, you're also are faced with a rapidly changing environment. And you have to be able not only to use the skills you've acquired and the knowledge you've acquired, you also have to be learn new things quickly.
2. Lza       Right.
3. Ri        Because today if the school doesn't teach you how to learn, how to process information and how to evolve, you would be very quickly out of work basically.
4. Lza       Well isn't one of the skills that's going to separate a winner from a loser in life, the ability to communicate? And I think that's something that's overlooked in education. Because they have to come out with all these facts, and they have to take these test test test based on facts. But they really can't sit around a table like this and explain themselves at all. They can't articulate their opinions, their classes are too big to have a discussion. . . . And whether it's verbally or on paper, with emails, I can't believe my kid's emails, sometimes I think, aren't you embarrassed to send that out.
5. Da        Did you have that in your education?
6. Lza       No, but that's why I'm even. . . .no because I had to learn this the hard way. I was always playing catch up because I didn't have basic grammar. I wasn't asked to write essays. And a lot of it, it's class size, 'cause work load, you know a teacher has five periods with twenty five kids, but if we don't get these kids to be able to, if they're gonna vote, they gotta know why. Or be able to have an intelligent conversation to express their point of view. And then back it up with something. . .
7. Liz        But now what they need to know is science and math.
8. Lza       Yeah. But if they can't write a letter, write an email, write a proposal, you know if you could be the most brilliant scientist, but you're going to have to write a grant, and give it to the government and say, you should support my research because x, y, and z. But if they can't write that down in a clear way, so I think that should be, [to Ri] on this journey, is to be able to communicate.
9. Ri        It's definitely a critical point.
10. Fr        I think that's an important point. Before we get off the economic actor, I want to remind you that there are a lots and lots of high school, investment clubs, where kids are reading the stock market

- reports every day . And they have a pool of money and they're being taught how to read the market reports and how to invest. And its very feasible. And so part of being an economic actor is to understand how money works in the culture... Every kid has to handle money, they all do.
11. Th      Talk about retirement. You know how you're going to live when you're not working.
  12. Fr      Oh gosh, it's hard for them to even think about how they're going to spend their allowance.
  13. Di      Well even what you were saying about health insurance. I wish that people would sit down with kids and talk about how far does money really go in the real world? I don't think they have any sense of, you know, so now say you get sick and have to go to the doctor and if you don't have insurance how do you pay for it?
  14. Ci      But did you know all of that?
  15. Di      No but, I wish I had.
  16. Ci      I think experiencing life in general is an education itself. It's just a process.
  17. Th      -- we had to learn how to balance a checkbook, we had to keep...

The following two excerpts illustrate the limits of conventional discourse and the difficulties that consequently may arise. In the first excerpt, Di and Ci are both interested in introducing media education into the schools. However Di is interested in the consumption of mass media and Ci is interested in the use of media technology. The exchange proceeds as though they are discussing the same thing and even when they begin to discover they are not, the disparity is not really addressed. Instead conversation at turn 9 shifts to another topic.

1. Di:      To me, it's huge, the way our children receive information through the consumerism, from the time they're two years old, what their expectations are, versus what reality is. And I really think it would be worthwhile to teach the kids to filter the information their receiving, because I think it sets them up to have anxiety, to fail, you know they don't really know how to identify what they like. .... We pour all this stuff from the outside world into them and I think then they....
2. Ci      So you're saying media awareness taught in public education that's kind of what I'm trying to get to, because when the media's in the school's, it's like they don't use it.
3. Di      I'm just saying when a child gets, I don't know if you ever, they had a great woman for Thurston, and she kind of gets the kids to understand about who's selling them this, what does that really mean. What does that really do to the world when you buy all this stuff, where does it go, all this junk you're buying, and how long do you keep it? And what does that, just you know responsibility as a citizen of the planet, and what are we supposed to do as a consequence of our lifestyle.
4. Ci      So what I hear you saying is that you want to bring it into the curriculum.
5. Di      I don't know if it could be something, maybe, that parents get kids to do on the side. I don't know, but just, I don't think it would be a bad idea to have some little block where the kids...
6. Ci      Yeah because if we had real librarians then they would teach the kids about media, as far as internet. It's just that California chooses not to have librarians in their schools.
7. Di      No I mean beyond that, I mean if you could get the (inaudible)
8. Ci      But I'm trying to figure out how it integrates into the education system...

In the second excerpt, after Ma questions the value of fostering independent thinking, the facilitator (FC) raises the problem of the meaning directly and introduces it as a subject for group discussion (turn 5). After a little unease (reflected by the laughter), the group begins. Even in this context, discussion consists of a listing of attributes with no elaboration or cooperative probing or developing of the meaning of the particular claims individual participants are making.

1. Ma      I think it is really important to get these kids motivated. I think that maybe it is important that it is goal oriented, freedom of choice oriented, see the results of your choices. I think there is a difference between critical thinking, which I think is really good, and independent thinking which at too

- early of an age or even in junior high, they start thinking that they are too smart for this school. They start not going to school. And the whole thing compounds itself and it's just not a good situation.
2. Cra Well you got learn before...
  3. Chr Right.
  4. Brief cross talk
  5. FC It depends on what we mean by independent thinking.
  6. [Everyone laughs, a number of participants say, "yah, yah."]
  7. Ang You can have independent thinking without being arrogant.
  8. Chr I think you can be quite responsible and be socially aware in an independent way but it is not spoon food. It is not...
  9. Ang That is the difference.
  10. Eliz What comes in is your responsibility as a parent at home. What kinds of independent thinking are you fostering? I mean how independent are you trying to get your six year old to what kind of decisions she should be making...
  11. Chr It depends how far you think they are going to go.
  12. Eliz Exactly.
  13. Sha Well that is where the values come in. Do you do your homework after school or do you do it after dinner. That is an important choice to make, but you can make it. So you can have some independence.
  14. The Sure.
  15. [A momentary lull and the topic shifts to teachers posing questions during class.]

The next excerpt provides an example of co-operative discourse. The exchange between To and Ri is exemplary in several respects. First, To attempts to articulate a general understanding of the current educational enterprise and an alternative strategy he is proposing (turns 1,3,10). He does so in a way that recognizes the perspectives of others, both by trying to incorporate their concerns (turn 3) and by elaborating his distinct perspective so that they may understand. Second, Ri engages To's effort. At several points, Ri offers his understanding or a clarification of what To is trying to communicate (e.g., turns 2, 9, 11,13, 15). Third, To responds directly to Ri's inquiries and concerns (12,14). Fourth, Ri then places the immediate discussion in the broader context of how the subject matter has been organized. In turn 17, Ri provides a general interpretation of the meaning of To's perspective. In so doing, he reminds To that the current focus is on goals and that strategies have been bracketed out for the moment. The exchange ends because To nods agreement and the discussion returns to elaborating the goal of educating citizenship.

1. To This kind of hits the core of what I was thinking about after we got out last time.. ...what you want for academics. I kind of realized when I was thinking about it that we're so outcome based in our teaching. All we teach is the outcome. We don't really let you see the process or development of anything that's come [inaudible] that we miss out on a lot of history. I was just thinking about like, well you know, the calendar. How do we have this calendar? All we learn about is the months and days and stuff, and then we're done. But if you go back to learn how the heck that calendar came about, you learn a lot of things about the math that you learn and how it's used, and the world...
2. Ri Are you saying...
3. To ..... [inaudible] that process being taught, than the outcome. So that the students are going through and learning history. I wouldn't teach history as history, I would teach history as a part of whatever it is I'm teaching. Just kind of development. And we could do this with all the different subjects you all have talked about as being important...
4. Ci Tom you are radical.



5. General laughter
6. Ri So basically you teach it not as an objective...
7. Ci I'm kidding.
8. (crosstalk)
9. Ri Okay education is not a place where you want to be, it's not an objective you're trying to reach, it's a journey.
10. To Right. You know, I got to thinking, my mission basically, I got to thinking what is it you want to achieve in your education. I tried to simplify it as much as possible. And I said to myself, ... what I want a basic curriculum that just touches on how to teach the media. Which would be arts and games and things, but media, from day one. I would teach commerce, the law, health and medicine and technology. And that would be my basic program throughout your years.
11. Ri No history?
12. To Well history, that's what I'm saying. History is taught .....through that. So if you teach commerce, you go back to when you start valuing money. So you get to the point of math, where you understand money, then you can start to learn about commerce and work your way through well, how did that happen. Then you get into exploration, you get into wars, you get into all these aspects to talk about. But you start with basic, simplified knowledge, when you're young, instead of trying to remember the fifty states, you journey through the states and pick it up as you go, through history. There's all these different things, same with health, when you learn about...
13. Ri What you were saying basically...you were taking some objectives, and you were looking at a different way of getting there.
14. To Right.
15. Ri Almost devising a new strategy...teaching strategy. Which has a lot of implications, you know, how you teach....
16. To That's what I was wondering, what do you teach in order to get –
17. Ri Exactly, so you're already defining solutions basically on how to reach the objectives, and I think we haven't really cleared all the objectives and we haven't agreed on all the objectives.
18. [To nods agreement and the topic shifts]

The foregoing excerpt is also interesting in two other respects, both of which relate to the conversational move made by Ci, with some support from the larger group, early in the exchange. To begin, this is interesting as an example of conventional resistance to the initiation of cooperative discourse. Ci's move in turn 4 and the supportive group laughter that follows constitute an attempt to resist To's initiation of a co-operative exchange. Ci engages To in a more conventional discourse, both by implicitly rejecting his effort to present a whole perspective (his educational alternative) and in doing so by simply labeling him in a negative and alienating way. Although the move fails, attempts to resist co-operative discourse through conventional responses typically succeeded in this group's deliberation.

In addition, this exchange revolving around Ci and To is interesting for its failure to take advantage of an opening for a more collaborative exchange. The group discussion could have focused on this resistance to a shift in type of discourse. Questions could have been raised regarding what Ci understood To's effort to involve, how she felt about it and why other group members responded by laughing. In this context, To's response to Ci's initiative and their differing understandings of the topic could also have been explored. This may have led to a more collaborative consideration the group members' differing logics and ways of constructing meaning as well as the nature of the social relationships among them. In addition, questions could have been raised regarding the

way the group felt constrained in the kinds of issues, both political and socio-emotional, it could address and why it was constrained in this way.

### Forms of Discourse, Deliberative Democratic Practice and Constituting Citizenship

The two deliberations observed in this study were assumed to occur under conditions that were relatively favorable to the conduct of democratic deliberation.

**Table 2**  
**Political Implications of Types of Discourse<sup>1</sup>**

	<b>Conventional</b>	<b>Cooperative</b>	<b>Collaborative</b>
<b>Construction of self as actor</b>	Selfish pursuit of externally dictated interests and/or selfless conformity to social conventions.	Self as author of belief and preference. Is a self-regulating system, a personality and a thinker.	Self as active, socially embedded actor who constructs meaning and value in collaboration with others.
<b>Socio-political definition of individual</b>	Individual defined by specific behavior and by social role, status or group membership.	Abstract concept of the individual as self-directing system that has inherent integrity.	Self as a construction produced both by the individual and through his interaction with others.
<b>Political relationship fostered</b>	Rigid set of role and situation specific relationships based on social convention and cultural definition.	General relationship of equals that may be variously realized in specific social situations.	A productive relationship of complementarity among individuals that may be manifestly unequal.
<b>Impact of deliberation</b>	Coordinates behavior in a way that reinforces existing conventional practices and cultural prescriptions	Allows for critique of specific cultural beliefs or conventional practices. Operates to sustain dominant ways of thinking and foundational assumptions.	Allows for critique of dominant ways of thinking, rules of argument and foundational assumptions. Creates complementary, rather than shared understandings and values. Facilitates personal and community development.
<b>Limits of deliberation</b>	Cannot address differences in belief or behavior produced by differing personal experience or cultural exposure.	Cannot address different ways in which meaning is constructed. Cannot address differences in foundational assumptions and values.	

The participants were highly educated, relatively wealthy individuals who were meeting to talk about a topic that both was of serious concern to them, the education of their children, and was rich with the potential for critical consideration of social dynamics and orienting cultural values. Nonetheless, the group deliberations generally did not rise either to the level of cooperative discourse expected in more liberal democratic conceptions of deliberation or to

<sup>1</sup>The first two rows, “construction of the self” and “socio-political definition of the individual,” address the kind of autonomy different discourse enable. The third row, “political relationship fostered” addresses the kind of political relationship between participants that is created by different discourses. The last two rows speak to the kinds of political outcomes the different courses allow.

the level of collaborative discourse expected by more critical and emancipatory democratic conceptions. This raises questions about the political implications of the different kinds of discourse. A central issue here is the democratic quality of the different discourses. To address this, I briefly consider the nature of the personal autonomy, political relationships and critical reflection fostered by conventional, co-operative and collaborative discourse. In so doing, I view communicative interaction as a constructive activity that enables certain forms of meaning, personhood and interpersonal relationship to be realized in a given social interaction.

### **I. The democratic potential of conventional discourse.**

Conventional discourse has only limited democratic potential. Participants in such a discourse are constituted as autonomous, but their autonomy is a shallow one. In the discourse, the individual participant is constituted as having a set of wants and desires that are expressed as preferences and orient her action. Participants recognize themselves and each other in these terms. The individual is thus accorded a degree of self-determination. But this capacity for self-determination is significantly constrained. It is not the individual participants in a conventional discourse who freely define themselves and their preferences and thus determine how they may interact with others. Instead it is forces external to the participating individuals and their interaction that regulate how individuals may engage one another and therefore who each of them can be in the context of their exchange. Socio-cultural definitions and rules (and to a certain extent objective realities) determine what claims may be made, how they may be related to one another and who can make which claims. As result, speech acts (and consequently the speakers who make them) are judged relative to objective realities, conventional practices and social norms. Authority and value is located there and not in the individual speakers or listeners. In this context, there is little consideration of the personal integrity and contribution of the individual speaker. Speakers have socially defined roles to play and politeness rituals to enact. They must conform to these. Insofar as they do not, their value and place in the discourse will be diminished.

There is also little room for equality in conventional discourse. Speakers enter the discourse with their social status defined and their possibilities to speak and be heard thus determined. This prior allocation of communicative possibilities may extend to formal exclusion if the speakers belong to relevant out-groups. Even in democratic societies where there are abstract norms pertaining equality of participation, these norms enter into conventional discourse only as ritual prescriptions of specific ways in which people are allowed to act in particular circumstances. Moreover these prescriptions are typically readily overridden by conventions regarding social practice, status and power. Consequently, invitations to equal participation typically lead to the rejection socially inappropriate contributions and to the diminution of those individuals who make them.

A final issue is the potential for critique in conventional discourse. Again space is provided, but only of a very restrictive kind. In discourse of this kind, discussion focuses on specific behaviors and beliefs. Claims will be made and defended by relating the behavior or belief in question to the particulars of an objective state or to specific conventional practices or cultural imperatives. The process consists of identifying, highlighting and collecting what it is the participants already know. Because participants perceive the same reality and accept the cultural dictates, these kinds of justifications will compel agreement. The social meaning thus constructed is concrete, fragmentary (not internally coherent or coordinated), rigid and culturally specific. Here direct experience and cultural dictates constitute the medium of meaning-making, not its object. They are not themselves

subject to critical consideration. When their meaning or value of conventional beliefs or behaviors is questioned, the claims made will be rejected and those who make them will be denigrated.

## **II. The democratic potential of co-operative discourse.**

In many respects, cooperative discourse is well suited to democratic deliberation, particularly in its liberal conceptualization by theorists such as Rawls (1993), Cohen (1996) and Gutmann and Thompson (1996). Cooperative discourse constructs individual participants in a manner that is consistent with these theorists' assumptions of autonomy and equality. In the discourse, participants are constituted as individuals that observe, reason and reflect in a rational, integrative manner. In this context, individuals view themselves and others as subjects who construct their own beliefs and preferences and direct their action accordingly. They are not only the pursuers of their preferences, but also the authors of the own understandings and generators of the personalities that gives rise to those preferences. In this sense, they are regarded as fully self-determining and are in this sense autonomous.

At the same time, individuals are constituted as equal by virtue of their common and comparable capacities to be reasonable, reflective, self-directing subjects. In a cooperative discourse, this equal capacity for autonomous thought and action translates into a demand for equality of participation. Given their equal capacities and their varying experience, individuals are accorded equal opportunity, at least at the outset, to introduce their points of view freely into the discussion and have those points heard with respect. Similarly it is the agreed quality of the arguments made (an agreement voluntarily accepted by equals) rather than the status or power of the individual who makes them that will determine the relative impact different speakers have on the agreements finally reached. As a result, cooperative discourse typically carry with it normative demands of freedom and equality of opportunity for expression and will operate to protect individual participants accordingly.

Cooperative discourse opens up greater possibilities for social critique. Specific cultural claims or action prescriptions may be targeted for consideration and then judged with reference either to a systematic observation of the facts or in light of other related cultural definitions of fact or value. In the process, inter-subjective agreement may be reached on the falsehood or wrongness of the particular claim or convention and thereby produce effective critique of specific commonly accepted practices or beliefs. On the other hand, individuals may come to critically reflect on the adequacy of particular beliefs they hold or practices they engage in. Through reflection induced by a cooperative discourse with others, individuals may come to change some of their own particular beliefs and practices in a way that is not only more consistent with inter-subjectively agreed upon understandings, but also with their own subjective understandings and personality. Insofar as this involves reconsidering specific practices and beliefs that were learned or imposed by others, this frees the individual to uncover her own point of view and discover herself. This then enables her to direct her actions in a way that is more independent of particular circumstances or social influences.

Despite its advantages, there are significant limits to the social critique that cooperative fosters. The problem is that argument based on reasons oriented to establishing inter-subjective agreement is limited to the use of rules of argument and foundational assumptions about the general nature of reality, human nature, discourse and society that are already established and commonly accepted. These rules and assumptions may be clarified, but are not themselves subject to critical reflection. The basis rather than the object of discursive consideration, they are understood to be the invariable means for producing meaning and not a product of social, psychological and political forces

which may themselves vary. Consequently there is a tendency to regard these foundational rules and assumptions as universal. When an alternative set of rules and assumptions are detected, the alternative is typically denigrated or excluded from the discourse (e.g., Rawls, 1993 exclusion of comprehensive doctrines from the arena of political debated about fairness).

### **III. The deliberative democratic potential of collaborative discourse.**

**Democratic potential.** Collaborative discourse is predicated on a conception of individuals and social relationship that suggests an understanding of basic political principles and governance that differs from most liberal democratic thought. In collaborative discourse, individuals are defined by how they think and engage others. This is reflected in their capacity to construct the logics, meanings and values that will determine what they can identify, understand and value. Constituted in these terms, not only are individuals recognized to be the authors of their beliefs and preferences, they are also understood to be engage in activity which structures the quality of their authorship. In this context, political autonomy is itself understood to be a construction, one which reflects the efforts of an individual to define, understand and judge her own individuality and her relations to others. Collaborative discourse fosters the recognition that this constructive activity and the autonomy it engenders may take a variety of forms. As a result, some people may be more self-consciously constructive and thus more self-directing in the meanings and definitions they construct. They will therefore be able to exercise a greater level of autonomy. However these differences are not considered to be absolute or immutable. Instead, differences in the capacity for autonomous thought and action are regarded as differences in actual development achieved by individuals who share the same potential. Thus significant differences among individuals are recognized, but at the same time all individuals are regarded as potentially equal in their capacity to be autonomous and as essentially equal in their right to the respect and caring consideration of others.<sup>4</sup>

Complementing this view of individuals is a democratic, if not liberal democratic, conception of the political relationship between individuals. On the one hand, it recognizes that, in their autonomy, all individuals have a basic integrity, but at the same time they are fundamentally dependent on one another. The construction of meaning is not only an activity of a reflective subject, but also the activity of a group coordinating the exchange among its members. Indeed the two activities are intertwined in such a way that each requires the other. As a result, individuals depend on one another for their own personal development. Thus not only does a collaborative discourse require mutual respect, but that it also requires mutual caring and support. On the other hand, a collaborative discourse recognizes that all individuals are not equally able to define their own meanings and purposes nor are they equally able to engage one another in discourse. This evident inequality does not, however, suggest disempowerment or the need for authority. Rather it creates a demand for complementarity – a coordination of perspectives and pursuits that both realizes the limits and enhances the capacities of the individuals involved. This complementarity is understood to depend on the collaborative, self-reflective efforts of individuals and the appropriate social structuring of the terms of their discursive engagement. The latter requires social regulation that facilitates interpersonal coordination, while recognizing the integrity and limits of individuals' autonomy.

Of the three types of discourse considered here, collaborative discourse encourages the broadest and deepest form social and political critique. In its presumption of the psycho-social, dynamic qualities of how meaning and value are constructed, collaborative discourse fosters personal and collective criticism that is structural or systemic rather than substantive or particular. At the same

time, it makes that critical activity the centerpiece of discussion. Discussion is thus understood as the medium both for the expression and the construction of personal autonomy and cooperative social exchange. It is here that citizens can express the quality as well as the substance of their point of view and who they are. It is also in the play of the differences between individuals that citizens can also develop and reconstruct how they think and therefore who they can be. It is thus an explicit vehicle for deepening autonomy and thus for emancipation. At the same time, collaborative discourse allows for the expression and transformation of the conditions of communicative exchange. In the discourse, there is an exploration of the fragmentation of cultural meanings and the social divisions among the participants. At the same time, there is an attempt to establish a means for communicating these distinctions and thus creating at least thin communitarian bonds among otherwise different groups. Thus the limits of current ways of communicating and interacting are recognized and alternative means are explored.

### **Conclusion**

I have attempted to offer a more differentiated understanding of the nature of discourse and democratic deliberation. Applying this theoretical understanding of deliberative discourses to the empirical study of actual citizen deliberations led to several conclusions. First, the quality of the discourse varies in the course of a deliberation. Second, even in what might be considered the favorable case of highly educated, empowered adults raised in a liberal democratic polity, the deliberation very rarely was rational, reasonable or critically reflective in the ways assumed by deliberative democrats. That said the deliberations rarely manifested egocentric quality typically assumed by the rational choice or materialist critics of deliberative democracy. Some narrowly self-interested claims were made by several of the participants early in each of the deliberations. However these were typically ignored. The lack of response quickly extinguished these kinds of initiatives.

In the terms of deliberative democratic theory, these empirical findings raise serious issues about the normative and practical value of deliberation as a form of democratic engagement. Even if deliberation is not openly conflictual and dominated by narrow self-interest, the fact that deliberative discourse among educated, empowered adults is largely conventional is problematic because this kind of discourse typically: (1) engenders a conformity to prevalent norms that enables only the most limited forms of self-reflection or social critique, (2) maintains existing social divisions and hierarchies, and (3) is unable to address differences in social norms and the ensuing value conflicts that are typical of multicultural societies. Consequently this kind of democratic deliberation cannot offer the normative or practical benefits claimed by either its liberal or more developmental democratic advocates.

In my view, the foregoing results do not reflect on the nature of citizen deliberation per se, but only how deliberation is theorized and how it occurs in particular socio-political contexts. The suggestion here is that we adopt a new approach to democratic deliberation. Rather than developing a context-independent, ahistorical understanding of what deliberation is, the focus shifts to further exploring the different forms which deliberative exchanges may take. This includes a consideration of the conditions which foster different types of deliberative exchanges. The present research suggests that creating a context that “frees” individuals to speak their mind under conditions of civility, openness and equality does not guarantee the quality of the discussion that will follow. Clearly substantial intervention will be necessary in order to create the conditions that are likely to foster deliberations that are more cooperative or possibly collaborative and transformative. This sets the

agenda for future theory and research. On the one hand, there is the theoretical problem of assessing the analytical and normative implications of the claim that individuals' capacities are discursively constructed and therefore that their ability to engage one another in an autonomous and equal way may require substantial intervention in order to foster desired democratic practice. On the other hand, there is the empirical problem of discovering (1) which conditions foster more adequate forms of deliberation and (2) how those conditions may be most effectively instituted in particular deliberative settings.

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## Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> Much of the inspiration for this project reported here came from two discussion groups to which I belonged and from which I greatly benefited. The first has continued intermittently for three years and included a number of doctoral students including Scott Winterstein, Mark Sellick and Ted Wrigley. The second was a very stimulating faculty discussion group that met weekly at UC Irvine in the winter of 2003. It included Janusz Reykowski (Warsaw School of Social Psychology, Poland), Molly Patterson (Aquinas College, Michigan) and Lisa Garcia Bedolla (UC Irvine).

<sup>2</sup> For an early observation on the discourse that occurs in a town meeting, see the innovative work of Jane Mansbridge (1980). For a recent example of a more systematic attempt to evaluate discourse in a parliamentary setting, see the work of Jurg Steiner and his colleagues (e.g. Steiner, et al., 2005).

<sup>3</sup> As the foregoing comments suggest, the bases of co-operative discourse (unlike the rules of conventional discourse) are constituted in general and abstract terms. Co-operative discourse therefore tends to be less affectively charged than conventional discourse. There are several reasons for this. First, individual participants are defined abstractly and proscriptions of how they relate to one another are quite general. This tends to have the effect of distancing the discussion from the particulars of an individual's personal identity or preferences and the specifics of her socio-emotional connection to particular other people. Second, differences and disagreements that emerge are considered with reference to shared rules of argumentation, common beliefs and a shared understanding of the discourse. Thus while specific and immediate differences are acknowledged, this is done with reference to shared general assumptions of truth and right and a shared understanding of appropriate conversational behavior. Divisions between those who disagree are thus not reciprocally denying or mutually alienating as they are in conventional or proto-discourse.

<sup>4</sup> For an interesting theoretical argument that takes a more developmental approach to democratic citizenship, see Warren, 1992.